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An Empirical Study of Emotional Regulation and Moral Disengagement among Juvenile Delinquents in Hebei, China—The Mediating Effect of Empathy

Wenwen Sun¹ and Zheyun Zheng^{*2}

¹Trade Union, Hengshui University, Hebei, China

²College of Social Innovation, Rangsit University, Pathum Thani 12000, Thailand

*Corresponding author, E-mail: zhengzheyun@gmail.com

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Abstract

With the continuous development of society, the issue of juvenile delinquents in China has attracted much attention in recent years. 137 juvenile delinquents in Hebei Province, China were researched, and SPSS was used to conduct difference analysis, correlation analysis and regression analysis on emotional regulation, empathy, moral disengagement, and related factors for juvenile delinquents in Hebei province, China. The results showed that the levels of emotional regulation and empathy of juvenile delinquents in Hebei province, China are at the lower middle level, and moral disengagement is at the upper middle level. Juvenile delinquents' moral disengagement is affected by juvenile delinquent's gender, age, education, and family structure. Juvenile delinquent's emotional regulation and empathy are influenced by juvenile their gender and family structure. The emotional regulation of juvenile delinquent has a significant negative relationship with moral disengagement. Empathy plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between emotional regulation and moral disengagement. This study's authors believe that China should give young people positive attention and timely help from family, school and society to prevent the occurrence of juvenile delinquency. Juvenile delinquents serving sentences should be actively provided with psychological counseling, and they should be given opportunities to reform in a timely manner from the perspectives of education, reformation, and rescue.

Keywords: *Chinese juvenile delinquents; emotional regulation; empathy; moral disengagement*

1. Introduction

As an indispensable part of the population structure of a society and a country, teenagers bring endless power for the sustainable development of society and a country (WHO, 2018). How to educate and train teenagers well is a problem that society, family and school need to think about together. Since the 1960s, juvenile delinquency in the world has shown a continuous growth trend. Each year, the American juvenile justice system adjudicates about one million delinquency cases (Snyder, & Sickmund, 2006). In China, the growth of teenagers has received relatively comprehensive concern and attention from all walks of life, and the number of juvenile crimes has decreased on the whole. However, the potential deterioration caused by juvenile delinquency and the potential for great harm still cannot be ignored. According to the "White Paper on Juvenile Procuratorate Work" released by Supreme People's Procuratorate of China (2021), in recent years, the number of juvenile crimes in China has rebounded after declining for many years. Due to the control of the Covid 19 in China, following the year-on-year increase of 7.51% and 5.12% in 2019, the acceptance of review arrests and review and prosecution of juvenile criminal suspects resulted in a decrease by 21.95% and 10.35% year-on-year in 2020, the lowest in five years. Even so, the issue of juvenile delinquent crime should not be underestimated. Juvenile delinquent crime is not only an indicator of the present state of society, but also of the future society (UNODC, & The World Bank, 2007). Juvenile delinquency not only destroys the family, but also affects the current and future social stability by destroying the social order. Students should enjoy a good life on campus, but the rapid economic development and drastic social transformation has pushed more and more teenagers onto the road of crime (Song, Li, Wang, & Zhang, 2022).

Accurately analyzing and mastering their psychological characteristics and actively carrying out correction work is a key link in the reshaping of education of juvenile offenders (Song et al., 2022). From the

perspective of criminologists and psychologists, internalizing moral standards is important to prevent violations (Hamidieh, 2022). This inner mechanism has also been explained in psychology. This mechanism, which separates behavior from normative moral cognition, is known as moral disengagement (Mihelič, Lim, & Culiberg, 2023). People avoid immoral behavior because they are afraid of internal sanctions such as guilt, shame, or regret, and external sanctions for fear of opposition, exclusion, or punishment (Mihelič et al., 2023).

Empathy can be defined as one's ability to take the perspective of another person in order to assist that person in relieving their distress (Steindl, Bell, Dixon, & Kirby, 2022). Empathy can involve a feeling of sorrow, a feeling that matches someone else's feeling, and/or an expression of understanding and support (Malbois, 2023). Eisenberg emphasized two factors that determine whether a person will experience personal distress or empathy: negative emotionality and emotion regulation (Eisenberg, 2005). Emotion regulation refers to an individual's ability to monitor or adjust the duration or intensity of an emotional reaction in order to cope constructively with a distressing situation or to achieve a goal (Eisenberg, Fabes, Guthrie, & Reiser, 2002; Eisenberg, 2005)

The juvenile delinquent longs for the trust and respect of adults: from parents, school, and society; but they are impulsive, emotional, and weak in self-control (Meng, 2022). Juvenile delinquents are characterized by emotional instability and they tend to be self-centered, one-sided, and suffer from an extreme evaluation of their own setbacks and difficulties, so that negative emotions occupy a dominant position; psychological problems also bring long-term reactions such as more anxiety, depression and fear. Once stimulated by the external environment, these factors are likely to lead to extreme behavior or criminal behavior (Song et al., 2022). Therefore, this article will discuss the relationship and application of emotional control, empathy, and moral disengagement in the juvenile delinquent.

