

The Role of Labelling Theory in Bunking Classes and Criminal Behavior among School Students: A Socio-Psychological Study of Sargodha

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Abstract

Adolescence is a critical developmental phase when the social interactions, identity, and behavioral patterns are merged to impact the future behavior. This empirical study discusses how labeling theory may be used to explain the nature of absenteeism and development of criminal dispositions among secondary school students in Sargodha Pakistan. The study, based on the theoretical frameworks hypothesized by Howard Becker (1963) and Edwin Lemert (1951) explores how teacher, peer, and parental labeling influence students psychologically, their academic and social behaviors. Based on a quantitative, descriptive-correlational design, the data were collected using a structured questionnaire on 200 male students who are in grades 8 to 10 and who study in public school. The results reveal that there is a strong association between negative labeling and a high likelihood of truancy, emotional distress, and deviant behavior. These findings should be taken to mean that stigmatizing language and social classification in the learning setting have a significant role to play in alienation, lack of self-esteem, and withdrawal in education. The study highlights the need to employ positive teacher student dialogue, counseling programs, and institutional consciousness in stripping the negative effects of labeling in the educational environment.

Keywords: Labelling Theory, Bunking Behavior, Deviance, Adolescence, School Psychology, Social Identity, Sargodha

Introduction

It is commonly seen that adolescence is a transition period of human development when an individual is actively exploring identity, is significantly sensitive to social judgement, and is striving to gain independence (Erikson, 1968; Steinberg, 2014). In this phase, people undergo a very quick intellectual, emotional, and social transition that makes them very sensitive to the feedback of the family, peers, and other authorities in the institution (Eccles and Roeser, 2011). Thus, the way the adolescent is viewed and the way he or she is treated by the people around significantly impact the way this adolescent views himself and predicts the future behavioral pattern. As such socializing institutions, schools are important in forming the identity, moral reasoning and interest of students in the learning process. Therefore, the classroom atmosphere and the social images which it carries can either contribute to positive growth or maintain deviant and disengaging trends. Disciplinary issues like bunking classes or skipping of lessons without the teacher's consent are very common among the students of the secondary school in the Pakistani school system. These complaints might not be taken seriously as they are often seen as minor offenses but they could indicate greater psychological or social issues, such as alienation, lack of academic motivation, or opposition to authority (Reid, 2005; Ali and Gracey,

2013). Another aspect of culture that might contribute to the development of these dynamics could be hierarchical teacher-student relations and strict discipline standards that would lead to a situation where labelling and stigmatization flourish. Instead of trying to correct the root causes of disengagement, some teachers will instead accuse the students as lazy, naughty or disobedient, consequently encouraging the behavior they are trying to resist. Another theory that is very useful in explaining this phenomenon is the Labeling Theory which was introduced by Edwin Lemert (1951) followed by Howard Becker (1963). According to the theory, deviance is not an inherent part of any act but it is a consequence of the societal responses towards the act. Since people are described as deviant, they can accept the label and change their behavior to meet expectations implied by the label- a process Lemert (1951) referred to as secondary deviance. Becker (1963) stressed that it is the outcasts who are created by such labelling processes, people who learn to see themselves through its prism of social rejection and so the process of deviance and marginalization goes on and on. Labeling in the school setting may have far reaching psychological and behavioral impact. In their original research on teacher expectations, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) showed that students tend to act in a manner that is in line with the expectations that have been made of them- a process called the Pygmalion effect. Likewise, Rist (1970) discovered that the initial assessment of the teacher of the ability of the students, which is often influenced by the socio-economic or behavioral evidence, can organize the interactions in the classroom in a way that reinforces inequality. More recent studies are in agreement that labeling at the educational level leads to lower self-esteem, lack of engagement in schoolwork, and misbehavior (Eccles and Roeser, 2011; Bernburg, Krohn and Rivera, 2006). Matters of classroom interaction in Pakistan have been shown to be often hierarchical with the teacher having a great influence over the identity of the students and disciplinary results. It has been found that repetitive stigmatization including intentional and unintentional triggers the sense of worthlessness, alienation, and resentment in students (Ali and Gracey, 2013). This can also cause students to find validation among other equally marginalized students and hence consolidate deviant behavior by the group. This may eventually develop into more severe behavioral problems such as absenteeism, aggression or early delinquent identities (Bernburg et al., 2006). Although the labeling theory has an explanatory value, few empirical studies have been conducted on how it is applied in the South Asian education system. The majority of research carried on school behavior in Pakistan have also been based on the academic performance or socioeconomic factors, without emphasizing on the psychological and symbolic aspects of labeling. The mechanisms of labeling on the emotional health and behavioral decisions of students and creating more inclusive and helpful learning settings is, thus, paramount to building better learning environments. It is against this background that this research paper will seek to investigate how labeling influences the development of peripheral behavior and deviant behavior among high school students in Sargodha, Pakistan. Having combined the theoretical aspects of labeling and evidence taken on the local settings, the study will explain the mechanism of social labeling within classrooms, as well as how social labeling affects student identity, student engagement, and student behavioural consequences. Finally, the research has a vision to add to the increasing amount of knowledge about school discipline, psychology of students, and social identity development, which can be applied by teachers, administrators, and policymakers.

