

The Role of Substance Abuse in Juvenile Delinquency and Solution Proposals

Çocuk Suçluluğunda Madde Kötüye Kullanımının Rolü ve Çözüm Önerileri

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ABSTRACT Objective: The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between the type of crime and the substance abuse of children in conflict with law. **Material and Methods:** The participants are 470 juveniles between the ages of 13 and 17 years who have been taken into custody in the Juvenile Justice Department of Adana. The survey forms, that consist of questions related to the demographic characteristics, type of crime and history of substance abuse, were filled out through face to face interviews. **Results:** In this study, the types of substance abuse were classified into 3 categories. The first group consisted of those who do not have any history of substance abuse. The 2nd group included those who are only smokers, only drinkers or only smokers and drinkers (with no other substance abuse history). The 3rd group included those with a story of substance abuse with or without a smoking and drinking history. The data was analyzed by using SPSS 20. version (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). Chi-square analysis was conducted. As a result of this analysis, a significant difference between the types of substance abuse across the types of crime was found. The frequency of substance abuse was highest among children who were accused of vandalism (26.3%). The ones who were accused of a crime against property (13.3%), and violent crimes (2.8%) follow them consequently. **Conclusion:** The results showed that childrens' substance abuse has an effect on juvenile delinquency. The studies about the criminal tendencies of the substance abusing children and the connection between alcohol-cigarette usage and drug addiction also need to be studied extensively.

Key Words: Substance-related disorders; juvenile delinquency

ÖZET Amaç: Bu çalışmada, suça sürüklenen çocukların madde kötüye kullanım durumları ile işledikleri suç tipi arasındaki ilişkinin incelenmesi hedeflenmiştir. **Gereç ve Yöntemler:** Örneklemi, Adana Çocuk Şube Müdürlüğü'nde işlem görmüş olan 13-17 yaş arası 470 çocuk oluşturmaktadır. Anket formları, çocukların demografik bilgileri, suç tipleri ve daha önceden işledikleri suçlarla ilgili sorulardan oluşmaktadır ve yüz yüze görüşme ile uygulanmıştır. **Bulgular:** Bu çalışmada, madde kötüye kullanımı üç kategoriye ayrılmıştır. Birinci grup herhangi bir madde kullanımı geçirmiş olmayan çocuklardır. İkinci grup ise sadece sigara, sadece alkol ya da sadece sigara ve alkol kullanan çocukları içermektedir. Üçüncü grup ise sigara-alkol kullanımı ile birlikte ya da olmaksızın madde kullanan çocuklardan oluşmuştur. Veri Analizleri SPSS (Sosyal Bilimler için İstatistik Paket Programı) 20. sürümünde yapılmıştır. Ki-kare analizi uygulanmıştır. Yapılan analiz sonucu madde kullanım tipleri ile suç tipleri arasında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı farka rastlanmıştır. Madde kötüye kullanım oranı en yüksek (%26,3) olarak Vandalizm (mala zarar) suçu işleyen çocuklardadır. Bunu, mala suç işleyen çocuklarda (%13,3) ve daha az oranda şahsa karşı suç işleyen çocuklar (%2,8) izlemiştir. **Sonuç:** Sonuçlar, madde kötüye kullanımının çocuk suçluluğunda bir etkisinin olduğunu göstermiştir. Madde kullanan çocukların suç eğilimleri ile alkol-sigara kullanımının madde kullanımı ile bağlantısını araştıran çalışmaların yaygınlaştırılması, çocuk suçluluğunun önlenmesi için gereklidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Madde kullanımına bağlı bozukluklar; çocuk suçları

Children's involvement in juvenile delinquent activity is studied in various research areas such as psychology, sociology, law and criminology. However, research on the prevention of this kind of behavior is found to be quite limited in applied area.¹ When risk factors of the individuals' tendencies to the delinquent behaviors at an early age are investigated, low socioeconomic status and social troubles stand out as the fundamental factors in juvenile delinquency.²

