

1989

The relationship between juvenile delinquents' behaviors and irrational beliefs

Jimmy Susan Binns Ramsey
University of Northern Iowa

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Copyright ©1989 Jimmy Susan Binns Ramsey

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ramsey, Jimmy Susan Binns, "The relationship between juvenile delinquents' behaviors and irrational beliefs" (1989). *Graduate Research Papers*. 3120.

<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/3120>

This Open Access Graduate Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Papers by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.

Offensive Materials Statement: Materials located in UNI ScholarWorks come from a broad range of sources and time periods. Some of these materials may contain offensive stereotypes, ideas, visuals, or language.

The relationship between juvenile delinquents' behaviors and irrational beliefs

Abstract

The use of adolescent aggression has been documented as being increasingly problematic (Faretra, 1981; Marohn, 1982; Short & Simeonsson, 1986). Violence in the schools has increased at a rate of sixty per cent in a five year period from 1971 to 1975 (Short & Simeonsson, 1986). A relationship has been found to exist between juvenile delinquents' use of aggressive behaviors and their use of irrational beliefs and emotional reasoning (Bandura, 1977; Ellis, 1977a, 1983; Burns, 1981). Irrational beliefs are idealized concepts or beliefs to which the user subscribes, and are based on the individual's emotional state rather than on factual evidence (Ellis, 1984; Burns, 1981; Orbach & Hadas, 1977). Juvenile delinquents' aggressive behaviors are not the consequence of the activating event which made them feel bad or use acting out behaviors, but instead it is what they believe about the event which triggers their response of aggression (Ellis & Grieger, 1977; Grieger & Boyd, 1980). It is the irrational beliefs about what happened, or the activating event rather than the event itself, which are used by individuals as a basis to decide to choose inappropriate behaviors such as aggression (Kassinove, Crisci, & Tiegerman, 1977; DiGiuseppe & Kassinove, 1976; Knaus, 1974).

The Relationship Between Juvenile Delinquents'
Behaviors and Irrational Beliefs

A Research Paper
Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Jimmy Susan Binns Ramsey
University of Northern Iowa
(Spring, 1989)

This Research Paper by: Susan Ramsey

Entitled: The relationship between juvenile delinquents'
behaviors and irrational beliefs

has been approved as meeting the research paper
requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts

Ann Vernon

3-28-89
Date Approved

Adviser/Director of Research Paper

Robert L. Frank

3-28-89
Date Approved

Second Reader of Research Paper

Dale R. Jackson

3-28-89
Date Received

Head, Department of Education
Administration and Counseling

The use of adolescent aggression has been documented as being increasingly problematic (Faretra, 1981; Marohn, 1982; Short & Simeonsson, 1986). Violence in the schools has increased at a rate of sixty per cent in a five year period from 1971 to 1975 (Short & Simeonsson, 1986).

A relationship has been found to exist between juvenile delinquents' use of aggressive behaviors and their use of irrational beliefs and emotional reasoning (Bandura, 1977; Ellis, 1977a, 1983; Burns, 1981). Irrational beliefs are idealized concepts or beliefs to which the user subscribes, and are based on the individual's emotional state rather than on factual evidence (Ellis, 1984; Burns, 1981; Orbach & Hadas, 1977). Juvenile delinquents' aggressive behaviors are not the consequence of the activating event which made them feel bad or use acting out behaviors, but instead it is what they believe about the event which triggers their response of aggression (Ellis & Grieger, 1977; Grieger & Boyd, 1980). It is the irrational beliefs about what happened, or the activating event rather than the event itself, which are used by individuals as a basis to decide to choose inappropriate behaviors such as aggression (Kassinove, Crisci, & Tiegerman, 1977; DiGiuseppe & Kassinove, 1976; Knaus, 1974).

Ellis (1977a) has identified three categories of commonly held irrational beliefs, which are: awfulizing statements, which exaggerate the consequences; shoulds, musts, and oughts, which require unrealistic demands of others or self; and statements of blame, which label other people, or events as the cause of our unhappiness and allows us to believe we have no control over our lives. Low frustration tolerance, self-downing, and making demands are three irrational beliefs identified as being characteristically used by juvenile delinquents (Bandura, Adams, & Beyer, 1977; Ellis, 1984; Ellis, 1977a; Madanes, 1981; Doane, 1978). While in no way implying the exclusion of other irrational beliefs in juvenile delinquents' thought processing, these three irrational beliefs will be defined; the irrational belief categories identified; and an example of an irrational belief thought processing will be followed in order to explain the connection between irrational beliefs and juvenile delinquents' aggressive behaviors.