Objectives

To examine the relationship between labeling and bunking behavior.

- To assess how negative labeling affects students' psychological and emotional well-being.
- To explore whether labeling predicts deviant or criminal behaviors.
- To identify the social consequences of labeling on student relationships.
- To recommend measures for reducing negative labeling in schools.

Research Questions

1. How does labeling correlate with the frequency of bunking among school students?

2. In what ways does negative labeling affect the psychological and emotional well-being of students?
3. Does labeling contribute to an increased likelihood of deviant or criminal behavior among students?
4. How can reducing negative labeling improve student participation and academic discipline?

Literature Review

Labelling Theory assumes the deviance is not part of an act but rather a response of a society to an act (Becker, 1963). Based on this assumption, Lemert (1951) differentiated between primary deviance, which refers to initial rule-breaking, and secondary deviance, which happens in case the deviant identity appears internally in an individual after negative responses of the society. These preliminary insights defined labeling as a key sociological explanation of how social control processes may unwillingly lead to deviant results. When applied to education, labeling is often practiced in the form of teacher expectations, peer perceptions and institutional practices that label students based on their behavior or academic achievement. Initial ethnographic work carried out by Rist (1970) found that judgments by teachers, which were usually guided by social-class cues, determined patterns of interaction and performance in classroom. Similarly, the study by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) indicated that expectations expressed by teachers may take the form of self-fulfilling prophecies which could affect the performance of students. These works emphasize the insignificant but powerful contribution of labeling to strengthen the inequality and the concept of self-concept of students. The empirical research has always supported this assumption as stigmatizing responses in schools may perpetuate deviant behavior, but the positive change is supported by inclusive and reintegrative feedback (Braithwaite, 1989). When a student is repeatedly branded as a lazy person, as weak or as a problem, such labels tend to be assimilated and the student becomes disinterested in learning and has low self-esteem (Eccles and Roeser, 2011; Rosenfield, 1997). Classroom discipline based on high amounts of public criticism or humiliation in developing contexts may actually increase emotional distress and alienation especially within adolescents in the process of forming their identity (Erikson, 1968; Steinberg, 2014). These psychosocial processes are closely related to truancy and classbunking. Reid (2005) noted absenteeism is a symptom and predictor of underlying behavioral and emotional issues whereas Henry and Huizinga (2007) have discovered chronic truancy to be a strong predictor of future delinquency. Negative labeling is a contributing factor to the process since it leads to school avoidance and a feeling of not being part of the academic life. In the case of students who feel that they are not successful or problematic, truancy is a way of protecting themselves and maintaining their identity (Bernburg, Krohn, and Rivera, 2006). The psychological consequences of the labeling are enormous. Studies have shown that negative labeling leads to anxiety, frustration and withdrawal of socialization (Rosenfield, 1997). The longitudinal results indicate that academically, stigmatized adolescents are less motivated and less self-efficient (Pomerantz and Wang, 2009; Eccles and Roeser, 2011). Such a dynamic is echoed by the findings of expecting effects by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) who found that students internalized negative expectations and modulated their performance. Furthermore, the labelling may bring more far-reaching social consequences. Bernburg et al. (2006) revealed that institutional labeling does lead to the possibility of reoccurrences of delinquency by leaving the individuals out of the normal social circles. Matsueda (1992) also found that parental labeling and peer labeling also affect self-perception of adolescents who in turn mediate deviant involvement. Altogether, these researches emphasize that the operation of labeling is a structural process as well as it is the psychological mechanism, which perpetuates the process of social exclusion and inequality. Socio-culturally, labeling supports existent hierarchies. Reputational stigma in collectivist cultures spreads out to the family and society, which puts an even greater burden on conformity (Archer and Francis, 2007). Positive and reintegrative labeling, by focusing on esteem and recovering moral, however, instead of damned, are more likely to increase the engagement and lead to pro-social development (Braithwaite, 1989; Gibbs, 2015). Although there is a large amount of international literature, there are little empirical studies conducted to explore the intersection of labeling, schooling, and adolescent deviance in Pakistan. The majority of the investigations in the field of South Asian education