Nonfunctional family structure and experiences of abuse and neglect are among the most prominent factors in children's tendency to criminal behavior.³ One of the problems that may occur with these children is substance abuse.² Substance abuse in children is referred in the literature as an important factor leading to deviant behavior and facilitating participation in an environment where crime is committed and their tendency to commit crime in order to have access to the substance.^{2,4-7}

Juvenile Justice Department of Adana, Turkey has started a survey research in 2008 to get information about the children in conflict with law and taken into custody. In the present research, these children's substance abuse findings will be presented and evaluated in the light of juvenile delinquency. Moreover, it was aimed to discuss solutions proposals to this issue.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN CHILDREN

In Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders IV (text revised), the substance abuse diagnostic criteria were cited as below:

"Substance abuse is defined as a maladaptive pattern of substance use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress as manifested by one (or more) of the following, occurring within a 12-month period:

1. Recurrent substance use resulting in a failure to fulfill major role obligations at work, school, or home (such as repeated absences or poor work performance related to substance use; substance-related absences, suspensions, or expulsions from school; or neglect of children or household).

2. Recurrent substance use in situations in which it is physically hazardous (such as driving an automobile or operating a machine when impaired by substance use)

3. Recurrent substance-related legal problems (such as arrests for substance related disorderly conduct)

4. Continued substance use despite having persistent or recurrent social or interpersonal problems caused or exacerbated by the effects of the substance (for example, arguments with spouse about consequences of intoxication and physical fights)."⁸

Substance abuse deteriorates the individuals' social, economic and personal life tremendously. When this habit begins in younger ages, it effects the child's physiological and psychological development negatively and the consequences are more hazardous. That is why the efforts to prevent substance abuse have an additional importance when the children's future is considered.⁹

When the risk factors of substance abuse in children are considered, some of them came out. These factors are, particularly, poverty and social conflicts stemming from irregular urbanization, the peers pressure, weak family bonds, violence and neglect in the family, having a substance abuser parent, feelings insufficiency since adolescence and issues such as external locus of control and false beliefs such as the comforting effects of drugs.²

As a result of neglect and weakening family bonds due to domestic violence, the streets may become more attractive and consequently, the child may become less attached to his/her family. This is one of the most important factors which increase the risk of a child's encountering with drugs.¹⁰ The adolescence is a period in which the need for belongingness to a group becomes one of the major issues. Therefore, if the peers in these groups are abusing drugs, this also may contribute as a risk factor. Especially, according to research, relationships with these kinds of peer groups increase the probability of drug abuse significantly.¹¹

When the substance abuse is closely investigated, it was discovered that the substances that are sold through illegal ways are specifically accessible at places where mostly children and adolescents spend their leisure time, such as game centers and amusement parks. This may facilitate the access of the children to illegal drugs more easily. In turn, this may create a risk factor for substance abuse.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND DELINQUENCY

When the relationship between drugs and criminal behavior was explored, the results showed that, children commit crimes in order to provide their drugs.¹² In a study, researchers found that 573 narcotic drug abusers committed more than 200.000 crimes in a year, just to be able to get drugs.² Besides, those who are under the influence of drugs are more likely to take more dangerous risks. Adolescents who experience difficulty in this developmental period also tend to use drugs as a result of some manipulation from the environment and friends.¹³

In a study aimed to determine the relationship between substance abuse and robbery, theft, and vandalism, researchers showed that substance abuse increases the tendency to commit crime.¹⁴ Moreover, in another study, children using substances had a higher probability of being found guilty than children who did not use substances.¹⁵

The effect of peer pressure on the relationship between juvenile delinquency and substance abuse should also be discussed. Friendship networks may be one of the most important factors on substance abuse in adolescence in regard of providing a ground for shared experiences.² In those environments, adolescents can also participate in these groups in order to learn about the using techniques of the substances and friends in this substance-related peer groups socially support this practice. Therefore, further drug use is reinforced. Research shows that these kinds of relationships with peer groups increase the probability of substance abuse.¹¹

MATERIAL AND METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

The participants of this study were 470 volunteer juvenile delinquents who had been brought to Juvenile Justice Department between the months of January and July in 2008. The majority of the participants were male and most of them were between the ages of 16-17 years. More detailed information on the gender and age distribution was presented in Table 1.