Irrational Beliefs Can Lead To Aggression

Irrational beliefs have been identified as an underlying characteristic aspect of juvenile delinquents' information processing; it is frequently recurrent to the point of being problematic (Madasnes, 1981;

Doane, 1978; Harbin & Madden, 1985; Meyers & Nelson, 1986; Morran & Stockton, 1980). The use of irrational beliefs becomes problematic when used as a basis for decisions to use aggressive behaviors of extreme defiance of authority, and socially unacceptable, or inappropriate aggressive responding (Madanes, 1981; Doane, 1978; Harbin & Madden, 1985; Meyers & Nelson, 1986; Morran & Stockton, 1980). The rapid growth of aggressive behavior among our juvenile delinquent population suggests the need for studying the relationship between irrational beliefs and aggressive behaviors (Faretra, 1981; Marohn, 1982; Short & Simeonsson, 1986). Using the irrational belief premises of low frustration tolerance, self-downing, and making demands, a thought process leading to aggression will be described.

Low frustration tolerance: Juvenile delinquents' low frustration tolerance refers to a belief they hold about having a marked inability or unwillingness to use delayed gratification of the delinquents' wants and needs (Meyers & Nelson, 1986; Doane, 1978; Blasi, 1980; Roush, 1984). This irrational belief can be justified and accepted as true by the following thought process. The desire of the juvenile delinquent

is for immediate gratification of their wants and needs to the extent that illegal means may be used to attain these needs (Bandura, et al 1977; Blasi, 1980; and Roush, 1984). The underlying juvenile delinquent's irrational belief is that they have the right to have all of their wants fulfilled (Ellis, 1977a; and Ellis, 1984). Proceeding with this line of thought, it is awful and terrible, and they "can't stand it" if these unrealistic expectations are not met (awfulizing statements) (Ellis, 1977a; and Ellis, 1984). Continuing the irrational beliefs thought process, juvenile delinquents tend to become frustrated and then angry over having their wants and desires thwarted, and blame their anger response on those perceived as denying or preventing the wants to be fulfilled (blaming) (Ellis, 1977a; and Ellis, 1984). Justification for the anger response comes from the irrational belief that the ones perceived as denying the juvenile delinquents' wants should and must meet these demands (Ellis, 1977a; Ellis, 1984; Burns, 1981; and Bandura, 1982). It is because of the irrational beliefs juvenile delinquents have about their feelings that the anger response is chosen (DiGuseppe s& Kassinove, 1976; and Kassinove, Crisci, and Tiegerman, 1977). The anger responses

of juvenile delinquents tend to result in the use of aggressive behavior decisions of: loss of temper to the point of exhibiting verbal abusiveness, pushing or hitting, destruction of property, or any combination of these responses to the extent that restitution and/or remediation may be required (Madanes, 1981; Meyers & Nelson, 1986; Harbin & Madden, 1985).

Self-downing: A second irrational belief characteristic of juvenile delinquents' thought processing is self-downing (Bandura, et al 1977; Burns, 1981; Ellis, 1977a). Self-downing is the negative evaluation, or self-induced lowering, of an individual's concept of personal value (self-esteem) (Bandura, et al 1977; Burns, 1981; Ellis, 1977). Delinquents who use self-downing statements tend to have a poor opinion of themselves and their own value as a person (Ellis, 1984; Ellis & Knaus, 1977; Bandura, 1982; Maxwell & Wilkerson, 1982). Juvenile delinquents who tell themselves they are no good because they have done something wrong are basing their decisions on the belief that if it feels that way it must be true, which is an irrational belief based on emotions instead of facts (musts & awfulizing) (Bandura, et al 1977; Ellis, 1977a; Burns, 1981). The behaviors that are chosen by juvenile delinquents, stemming from the irrational beliefs, tend to be inappropriate or self-destructive

which serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy that confirms their feelings of worthlessness and being no-good; this justifies their continued use of self-downing statements and can result in escalating the use of inappropriate and aggressive behaviors, such as suicide, giving or receiving abuse, and teen pregnancy (Bandura, et al 1977; Burns, 1981; Ellis, 1977a; Ellis, 1984).

Making demands; A third irrational belief that is characteristic of juvenile delinquents' thought processing is having the right to make demands (Madanes, 1981; Harbin & Madden, 1985; Meyers & Nelson, 1986; Morran & Stockton, 1980). Making demands is viewed as an attempt to get others to conform to ones own way of thinking, or acting, regardless of its inappropriateness, in an attempt to be in the position of power and control (Madanes, 1981; Harbin & Madden, 1985; Ellis, 1977; Burns, 1981). The irrational beliefs that others must meet the juvenile delinquent's demands triggers the use of an anger response at failure to do so (musts, shoulds, and oughts; and blaming) (Ellis, 1977a; Ellis, 1984; Burns, 1981). Using the irrational belief of having the right to make demands can lead to justifying the use of aggression when others do not fulfill the demands, or giving themselves the right to punish or retaliate against others for failure to meet their expectations (Madanes, 1981; Bandura, et al 1977; Burns, 1981).