research are aimed at performance and discipline as opposed to the psychosocial aspects of labeling. On this scholarly gap, the current study examines the effect of labeling on the bunking, emotional, and deviant inclination among secondary school students in Sargodha, which, as such, expands the Labelling Theory applicability to a highly critical but under-researched setting.

Methodology

The research design used in this study was quantitative and descriptive-correlational in nature and the aim of the research was to determine the connection between labeling and behavioral outcomes in secondary school students. The study used this design as it allows conducting systematic measurements of variables and statistical analysis of associations without interfering with the study environment (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The study was focused on identifying the relationship between labeling experience and bunking behavior, psychological wellness, deviant behavior, and the interactions of adolescents in educational setting of Sargodha, Pakistan.

Research Design

A self-administered questionnaire was developed that was structured and based on five dimensions: (a) school absenteeism; (b) teacher and peer labeling; (c) psychological and affective consequences; (d) involvement in deviant or antisocial behavior; and (e) perceived social consequences of labeling. The instrument was based on tested indicators of student behavior and school climate, and some contextual modifications were made in order to fit the local context. The rating was done on a five-point Likert scale, starting with strongly disagree (1), and strongly agree (5).

Population and Sampling

The population of the study included secondary education learners in Grades 9 and 10 in schools of Sargodha District that belong to the public sector. To consider the heterogeneity of the school types and localities, multi-stage stratified cluster sampling process was selected to assist with proportionate representation of urban and rural environments. In the first phase, schools were stratified by geographic area and area of administration; in the second phase, there was random sampling of clusters of schools; and in the last phase, proportional sampling of students was done in each institution that was identified. The final sample population consisted of 200 male respondents who were used on basis of accessibility, informed consent and voluntary participation.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

The main data were developed through a standardized questionnaire, which was closely reviewed by expert validation of both clarity and relevance in the content of the questionnaire by the faculty members in respective fields of educational psychology and sociology. A pilot study involving thirty student participants was done to concert wording of items and to determine how reliable the scales were when a pilot study was conducted and good internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach alpha above 0.70) were found in all subscales. The sample period was four weeks and was both face-to-face and online based (using Google Forms) to ensure that geographically spread schools were represented. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality measures, and the voluntary aspect of the study participation. Secondary data that was obtained through available academic sources were used in setting up the theoretical framework and also informing the instrument development.

Data Analysis

The data were entered and analyzed with the help of IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 25, where the methods of analysis included the descriptive and inferential techniques. The descriptive element involved making

computation of the frequency, percentages, and means to provide a concise summary of the demographic properties and distributions of responses of every variable in question. Pearson correlation coefficients were used to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between labeling and the outcome of behavior and hierarchical linear regression models were used in test of predictive ability of labeling experiences on deviant behavior and co-occurring psychological consequences.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted using the required ethical guidelines of educational and social science research. The participation was purely voluntary and the respondents were notified fully of the right to withdraw at any stage with no negative repercussions. Both during the collection of data and during the analysis, anonymity and confidentiality was maintained. The research adhered to the ethics outlined in the Ethical Guidelines of the American psychological association (APA, 2017) and received official authorization of the relevant institutional review board prior to the start of the data collection process.