2. Objectives

- 1) Evaluate the level of emotional regulation, empathy and moral disengagement in the Chinese juvenile delinquent.
- 2) Evaluate the influence of emotional regulation, empathy and moral disengagement by gender, age, education, and family structure.
- 3) Research the relationship between emotional regulation and moral disengagement.
- 4) Evaluate the mediating effect of empathy in the relationship between emotional regulation and moral disengagement.

3. Materials and Methods

Literature Review

Many studies have confirmed that moral disengagement is closely related to teenagers' problem behavior. It is important to be able to predict whether teenagers will engage in immoral behavior, and there is also a significant positive correlation between immoral behavior and the teenagers' anti-social behavior such as engaging in crime. For example, in the research about the role of moral disengagement in children's criminal conduct, moral disengagement tends to result in aggressive and antisocial pursuits (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Mihelič et al., 2023). In the study of bullying behavior, it has been found that the higher the level of moral disengagement, the more abusive the bully's behavior is (Gini, Pozzoli, & Hymel, 2014). Bullying removes them from moral reasoning about their abusive behavior (Hymel, & Bonanno, 2014).

The concept of "Techniques of Neutralization Theory" put forward by criminology experts explains this phenomenon and holds that even if criminal teenagers realize that their behavior violates the common values and moral concepts of society, they will use techniques of neutralization theory to excuse their illegal and criminal behavior (Liu & Xian, 2005). They will deny responsibility, damage, claim victimhood, condemn others, and become highly loyal to groups or gangs (Hirschi, 2017). Bandura called this mechanism of separating cognition from behavior moral evasion, which refers to an internal cognitive mechanism of individual moral self-regulation (Mihelič et al., 2023). The theory holds that the self-regulation system is the basis of the whole moral system, which is composed of three stages: self-supervision, self-evaluation, and self-feedback. When an individual engages in immoral behavior, the self-regulation system may fail, and the main reason for the failure of this system is moral evasion (Wang, Lei, Liu, & Hu, 2016).

Related research results on moral disengagement point out that, on the one hand, there are significant gender differences in moral disengagement, and the level of moral disengagement in boys is significantly higher than that in girls (Barchia, & Bussey, 2010; Hyde, Shaw, & Moilanen, 2009; Yang, Li, & Wang, 2014; Ma, & Jiao, 2018). On the other hand, there are significant differences in the moral disengagement levels of adolescents of different ages (Paciello, Fida, Tramontano, Lupinetti, & Caprara, 2008), and the moral disengagement levels of adolescents change significantly at the age of 15 and 19, and increase with age (Yang et al., 2014). The research results of Dewi, Utomo, and Lestari (2022) pointed out that men are better at controlling their emotions, and believe that men have better emotional management skills. It is indirectly pointed out from the research results of aggressive behavior closely related to emotional regulation (Robertson, Daffern, & Bucks, 2012; Holley et al., 2016). On the one hand, there is no significant difference in the aggressive behavior of boys and girls in early adolescence, but in middle and late adolescence the aggressive behavior of boys is significantly higher than that of girls (Yu, Wei, Yuan, & Fang, 2015). Gender plays a moderating role in the impact of moral disengagement on cyberbullying. Boys' moral disengagement has a stronger effect on cyberbullying than girls (Wang et al., 2016); moral disengagement only has a significant effect on boys' relational aggression (Kokkinos, Voulgaridou, Mandrali, & Parousidou, 2016). On the other hand, adolescent aggression increases with age, and is significantly higher in middle and late adolescence than in early adolescence (Zhang, Qian, & Wang, 2008; Yu et al., 2015). Through the intervention of emotional intelligence on adolescents, it has been found that adolescents, especially males, have a positive effect on alleviating negative emotional experiences such as anger, hostility, and personal pain (Du, 2020; Maalouf et al., 2022; Kiarostami, Aghajanyhashjin, & Alizadeh, 2022). In terms of family structure risks, such as family divorce (Brody, Murry, Kim, & Brown, 2002), low parental education (Buehler, & Gerard, 2013), low family cohesion (Gerard, & Buehler, 2004), and high familial conflict (Wadsworth, & Compas, 2002), these can all seriously threaten the mental health development of adolescents (Bian, Liang, & Zhang, 2016). Family cumulative risk widely affects adolescents' internalizing and externalizing problems (Buehler, & Gerard, 2013). For example, as family cumulative risk increases, adolescents have more self-harm behaviors (Ge, & Liu, 2018) and deviant behaviors (Chen, 2019).