In terms of the types of crime, the sample is categorized based on property crimes, violent crimes, vandalism and other crimes. Among these categories, property crimes consisted of workplace robbery, shoplifting, crimes against assets, home, car, etc., violent crimes included injury or murder by using a knife, stick etc. Behaviors like breaking the glass of a workplace and cutting the tire of a car..etc. were considered as vandalism. Other crimes such as sexual harassment and verbal assault were also being included as a different category. The property crimes and vandalism were considered as two different categories because each of them has minor peculiarities to themselves. According to United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, vandalism is considered to be as a separate crime category than theft and burglary.¹⁶ While in vandalism the purpose of the perpetrator is to damage the property, in other forms of property crimes

TABLE 1: Distribution of gender and age frequency.

n=470	n	%
Gender		
Male	453	96.4%
Female	17	3.6%
Total	470	100%
Age (year)		
13	17	3.6%
14	28	6%
15	58	12.3%
16	138	29.4%
17	227	48.3%
Total	470	100%

such as theft, robbery etc. the purpose is to take for their benefits.

In this study, it was attempted to investigate the effect of substance abuse on juvenile delinquency within the context of property crimes, violent crimes and vandalism.

MATERIALS AND PROCEDURE

With the permission given to Juvenile Justice Department from the Adana Governorship, a survey for the assessment of juvenile delinquents' sociodemographic characteristics is applied to the children who have been taken into custody for being led to crime. All of the participants signed the informed consent forms before taking part in the study. Moreover, the survey also involved the sociodemographic characteristics of these children and their parents.

RESULTS

When education level was analyzed, it was observed that 8.7% of the children (n=41) have never gone to school, and 58.5% of those who have gone to school dropped out. 64.9% of the participants (n= 305) have low socioeconomic status, 44.8% of the children (n=210) have 3-5 siblings, 4.7% of them (n=22) have at least more than 10 siblings and 17.4% of children's parents (n=82) were divorced. It was also found that 7.3% of the children (n=34) were not living with their parents, and 44.1% of those children (n=15) were living with a relative, 11.8% (n=4) were living in a dorm, 29.4% (n= 10) were living on the streets, 14.7% (n=5) were living in other places like in a friend's house.

It was found that, 55.8 % of the children who participated in this study (n=266) were the kids of immigrant families, 17.4 % of the children (n=82) were living in slam areas and approximately 80 % of the children (n=375) were living in the districts that were established for immigrants.

Frequency distributions of type of crime and history of substance abuse are reported in Table 2. For percentage distributions, valid percent values; in which the missing cases are excluded, are taken into account (Table 2).

TABLE 2: Type of crime and history of substance abuse.

n=470	n	Valid %
Type of Crime		
Property Crimes	293	64.1%
Violent Crimes	107	23.4%
Vandalism	57	12.5%
Valid	457	100%
Missing	13	
Total	470	
History of Substance Abuse		
Non-abusers	133	28.6%
Cigarette	251	53.9%
Alcohol	1	0.2%
Cigarette, Alcohol	19	4.1%
Substance	9	1.9%
Substance, Cigarette	38	8.2%
Substance, Cigarette, alcohol	14	3.1%
Valid	465	100%
Missing	5	
Total	470	

The property crimes of the 457 participants were evaluated in 3 different categories; property crimes, violent crimes and vandalism. Based on this categorization, 64.1% of the participants were found to be taken into custody due to property crimes.

Substances that were found to be used by the participants in this study were inhalants, drugs and stimulants. When the participants' histories of substance abuse were analyzed, smoking cigarettes was found to be the most frequent one (n=251, 53.9%). Additionally, 8.2% of the children (n=38) reported that they were both using substance (inhalant-glue, thinner, drugs and stimulants) and smoking, and 4.1% (n=19) of the children were both smokers and drinkers. 3.1% of the children (n=14) were smokers, drinkers and substance abusers at the same time.

