Development of Antisocial Behaviour

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Abstract

Developmental psychologists have examined antisocial behaviour from many perspectives, including the academic experience, and peer relation and socio economic status. Thus, this paper focuses on the role of family relations, especially parent-child attachment, as determining factor in the development of antisocial behaviour among adolescents. Previous studies have shown that secure attachment is generally related to positive behavioural and social outcomes, while insecure attachment (ambivalent or avoidant) are often related to negative outcomes. Insecure attachment which is associated with parental negativity and rejection predicts externalizing behaviour such as aggression and disruptiveness; and internalizing behaviours; such as depression, anxiety, and social withdrawal.

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1. Introduction

Antisocial behaviour is defined as behaviours resulting from an individual’s inability to respect the rights of others (Frick, 1998; cited in Fortin, 2003). These behaviours include assault, vandalism, setting fires, theft, crime and other delinquent acts which conform to social norms. According to Farrington (2005), antisocial behaviour in childhood and adolescence are categorized to behavioural disorders, impulsiveness, stealing, vandalism, physical and psychological aggression, bullying, running away from home and truant. In this paper, antisocial behaviours refer to a set of behaviours which is against any established rules or norms. It could be from the action of spitting in the public and other behaviours that go against the society norms. In the research by Moffitt (1993), it is believed that the early stage of delinquent behaviour is antisocial behaviour. He believes that antisocial behaviour has the potential to cause school failures, impairments in socio-emotional development, peer rejection, delinquency, and adult crimes.

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According to Patterson (1990), antisocial behaviour appears to be a developmental trait that begins early in life and often continues into adolescence and adulthood. He further emphasized that if antisocial behaviours begin at an early age, the persistence and chronic of these behaviours can be differentiated by the age of the antisocial behaviour onset.

There are two broad dimensions of behaviour disorders; internalizing and externalizing behaviour. Internalizing behaviour is directed inward and involves behavioural deficits, such as isolation, withdrawal and depression. On the other part, externalizing behaviours are in the form such as disturbing others, verbal and physical aggression, and acts of violence. In fact, psychologists have been studying many different aspects of child development and how they relate to the formation of externalizing behaviour problems.

2. Factors associated with Antisocial Behaviour

Based on the literature review, it has been found that during the first five years of life, family and personal characteristics are the most important predictors of child delinquency (Moffit, 1993; Patterson et al., 1992). Risk factors at home include antisocial parents, parents suffering from depression, family poverty, marital problems, large family size, history of family violence, involvement of parents in drug and alcohol and poor parenting practices (Loeber, 1982).

There are many other factors affecting the antisocial behaviour too. These factors originate either from the child’s personal characteristics such as interests, attitude, and temperament. Other external factors include individual’s past experiences, and expectations which can influence their interpersonal relationships. There is also a link found between environmental factors with antisocial behaviours. According to Patterson (1992), environmental factors are the main causes of antisocial behaviour. These factors include parents, peers, and schools which believed to be able to influence the wholesome development in the child, either in the aspects of physical, affective, social, and spiritual.

According to Sprinthall (1995), the state of early adolescence is a time of both intensive and extensive transitions that affect individuals physically, psychologically and socially. During this period of transition, adolescents are more vulnerable to emotional difficulties. At this time, adolescents seek for comfort and emotional support either from parents or peers. Thus, parents attachment and peers attachment play an important role during childhood and adolescence period especially during the early adolescence.

3. Family influences on Antisocial Behaviour

Sociologist and psychologists (Farrington, 1978; Loeber, 1982) came to view family variables as the prime determinants for antisocial and delinquent behaviour. These family processes are embedded within contexts that affect the family such as employment changes, divorce (Capaldi & Patterson, 1991), large family size, criminality of parents (Farrington, 1979), psychiatric disorder of parents, urban residence and disorganized and high-crime neighbourhoods. Hence, family environment is strongly associated with the stability of aggressive behaviours among the children subject to this risk factor.

As the literature goes on, family variable is one of the main environmental factors that have been identified as a consistent variable for early forms of antisocial behaviour. These include inconsistent discipline, little positive parental involvement with the child, poor monitoring and child’s activities (Patterson et al., 1990). These factors may affect the individuals during their developmental period.

3.1 Parenting

Parenting is generally known as an important risk factor linked with antisocial behaviour. Previous studies list out many various important parenting practices that have been associated with antisocial behaviour such as punitive discipline (yelling, nagging, threatening), inconsistent discipline, lack of warmth and positive involvement, physical aggression, insufficient monitoring and ineffective problem-solving modeling (Patterson, 1986; Patterson and Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984; Weiss et al., 1992).

As children move into adolescence, monitoring becomes an important aspect of parenting. Patterson (1985) found a strong correlation between parents monitoring practices, adolescent delinquent behaviour and deviant peer associations. It is proven that an inadequate parents monitoring seems to be important in the emergence and maintenance of antisocial behaviour in children from middle childhood through adolescence.

Furthermore, Patterson et al., (1998) in his research agreed that lack of parental involvement in the child’s activities and inadequate supervision are strongly associated with externalized behaviour disorders. These two variables are reported in many studies on behaviour disorders and could constitute as specific factors.
3.2 Family Structure
Meanwhile, according to Aguilar et al., (2000), those who come from a broken home and a single parent family are two factors related to the family structure which increase the risk of developing antisocial behaviour. Besides that, marital conflicts can contribute to the development of internalized and externalized behaviour disorders. Certain problems related to the parents such as criminality depression and alcohol and drug abuse, are also associated with antisocial behaviour by their children. Those functional variables related to the family context which can trigger of antisocial behaviour, since they directly affect the child’s self regulation and reactivity (Farrington, 2005).