The defining feature of emotion regulation is the activation of a goal to influence the emotion trajectory (Gross, Sheppes, & Urry, 2011). Gross believes that emotion regulation refers to the process in which individuals exert influence on emotion occurrence, experience and expression; Emotion regulation involves changes in the latency, occurrence time, duration, behavioral expression, physiological experience and physiological response of emotion (Goldin, McRae, Ramel, & Gross, 2008). It is a dynamic process. Firstly, emotion regulation includes positive emotion and negative emotion, and they all include enhancement, maintenance and reduction; Secondly, emotion regulation can sometimes be controlled by consciousness, but sometimes it is involuntary and unconscious; Third, the habit of emotion regulation is like character, and there is no distinction between good and bad, right and wrong (Li, Wang, Zhong, & Zhang, 2014).

Empathy is the ability to understand others and then communicate this feeling to others, in other words, to understand others through what they know and experience about themselves (Zhang, 2022). Empathy is an important component of emotional intelligence (EQ). Modern theory believes that emotional intelligence has five aspects, namely: emotional self-awareness, self-emotional control, self-motivation, empathy, and interpersonal (Yahaya et al., 2012). Emotional intelligence is an important factor affecting interpersonal communication and survival adaptation. Teenagers are in adolescence, and their emotions are characterized by variability, such as sensitivity and instability, strong changes, relative vulnerability, impulsiveness, and lack of reason and control (Zhang, 2022). Adolescents' lack of recognition of their own and others' emotions and their inability to effectively use and control their emotions is one of the prominent factors leading to individual aggressive behavior (Robertson et al., 2012; Holley et al., 2016). Moral disengagement is the cognitive tendency of individuals to avoid immoral behavior. Individuals with high levels of moral disengagement tend to misinterpret aggressive behavior as a reasonable behavior.

Research has shown that individuals with high levels of emotional regulation are more likely to experience empathy because they are able to control their own emotional reactions and focus on the feelings of others (Schipper, & Petermann, 2013; Lockwood, Seara-Cardoso, & Viding, 2014). On the other hand, people with low levels of emotional regulation may experience personal distress because they do not have

the coping skills to manage their own negative emotions. This has been supported by studies that found that well-regulated children tend to display higher levels of empathy. Eisenberg found that preschool children who had high levels of attentional control and low levels of unregulated coping behaviors were more likely to show concerned facial reactions in response to a film designed to elicit empathy (Eisenberg, 2005). Alternatively, research also suggests that individuals with low regulatory abilities are more likely to experience personal distress because they do not have the necessary coping strategies to manage their negative emotions. Multiple studies have found that well-regulated children have higher levels of empathy. (Murphy, Shepard, Eisenberg, Fabes, & Guthrie, 1999; Eisenberg et al., 2002; Liu, & Lu, 2013).

Conceptual Framework

According to the theoretical analysis, this study established a research model as shown in Figure 1:

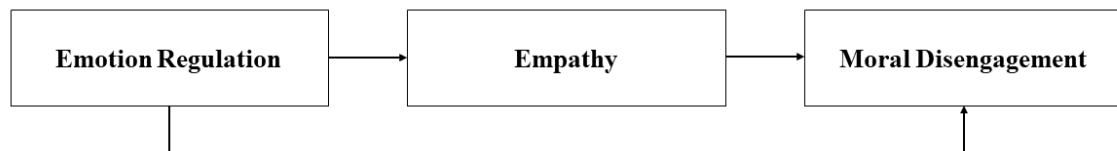


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Sample: In this study, purpose sampling was used for sample selection. Starting from March 1, 2021, China defines juvenile delinquency as an act committed by a person aged 12 to 18 that seriously endangers society and violates the criminal law and should be punished according to law (Guo, 2021). Therefore, this paper takes juvenile delinquents aged 12 to 18 as the research sample. Due to the particularity of the sample in this study, which are under strict supervision, complicated research permits, and incompatibility of the sample, under the limited resources available for this study, juveniles from three correctional institutions in Hebei, China were selected as the research sample. For research purposes, this study was approved with research permission from the Institution Review Board of Assumption University. The data were collected through paper questionnaire, and the services of an online and offline data collection agency was employed in the data collection process from December 1st, 2022 to January 10th. A total of 200 offline paper questionnaires were distributed, performing a random sample analysis. Finally, 149 questionnaires were received, with a recovery rate of 74.5%. A total of 12 unqualified questionnaires such as incomplete answers were deleted, and 137 valid questionnaires were finally collected, with an effective rate of 91.9%. The descriptive statistics results from SPSS show that:

