



## JUVENILE DELINQUENCY: A SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

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### Abstract

Children are important asset of any nation. Their physical, mental, moral and social development will take place if provided proper care, attention and nurtured them, on the other hand if they are exposed to an unfavourable environment it is likely that they get influenced and deviate from the social norms or violate the law. The central thrust of this paper was to examine the circumstances that are responsible for the adolescents' involvement in juvenile delinquency. Qualitative data was collected from 50 male juveniles in conflict with law. Results state that family, school, neighbourhood, poverty, deviant peer association, and substance abuse are not only the circumstances that heaved the participants into delinquency but risk factor for adolescents.

**Keywords:** Juvenile Delinquency, Social Perspective



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### Introduction

Children are important asset of any nation. Their physical, mental, moral and social development will take place if provided proper care, attention and nurtured them, on the other hand if they are exposed to an unfavourable environment it is likely that they get influenced and deviate from the social norms or violate the law. Certain population subgroups are at high risk of delinquency because of their exposure to unfavourable economic, social, political and environmental circumstances. Studies at different levels show that the phenomenon of delinquency is greatly shaped by the economic, social, political and environment factors. Studies on Juvenile Delinquency in western countries have linked it to risk factors such as negative peer influence, poor socioeconomic background, parental absence,, negative neighbourhood factors, family violence, and others (Green et al., 2008; Simões et al., 2008; Hunte, 2006;). The results of a study conducted on Juvenile Delinquency in Ghana revealed that the functioning of the nuclear family, inadequate extended family support, schooling apathy, deviant peer influence and substance use were factors responsible for Juvenile Delinquency there (Augustine Osei Boakye., 2012). In a study on socio-legal status of juvenile delinquency in Maharashtra, Pupali Pandurkar, (2010) states that like many countries India is also facing the problem of Juvenile Delinquency. Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat together account for 60.35 percent of Indian Juvenile Delinquents of which Maharashtra ranks first in India in cases of theft, hurt and burglary. The factors that play a

vital role in delinquency are family, neighbourhood, slums, peer groups, school environment, movies, T.V., poverty and mass media.

### **Aim**

The present paper aims to highlight the social determinants of Juvenile delinquency.

### **Objective**

To find the perception of juveniles in conflict with law about the social circumstances that led them to be involved in delinquency.

### **Research Question**

What are the perceived circumstances that lead adolescents boys to get involved in juvenile delinquency?

### **Method**

Population for the present study comprises of juveniles in conflict with law being admitted in the special homes of urban Maharashtra out of which participants for the present study were recruited using purposive sampling. 50 male participants enrolled in the Jawaharlal Nehru Industrial School, Pune, between the age group of 14 to 17 years were selected for study.

Data for the present study was gathered through qualitative observation and semi-structured interviews of the participant. Stakeholder of the institution were interviewed to get deep insight into the problem. A qualitative analysis of the data was done.

### **Conceptual understanding**

**Juvenile delinquent:** A **juvenile delinquent** is a person who is typically under the age of 18 and commits an act that otherwise would have been charged as a crime if they were an adult. Depending on the type and severity of the offense committed, it is possible for persons under 18 to be charged and tried as adults.

**Juvenile Delinquency:** Etymologically the word juvenile is derived from Latin word 'juvenis', which means young and the word delinquency is derived from the Latin word 'delinquer' which means to omit. In general term Juvenile Delinquency means any antisocial act committed by children who are below the age of eighteen years.

### **Theoretical framework**

**Social bond theory:** Hirschi's Social Bond Theory (1969) has four basic elements i.e. attachment, involvement, commitment and belief. This theory argues that those persons who have strong and abiding attachments to social institutions (in the form of attachment, involvement, investment and belief) are less likely to deviate than persons who have weak shallow bonds. Social institutions mean family, school, friends etc.

The belief component of the theory also has to do with adolescents' acceptance of the conventional or moral code of ethic of the society which is deemed to be an avenue for reducing delinquency (Shoemaker, 2009; Regoli, Hewitt & Delisi, 2008).

The next component of the theory which is commitment demands that, when adolescents' devote much of their time, energy and resources in pursuing an ambition or a goal, that will keep them focused in life devoid of delinquency (Augustine Osei Boakye., 2012).

