

Experimental design to exploring the potential iatrogenic effects in interventions with
delinquent adolescents

The iatrogenic effects are the undesirable effects might appear when adolescents with the same type of problems are grouped in the same place: certain iatrogenic effects have been observed in groups of adolescent delinquents in collective intervention programs, such as an increase in delinquent behavioural patterns and or a higher consumption of cigarettes or psychotropic substances. This phenomenon has been termed “deviant peer contagion” in the literature. The goal of the present study is exploring the potential presence of the iatrogenic effects in a micro experimental design in focusing on the verbal and non verbal reinforcements such as the clues of these aversive effects. The sample consists of 70 male teenagers aged between 15 and 18 years old, divided into three groups: the first group is composed of 24 delinquent adolescents (homogeneous group) who are placed in a residential setting. All of them have a criminal record. The second one includes 22 non delinquent adolescents (control group) who are going to school and haven’t any criminal record. Finally, the third, mixed, group is composed of 12 delinquent adolescents and 12 non delinquent ones. The main measures are derived from the systematic observations of the interactions between adolescents during group discussions. The discussions include four participants who meet over three weekly sessions of 20 minutes. The verbal and non verbal reactions are encoded by three coders. Preliminary quantitative results with ANCOVA reveal that the main differences are due principally to the types of groups: the adolescents in mixed groups express more normative elements and moreover, few antisocial elements and they reinforce themselves not so much in antisocial talk or behaviours in comparison than control and homogeneous groups. These results came from experimental setting but suggest that heterogeneous groups could be positive in interventions with delinquent youths.