

# Clinical & Counselling Psychology Review (CCPR)

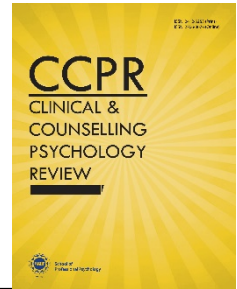
Volume 4 Issue 1, Spring 2022

ISSN<sub>(P)</sub>: 2412-5253 ISSN<sub>(E)</sub>: 2706-8676

Homepage: <https://journals.umt.edu.pk/index.php/CCPR>



Article QR



**Title:** Predicting the Role of Emotional and Behavioral Problems on Delinquent Tendencies in Adolescents

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.32350/ccpr.41.02>

**History** Received: November 17, 2021, Revised: May 26, 2022, Accepted: May 31, 2022

**Citation:** Lakhani, A., Ali, M. M., Sarwar, J., & Sabir, M. (2022). Predicting the role of emotional and behavioral problems on delinquent tendencies in adolescents. *Clinical and Counselling Psychology Review*, 4(1), 16-36. <https://doi.org/10.32350/ccpr.41.02>

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**Conflict of Interest:** Author(s) declared no conflict of interest



**UMT**

A publication of

Department of Clinical Psychology

University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan

# Predicting the Role of Emotional and Behavioral Problems on Delinquent Tendencies in Adolescents

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## Abstract

The current study investigated the relationship between adolescents' emotional and behavioral problems and delinquent tendencies. It was hypothesized that there is a significant relationship between emotional and behavioral problems with delinquent tendencies in adolescents. Purposive and convenient sampling techniques were used to select 225 participants ages ranging from 12-19 years. The participants were selected from private and government institutes in Karachi. Emotional and behavioral problems were measured through the indigenously developed scale School Children Problem Scale SCPS, whereas Delinquent tendencies were assessed using the Self-Report Delinquency Scale SRDS. Pearson correlation analysis showed a significant moderate relationship between adolescents' emotional and behavioral problems and delinquent tendencies. Further suggestions and implications for future research were also discussed.

**Keywords:** adolescents, behavioral problems, emotional problems, delinquency

## Introduction

The future of each civilized and dynamic society lies in the best possible development and improvement of youngsters, as they are the building blocks of society. In recent decades, children and adolescents have gained another remarkable status. Expanded intrigue and attention to a child's welfare and rights have opened new roads towards development and advancement. The most crucial and pivotal period of personal growth in a person's life is commonly recognized as adolescence and childhood. This duration is also known as the period that requests consistent alteration with the developmental process (Windle & Mason, [2004](#)). During this phase, young people face numerous difficulties, pressure, and metabolic changes, associated with distress (Erikson, [1950](#), [1968](#)). New pressures and social and emotional changes may put youngsters at more serious and hazardous

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emotional and behavioral issues (Dhuria et al., [2009](#)). As a rule, if these emotional and behavioral problems are not taken care of appropriately and cautiously, they may result in physical, social, and academic issues that can ultimately cause stress and other psychological problems for the children, their families, schools, and networks.

Hall was the father of the scientific study of children and adolescents. Adolescence is defined as the transition period between childhood and adulthood. According to the world health organization, adolescents are defined as any person between 10 to 19 years of age. Furthermore, the most important development period, i.e., adolescence, is when teenagers continue to grow physically, mentally, and psychologically. During this time, they are also developing socially and emotionally. Hall considered the adolescence period traversing from 12 to 18 long stretches of an individual's life, full of turmoil and upheaval (Lerner & Steinberg, [2004](#)). Adolescence is also commonly depicted in professional literature as an adverse phase of life, a period of storm and stress to survive or suffer (Arnett, [1999](#)). It is an unstable period in which these individuals face many different trends and challenges that needs to be dealt with appropriately.

Common issues that put adolescents at risk of developing delinquent tendencies encompass child maltreatment, substance abuse, fighting, and suicide (Kuther & Tara, [1995](#)). Though, little has been documented on the potential role of emotional and behavioral problems in explaining high school drop-out rates, criminal behavior, and adolescent wandering problems. Similarly, it is hard to analyze these behaviors individually as they frequently concur with one another and are generally interlinked.