Findings and Discussion

The research results explain the role of labeling in influencing absenteeism, affective well-being and development of deviant propensities in secondary-level students in Sargodha, Pakistan. The findings highlight the psychological and sociological consequences of labeling to demonstrate that it has both direct and indirect impacts on the behavior of adolescents and their involvement at school.

Demographic Overview

The demographic information of respondents shows that 62% of the respondents were within the age scope of 12 to 15 years and 38% were within the age range of 16 to 18 years. Most (74%), were in urban schools, and 26% of them lived in the rural setting. The respondents were all male students in the secondary level. Interestingly, 92 per cent of them stated that they attended school regularly, which presupposes their dedication to schooling despite some cases of skipping. This population sample is typical of Pakistani government secondary schools and provides a suitable base of the analysis of the behavioral patterns in the different social settings.

Bunking Behavior

The response analysis showed that, despite the majority of students refusing to admit that a rise in bunking had occurred recently, about 12.0 percent of themselves said that they were skipping classes more often and nearly 48.0 percent of them thought that bunking was a standard among their classmates. This trend indicates the development of a culture of nonconformity with passivity among school-going children, whereby the culture of truancy is condoned or trivialized by the students. This normalization of the absenteeism is reminiscent of the previous studies by Reid (2005) and Henry & Huizinga (2007) who noted that repetitive truancy is a common indicator of the initial development of disengagement and is a predictor of subsequent deviant behavior. The findings highlight the importance of positive teacher-student interactions and early intervention measures to deter the development of the habitual avoidance of classes.

Perceptions of Labelling

A vast majority of the respondents (80% of the respondents) said that study students who do not attend classes are usually described as troublemakers. One in every two (46.3) agreed that these negative labels are difficult to remove once in place, highlighting the inability of reputational stigma to fade away in educational settings. Further, 58 per cent of students stated that labels issued by teachers reduced their self-confidence, but 48 per cent said that similar results occurred due to the conferral of negative labels by peers. The results are consistent with the ethnographic study by Rist (1970) that teacher expectations have the potential to support social

stratification in classes. Similarly, they coincide with the conclusion of Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) who recorded that teacher expectations generate self-fulfilling prophecies which have a significant influence on student performance and motivation. The extensive manifestation of negative labeling in the current study helps to depict how symbolic messages are laden in classroom dynamics which could undermine the emotional stability and academic identity of students.

Emotional and Psychological Effects

The psychological connotations of labeling were to be shown through the reactions of students. About 70 0 - percent of the respondents noted that they have felt anger or distress when subjected to negative appellations or labels, and 60 0 -percent said they felt socially isolated as a result of what others have said about them. It is worth noting that 42 percent said they were attracted to other students that were labeled as being problem after labeling, hence suggesting the development of deviant peer groups as a coping mechanism. The mentioned results support the findings of Bernburg, Krohn, and Rivera (2006), who assumed that stigmatization supports social exclusion and increases the likelihood of joining deviant individuals. Moreover, emotional distress that is witnessed herein aligns with the thesis by Rosenfield (1997) that labeling causes psychological strain through perceived stigma which may culminate to low self-esteem as well as defensive tendencies among adolescents.

Labelling and Deviant Behavior

Some 66 per cent of the respondents stated that misapplied or erroneous labeling would increase the risk of future criminal or deviant behaviour, but 56 per cent of the respondents linked the conjoint phenomena between the labeling and bunking (absenteeism) with a significant reduction in academic involvement. These practical observations affirm the theoretical conceptualization of Lemert (1951) of primary versus secondary deviance where labeling transforms first metamorphoses of deviant acts to a sustained deviant self-identity when the label becomes internalized. Similar arguments were made by Becker (1963) who argued that labeling does not serve only descriptive roles, but rather functions as a construct of deviance, in the sense that it alters social reactions and the identity that a deviant forms about herself. In the current study, some respondents who were repeatedly labeled as problematic stated that they experienced intense experiences of alienation and deprivation on normative expectations of school and therefore helped to validate the fact that the above theoretical framework is valid.