Juvenile delinquents' use of irrational beliefs justifies their choice of delinquent behaviors (Young, 1974; Knaus, 1974). Helping juvenile delinquents learn how to distinguish between irrational beliefs and facts, and practicing making decisions based on facts can also serve to reduce decisions for using aggressive behaviors (Madanes, 1981; Ellis, 1984; Bandura, et al 1977; Burns, 1981). Rational Emotive Therapy (RET) is an effective method to use in reducing the irrational beliefs of low frustration tolerance, self-downing, and making demands (Maxwell & Wilkerson, 1982; Ellis, 1977; Ellis & Knaus, 1977).

Reducing Irrational Beliefs With RET

In the book How to live with-and-without anger, Albert Ellis (1977) uses RET as a cognitive conditioning perspective. RET stresses 1.) self-conditioning or learning how to restructure our own thinking processes; and 2.) social influence conditioning or becoming more aware and concerned about how we are perceived by others (Ellis, 1977). RET provides insights to the present, not the past, and stresses the fact that individuals have conscious choices that are self-directed--not directed by our parents, authorities, or peers (Ellis, 1977; Ellis & Grieger, 1980). Helping juvenile delinquents gain

insight into their irrational beliefs will provide them with a reason to reduce their use of anger and aggressive behaviors that are chosen because of their irrational beliefs (Ellis, 1985; Ellis, 1984). The following insights can help juvenile delinquents in their irrational belief reduction process: 1.) Anger responses are not forced on juvenile delinquents by others, external conditions, or events--they are chosen because of the irrational beliefs held about others, external conditions, or events (Ellis, 1985; Ellis, 1984). As example, a juvenile delinquent's verbal statement when angry might be "You made me angry!"--the irrational belief that someone else has forced them to feel angry is an abdication of responsibility for choosing an anger response. 2.) The anger is continued by subscribing to previously held irrational beliefs (Ellis, 1985; Ellis, 1984). Continuing with the irrational belief that someone else has caused them to feel angry, a previously held irrational belief may be that the juvenile delinquent may believe that since it feels like they do not have control over their anger, it is a fact that they are unable to control their anger response; or that they have the right to control someone else's behavior to prevent themselves from ever feeling anger. 3.) A third insight that will help juvenile delinquents reduce their use of

irrational beliefs is to recognize they have choices in how to respond to the anger feelings once their irrational beliefs are disputed (Ellis, 1985; Ellis, 1984). Disputing and challenging these irrational beliefs will require considerable work and practice, and then taking action to change the old patterns of behavior (Ellis, 1985; Ellis, 1984).

Juvenile delinquents will be able to gain these insights by using RET active-directive methods such as confrontation, probing, challenging or disputing irrational beliefs, teaching procedures, and homework (Grieger & Boyd, 1980; Ellis, 1977a; Ellis & Grieger, 1980). When using RET, therapists try to help clients select their own target behaviors to change, and pick their own reinforcements and penalties when they want to modify or reduce their use of irrational beliefs, angry emotions, or aggressive behaviors (Ellis, 1977a; Ellis & Abrahams, 1978; Ellis & Grieger, 1977; Ellis & Knaus, 1977; Ellis & Harper, 1975). The RET methods are used to reach the objective of reducing the individual's use of the three irrational belief categories: awfulizing statements; musts, shoulds, and oughts; and using blaming statements (Grieger & Boyd, 1980; Ellis, 1977a; Ellis & Grieger, 1980). Once juvenile delinquents are able to lessen their use of

irrational beliefs, they will be able to achieve the RET goals of becoming less angry, less glib and absolutist, and more optimistic and inclined to work toward solutions that are socially acceptable (Ellis, 1977a; Ellis & Grieger, 1980; Ellis & Harper, 1975; Ellis & Abraham, 1978). According to Grieger and Boyd (1980), individuals can achieve ten benefits through the use of RET, summarized as follows: 1.) Self interest can be broadened to include those around you. 2.) You become more self-directed, and can assume responsibility for your own lives and work out solutions independently of others. 3.) You can increase your tolerance of frustration by allowing yourself and others the right to be wrong. 4.) Individuals can learn to accept that uncertainty is not horrible, but a fact of life--it can even become exciting. 5.) You can become more flexible and open to new ideas and changes that will happen whether you approve or not. 6.) You can base your judgments on a more objective thinking process which uses facts about events or relationships. 7.) You will become more open to making commitments to people, or ideas. 8.) You will be better able to take risking failure, and become willing to try new behaviors and activities to change monotony. 9.) You can stop causing yourself unnecessary pain by accepting and enjoying

the real you, including the faults. 10.) You can minimize the negatives in life by maximizing the positives. The benefits appear to be worth the risk juvenile delinquents would be facing in order to reduce their use of irrational beliefs that are used as a basis for decisions to use aggressive behaviors.