Behavioral problems are those that aren't considered acceptable in society. The behavioral problems are referred to as the individual's behaviors that create difficulties in the daily routine. Nearly everyone can have a moment of disruptive behavior, but these behaviors must have a consistent pattern (DSM-5, [2013](#)). It may vary in severity and appear in children and adults. Behavioral problems are not inherited by nature. The world health organization, approximately shows that up to 20% of adolescents have one or more mental or behavioral problems (Pathak et al., [2011](#)). This data states that around one-fourth of the population suffers from behavioral problems that need to be addressed. The behavioral problem of adolescents includes unhappiness and being excessively moody, defiant against parents, teachers, and authority, destroying school property,

bullying, teasing, cheating, lying, stealing, defiance, indiscipline, daydreaming, truancy, offensive behavior towards girls, disappointment over petty issues, excessively thoughtful, and carelessness. Another study reveals a noticeable relationship between behavioral problems and alcoholism in either parents or caretakers (Jogdand & Naik, [2014](#)).

On the other side, emotional problems show one or more difficulties and emotional troubles to a noticeable degree over a long period, adversely affecting interpersonal relationships and academic performance (Idea, [2017](#)). Emotional problems may include mood dysregulation, anxiety, phobias, depression, stress, fear, etc. The problems faced by schoolchildren are usually named emotional and behavioral problems (Achenbach & Edelbrock, [1978](#)). Both terms can be used interchangeably. These emotional and behavioral problems are also known as internalizing and externalizing problems. Internalizing problems are commonly referred to as controlled behaviors, including symptoms and trends related to depression, anxiety, social withdrawal, and somatic complaints (Baker, [2008](#); Merrell, [2008](#)). Externalizing problems are defined as the more under-controlled and overt behaviors, including aggression, disruptive, defiant, acting out tendencies, and hyperactive behaviors (Merrell, [2003](#); Zahn-Waxler, [2000](#)). Externalizing problems are considered the most troublesome and annoying ones, as they are out-directed behaviors. It has received the utmost importance because of its observable and identifiable characteristics.

The word “delinquency” has been extricated from the Latin word ‘delinquere’ which means to leave or abandon. As indicated by the definition of criminology, the implicit meaning of delinquency is that these ways of behaving do not fit society's legal or good moral standards (Delinquency & Britannica, [2022](#)). Similarly, delinquent tendencies describe the characteristics or type of behavior that leads to delinquency. More than a million children and adolescents are behind bars globally by today because of parental alcoholism, poverty, breakdown of the family, overcrowding, abusive conditions at home, death of parents during armed conflicts, unemployment, injustice, absence of appropriate laws, gambling, running away from home, lack of attention by elders, addiction, peer pressure, illiteracy, electronic media, and discord between siblings (Rafique, [2017](#)). Unfortunately, a large number of the cases go unreported because of several reasons including family reputation, the under-coverage of rural areas, and the lack of policing and reporting facilities. Similarly, we

can also see the ever-increasing rate of delinquency in Pakistan. Moreover, in 2019 1,424 child cases were reported across Pakistan including 1,209 cases of juvenile delinquency and 215 cases of convicted children (My Legal Rights, [2022](#)).

Deviant practices are learned from the environment. The child isn't conceived as a reprobate, nor are its genes responsible for delinquent behaviors. In this regard, delinquents are not solitary people brought into the world with any such innate, physical, mental, or emotional characteristics. Like other typical adolescents, these individuals need love, and security to be seen as normal children. The failure to fulfillment of these fundamental needs' prompts alteration issues, thus, these adolescents become enmity and challenge society. Subsequently, delinquent behavior is produced that is ranked against social and environmental conditions. Most delinquents can't perform at school; they are discontent with their scholastic execution. Thus, they become a part of juvenile gangs and get involved in delinquent activities for social acceptance and to accomplish the status inside their gathering. Therefore, school is one of the platforms where delinquent behavior could originate. The current study is intended to explore the delinquent inclinations in school children who are likewise experiencing some sort of behavior and emotional issues. Juvenile delinquency tendencies are marked by criminal activities, persistent antisocial behavior, or disobedience. This could incorporate everything from minor violations like lying, gambling, and skipping school to serious crimes like theft and sex-related offenses (Gottfredson, [2011](#)).