One of the most fundamental aims of this study was to determine whether there is a relationship between the frequency of substance abuse of the children who were led to crime and the frequency distribution of the type of crime. For this

TABLE 3: The relationship between substance abuse and type of crime.

The History of Substance Abuse	Against Property		Against Person		Vandalism		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Non abusers	73	24.9%	46	43.0%	11	19.3%	130	28.4%
Substance	39	13.3%	3	2.8%	15	26.3%	57	12.5%
Cigarette/Alcohol	181	61.8%	58	54.2%	31	54.4%	270	59.1%
Total	293	100%	107	100%	57	100%	457	100%
			Chi-Square: 28.864		df: 4		p= .000	

purpose, the types of substance abuse were classified in 3 categories: The first group consisted of those who do not have any history of substance abuse. The 2nd group included those who are only smokers, only drinkers or only smokers and drinkers (with no other substance abuse history). The 3rd group included those with a story of substance abuse with or without a smoking and drinking history. A chi-square analysis was conducted with the SPSS 20. version software. As a result of this analysis, a significant difference between the types of substance abuse across the types of crime ($\chi^2 (4, N= 457)=28,864, p=.000$) was found. Specifically, substance abuse was observed most in children who were accused of vandalism (26.3%), following those with a crime against property (13.3%), and it was observed least in those with violent crimes (2.8%) (Table 3).

DISCUSSION

In the current study, when the proportion of the different sexes was considered, a great difference between males and females was noticed (96.4%). This finding is consistent with some research conducted in the past.^{2,17} On the other hand, recent studies yield different findings suggesting that although males still outnumber females, the gender difference narrowed considerably.²

The studies showed that the prevalence of juvenile delinquency tends to increase from late childhood, peaks in the teenage years at around ages 15-19, and then declines in the early 20s.¹⁸ The finding of the present study was also parallel to the previous findings regarding the relationship between age and rates of juvenile delinquency, since

it was found that 90% of the participants were above the age of 15. In this study, most of the children who were led to crime were around the ages of 16-17.

Previous studies also showed that 19% of the children who were led to crime had separated families due to divorce, death or other reasons.¹⁹ In the present study, it was found that 18.7% of the parents of the participants were separated. So these results are consistent with previous findings.

The excessive number of siblings of the children seems to be related with a decrease in the level of parental care and control over these children. In a study conducted by Salman and her colleagues, it was shown that 68.1% of the children who were led to crime have three and more siblings.¹⁷ The results of the current study are also parallel with these findings. 64.1% of the children who were taken into custody were charged with property crimes, 23.4% of them with violent crimes, and 12.5% of them with vandalism. According to Turkish Statistical Institute, crimes against property include theft, forgery, damage against property and similar crimes (extortion/robbery, arson). Theft category includes house theft, workplace theft and car theft/breaking into car. Property crime is the most frequent (55%) public security crime in Turkey. Theft has a high share like 81.1% in these crimes.²⁰ In the current study, most of the children who have been brought to Juvenile Justice Department with a claim of crime against property were accused of theft.

Although damage to property can be thought as a subtype of crimes against property, it was eval-

uated as a different category. Vandalism is the specific category here, generally defined as destroying or distorting common property willfully.²¹ A child would tend to destroy common property or property of a stranger intentionally in this category. Vandalism is an issue that should be evaluated with its social, psychological and economic dimensions.

When the children were asked if they were using any substance, 53.9% of these children reported smoking, 8.1% reported both using substances and smoking, 4.1% reported both smoking and drinking alcohol. In another study on substance abuse, it was shown that 36.4% of the juvenile delinquents smoke.¹⁹ Although the ratio of smoking was higher in the mentioned research than the present study, the findings are still consistent in terms of smoking's being most frequent one.¹⁹

