

Childhood Maltreatment and Symptoms of PTSD and Depression Among Delinquent Adolescents in Malaysia

Siti Raudzah Ghazali¹ · Yoke Yong Chen¹ · Hafizah Abdul Aziz¹

© Springer International Publishing AG 2017

Abstract Adolescents in the juvenile justice system are known to suffer from various psychological disorders. Less is known about how childhood psychological trauma is related to psychological disorders among delinquent adolescents in Malaysia. This study investigated the relationship between childhood maltreatment and depressive and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms. Of 327 adolescents 96% were exposed to at least one childhood victimization. Significant differences were found for all types of victimization (i.e. maltreatment, sexual abuse, severe assault, neglect, and family victimization) between delinquent and non-delinquent adolescents. Females were more likely to be involved in family victimization, while males were more likely to experience severe assault and crime victimization. Delinquent adolescents reported depressive and PTSD symptoms significantly more than non-delinquent adolescents. The prevalence of PTSD and depressive symptoms among delinquents was 20.8 and 52.7% respectively. Highly victimized delinquent adolescents and/or those victimized in family-related events were at significantly higher risk to develop psychiatric symptoms.

Keywords Trauma · Abuse · Victimization · Psychiatric symptoms

The number of youth detained in the juvenile justice system in Malaysia is increasing at an alarming rate. Police recorded

2955 juvenile cases in 2002, increasing to 6048 cases in 2009 (Hariati 2010) and 8704 cases in 2013 (Tahir 2014). Previous studies have documented that most juvenile offenders have experienced traumatic events and have a higher prevalence of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) compared to the general population (Abram et al. 2013; Adams et al. 2013; Ariga et al. 2008; Falk et al. 2014). Prevalence of PTSD among detained adolescents has been found to be two to eight times higher than community samples (Wolpaw and Ford 2004). The issue of high prevalence of trauma exposure and PTSD among youth in the juvenile justice system is a major concern (Abram et al. 2013; Teplin et al. 2002).

Previous studies found that two-thirds of male delinquents and three-quarters of female delinquents have one or more psychiatric disorders (Adams et al. 2013; Ariga et al. 2008; Teplin et al. 2002; Wasserman et al. 2002). For example, Adams et al. (2013) and Ariga et al. (2008) reported that most juvenile offenders have PTSD and were highly comorbid with other psychological disorders (i.e. depression, substance dependence, and eating disorders). A review of 33 studies showed that adolescent offenders were highly exposed to multiple types of trauma, and 30% of the offenders reported PTSD (Foy et al. 2012). Severe trauma experiences among delinquent adolescents have serious mental health sequelae, such as high prevalence of depression, substance abuse, anxiety, and suicidality (Foy et al. 2012). However, many delinquent studies have small samples of single-gender juvenile offenders (e.g. Foy et al. 2012), or are based on samples of pre-trial detainees (e.g. Adams et al. 2013) limiting generalizability to those who have adjudicated juvenile sentences. Also, studies often have not compared mental disorders between delinquent and non-delinquent adolescents.

Previous studies have shown that delinquent adolescents are at risk for developing mental illness (Colins et al. 2010;

✉ Siti Raudzah Ghazali
gsraudzah@fmhs.unimas.my

¹ Department of Psychological Medicine, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Kota Samarahan 94300, Sarawak, Malaysia