In a nutshell, children and adolescents are the building block of society. This specific period is considered an essential and crucial period for development in improving one's life. During this duration, children and adolescents face numerous obstacles, pressures, hurdles, and troubles, and if not supervised appropriately, it leads to emotional and behavioral problems. In the past reported cases, it has been observed that these problems are the leading cause of juvenile delinquency.

In accordance with the variables discussed above, multiple theories tend to explain their interrelatedness. It is essential to highlight the theoretical establishments to classify adolescence as a distinct phase of human development concerning behavioral and emotional problems and their combined effect on juvenile delinquent tendencies. As in the past, an

indirect relation between these variables was studied. This theoretical framework attempts to develop a strong relationship between the variables.

The theory of Attachment aims to define the ability to form an emotional and physical attachment toward the guardian. According to him, attachment is a fundamental biological instinct, essential for children's survival (McLeod, [2017](#)). He accentuated that the early emotional bond with the caregiver has a prolonged impact on youngsters' and adolescents' interpersonal relationships, psychosocial functioning, and prosperity. Parents who are aware and mindful of their child's needs will promote a safe and healthy environment for their children, where a child can develop social, emotional, and secure attachments toward their parents. In contrast, a situation that cultivates doubt, where a child's need goes neglected, gives an unhealthy environment where the child feels uncomfortable and insecure. Furthermore, this insecure attachment and adverse parent-child relationships aid repressed hyper-vigilant, casual friendliness, and evident psychopathology, promoting skepticism and hostility toward their parents (Elgar et al., [2003](#)). Therefore, a child will be emotionally and behaviorally disturbed if they have a poor attachment with their primary caregiver.

Social learning theory attempts to explain human conduct as a continuous reciprocal interaction between behavioral, cognitive, and environmental influences. Bandura is viewed as the pioneer of this Social Learning Theory (Bandura, [1977](#)). He posits that individual learns from one another through observations they made, imitation, and modeling. Naturally, children will generally duplicate positive or negative behavior from grown-ups and other children. The theory centers on the social setting where learning occurs and the reciprocal influence between an individual, the behavior, and the environment. The key elements of this theory include attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation. The theory further predicts that antisocial or prosocial acts can be learned from watching films or television. Watching such content repeatedly drives a person to play out these vicious demonstrations in reality (S-Cool, [2022](#)). Consequently, a child will be able to imitate acts or become the one by observing their environment.

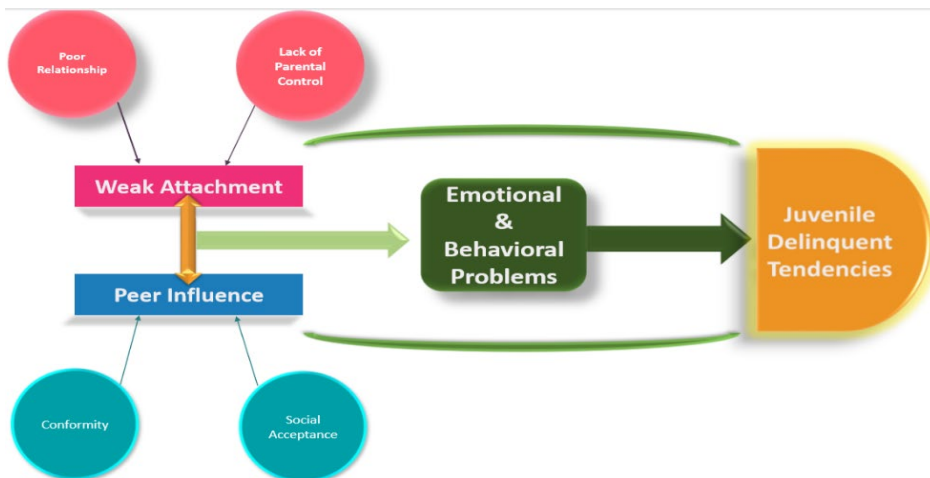
Lastly, Alamgir et al. ([2018](#)) explain Social Control Theory, whereas Hirschi ([1969](#)) alludes to the idea based on the individual development of social and inner control. Hirschi has argued that the absence of control is required to explain much of the delinquent behavior. As indicated by the