Finally, the involvement component proposes that, when adolescents' participate in conventional activities which their society has to offer, it will keep them out of delinquency. This will keep them busy and occupied and delinquency will be out of their options. This may take the form of extracurricular activities in school or at church. (Augustine Osei Boakye., 2012).

**General theory of Crime:** The central constructs of general theory of crime (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990) are self-control and criminal behavior; low self-control is the most important predictor for delinquent behavior. This theory holds that both for the development of self-control and for an explanation of delinquent behavior, the family is the most important institution. According to the general theory of crime, an adolescent's connectedness alone to important agents in the community without strong self-control will still make him or her prone to delinquency. Unlike the social bond theory (Hirschi, 1969) discussed earlier on which posits that adolescents with strong attachment to their parents, school or friends stand a higher chance of not becoming delinquent, the general theory of crime challenges such a position. According to the general theory of crime, an adolescent's connectedness alone to important agents in the community without strong self-control will still make him or her prone to delinquency. This is typical of situations where they are attached to deviant peers who happened to be their friends. In such a case, the essential determinant of whether they will succumb to their peer's influence or not will be determined by their self-control (Augustine Osei Boakye., 2012).

**Labelling theory:** Labeling theory (Becker 1963) investigates how the behaviour and self-identity of individuals may be affected, influenced, or determined by the terms which are used to classify them or fit them into defined sociological categories. Labeling theory hold that, the reaction society develops towards delinquency has a future repercussion on the

behaviours of juvenile delinquents (Putwain & Sammons, 2002; Shoemaker, 2009). This means if children are tagged as delinquent they start taking it as a part of their self image and it affects their behaviour in the future also.

**Main findings:**

**Family:** Family is the first agent of socialization. It is responsible for the basic love, care, sense of security, physical, mental, moral and emotional development of a child. Family plays a vital role in producing a loving, caring, mentally and morally sound individual or an individual presenting antisocial behaviour. Out of the 50 participants that were interviewed 40 participants i.e. 80 percent were staying in nuclear family with a background of alcohol, domestic violence in the family, use of abusive language, that was conducive to the involvement into delinquency. 20 participants i.e. 10% came from single parent family with either father or mother dead, divorced or not divorced but staying separate which led to laxity in parental control. From this result it becomes apparent that the existence of nuclear family or single parent family became a cause for indulging into delinquency act. The participants perceived that since they were exposed to adverse family conditions like background of alcohol, domestic violence in the family, use of abusive language etc. and absence of proper care, adequate love and parental support and supervision they sought support and comfort from peers and got pulled into the delinquency act. This result was in line with a study conducted on Juvenile Delinquency in Ghana revealed that the functioning of the nuclear family, inadequate extended family support, were factors responsible for Juvenile Delinquency (Augustine Osei Boakye., 2012). The above finding supports the views of social bond theory, when adolescents attached to an institution like the family, it compels them to behave well when they are outside in order to avert bad image not only for themselves but for their family as well (Abotchie, 2008). It also supports the views of the general theory of crime (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990) which states that the inadequate support from the parents made the participants to be vulnerable to other vices as a source of livelihood.

**School:** The second agency of socialisation after family is school. All children have the right to quality education that will enable to develop their skills and competencies needed to be productive adults. When school fails to cater to the needs of children they tend to deviate from school. Apathy in schooling, low academic achievements, corporal punishments, humiliating language by classmates and teachers, bullying by classmates and labelling were factors responsible for the participation in delinquent acts. Apathy in schooling was mainly

caused due to lack of parental supervision and poor financial condition. Since the participants belonged to a strata which was economically low, the most important thing for them was to earn a living than pursue studies. This finding supports the view of Gulsen Yukul (2003) who states that, the most common factor which influences the academic performance of students is family and its financial situation. When the parents are not interested in the success or failure of their children, the child will not care about school or lessons, and will perform poorly. Some students have to work after school; as a result, they cannot concentrate on their studies. When the difficulty of the lessons is added to this list, school becomes a nightmare for these students. Moreover corporal punishments, humiliating language by classmates and teachers, bullying by classmates and labelling also created apathy in schooling. The participants went to school already with a baggage of family turbulence and poverty due to which they failed to exhibit good performance in academics. This finding is in vein with a study conducted by Foley in 2001, which revealed that incarcerated youth have significant problems in many academic areas and typically exhibit low-average to average academic ability.

