



**BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS IN CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE:
A COMPARISON OF JUVENILE OFFENDERS, ADOLESCENTS
REFERRED TO A MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE, AND A COMMUNITY
CONTROL GROUP**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	ii
LIST OF TABLES	iv
ABSTRACT	v
AUTHOR'S STATEMENT	vii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	viii
INTRODUCTION	1
Overview of the thesis	1
CHAPTER 1: SOCIAL SKILL: THEORY AND RESEARCH	4
1.1 Background	4
1.2 Social Skills	5
1.3 Social Skills Deficits	8
1.4 Antisocial Behaviour	11
1.5 Delinquency	13
1.6 Assessing adolescent behaviour and social skills	21
1.7 The aims of the present investigation	23
CHAPTER 2: THE SELECTION OF MEASURES FOR ASSESSING BEHAVIOUR	26
2.1 Measures	26
Adolescents' Psychopathology	26
Family Functioning	31
Social Skills	33
Anger Expression	36
Self-Esteem	38
Intelligence	39
2.2 Pilot study - Reliability of the proposed assessment battery	40
Method	41
Results and Discussion	42
CHAPTER 3: A DESCRIPTION OF THE SUBJECTS	44
3.1 Adolescent Offenders	45
3.2 Clinic Group	46
3.3 Community Control Group	48
CHAPTER 4: A COMPARISON BETWEEN ADOLESCENT OFFENDERS, ADOLESCENTS REFERRED TO A MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE & A COMMUNITY CONTROL GROUP	49
4.1 Introduction	49
4.2 Method	50
4.5 Results	52
4.6 Discussion	61

CHAPTER 5: SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING	67
5.1 Social Skills	67
5.2 Evaluation	70
CHAPTER 6: THE EVALUATION OF A SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING PROGRAM FOR ADOLESCENTS	78
6.1 Introduction	78
6.2 Method	80
6.3 Results	83
6.4 Discussion	91
6.5 Conclusions	95
CHAPTER 7: GENERAL DISCUSSION	97
APPENDICES	102
Appendix A: General	103
Appendix A1: Glossary of abbreviations	104
Appendix A2: Offences reported by the court referred group	105
Appendix A3: Reason for referral	106
Appendix B: Chapter 4	107
Appendix B1: Significant group by sex interaction effects	108
Appendix B2: Analysis of the MESSY for males	109
Appendix B3: Analysis of the RSE	110
Appendix C: Chapter 6	111
Appendix C1: Content of the two programs	112
Appendix C2: Background Characteristics of subjects in each group	113
Appendix C3: The mean Pre- and Post-treatment scores obtained on the Behavior Problem Section of the YSR	114
Appendix C4: The mean Pre- and Post-treatment scores obtained on the Social Competence Section of the YSR for Males	115
Appendix C5: The mean scores obtained on the FAD-GF	116
Appendix C6: The mean scores obtained on the RSE for Males	117
Appendix C7: The Mean MESSY scores for Males	118
Appendix C8: The Mean STAXI scores for Males	119
Appendix C9: The Mean Pre-and Post-treatment scores obtained on the Behavior Problem Section of the CBCL	120
Appendix C10: The Mean Pre- and Post-treatment scores obtained on the Social Competence Section of the CBCL	121
Appendix C11: The mean scores obtained on the FAD-GF by parents	122
REFERENCES	123

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1: The internal reliability of measures using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient	43
Table 3.1: Demographic Characteristics of Subjects	44
Table 4.1: Significant Main effects of Sex	54
Table 4.2: Analysis of the Behavior Problem Section of the YSR for males	56
Table 4.3: Analysis of the Social Competence Section of the YSR for males	58
Table 4.4: Analysis of the FAD-GF	59
Table 4.5: Analysis of the STAXI for males	60
Table 6.1: Demographic Characteristics of Adolescents	81

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis was to identify the behaviour problems and specific social skill deficits associated with two forms of deviant adolescent behaviour: (i) the officially detected behaviour of recidivist offenders, and (ii) the behaviour of adolescents referred to a mental health service, in order to determine why some adolescent deviants enter a cycle of repeated police apprehension and court referral, whilst others are referred for treatment. Whilst previous research has established associations between poor social functioning in childhood and adjustment problems in adulthood, very little is known of the specific behaviour problems and social skill deficits of adolescent repeat offenders. Furthermore, there is no evidence to demonstrate that the behaviour problems and skill deficits of adolescent offenders are distinguishable from those of disturbed youth.

An integral part of this thesis was the selection of a battery of measures to assess adolescents' overall social competence, emotional and behavioural problems, family functioning, global self-esteem, as well as two specific domains of behaviour comprising social skills and anger expression and control. A small-scale investigation was initially undertaken to determine the suitability of a battery of self-report questionnaires for use in the main study.

The first investigation in the main study gathered reports from apprehended adolescents with histories of prior contact with the police and the juvenile justice system (adolescent offenders), adolescents referred to a child and adolescent mental health service (clinic group) and a non-referred community group (community

control group). The investigation was undertaken to determine the extent to which the behaviour problems of adolescents in each group could be distinguished. The results demonstrated few differences between the reports of the male adolescent offenders and males in the clinic group in terms of overall social competence, emotional and behavioural problems and general family functioning. In addition, few differences were identified between the two groups in terms of specific social skills, inappropriate social skills, and the intensity and control of anger and frustration.

The results of this investigation also identified differences between the reports of males and females in the clinic group. Specifically, females reported more emotional problems relating to withdrawn and anxious behaviour as well as more behaviour problems, inappropriate social skills and jealous behaviour. Females also reported a greater tendency to suppress their anger compared to males.

The second investigation was designed to evaluate a form of social skills training. The results demonstrated that at a fifteen week follow-up, adolescents who were administered an intervention program consisting of social skills training, anger and stress management and problem solving, reported an increase in overall social competence, a reduction in inappropriate social skills and a reduced tendency to experience and express anger and frustration.

Finally, the implications of both investigations are discussed and suggestions are made for extending the findings of this thesis in terms of further empirical work.

AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University, and to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

I consent to this thesis being made available for photocopying and loan if accepted for the award of the degree of Master of Arts.

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