theory, when the individual is more attached, involved, and committed, the bond with society will be greater. Hirschi likewise asserts that the primary task of delinquency theory is to explain conformity, not delinquent behavior. Hence, to gain social acceptance and be influenced by peer pressure, an individual performs such an act that prompts delinquent activity. Likewise, this Venn diagram will illustrate how the factors extracted from the theories are interconnected and lead to juvenile delinquent tendencies.

Various epidemiological studies have been conducted worldwide regarding school children's emotional and behavioral problems and their connection with delinquency. According to Khurshid and Urooj (2012), the most important factor pushing youth towards delinquency is poverty combined with family conflict and neglect. According to Banovcinova et al. (2014), the family stressors caused by the problems in fulfillment of the family's economic function affect the fulfillment of their parental role. Therefore, poverty and low socioeconomic status affect parents psychologically and cause emotional and behavioral problems in children as they struggle to cope with stressful life situations. It clearly explains why parents with serious financial constraints tend to have delinquent children.

**Figure 1**

*Causes of Criminal Behavior*



According to Green (2005), the underlying cause of crime is the influence of parents, which is strongly evident in social-sciences research.

A recent survey has found that criminal parents are more likely to raise criminal offspring. Honkatukia and Kivivuori (2006) explain that maltreated children commit more crimes in adulthood than non-maltreated children. In addition, World Youth Report (2003) reported that children who receive adequate parental supervision are less likely to engage in criminal activities. While dysfunctional family settings, i.e., conflict, inadequate parental management, weak internal linkages, integration, and premature autonomy, are closely linked with delinquency.

In Pakistan, 175 million, 64% of the population lives in rural, and the remaining 36% of the population lives in urban areas (Mubashir, 2017). Around 43% of the population is under 15 years (Zulu, 2019). It has been approximated that 20 percent of young people may have emotional or mental disorders, 10% have diagnosable mental health issues, and 70% have not had appropriate interventions (Mental Health Foundation, 2016). There are very few systemic studies that have been carried out in Pakistan to deal with this crucial issue of emotional and behavioral problems in adolescents. For instance, Syed (2009) asserted that the prevalence of mental health problems was higher than reported in studies from other countries. According to Syed et al. (2007), the account of emotional and behavioral problems among 5-11 years old school children in Karachi was found to be 47% of the children as normal (i.e. having no emotional and behavioral problems), 19% as borderline, and 34% as abnormal. Ahmed and Murtaza (2016) concluded in qualitative research that the factors affecting juvenile delinquency in Punjab are both socioeconomic and psychological. The respondents asserted that the family environment includes prohibitive behavior, negligence, improper supervision, and delinquent behavior of their parents leads to delinquency. For some of the respondents, motivation by peers and friends to involve themselves in deviancy and peer rejection also becomes the push factors toward delinquency.

Qualitative research by Zafar (2012) being carried out in Adyala jail at Rawalpindi District in Punjab Province (Pakistan) in the Juvenile barracks showed that the lack of basic facilities led children to become criminals and courts make them professional. So, bringing up the rear, numerous worldwide researches demonstrate the link between increasing behavioral and emotional problems and delinquency. This preexisting link is assumed to be generated by factors including family conflict, negative peer influence, low socioeconomic status, criminal parents, abusive & maltreated child-



rearing, inadequate parents' supervision, drugs, and antisocial and conduct disorders.