3.3 Child raising style
Child raising styles also consider as the most influential factor in the development of antisocial behaviour as indicated by several studies (Prinzie, Onghena, Hellinckx, Grietens, Ghesquiere & Colpin, 2004). Negative child raising styles or inconsistent control and low parental supervision negatively affect the child’s behaviour. Studies support the affirmation that parents of aggressive children show coercive parental styles that have a negative effect on the child’s development.

Olweus (1993) identifies three specific factors of child raising styles that are conducive to an aggressive reaction pattern. The first identified factor is a negative basic attitude of the parents, especially the mother that is characterized by a lack of warmth and involvement. The second factor is the extent to which the parent is permissive of aggressive behaviour. Thirdly parents that use power-assertive child raising methods increase the aggressive pattern of behaviour in their children.

3.4 Family socioeconomic status
Previous studies found that low family socioeconomic status is strongly associated with antisocial and aggressive behaviour (Aguilar et al., 2000; Farrington, 2001; Patterson et al., 1998). Patterson et al. (1992) reported that poor families undergo great stresses and the parents are subject to negative experiences over which they have little control. Under such conditions, the parents are not very available to their child and they tend to use coercive and punitive parenting practices. Study supports the affirmation that parents of aggressive children show coercive parental styles that have a negative effect on the child’s development.

Moreover coercive parents lack of positive reinforcement skills and they fail to eliminate unsuitable behaviours. According to Patterson (1992), parents at this stage unconsciously model and reinforce the coercive behaviour exhibited by their children as the children learn that aggressive behaviour normally leads to get what they want.

Family variables are important and consistent for early forms of antisocial behaviour and for later delinquency. Although many studies prove that poor monitoring, poor supervision, and harsh discipline are the cause of the child’s antisocial behaviour; family demographic variables such race, neighborhood and parental education also related to the antisocial behaviour (Elliott et al., 1985).

4. Attachment and Antisocial behaviour
Attachment has been defined as an intimate and affectionate relationship between two people (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). According to Bowbly (1982), attachment is also an emotional bond whereby it comprises comfort, safety, and support. Bowbly (1982) further defines attachment as a child being “strongly disposed to seek proximity to and contact with a specific figure”. Attachment behaviour has its own dynamics and is distinct from both feeding and sexual behaviour. It is a person’s basic needs of emotion. Thus, during the course of a healthy development, attachment behaviour leads to the development of affection bonds between a child and a parent (Goodwin, 2003).

This theory has been used within developmental psychology for studying individual differences child adjustments. Bowbly (1982), states that based on the quality of early parent-child interactions, children build internal representational working models; a set of internalized beliefs and expectations about oneself and others. This working model in turn determines or influence the way individuals interact with their environment. Attachment has often been considered as a categorical construct distinguishing different sets of behaviours by Ainsworth (1978). Ainsworth then identified three distinct patterns of attachment: secure, anxious-resistant, and avoidant.
4.1 Secure Attachment
A warm and consistent parenting is related to “secure” attachment, which is characterized by the child’s use of the attachment figure as a secure base. Adolescents with secure parental attachments may contribute to positive views of self and lower levels of depressive symptoms (Ainworth, 1989). Securely attached adolescents are less likely to engage in antisocial behaviour. They also manage their school works more successfully, and enjoy more positive relationships with family and peers. In fact, they demonstrate less concern about loneliness and social rejection and display more adaptive coping strategies.

Such adolescents feel confident in leaving their parents to learn about the world. They know that they can depend on their parents to be there giving help when it is needed. They become more socially competent. This attachment is contrast with insecure attachment such as avoidant, dismissing attachment which is associated with parental negativity and rejection. Adolescents who do not have a trusting or secure attachment to their parent will be anxious, no confidence, depress and has social withdrawal.

4.2 Anxious-resistant Attachment
Those adolescents classified as anxious-resistant show ambivalent behaviour toward caregivers and an inability to be comforted on reunion. They hold negative views of themselves.
Meanwhile those classified as avoidant avoid proximity or interaction with the parents on reunion. Thus, the adolescents may not sure whether to approach or avoid the parents and may not be able to control their emotional responses because they have received inconsistent feedback (Ainsworth, 1989).

5. Attachment, parenting and antisocial behaviour
Control theory in Sociology (Hirschi, 1969), views that poor attachment implies failure to identify parental and societal values regarding conformity and work. These omissions leave the child lacking internal control and shows negative attitudes toward school, work and authority tend to have antisocial behaviours (Elliott, Huizinga, & Ageton, 1985; Hirschi 1969).

Hirschi (1969), thinks that attachments are most useful for predicting delinquency for those children who has their parents, schools and peers as the primary agents of socialization. The children’s attachment to parents is the most crucial among the bonds, including peers (Hirschi, 1969).

According to the Control Theory, delinquent behaviours occur when a child’s bond to family or society is weak. If the bond of affection to the family is strong, the attachment formed may be able to deter criminal behaviours. The theory emphasized that the stronger this bond, the higher the likelihood the child will internalize the social norms and make rational considerations when faced with moral dilemmas. Thus, family environment is the foundation which a strong positive attachment could be built to serve as a barrier to delinquency.

6. Conclusion
After discussing the literature review and theories, it is understood that the role of parenting in children’s relationship and peers are very important in predicting antisocial behaviour. One of the strong predictor is parent-child relationships, specifically children’s attachments with their mother and father. Like other aspects of parenting, attachment security is related to a variety of behavioural, motivational, and regulatory social skills that may have an impact on peer relations (Thompson, 1999).

Thus, it is important to realize that antisocial behaviour is not only related to parenting behaviour but also to the way children attached to their parents. The bonding between parents and his/her child is important. If the bond of affection to the family is strong, the attachment formed may able to deter criminal behaviours.
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