



Does Moral Practice Matter in Restraining Juvenile Delinquency and Drug Addiction in the Socialization Process?

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of moral practice in restraining juvenile delinquency and drug addiction within the socialization process. Adolescence is a critical developmental stage in which individuals are highly influenced by family, peers, educational institutions, and broader social environments. Using a qualitative research design, this study collected primary data through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with juveniles, including those involved in delinquency and substance use, while secondary data were obtained from academic literature, legal documents, and relevant reports. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns related to moral development and deviant behavior. The findings reveal that moral practice, particularly when reinforced within family environments through supervision, communication, and religiosity, plays a crucial protective role in reducing involvement in delinquent activities and drug use. Adolescents raised in morally structured and religiously oriented families demonstrated stronger self-control and resistance to negative behaviors. In contrast, weak parental supervision, unstable family conditions, peer pressure, and exposure to harmful digital content were identified as major risk factors contributing to delinquency and addiction. The study also highlights that religiosity functions as a supportive mechanism by strengthening internal moral beliefs and guiding behavior, although its effectiveness depends on broader social contexts. Overall, the study concludes that moral practice is most effective when integrated with strong social support systems. Therefore, comprehensive prevention strategies should incorporate family-based moral education, school engagement, and community interventions to address the root causes of juvenile delinquency and drug addiction.

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a distinct developmental stage marked by rapid biological, cognitive, and social change, during which young people are especially sensitive to the influence of family, school, and peers. It is also a period when moral reasoning and self-regulation are still developing, making adolescents more vulnerable to risk-taking, rule-breaking, and other problem behaviors (Sawyer et al., 2018). Contemporary reviews of adolescent moral development emphasize that morality is shaped through dynamic socialization processes rather than appearing fully formed, and that moral growth in adolescence is strongly linked to the social environments in which young people are raised (Hardy et al., 2019; Malti et al., 2021a).

Within this developmental context, family process and peer relations play a central role in shaping adolescent behavior. Research shows that family processes and peer influences are significantly associated with substance use among adolescents, while peer delinquency and unstructured socializing are consistently linked to both delinquency and substance use (Loke & Mak, 2013). In addition, stronger family social bonds and social capital have been identified as protective factors against delinquent behavior, suggesting that supportive and supervised family environments may reduce youths' exposure to deviant peer networks and risky conduct (Hoeben et al., 2016; Hoffmann & Dufur, 2018).

Moral practice and religiosity may also function as protective resources during adolescence by strengthening internalized norms, self-control, and moral beliefs. Prior research indicates that religiosity can reduce delinquency partly through the socialization of strong moral beliefs, and systematic reviews of religious and spiritual influence in adolescence report that these factors are often associated with healthier developmental outcomes (Desmond et al., 2008). More recent work on Muslim adolescents similarly suggests that religiosity can operate as a protective factor against delinquency and may be relevant for prevention-oriented interventions (Mohammad & Banse, 2023).

Against this background, the present study examines whether moral practice within the socialization process helps restrain juvenile delinquency and drug addiction, with particular attention to the roles of family, educational institutions, peers, and religious formation. By focusing on the mechanisms through which moral values are internalized and translated into behavior, this study seeks to contribute evidence that may inform more effective preventive strategies for youth deviance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Juvenile delinquency and adolescent drug use are widely recognized as co-occurring problem behaviors that emerge from a complex mix of social, familial, and developmental factors rather than from individual choice alone. Research shows that delinquency and substance use often travel together across adolescence, and that multiple health-risk behaviors tend to cluster during this developmental period

(D'Amico et al., 2008; Hale & Viner, 2016).

Developmental scholarship also shows that adolescence is a critical period for moral development, with moral reasoning and behavior shaped through dynamic socialization processes (Malti et al., 2021b). In this sense, moral development is not static; it is influenced by family, school, peers, and broader social environments that help young people internalize norms, self-regulation, and civic responsibility.

A large body of international research indicates that parenting and family processes are important protective factors. Meta-analytic evidence shows that parenting—especially monitoring, support, and low rejection—is strongly related to lower delinquency, while family and peer factors are also associated with adolescent substance use across development (Hoeve et al., 2009). Peer influence is likewise robust: a meta-analysis of longitudinal studies found that peer behavior has a small but significant effect on youth behavior over time (Giletta et al., 2021; Van Ryzin et al., 2012).

Studies focused on juvenile justice-involved youth further confirm that substance use is shaped by family and peer influences, suggesting that delinquency and drug use should be understood within a shared socialization framework (Zapolski et al., 2019). These findings imply that weak supervision, deviant peers, and poor family attachment can increase vulnerability to both delinquency and drug involvement.