In the light of scientific research and theoretical conceptualizations, it can be predicted that the pattern of delinquency will be at an alarming rate that might be associated with the emotional and behavioral problems of an individual. The nurturing and upbringing of a child primarily starts within the home. In this regard, the major influencers are the parents, siblings, relatives, etc. If the child doesn't get a sense of warm attachment safe and healthy environment, the child will become prone to be involved in criminal and law-breaking acts (Goldenson, [2015](#)). As a consequence, the growth of society is at risk. Therefore, the lack of socializing environment and some other psychological factors that have a negative impact on an individual, need to be addressed.

### **Rationale**

The literature and empirical data support an indirect relation between behavioral and emotional problems with juvenile delinquency in all the research mentioned above. However, the present study aims to establish the direct relationship between the variables. Additionally, the prior studies were restricted to criminals in the prison system regarding delinquency, but the current research considers adolescence in an institutional setting.

As cited before, the ever-increasing delinquency rate is due to the lack of parental control, attachment styles, neglect, peer pressure, etc. Hence, it has been hypothesized that there is a significant relationship of emotional and behavioral problems with delinquent tendencies in adolescents. The research primarily examined the prevalence and their underlying relationship regionally.

### **Research Objectives**

The research objective is to identify the relationship between emotional and behavioral problems with delinquent tendencies in adolescents.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

The current study is based on a quantitative correlational research design.

## Participants

In this research, 15 institutes were approached ( $N = 225$  adolescents from all the towns of Karachi. Students from both the government and the private institutes (i.e. schools and colleges) were selected, which accounted for more than 90% of school-going children in Karachi. Purposive and convenient sampling techniques were used to select the participants between the age range of 12-19 years. The participants who had not been previously diagnosed with any psychiatric disorders, and students registered in an educational institution in Karachi, Pakistan were selected. In the first stage, the purposive technique was used to locate the adolescents then a convenient sampling technique was used to get the participants that came across effortlessly. The sample size includes  $N = 225$  adolescents.

## Assessment Measures

The demographic information form was used to ensure that only the individuals who fit the research criteria were a part of this study. It included name (optional), age, gender, parental education, parental occupation, birth order, education, family structure, head of the family, living with which parent, and primary caregiver.

### *School Children Problem Scale (SCPS)*

The emotional and behavioral problems were assessed through an originally developed self-report measure School Children Problems Scale (Saleem & Mahmood, [2011](#)). This scale determines the relationship between the emotional and behavioral problems of adolescents. It is a 4-point (0-3 Likert-type rating scale, where 0 means “Never” and three means “Often.” The Factor Analysis of SCPS resulted in six factors: anxiousness, academic problems, aggression, withdrawal, feelings of rejection, and Somatic Problems. The Cronbach Alpha was .92, and the one-week test-retest reliability was .79. The split-half reliability of SCPS was .89. A significant positive correlation was found between SCPS and two broadband scales of the Youth Self Report of CBCL (Achenbach & Rescorla, [2001](#)), with Internalizing Problems ( $r = .76$ ) and with Externalizing Problems ( $r = .70$ ).

### *Self-Report Delinquent Tendency Scale (SRDS)*

Self-Report Delinquent Tendency Scale is a 5-point Likert-type scale developed by Naqvi and Kamal ([2008](#)). This scale was primarily developed

to measure the delinquent pattern among adolescents and obtain more authentic information about their criminal and antisocial behavior among them. Initially, the scale comprised of 40-items; after factor analysis, it was then reduced to 27 items that included eight subscales, namely; Theft Measurement, Drug Abuse, Lying, Non-Compliance to Adults, Police Encounter and Escape, Violence Related Delinquency (Extortion, Vandalism, and Aggression), Cheating and Gambling, Sex Related Delinquency. The scale has high construct validity. The alpha reliability for SRDS is .94.