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of samples

	n	Percent	Cumulative Percentage
Gender			
Male	92	67.15%	67.15%
Female	45	32.85%	100.00%
Age			
Under 15 years old	20	14.60%	14.60%
15 & 16 years old	45	32.85%	47.45%
Over 16 years old	72	52.55%	100.00%
Degree			
Lower than Junior school	35	25.55%	25.55%
Junior school	26	18.98%	44.53%
High school	76	55.47%	100.00%
Family Risk Construct			
Non-intact family	118	86.13%	86.13
Intact family	19	13.87%	100%

According to Table 1, among the samples collected this time, there are 92 male juvenile delinquents, accounting for 67.15%, and 45 female juvenile delinquents, accounting for 32.85%; The age is mainly concentrated in over 16 years old and 15 & 16 years old, with 72 and 45 people respectively, accounting for 52.55% and 32.85% respectively. Education is mainly concentrated in high school, for a total of 76 people, accounting for 55.47%. The family risk structure is mainly concentrated in non-intact families, with a total of 118 people, accounting for 86.13%. It can be seen that the overall survey sample is more adult-oriented.

The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire for Children and Adolescents: The Chinese version of The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire for Children and Adolescents (ERQ-CCA), was used in this study to measure participants' emotional regulatory ability (Gross, & John, 2003; Chen et al., 2020). The original ERQ-CA is a 10-item questionnaire that assess the ER strategies of cognitive reappraisal (CR, 6 items) and expressive suppression (ES, 4 items). It has been translated for and validated in Chinese samples (Wang, Liu, Li, & Du, 2007; Chen et al., 2020). The ERQ-CCA was developed by modifying the items to make the items more easily understandable for children (e.g., "I keep my emotions to myself" was replaced with "I do not want to show my feelings to others" in Chinese). Each item is rated in a Likert response format of 7 options ranged from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree). The higher the scores on each scale, the greater the use of the corresponding ER strategy is. The mean scores were calculated on both the CR and ES scale. The two-factor confirmatory factor analysis results showed that: $X^2/df=12.513$, $NFI=0.901$, $CFI=0.902$, $IFI=0.902$, $TLI=0.899$, $RMSEA=0.167$. The Cronbach's alpha of the cultural confidence scale is 0.910.

The empathy questionnaire for children and adolescents (EmQue-CA): Empathy was measured with the Chinese version of The Empathy Questionnaire for Children and Adolescents, which was modified from the initial version of the EmQue-CA (Overgaauw, Rieffe, Broekhof, Crone, & Güroğlu, 2017) to Chinese context, after discussing with experts in Chinese adolescent psychology and related fields, this questionnaire revised the 21 items of the original scale to 14 items. All of the items are scored on a 3-point rating scale ranging from 1 "not true" to 3 "true". Higher scores indicate higher empathy. According to the exploratory factor analysis (EFA), $KMO = 0.917$, $p = 0.0001$. After deleting items for which the communalities were lower than 0.40 (Ho, 2006), 14 items were finally retained to form a three-factor structure. The absolute value of each rotated factor loadings was greater than 0.50, and the cumulative percent of variance accounted for was 67.73%. The final version consists 14-items with three factors: cognitive empathy with 3 items; affective empathy with 6 items; intention to comfort with 5 items. The three-factor confirmatory factor analysis results showed that: $X^2/df=13.618$, $NFI=0.927$, $CFI=0.945$, $IFI=0.931$, $TLI=0.906$, $RMSEA=0.089$. The Cronbach's alpha of the empathy scale is 0.915.

Moral disengagement scale (MDS): Moral disengagement was measured with Chinese version of the Moral Disengagement Scale (MDS-C) (Wang, & Yang, 2010) which was translated from the MDS. This Chinese version of the instrument was based on the Translation - Back - Translation technique. The MDS-C contains 32 items, with 4 items under each of the eight moral disengagement sub-scales. The sub-scales are: Euphemistic labeling, Moral justification, Dehumanization, Diffusion of responsibility, Minimizing, Ignoring or Misconstruing the consequences, Displacement of responsibility, Palliative comparison, and Attribution of blame. Each item is rated on a five-point Likert scale scoring ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Academic Deception Behavior Questionnaire and the Moral Identity Questionnaire were used as validation criteria to test the validity of the MDS in China context. The confirmatory factor analysis results showed that: $X^2/df=8.105$, $NFI=0.912$, $CFI=0.907$, $IFI=0.908$, $TLI=0.901$, $RMSEA=0.093$. This scale was tested in Chinese that showed adequate internal consistency and Cronbach's alpha for the entire scale is 0.87, split-half reliability is 0.80.