References

- Bandura, A (1982). Self-efficacy mechanism in human agency. American Psychologist, 37, 122-147.
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. Psychological Review, 84(2), 191-215.
- Bandura, A., Adams, N. E., & Beyer, J. (1977). Cognitive processes mediating behavioral change. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 35(3), 125-139.
- Blasi, A. (1980). Bridging moral cognition and moral action: A critical review of the literature. Psychological Bulletin, 88, 1-45.
- Burns, D. D. (1981). Feeling good: The New Mood Therapy. New York: Signet Book, New American Library.
- Diguiseppe, R., & Kassinove, H. (1976). Effects of a rational-emotive school mental health program on children's emotional adjustment. Journal of Community Psychology, 4, 382-387.
- Doane, J. A. (1978). Family interaction and communication deviance in disturbed and normal families: A review of research. Family Process, 17, 357-376.
- Ellis, A. (1985). Approaches to overcoming resistance: Handling special kinds of clients. British Journal of Cognitive Psycho-therapy, 3(1), 26-42.

- Ellis, A. (1984). Rational-Emotive Therapy. In R. J. Corsini & Contributors (Eds.). Current psychotherapies (3rd ed.) (pp. 196-238). Itasca, Ill.: F. E. Peacock Publisher, Inc..
- Ellis, A. (1983). Rational-Emotive Therapy (RET) approaches to overcoming resistance: II. How RET disputes client's irrational, resistance-creating beliefs. British Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy, 1(2), 1-16.
- Ellis, A. & Abrahams, E. (1978). Brief psychotherapy in medical and health practice. New York: Springer Publishing Co..
- Ellis, A., & Grieger, R. (1977). Handbook of rational-emotive therapy. New York: Springer Publishing Co..
- Ellis, A., & Knaus, W. (1977). Overcoming procrastination. New York: Institute for Rational Living.
- Ellis, A., & Harper, R. A. (1985). A new guide to rational living. Englewood Cliffs: Prentise-Hall Inc., and Hollywood: Wilshire Book Co..
- Grieger, R., & Bohd, J. (1980). Rational Emotive Therapy: A skills based approach. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company.
- Harbin, H. J., & Madden, D. S. (1985). Assaultive adolescent: Family decision-making parameters. Family Process, 22(1), 85-98.

- Kassinove, H., Crisci, R., & Tiegerman, S. (1977).
Developmental trends in rational thinking: Implication
for rational-emotive, school mental health programs.
Journal of Community Psychology, 5, 266-274.
- Knaus, W. (1974). Progress in rational-emotive-education.
Rational Living, 9, 27-29.
- Madanes, C. (1981). Severe problems of adolescents:
Putting the parents in charge. Strategic Family Therapy
(pp. 122-146). San Francisco: Jossey-Boss Publishers.
- Marohn, R. C. (1982). Adolescent violence: Causes and
treatment. Journal of the American Academy of Child
Psychiatry, 21, 345-360.
- Maxwell, J. W., & Wilkerson, J. (1982). Anxiety reduction
through group instruction in Rational Therapy. Journal
of Psychology, 112(1), 135-140.
- Meyers, J. E., & Nelson, III., W. M. (1986). Cognitive
strategies and expectations as components of social
competence in young adolescents. Adolescents, 21(82),
283-303.
- Morran, D. K., & Stockton, R. A. (1980). Effect of
self-concept on group member reception of positive
and negative feedback. Journal of Counseling Psychology,
27(3), 260-267.

- Orbach, I., & Hadas, Z. (1982). The elimination of learned helplessness deficits as a function of induced self-esteem. Journal of Research in Personality, 16(4), 511-523.
- Roush, D. (1984). Rational-emotive Therapy and youth: Some new techniques for counselors. Personnel and Guidance Journal, 62(7), 414-417.
- Short, R. J., & Simeonsson, R. J. (1986). Social cognition and aggression in delinquent adolescent males. Adolescents, 21(81), 159-176.
- Young, H. (1974). A framework for working with adolescents. Rational Living, 9, 3-7.