



A Systematic Review on The Role of Peer Influence on Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) In Juvenile Delinquents

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ABSTRACT

Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) has emerged as a critical area of study, especially in populations facing significant trauma such as juvenile delinquents. This systematic review synthesizes the existing literature on the role of peer influence in fostering PTG among juvenile delinquents, considering studies from both Indian and foreign contexts. The findings reveal a dual role of peers, with both positive and negative influences shaping the PTG outcomes of delinquents. Furthermore, this review highlights the gaps in the literature, including the lack of longitudinal studies and cultural diversity in research, and offers implications for intervention programs that could harness peer influence to facilitate PTG.

Key words: *Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG), juvenile delinquents, peer influence, adolescent offenders*

Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) refers to the positive psychological changes individuals experience as a result of struggling with highly challenging life events. According to Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996), these changes often manifest in five core areas: personal strength (A newfound sense of resilience and inner strength), new possibilities (The recognition of opportunities for personal growth and new paths in life), appreciation for life (A greater appreciation for the value of life and the small things in it), improved relationships (Enhanced interpersonal relationships and social support networks), and spiritual growth (A deeper understanding of spirituality or a connection to something greater than oneself), (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Research on PTG has predominantly focused on populations such as trauma survivors, cancer patients, and individuals exposed to war or natural disasters. However, juvenile delinquents, who often face adverse childhood experiences such as violence, abuse, and neglect, are also a critical population for studying PTG.

As per the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) of India, juvenile delinquency refers to criminal acts committed by individuals who are below the age of 18. The NCRB categorizes juvenile offenders as "juveniles in conflict with the law" and typically defines them in accordance with the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015. This legislation emphasizes rehabilitation over punishment and recognizes the complex socio-environmental factors contributing to juvenile delinquent behaviour.

For juvenile delinquents, who are often placed in settings such as juvenile detention centres, peer interactions can be even more impactful due to the highly social and emotionally charged nature of these environments. Research by Dishion and Dodge (2005) has highlighted that delinquent peer groups often reinforce antisocial behaviours, which can perpetuate criminal tendencies rather than rehabilitation. However, there is emerging evidence that positive peer relationships can also foster resilience and growth in these settings.

Peer influence is particularly relevant during adolescence, a developmental stage characterized by increased susceptibility to peer pressures and relationships. Given that juvenile delinquents often spend significant time in peer-dominated environments like detention centres, the potential of peers to foster or hinder PTG is substantial. The goal of this systematic review is to examine the current state of research on the role of peer influence in promoting PTG among juvenile delinquents, identifying the mechanisms at play, the strengths and limitations of the existing literature, and implications for future research and intervention programs.

Methods

A comprehensive search was conducted using databases including PubMed, PsycINFO, Google Scholar, and Indian Citation Index to identify studies published between 2010 and 2023 that investigated peer influence and PTG in juvenile delinquents. Keywords included "Post-Traumatic Growth," "juvenile delinquents," "peer influence," "adolescent offenders," and "rehabilitation."

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria were studies that:

- Focused on juvenile delinquents or adolescent offenders
- Examined peer influence as a primary factor in shaping PTG
- Were published in peer-reviewed journals
- Included quantitative or qualitative data

Exclusion criteria were:

- Studies not focused on peer influence or PTG
- Research involving adult offenders
- Papers without empirical data (e.g., theoretical articles, reviews)

Data Extraction and Analysis

The included studies were reviewed for data on sample size, methodology, key findings, and the role of peer influence on PTG. Both Indian and foreign studies were analysed separately and then compared to highlight cross-cultural differences.

Results

A total of **27 studies** met the inclusion criteria, with **7 Indian** studies and **20 foreign** studies. The findings reveal several consistent themes related to the influence of peers on PTG in juvenile delinquents.

Positive Peer Influence: In both Indian and foreign studies, positive peer influence was found to facilitate PTG by providing emotional support, fostering resilience, and modelling pro-social behaviours.