**Neighbourhood:** Studies across various time frames have stated that there exists a relationship between neighbourhood and delinquency. Results of the present study reveal that the participants came from areas which were disorganized and disadvantaged. Their neighbourhood tends to have residents that are less bonded to one another and look down upon them as hopeless. The neighbours also labelled the participants as criminals. All the participants interviewed had faced the problem of labelling from their neighbours. This finding is in line with the labelling theory (Becker, 1963) which states if children are tagged as delinquent they start taking it as a part of their self image and it affects their behaviour in the future also. Moreover constant fights and conflicts among the neighbours provided them examples of immoral values that people uphold.

**Poverty:** Out of the total participants 35 i.e. 70 percent of the participants belonged to the family whose monthly income is 5000/- to 7000/- rupees, 10 participants i.e. 20 percent belonged to the family whose monthly income is 8000/- to 10000/- rupees and 5 participant i.e. 10 percent belonged to the family whose monthly income is 11000/- to 15000/- rupees. Poverty has deprived them even of basic necessities and has brought a sense of insecurity. For the participants earning money was more important than the means to earn it. Sometimes money was needed to fulfil their basic necessities and sometimes to satisfy their desires of

luxury. This obsession to earn money pulled them into stealing and were entitled to formal and informal sanction. This finding is in line with results of Jarjoura, G. Roger; Ruth A. Triplet, & Gregory P. Binker, (2002), which state that poverty and delinquency are related. Children who experience long periods of poverty between the birth and age 5 or in the early teenage years (11-15) are more likely to engage in both property and violent offending.

**Deviant Peer Association:** Deviant peer association was another social determinant as perceived by the participants. The association with deviant peers influenced the participants to indulge into substance abuse and delinquency. Laxity in family control, weak social relations, poverty, apathy in schooling were factors influencing the participants to seek support from deviant peers. Being deprived of love, affection, sympathy etc. they experienced comfort and warmth in the company of the deviant peers. However the participants also admitted that their association with these deviant peers persuaded them to resort to unlawful means which got them formally sanctioned. The above finding supports the views of social bond theory, when adolescents attached to an institution like the family, it compels them to behave well when they are outside in order to avert bad image not only for themselves but for their family as well (Abotchie, 2008). In the present study the participants were not attached to family, school or other social institution so that they could avert from deviant peers. It also supports the views of the general theory of crime (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990) which states that the inadequate support from the parents made the participants to be vulnerable to other vices as a source of livelihood. This finding also supports the central thrust of general theory of crime by Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) which is self-control. If the participants had self control it would help them to avert from their deviant peers and resultantly from illegitimate behaviour.

**Substance Abuse:** All the circumstances mentioned above are responsible for substance abuse among the participants as perceived by them. The participants admitted that they took over substance use as a coping mechanism to deal with multiple stressors resulting from adverse family and living conditions. Failure in schooling and labelling also instigated them to consume various substances which started with experimenting as a part of curiosity and ended up in addiction. Deviant peer association was a measure factor that debilitated the sense of judgment of the participants and got heaved into substance use. This finding also supports the central thrust of general theory of crime by Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) which is self-control. If the participants had self control it would help them to avert from their deviant peers and resultantly from substance abuse. The participants also revealed that they

gained courage from substance use and were able to execute the delinquency act firmly. This result supports the views of (D'Amico et al., 2008; Ford, 2005; Menard et al., 2001) who state that there exists a mutual relationship between substance use and delinquency.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the present study the perceived circumstances that made the juveniles in conflict with law engage in delinquent act were examined. It was observed that no child wants to be delinquent but circumstances make them so. Family which is always considered an institute that provides support, love, affection, care to its members, was a booster to the participants to indulge into delinquency. Moreover when school fails to perform its role apathy in schooling increases leading to delinquency. The disorganized, disadvantaged and less bonded communities provides greater risk of delinquency. Poverty however perturbs the physical, mental as well as the social life of children and adolescents that opens avenue for both serious crime and developmental risk factors. Deviant peer association and substance abuse was the option they saw to end their distress. Thus risk factors at the individual, social, and community level most likely interact in complex ways to promote delinquent behaviour in juveniles. It was also observed that the participant aspiration to become a good and productive citizens.

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