Religiosity and moral beliefs have also been identified as potential protective factors. Research has found that religiosity is associated with lower delinquency when combined with moral beliefs, while reviews of adolescent religiosity and spirituality suggest that these processes often support positive youth development and reduce risk behaviors, including substance use (Desmond et al., 2008; Hardy et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2000). Studies on religiosity and adolescent substance use similarly report protective associations. Therefore, the literature suggests that juvenile delinquency and drug addiction should be approached as socialization-related outcomes shaped by parenting, peers, moral development, and religiosity. This provides a strong theoretical basis for examining moral practice as a possible protective factor in restraining delinquent and substance-using behavior among adolescents.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design to examine how moral practice within the socialization process may restrain juvenile delinquency and drug addiction. Qualitative inquiry is appropriate for exploring complex social experiences, so the study used face-to-face in-depth interviews and focus group discussions as the main techniques of primary data collection, while secondary data were drawn from books, journal articles, legal documents, reports, and other relevant sources to contextualize

the findings. Interviews and focus groups are widely recommended for examining perceptions and social processes, and focus groups are especially useful for generating interaction and richer discussion among participants (Gill et al., 2008; Halcomb et al., 2007). Participants were selected purposively as information-rich cases, following established guidance that purposeful sampling is suitable when researchers need respondents with direct experience of the phenomenon under study (Palinkas et al., 2015). The interview and discussion transcripts were then analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, code meaningful segments, and develop analytic themes from the data, an approach that is flexible and widely used in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study suggest that moral practice matters most when it is embedded in everyday family life and reinforced through supervision, communication, and religious socialization. In the interviews, 15 of 17 respondents said that religiosity and moral practice in the family discouraged involvement in theft, drug use, and other antisocial acts, while respondents who described fractured family care, weak guidance, or unstable home environments reported greater vulnerability to delinquency and substance use. This pattern is consistent with the broader qualitative evidence in this study, where youths raised in religiously oriented households described stronger self-restraint and those lacking parental guidance described more deviant behavior.

This interpretation is supported by international research showing that family processes are a key protective factor during adolescence. A systematic review of longitudinal studies found that parental supervision is significantly associated with later offending, with a weighted mean effect size of $d = 0.37$, and the effect was stronger for parental knowledge ($d = 0.45$) (Flanagan et al., 2019). Related evidence also shows that family social capital is a strong predictor of delinquent behavior, while studies of adolescents have found that family process and peer influences are associated with substance use (Hoffmann & Dufur, 2018). These findings suggest that consistent monitoring, warm attachment, and active parental knowledge reduce adolescents' exposure to delinquent opportunities and risky behavior (Loke & Mak, 2013).

Peer pressure was another recurring theme in the study. Several informants linked cigarette smoking, drug initiation, and criminal behavior to friends or older peers, which fits the evidence from a recent meta-analysis of 27 longitudinal studies showing that peer influence has a significant positive effect on adolescent substance use across multiple substances and often operates through perceived norms (Watts et al., 2024). In other words, adolescents do not only imitate peers; they also absorb the idea that risky behavior is normal or acceptable within their peer group, which can accelerate both substance use and delinquent conduct.

Religiosity also emerged as an important protective theme, but it should be

understood as one part of the broader socialization process rather than as a stand-alone explanation. A systematic review of Muslim religiosity and juvenile delinquency found that Muslim adolescents generally show lower delinquency, although the pattern varies by cultural context and by how religiosity is measured (Mohammad & Banse, 2023); similarly, a meta-analysis of religion, delinquency, and drug use reported an inverse relationship between religious involvement and delinquent behaviors (Kelly et al., 2015). The participants' statements that religious upbringing helped them avoid drugs and misbehavior therefore align with the wider literature, especially when religiosity is linked to family discipline, self-control, and pro-social norms.

Finally, the technology-related findings are also supported by current evidence. A systematic review and meta-analysis in *BMJ* found that social media use is associated with several adolescent health-risk behaviors, including drug use, antisocial behavior, sexual risk behaviors, and multiple risk behaviors (Flanagan et al., 2019; Watts et al., 2024), while a separate systematic review reported that internet pornography can adversely affect children and adolescents (Purba et al., 2023). In the context of this study, these findings suggest that weak supervision combined with unrestricted digital exposure may intensify risk, especially when adolescents are already influenced by delinquent peers and limited moral guidance.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that moral practice plays a significant role in restraining juvenile delinquency and drug addiction, particularly when it is embedded within the broader socialization process involving family, peers, educational institutions, and religious influences. The findings demonstrate that adolescents who grow up in environments characterized by strong moral guidance, active parental supervision, and religious or ethical orientation tend to develop better self-control and are less likely to engage in deviant behaviors. Conversely, weak family structures, lack of supervision, and exposure to negative peer groups increase the likelihood of delinquency and substance abuse. These results reinforce the argument that moral values are not formed in isolation but are socially constructed and internalized through continuous interaction with key agents of socialization.

Furthermore, the study highlights that moral practice alone is not sufficient unless it is supported by consistent social structures and adaptive responses to contemporary challenges such as peer pressure and digital exposure. The influence of peers and the misuse of technology were found to intensify risky behaviors, especially when moral guidance is weak or absent. Therefore, effective prevention strategies should adopt a holistic approach that integrates moral education, family involvement, school-based interventions, and community support systems. Strengthening moral development alongside social control mechanisms can contribute to reducing juvenile delinquency and drug addiction, ultimately fostering

a more responsible, resilient, and socially integrated youth population.

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