Statistics: This study mainly used SPSS for data entry and statistical analysis. Descriptive analysis was used to analyze the demographic information. Independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA were used to analyze the level of emotion regulation, empathy, and moral disengagement, and their influencing factors. Correlation analysis was used to analyze the relationship between the respondents' emotion regulation, empathy, and moral disengagement. Finally, a regression model was established, with gender, age, education, and family risk construct as control variables, emotion regulation as independent variables, empathy as mediator variables, moral disengagement as dependent variables, and four models were

established by regression analysis. Group 1 was used to verify the direct effect of emotion regulation on moral disengagement. Group 2 was used to verify the mediating effect of empathy.

4. Results

Difference tests analysis: According to the statistical results shown in Table 2, juvenile delinquents' emotion regulation ($M=35.50$, $SD=9.85$) and empathy ($M=24.90$, $SD=8.12$) were in the low-middle range. Moral disengagement ($M=113.63$, $SD=4.78$) was in the upper-middle range. Through post-hoc test analysis, females were found to have significantly higher average levels in emotion regulation and empathy ($p<0.001$); Over 16 years old was significantly higher in empathy than the other two age groups, and were significantly lower in moral disengagement than the other two age groups ($p<0.001$). Conversely, the under 15 years old group was significantly lower in empathy than the other two age groups, and significantly higher in moral disengagement than the other two age groups ($p<0.001$). High school students were significantly lower in moral disengagement than the other two educational levels ($p<0.001$). Intact family was significantly higher than non-intact family in emotion regulation and empathy ($p<0.001$), and significantly lower than non-intact family in moral disengagement ($p<0.001$).

Table 2 Difference test statistics of emotion regulation, empathy, and moral disengagement

	Emotion regulation M(SD)	Empathy M(SD)	Moral disengagement M(SD)
Gender			
Male	30.11(8.17)	23.73(8.85)	115.87(8.31)
Female	46.52(8.32)	27.24(8.43)	109.03(7.84)
	$t=2.569^{***}$	$t=2.775^{***}$	$t=2.663^{***}$
Age			
Under 15 years old	34.56(8.03)	24.18(8.33)	114.96(8.24)
15 & 16 years old	34.85(7.52)	25.49(8.60)	112.10(7.41)
Over 16 years old	35.22(8.99)	26.82(8.41)	110.76(7.72)
	$F=90.061$	$F=69.926^{**}$	$F=88.303^{**}$
Degree			
Lower than Junior school	34.60(6.07)	26.21(6.47)	116.74(9.43)
Junior school	35.12(6.47)	26.25(6.72)	115.58(8.25)
High school	34.85(6.08)	26.82(6.57)	108.22(9.27)
	$F=35.733$	$F=37.412$	$F=33.505^{**}$
Family			
Non-intact family	32.17(8.36)	20.66(9.82)	117.64(12.86)
Intact family	41.43(8.61)	29.88(7.01)	99.26(12.34)
	$t=8.840^{***}$	$t=8.155^{***}$	$t=7.006^{***}$

** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$

Correlation analysis: In this study, the total score of each scale was used as a variable, and Pearson correlation analysis was carried out on motion regulation, empathy, and moral disengagement. As shown in Table 3, it was found that emotion regulation was positively correlated with empathy ($r=0.768$, $p<0.001$) and was negatively correlated with moral disengagement ($r=-0.742$, $p<0.01$); empathy was negatively correlated with moral disengagement ($r=-0.644$, $p<0.001$).

Table 3 Correlation analysis of emotion regulation, empathy, and moral disengagement

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.GEN	1						
2.AGE	0.154	1					
3.DEG	0.038	0.066	1				
4.FAM	0.109***	0.095*	0.188*	1			
5.EMO	0.671**	0.095	0.113	0.597***	1		
6.EMP	0.622**	0.516***	0.054	0.631**	0.768***	1	
7.MOR	-0.263*	-0.311***	-0.300***	-0.288**	-0.742***	-0.644***	1

1=gender, 2=age, 3=degree, 4=family risk construct, 5=emotion regulation, 6=empathy, 7=moral disengagement;
 * $P < 0.05$, ** $P < 0.01$, *** $P < 0.001$

Regression Analysis Before performing the regression analysis, the data was standardized, and after multicollinearity diagnosis, the results meet the preconditions for regression analysis (Ho, 2006). Model 1 was established by adding control variables and independent variables. The results in Table 4 show that emotion regulation ($\beta = -0.837$, $p < 0.001$) can significantly and negatively predict moral disengagement. Based on correlation and regression analysis results:

Hypothesis 1 was supported, that is, emotion regulation has a significant negative impact on moral disengagement.

