Effects of Maturity and Criminal Experience on Adolescents’ Analysis of Delinquency

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This thesis is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Psychology (Honours), Murdoch University, 2013.
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work, which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.

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Abstract

In an attempt to prevent the overrepresentation of adolescents in crime, many contemporary Western societies use legal systems based on deterrence and the rational choice model. The current study posits rational choice model is too narrow for use with adolescents, and creates a new model examining associations between the individual components of maturity- sensation seeking, peer influence, risk perception and future orientation- and benefit over cost analysis of delinquency scenarios, moderated by criminal experience. The sample consisted of 16 female and 45 male adolescents detained in a New Hampshire delinquent facility who responded to a questionnaire administered via one-on-one interviews with a facilitator. The findings are limited by the small sample size and lack of variability in the data, however they indicate at least one of the psychosocial factors that comprise maturity of judgment has an independent main effect on benefit and cost analysis. For a number of the other psychosocial factors the relationship appears more complex and appears to be an interaction with other intervening factors, which for one includes criminal experience. These findings have implications for prevention and intervention programs for delinquent youth, indicating a need to focus on particular influences of delinquency. Further research should test this model more thoroughly, with a larger sample size, longitudinal studies and a comparison non-delinquent sample.

Keywords: adolescence, delinquency, criminal experience, psychosocial factors, rational choice model.
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