### Procedure

The research was carried out by getting permission and consent from the authors of the scale, authorities, and participants. The necessary help and assistance were provided to the research participants. After that, the participants were provided with a demographic form and two questionnaires, namely, SCPS (Saleem & Mehmood, 2011) and SRDS (Naqvi & Kamal, 2008). After completing the questionnaires, they were debriefed and answered the queries about the procedure and research. They were encouraged to respond honestly and as accurately as possible. The time limit was set at approximately 30 minutes for the entire procedure, and if they want to quit they are free to leave the research.

### Results

Descriptive analysis was drawn out to get the mean, median, and Cronbach alpha of the data, and inferential statistics, i.e., Pearson correlation, was done to draw the inferences. Furthermore, regression analysis was done to analyze and draw the conclusion between independent and dependent variables.

**Table 1**

*Reliability and Descriptive Analysis*

Variable	Items	$\alpha$	$M$	$SD$	$K$	$SK$	Range
SCPS	44	.902	46.59	19.24	-.181	367	5-100
SRDS	27	.880	11.30	12.38	3.00	1.70	0-62

Table 1 shows that the data were normally distributed as predicted by skewness and kurtosis analysis. The Cronbach alpha of SCPS is  $a = .902$ ,

which lies in an excellent range and the Cronbach alpha of SRDS is  $\alpha = .880$ , which lies in a good range.

**Table 2**

*Correlational Analysis*

	1	2	3	4
1. Age	-	.84**	.18**	.25**
2. Education		-	.12	.19**
3. SCPS			-	.40**
4. SRDS				-

Table 2 demonstrates the significant positive relationship between age and education, SRDS, and SCPS. In a nutshell, it showed a significant increasing trend of SCPS and SRDS which means that when emotional and behavioral problems (SCPS) were increased, delinquent tendencies SRDS also increased with a correlation of .40.

Regression analysis was done to predict where the significance lies. Firstly, Age and education were constant predictors of demographic variables to check their significance with the dependent and independent variables.

**Table 3**

*Regression analysis of Age with Emotional & Behavioral Problems and Delinquency*

Criterion	B	Sig	R	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$	95% CI	
						LL	UL
SCPS	.177	.008	.177	.031	.031	-8.6	38.20
SRDS	.251	.000	.251	.063	.063	.860	2.63

Table 3 illustrates that there are 31% chances that if age increases, the emotional and behavioral problems will also increase, and there are 63% chance of it with delinquent tendencies.

**Table 4**

*Regression analysis of Education with Emotional & Behavioral Problems and Delinquency*

Criterion	B	Sig	R <sup>2</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	95% CI	
					LL	UL
SRDS	.192	.004	.037	.037	-.906	9.25
F1(SCPS)	.178	.000	.032	.032	6.73	12.17

Table 4 explains that the delinquent tendencies will increase concerning education level with the chance of 37%.

**Table 5**

*Regression analysis of Emotional & Behavioral Problems and Delinquency*

Criterion	B	Sig	R <sup>2</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	95% CI	
					LL	UL
SRDS	.398	.000	.158	.158	.178	.334

Table 5 clearly shows that SCPS predicts SRDS with 15 %, which means that if there are emotional and behavioral problems, there is a 15 % chance of delinquency occurring.

### Discussion

The objective of the current study was to find out the relationship between emotional and behavioral problems with delinquent tendencies in adolescents in Karachi, Pakistan. Therefore, it was hypothesized that there is a significant relationship between emotional and behavioral issues and delinquent tendencies in adolescents. This study shows a significant moderate relationship between the study variables.

Prior researches have highlighted multiple causes of delinquency. For instance, it has been observed that bullying in schools was correlated with delinquency. Furthermore, the emotional and behavioral problems caused by bullying are a high risk of becoming delinquent (Baldry et al., [2000](#)). In

addition to this, adolescents who repeated a grade in school or had an encounter with police or juvenile judges were found at high risk of being delinquent (Rucevic et al., [2009](#)).