For the mediating effect shown in Figure 2, model 2 was established with emotion regulation as an independent variable, model 3 was established with empathy as an independent variable, and model 4 was established by adding emotion regulation and empathy. The results show that emotion regulation ($\beta = -0.694$, $p < 0.001$) can significantly and positively predict empathy; empathy ($\beta = 0.733$, $p < 0.001$) can significantly negatively predict moral disengagement; adding emotion regulation ($\beta = -0.640$, $p < 0.001$), and empathy ($\beta = -0.613$, $p < 0.001$) still had a significant effect on moral disengagement. Comparing Model 1 and Model 4, it shows that empathy plays a partial mediating role. Based on correlation analysis, and regression analysis:

Hypothesis 2 was supported, that is, empathy has a mediating effect between emotion regulation and moral disengagement.

Table 4 A sequential test of direct and mediating effects

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
1.Gender	-0.187**	-0.165***	-0.177***	-0.153***
2.Age	-0.135	-0.084***	0.123***	0.133*
3.Degree	0.126	0.044***	0.093***	0.102***
4.Family	-0.148**	-0.121***	0.127	-0.142**
5.Emotion regulation	-0.837***	0.694**		-0.640**
6.Empathy			-0.733***	-0.613***
R^2	0.750	0.731	0.748	0.784

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

5. Discussion

The survey results of this paper show that the emotional regulation of juvenile delinquent offenders in Hebei, China is at a moderately low level of empathy, and their moral disengagement is at a moderately high level. It shows that the emotional regulation, empathy, and moral disengagement of Hebei juvenile delinquent need to be improved. From the perspective of gender, the moral disengagement level of boys is significantly higher than that of girls. Except for the dimension of responsibility dispersion, there are significant gender differences in the other seven dimensions and the total score of moral disengagement, and the scores of boys are significantly higher than girls. This conclusion has been generally proved (Barchia, & Bussey, 2010; Hyde et al., 2009; Yang et al., 2014; Ma, & Jiao, 2019). According to the characteristics of physical and mental development of both sexes, girls mature earlier than boys in terms of psychology and body, can use assimilated moral concepts to restrain their behavior, and are not inclined to justify themselves. Men take fairness as the focus of attention, and are more likely to engage in immoral behaviors and distort

them into seemingly reasonable behaviors, which is also related to the low level of boys' moral identity. In addition, from the perspective of China's "face culture", Chinese women are more engaged in self-attribution, self-reflection, and self-criticism, while Chinese men are deeply influenced by the face culture and tend to attribute problems to the outside world and do not tend to blame themselves for their mistakes and find excuses for their behavior. Thus, the level of moral disengagement of the male juvenile delinquent is higher than that of the female juvenile delinquent.

According to the characteristics of physical and mental development of both sexes, female adolescents mature earlier than male adolescents in terms of psychology and body, can use assimilated moral concepts to restrain their behavior, and are not inclined to justify themselves. Male adolescents take fairness as the focus of attention, and are more likely to engage in immoral behaviors, and distort them into seemingly reasonable behaviors, which is also related to the low level of moral identity of male adolescents. In addition, from the perspective of China's "face culture", Chinese female adolescents are more engaged in self-attribution, self-reflection, and self-criticism, while Chinese male adolescents are deeply influenced by the face culture, tend to attribute problems to the outside, and justify wrongdoing. Thus, the level of moral disengagement of male juvenile delinquent is higher than that of female juvenile delinquent.

This study found that education also has a significant impact on moral disengagement. Among youth juvenile delinquent criminals, the educational level of professional criminals has its own characteristics and differences, and the number of crimes committed by occupational groups with lower educational levels and shorter years of education is significantly higher (Wu, & Zhang, 2013). The juvenile delinquent family structure showed different school-age stage characteristics and gender differences. Compared with junior high school students, high school students reported lower levels of parental caring and demanding, and the decline in parental caring and demanding levels may be related to the development of adolescent self-awareness and the covariant parent-child relationship. Family structure plays an important role in adolescents' moral disengagement. In a complete family, parents' supportive parenting style can enhance the ability to experience shame and promote moral identity, thereby helping to inhibit individuals from engaging in moral disengagement. This is consistent with the findings of Ouvrein, De Backer and Vandebosch (2018). These results illustrate the important role of affective factors in adolescents' moral development. Parents' caring dimension of the way is less likely to produce moral disengagement, and this level of emotional empathy is reached. Parents in a complete family need women to provide a good foundation of empathy and role models while caring for their children. Parents in incomplete families may have experienced more adverse family development environments because adolescents grew up, so parents do not have such an effect. On the contrary, parents show more coerciveness when making demands, thus reflecting a lack of empathy. In addition, the excessive demands common in single families will destroy the relationship balance of intimacy and autonomy between adolescents and parents, without really improving the empathy ability of adolescents, thus failing to have an impact on moral disengagement.

