

# Studying links between EI and delinquency

November 13 2014, by Alan Williams

---

Young women with high levels of emotional intelligence (EI) are far more likely to engage in delinquency than their male counterparts, and those with apparently lower ability to regulate their emotions.

The "surprising and unprecedented result" was generated in a study by psychologists at Plymouth University, which aimed to further investigate well-documented associations between [sensation seeking](#) and delinquency.

But, in a first for studies of its nature, the research also factored in an individual's [emotional intelligence](#), showing whether traits commonly seen as positive influences on wellbeing – such as empathy and self-regulation – impacted on a person's adolescent behaviour.

The results go against previous thinking which suggested those with high trait EI would have greater ability to control their behaviour.

Lecturer in Psychology Dr Alison Bacon, who led the study, said, "Levels of sensation seeking – where you actively seek out novel experiences – peak in adolescence, and there is a well-documented association of them with delinquency and other risk-taking behaviours. In general, high trait EI individuals are able to form positive and effective personal relationships and are able to regulate their emotions and behaviours in ways that support personal well-being. We predicted the relationship between sensation seeking and delinquent behaviour would be affected by EI, but to discover it seemingly only lessened delinquency in [young men](#) – and not young women – was a surprising

and unprecedented result."

For the study, around 100 young people were asked if, while between the ages of 12 and 25, they had engaged in forms of anti-social behaviour. Those behaviours ranged from truancy, rowdy behaviour in public, smoking cannabis and using public transport without a ticket, to more serious forms of delinquency such as drink driving, arson and physical violence. They were also given detailed questionnaires to gauge their sensation seeking and trait EI levels.

The results showed young men with low EI and high levels of [sensation seeking](#) were more inclined towards delinquency, but high EI tended to having a balance effect and lower delinquency. Researchers believe, and previous studies have suggested, that men are more inclined towards shows of violence and aggression, acts which do not necessarily require them to understand their victim's thoughts and emotions.

For young women, however, those showing high levels of both factors were in fact more inclined towards [delinquency](#), with the researchers believing they could show more tendency towards bullying, both of a social and emotional nature.

Dr Bacon said, "By showing that high EI is a positive thing for young men, we can see that promoting it in schools and other social arenas could have positive outcomes. For [young women](#), we need to further explore why traits which should lead to high levels of self-esteem and self-regulation might predispose them to antisocial relational behaviours. In turn, we hope to discover how we might help them find ways to channel their behaviour in a positive way."

**More information:** "Sex differences in the relationship between sensation seeking, trait emotional intelligence and delinquent behaviour." [www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10 ... .943796#.VGOCZPmsWSo](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10...943796#.VGOCZPmsWSo)

Provided by University of Plymouth

Citation: Studying links between EI and delinquency (2014, November 13) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-11-links-ei-delinquency.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.