In the light of the current study, the results shown in table 3 illustrate the significance, i.e. as Age increases, Emotional and Behavioral Problems also increase which is measured by factors in SRDS. Similarly, with age, it has been reported that Delinquent tendencies will also increase. One of the magazine's research also stressed that anxiety is more likely to increase due to health problems, losses, and major life incidents with an increase in age (Cicetti, [2010](#)). It is also suggested that adolescents who experience anxiety may worry about the future, fear losing loved ones, and fear people, places, or things (Guarnotta, [2020](#)). Moreover, Rumberger ([1995](#)) claimed that age has a significant effect on a student's academic performance. Moreover, the studies on criminal activities suggest that offending begins to rise with age, predominantly in preadolescents or early adolescents, and reaches a high risk until late adolescence. For example, in a longitudinal study, it was found that there was an eightfold increase in the number of boys who committed criminal activity from age 10 to 17.

In addition to this, table 4 draws the prediction between education with SCPS and SRDS, which illustrates a positive correlation between an increase in educational level, anxiousness (SCPS), and delinquency. On the contrary, the prior literature did not support this claim of an increase in academic level with an increase in anxiety. With this, the relationship between education and anxiety throughout life is unclear. A higher educational level seems to have a protective effect against anxiety which builds throughout life (Bjelland et al., [2008](#)). There is a possibility that this ambiguous statement is because of the prevailing education system of Pakistan. On the other hand, the link between educational levels and delinquency is complex. Initial stages of aggressive behavior in adolescents may lead to difficulties in the classroom. Some studies have also shown a reduction in delinquency when a teenager drops out of school.

Consequently, emotional and behavioral problems (SCPS) predict delinquency (SRDS) with 15%. Prior research hasn't done any work on connecting the variables directly, so it offers support by indirectly connecting them all. In a previous study, it was found that academic problems (F2 of SCPS) predict delinquency. It was evident that poor school performance, absenteeism, and leaving school at an early stage correlate

with adolescents' delinquent tendencies. Peer associations involved in such acts of delinquency may also serve as a consequence of school failure where students reject one's academic achievements. School performance was thought to be the most serious problem among violent delinquents. The researchers found that serious and violent delinquents had more school-related problems, including absenteeism, low grades, suspension, and dropping out, compared to non-violent adolescents.

Likewise, aggression and rejection (F3 and F5 of SCPS) were also positively correlated with delinquency. Prior researches posit peer rejection to be strongly related to aggressive behaviors and is moderately connected with delinquency (Barnow et al., [2005](#)).

A research in Pakistan has found that delinquents are more aggressive and impulsive with low self-control (Shahzad & Yasmin, [2015](#)). The research found that 24% of crime by adolescents is due to revenge and 19% of the crime is due to land disputes; both crimes were related to aggressive handling of the situation (Mahmood & Cheema, [2004](#)). Furthermore, one such study has found that peer rejection is causally associated with delinquency and aggression (Cairns & Cairns, [1994](#); Graham & Juvonen, [1998](#)). This illustrates that the feelings of isolation and the student's perspective of not receiving emotional support from the caregiver play a vital role in becoming delinquent.

### **Limitations and Recommendations, and Implications**

The current study considered the age range of 12 to 19. The study was limited to the secondary male school population. The questions were asked in a direct and impersonal manner. Students were reluctant to answer accurately at first, and due to the social desirability factor, the responses were being molded in a socially acceptable form. Thus, it is recommended for future researchers to include the religious and prisons system. Also, it can be conducted in rural areas for the adult population. In future implications, this study will help the educational sector apply interventions with the help of psychologists at an early stage to resist students' delinquent behaviors or stop individuals from becoming delinquents. This will help parents know the causes of the behavior shown by their child and help establish realistic goals according to it. At the governmental level, it lays the foundation for the amendments in the educational policies and can help

Police Officers in picking up information on what drives the adolescent to get involved in delinquent-related activities.

## Conclusion

The current research aimed to find the correlation between adolescents' emotional and behavioral problems with delinquent tendencies. The results indicated a significant positive relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Furthermore, it was found that an increase in SCPS will likely increase SRDS by 15 %. Some of the factors of SCPS and SRDS were found to be moderately correlated, while other factors had a low correlation between them.

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