Emotional regulation has a less significant moderating effect on favorable comparisons, responsibility transfer and responsibility dispersion, which may be due to the lower degree of socialization of juvenile delinquent and the deviation of cognition of moral responsibility. This paper argues that the reason why gender has an impact on emotional regulation is because, on the one hand, the male juvenile delinquent finds it easy to ignore and suppress the positive emotion regulation effect, while the female juvenile delinquent has more attention and catharsis to the positive emotion regulation effect. On the other hand, in the process of emotional regulation, women are more likely to use emotion-focused strategies, while men are more likely to use cognitive reappraisal strategies (Hu, & Xie, 2019).

This study shows that empathy plays a partial mediating role between emotional control and moral disengagement. Juvenile delinquents with different levels of empathy have different behaviors. Specifically, juvenile delinquents with high emotional regulation ability have higher empathy ability (Wang, Wang, Deng, & Chen, 2019), and empathy will affect the juvenile delinquent's moral disengagement (Caravita, Sijtsema, Rambaran, & Gini et al., 2014). In addition, empathy has a partial moderating effect on moral disengagement, indicating that emotional regulation has a stronger predictive effect on juvenile delinquent moral disengagement. Therefore, positive emotional regulation can significantly affect moral disengagement for both adolescents with high levels of empathy and adolescents with low levels of empathy. This paper argues that individuals with high levels of moral disengagement may perceive and experience the helplessness of

help-seekers when faced with a helping situation, but they may think that they have no responsibility to help others and find reasons for their unhelpful behavior.

Emotional regulation plays an important role in adolescents' moral disengagement, which is consistent with the findings of Ouvrein et al. (2018). These results illustrate the important role of affective factors in adolescents' moral development. Previous studies have explored the effects of emotional regulation and empathy on moral disengagement, and the mediation analysis results of this study verify the mediating role of empathy between emotional regulation and moral disengagement. Emotional regulation is significantly negatively correlated with the total score of moral disengagement, which shows that if an individual can have good emotional regulation, it is a buffer to reduce the occurrence of problem behaviors. Among them, the correlation coefficient between regulating negative emotions and responsibility attribution is higher, and regulating angry emotions and inhumanity correlation is higher. If individuals can better control the expression and venting of their negative emotions, and even have the ability to transform negative emotions into positive emotions, such individual emotional symptoms will be less; and if individuals can effectively manage their anger, they will be more able to turn anger into moral disengagement. If the parents often have conflicts in the marriage, the child will learn a series of bad interpersonal communication patterns from it, and then change his moral cognition, making him think that it is normal to vent his emotions, so that he will show more emotions in future relationships, and engage in unreserved emotional out-of-control situations (Yang, & Wang, 2011). Combined with previous studies, emotional regulation self-efficacy has a significant negative correlation with adolescent bullying behavior. That is, individuals with higher emotional regulation engage in less violent behavior. This is because emotional regulation, as a sense of ability for individuals to effectively manage emotions, has a greater impact on improving the self-moral regulation function of children and adolescents and reducing juvenile delinquent violence. Therefore, emotional regulation plays a very important conduction role in the influence of moral disengagement on juvenile delinquent.

This study found that exposure to violence in real life will not only inhibit their sense of self-control in emotional regulation, but also change their moral cognition, increase the level of moral disengagement, and prompt them to produce more aggressive and disciplinary behaviors. But unlike the direct violent exposure model, moral disengagement plays a similar role in the model as emotional regulation efficacy. Studies have also shown that the effect of emotional regulation is significantly higher than that of moral disengagement (Wang, 2017). Ma, and Jiao (2019) believes that because direct contact with violence is becoming a victim of violence, the victim's judgment on the outcome of violence is generally worse, so it is more damage to the emotional regulation mechanism, which works through emotional regulation, resulting in more attacks, violations of discipline, etc. However, those who witness violence usually have not suffered any real harm, so they will not necessarily make a negative cognitive evaluation of the violence, but will increase the level of individual moral disengagement. Therefore, when indirect contact with violence, the role of moral disengagement is the same as that of emotional regulation. The roles played are quite important. Although moral disengagement and emotional regulation play different roles in the mechanism of exposure to violence and externalizing problematic behavior, the relationship between emotional regulation and moral disengagement in this paper proves the importance of both in juvenile delinquent psychology and behavior.