Substance abuse and crime are related in various senses.^{22,23} This relationship is established through different ways: by examining whether substance abuse leads to crime, whether crime is a precursor of substance abuse and whether both substance abuse and crime are functions of other factors. Elliott and his colleagues from the Institute of Behavioral Science found via the results of the National Youth Survey that there is a strong relationship between substance abuse and crime.²⁴ However the direction of this relationship is not very clear. As a general rule, substance abuse can be seen as a type of crime but is not a reason of crime. Most of the children also were involved in criminal behavior before using substances. In this sense, it is hard to establish that substance abuse causes crime.² When the frequency distributions of drinking alcohol were considered, 4.1% of children are found to be both smokers and drinkers, and 3% of them are smokers, drinkers and substance abusers all together. When two parameters were evaluated together, approximately 8% of the participants reported drinking alcohol together with other substances. In a study with adolescents, it is shown that those who drink alcohol at an early age are likely to become chronic users and also to start using other substances such as pot, marijuana and heroin.²⁵ This type of abuse starting with alcohol may be an important predictor of future substance

abuse and involvement in a crime action.⁷ However, it is not possible to say that all drinkers become substance users.² Similarly, Unal and Cukur showed in a study conducted with 3742 high school students that there is a relationship between alcohol/substance abuse and various deviant behaviors. Unal and Cukur compared students who have drunk alcohol with those who have never drunk and found that, those who have drunk 3 times in their lives are 5 times more likely to apply physical force to gain money or other things from people. Also they were 7 times more likely to secretly carry offensive weapons and 8 times more likely to attack for murder.²⁶

As pointed out previously, the relationship between the frequency of substance abuse and the type of crime children committed (property crimes, violent crimes and vandalism) was analyzed. As a result, all these types of crimes were found to be related with substance abuse ($\chi^2(4, N=457)=28,864, p=.000$). This effect was most clearly seen for vandalism. In this sense, our findings are in parallel with both studies conducted by Elliott and his colleagues and by Unal and Cukur (23-25). Moreover, Culligford and Morrison (1995) also showed in their study that behaviors such as violence, vandalism, theft, drinking alcohol, smoking and skipping school are related. However, it cannot be inferred from these results alone that substance abuse leads to delinquency or those who use substances are more likely to commit crimes.²⁷

When the data was analyzed, it was understood that children's substance abuse has an effect on juvenile delinquency. However, as mentioned in the previous section, substance abuse cannot be established as the cause of juvenile delinquency. Future research with longitudinal methods and new data should consider whether substance-abusing children have a tendency to commit crime, to what extent they have and whether smoking-drinking alcohol are precursors of substance abuse. These studies are required in order to be able to prevent juvenile delinquency.

Substance abuse affects children's socialization process negatively and causes serious risks on their becoming healthy individuals. As can be seen in

this study, substance abuse has a role in crime behavior. In that sense, in order to prevent juvenile delinquency, substance abuse is one of the most important factors that should be overcome.

In order to prevent children's substance abuse, research by police forces, education and social strategies and creating public opinion should be the first steps. In that sense, public and nongovernmental organizations are required to be effective in early intervention and prevention programs such as strengthening communication and parenting skills in families, supporting educational and health professionals in detecting child neglect and abuse, creating public awareness about this issue. It is important to conduct the studies in a multidisciplinary fashion and bring all the information together to put into practice.

A key example is D.A.R.E (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) which is administered in the US in order to counteract adolescent peer pressure to smoke, drink alcohol and abuse substances.² This program includes a series of education programs which aim to increase the capabilities of young people to resist peer pressure, inform them about substances and their dangers, increase trust in police forces and make people self-confident individuals.

In the present study, substance abuse is considered to be a unique category. On the other hand,

inhalants, drugs, stimulants, opiates, sedatives ...etc. may have different effects on individuals' behaviors. Therefore, designing further studies, which will explore whether different types of substances have a particular influence on the trajectories of delinquency and examine the prevalence of each type of drug abuse, separately, may have considerable contributions to the literature.

The data of the current study was gathered from Adana. Selecting participants from one specific city may limit the generalization of the findings. In the future, adding some additional data from other regions is required.

Additionally, the present study was based on self-reports. In the future studies, adding additional data from other resources may contribute to the validity of findings.

In light of all this data, there should be further studies on the rehabilitation of juvenile delinquents and children who use substances. The data collected in Adana underlines this requirement. Further, informational and awareness-raising practices for families should be increased in schools and local areas as in other countries.

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