Social Implications

Social aspect of labelling was also evident. About 60% of the respondents said that labelled students felt peer neglect or exclusion and 52% said that labelling reduced classroom and extracurricular activities. More than half of the respondents agreed that labeling affected teacher student relationships negatively. These results indicate that labeling is a process of social differentiation, which then continues to create hierarchies and exclusion in educational institutions. Stigmatization may have long-term effects of negative identity on the individual and family among collectivistic societies like Pakistan, where reputation and belonging to a group has a significant cultural impact (Archer and Francis, 2007). However, contrary to that, reintegrative strategies-that deal with misbehavior without demeaning the individual- could assist rehabilitation and moral growth (Braithwaite, 1989).

Discussion

The empirical data provided below supports the statement that labeling is a psychological and sociocultural process that impacts student behavior and constructing identity. According to Becker (1963) and Lemert (1951), labeling does not only classify behavior but also alters self-conception, hence triggering students to comply with deviant roles granted by the authority and their peer groups. The results show that negative

labeling worsens affective distress and social alienation which then mediates the relationship between minor deviance (ex. absenteeism) with more established deviant patterns. In addition, the study outlines how teacher bias, disciplinary punishment and inadequate emotional support create a self-perpetuating system of rejection and opposition.

In line with Pygmalion effect as defined by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), the results show the expectation by teachers on students and how it affects their behavior. Similarly, it is shown that the institutional labeling predicts future delinquency by undermining social cohesion (Bernburg et al., 2006). In sum, these findings demonstrate that compassionate and inclusive forms of pedagogy must be implemented without any stigmatization and, on the contrary, lead to positive identity construction. The educational institutions by theorizing the concept of labeling as a socio-enactive process in place of a mere punitive tool may play a key role in preventing the development of the minor misconduct into a deep-rooted deviance.

Conclusion

This research arrives at the conclusion that labeling in Pakistani schools can be viewed as an effective social and psychological phenomenon that has a significant influence on how students are engaged in their studies, their emotional status, and the development of their behaviour. These results substantially confirm the underlying tenet of the Labelling Theory according to which deviance is not an intrinsic part of a given act but rather the result of social responses to it (Becker 1963; Lemert 1951). Students who were constantly negatively labeled by teachers and peers were less motivated, more prone to truancy, and had a stronger disposition to the oppositional or deviant behaviour. The data also suggests the mediation between labeling and behavioural disengagement by emotional distress as typified by anger, frustration, and social withdrawal to convert external judgments into internalised self-perceptions.

In addition, the study found out that institutional and peer labeling enhance social exclusion, degrading students and their sense of belonging. Such experiences over a time develop into self fulfilling prophecies and reinforce the identities that were created by stigmatization (Rosenthal and Jacobson 1968). On the other hand, these adverse consequences can be reduced by positive reinforcement, understanding teacher-student communication, and non-discriminatory pedagogy, which leads to reintegration. Overall, this paper highlights the idea that labeling is not a neutral disciplinary act but a social process that develops students, marginalises them, or empowers them, based on the ways in which it is practiced in the school environment. Appreciating the psychological and social implications of labelling is thus critical in the development of an educational environment that fosters decency, inspiration and fairness in the growth of the student.

Recommendations

As a result of all the findings, it is advisable that the learning institutions in Pakistan should embrace a holistic method that is geared towards ensuring that the negative effects of labeling are reduced as well as the learning environment in the institutions made more inclusive. The clarity of psychological consequences of labeling based on the study needs to be incorporated in teacher training programmes to provide teachers with evidence-based practices in the areas of positive reinforcement, empathy-oriented communication, and reestablish classroom-based discipline. Moreover, schools should develop strong counselling and mentorship programmes that would help students who feel stigmatised as well as it would help in dealing with the emotional turmoil that comes with labeling. The policy level reforms ought to incorporate modules on emotional intelligence, social interaction and behavioural management in teacher-education programmes. Moreover, there is a necessity of programmes that foster parental knowledge aimed at deterring the act of labeling at home, as well as, developing supportive, non judgmental attitudes towards children in learning and behaviour. Through these interventions in institutional, instructional, and familial terms, the education system can transform labeling as an exclusion factor to an encouragement factor, personal growth, and fair development of students.

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