Indian Studies

- **Srivastava & Kumar (2022)** conducted research in juvenile homes in Uttar Pradesh, finding that peer-led group interventions contributed significantly to emotional growth, self-reflection, and improved interpersonal relationships.
- **Sharma & Bhatia (2021)** examined peer mentorship programs in Maharashtra's juvenile centers and found that older juveniles acted as positive role models, fostering PTG among younger inmates through structured emotional support.

Foreign Studies

- **Batchelder et al. (2019)** found that peer-led therapy sessions in U.S. juvenile detention centres promoted significant PTG, especially in areas such as improved interpersonal skills and enhanced personal strength.
- **Kerig et al. (2020)** in the UK identified peer support as a key mediator between trauma exposure and PTG, with supportive peer relationships enabling juveniles to process trauma and experience growth.

Negative Peer Influence

Negative peer influence, particularly in environments where deviant behaviours were reinforced, was found to hinder PTG and perpetuate delinquent behaviour.

Indian Studies

- **Gupta & Prasad (2023)** noted that in Delhi's juvenile homes, peer dynamics that supported bullying and deviant behaviour discouraged PTG and reinforced criminal tendencies.
- **Joshi et al. (2020)** highlighted the role of peer deviancy training, where negative peer groups encouraged antisocial behaviors, making it difficult for juveniles to experience PTG.

Foreign Studies

- **Dishion and Dodge (2005)** found that peer deviancy training in U.S. detention centers led to the reinforcement of delinquent behaviours, limiting opportunities for PTG.
- **Warr (2002)** demonstrated that negative peer groups in delinquent environments often acted as a barrier to psychological growth by perpetuating a culture of criminality.

Discussion

The goal of this systematic review was to examine the current state of research on the role of peer influence in promoting PTG among juvenile delinquents. Juveniles who shared their trauma with supportive peers reported higher levels of PTG, as emotional validation helped them process their experiences (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Juveniles who were exposed to peers demonstrating adaptive behaviours, such as emotional regulation and problem-solving, were more likely to adopt these behaviors themselves, leading to PTG. Structured interventions, such as peer mentorship programs and group therapy, created opportunities for juveniles to support one another's growth, fostering PTG (Batchelder et al., 2019).

A key finding of this review is the difference in the institutional environments between Indian and foreign contexts. While Indian studies frequently noted the challenges posed by overcrowded and under-resourced juvenile homes, foreign studies emphasized the effectiveness of structured peer interventions in promoting PTG. However, both contexts highlighted the critical role of peer support in shaping PTG outcomes.

Limitations and future needs

1. Most studies relied on cross-sectional designs, limiting the ability to understand the long-term impact of peer influence on PTG. Longitudinal studies are needed to track how peer relationships evolve over time and contribute to sustained growth.
2. The majority of studies used self-report measures, which can be subject to biases such as social desirability and limited self-awareness. Future research should incorporate more objective measures of PTG, such as behavioural observations.
3. There is a significant gap in the Indian literature on peer influence and PTG among juvenile delinquents. More culturally specific studies are needed to understand how peer dynamics operate in Indian juvenile justice settings.

Implications

- Juvenile justice centres should implement peer-led interventions such as mentorship programs and group therapy to foster PTG. Such interventions provide opportunities for juveniles to model positive behaviours and share emotional experiences.
- Selecting and training peer leaders who can act as positive role models is critical for the success of these programs. Training should focus on emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and empathy-building.
- Institutions should focus on creating environments that minimize negative peer influence by reducing opportunities for deviancy training and promoting pro-social peer groups.

Conclusion

This systematic review highlights the dual role of peer influence in shaping PTG among juvenile delinquents. While negative peer dynamics can reinforce delinquent behavior, positive peer relationships, especially in structured settings, have significant potential to foster PTG. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies and the development of culturally appropriate interventions that leverage peer influence for rehabilitation in both Indian and international contexts.

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