6. Conclusion

This study explores the formation mechanism of moral disengagement through the intermediary analysis of two variables that affect moral disengagement—emotional regulation and empathy—and verifies the effects of emotional regulation and empathy on moral disengagement. The main results show that with age, the empathy and moral disengagement levels of juvenile delinquent gradually increase, and the moral disengagement level of boys is higher than that of girls; there are gender differences in juvenile delinquency, and juvenile delinquent girls have higher levels of emotional control and empathy. The emotional regulation of the juvenile delinquent mediates between empathy and moral disengagement. Overall, this research has certain theoretical and practical significance. The results of this paper provide important ideas for the psychological and behavioral intervention of juvenile delinquent in family and society. In the process of education and training, educators should not only strengthen moral awareness education, but also pay

attention to the connection with family education. Institutions should pay attention to the establishment of good emotional regulation and empathy, and also provide the juvenile delinquent with a good sense of family.

7. Recommendation

In terms of mental health issues, minors are undoubtedly a vulnerable group in society. For minors, we can set up youth social work stations and hire experts to hold regular lectures on the physical and mental health of minors, set up a juvenile psychological counseling hotline, set up physical and psychological counseling rooms for minors, strengthen adolescent psychological education, promote minors to form a sound personality, and suppress social unrest and signs of illegal and criminal activities.

Preventing juvenile delinquency is a systematic project, not just relying on the strength of a certain aspect. Families, schools, and society should take responsibility together and work together to stop juvenile delinquency. Family education is the first classroom in life. Therefore, family education should be the first line of defense against youth juvenile delinquent. Parents should correctly guide their children with positive moral concepts, and care for them in life, so that they can lay a good ideological foundation from an early age; More importantly, parents should create a warm family environment for their children so that they can grow up healthily. Schools are the cradle of cultivating talents and the first stop for young people to face the society. Schools play an important role in preventing and controlling youth juvenile delinquent crimes. Schools should strengthen legal education on the basis of strengthening ideology and morality, and should not one-sidedly pursue the enrollment rate, but should start from the perspective of cultivating minors, and use scientific knowledge and legal concepts to educate them on the principles of life.

The social environment affects the healthy growth of adolescents. All parties should participate together and take their own responsibilities to create a good social environment for the physical and mental health of minors. It is necessary to strengthen the construction of science and culture, strengthen the management of entertainment venues such as Internet cafes, game machine rooms, and video halls, control school students from entering entertainment venues, and standardize the management order of entertainment venues. We need to completely reverse the unhealthy social atmosphere, fundamentally purify the social environment, and eliminate the root causes of juvenile delinquency. In addition, the principle of education first and punishment second is China's current criminal policy against juvenile delinquency. Therefore, strengthen the combination of school, family, and society to help and educate, reform, and rescue minors who violate the law. The judiciary has strengthened return visits and inspections, set up assistance and education institutions in Juvenile Delinquent's residence, and implemented assistance and education measures.

8. Limitation

At present, the international research on juvenile delinquent moral disengagement mainly focuses on the description of the status quo and the explanation of the causes, and there is a relative lack of research on prediction and control. In view of the important value of moral disengagement to immoral behavior and illegal and criminal behavior. For delinquent juveniles, the research on the control of moral disengagement is of greater significance, and carrying out moral disengagement education and correction is one of the ways. Although this article supplements the relevant impact and causal relationship of moral disengagement, it has certain practical significance. However, due to the limitations of research methods and sample selection, this study still has some research deficiencies, which need to be made up and improved in future research.

Similar to other studies that used questionnaires as a method of data collection, this study used juvenile delinquents to fill out the questionnaires based on subjective evaluations, and there may be survey errors. It is mainly manifested in two aspects: due to the existence of social approval, delinquent juveniles may deliberately conceal their moral disengagement and deliberately raise their moral standards; self-knowledge of disengagement is not objective enough. It is necessary to face up to the impact of these factors on the results, and continue to enrich and improve the means of investigating the moral disengagement of criminal juveniles.

This study adopts the purpose sampling method, and only samples a juvenile correctional center, which is relatively weak in representativeness. The number of effective research subjects obtained was also relatively small, only 137. The type of crime covered by the survey is also relatively loose, and neither the type of crime nor the length of time in prison was investigated on the demographic variables of the juvenile

delinquents. All these factors will affect the generalization of research conclusions to some extent. In addition, due to limited research resources, this study only selected Hebei, China as the research venue, and lacked relevant investigations in different regions of China. Therefore, in future research, it will be necessary to expand the sampling scope, increase the number of criminal juveniles sampled, and expand the types of crimes.

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