

Factors Contributing to Juvenile Crime: A Narrative Review

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Abstract: This study aims to discuss on some of the main factors that contribute to juvenile crime commitment, and specifically how those factors affect the psychological health of young adults. Factors identified in previous literatures as a significant contributor to juvenile crimes fall under three main categories: family, school, and peers. Structure of the family, parental attachment and treatment of the child during their early childhood are the main elements of family-related factors that determine the likeliness of teenagers leaning towards infliction. For school-related factors, a poor performance (whether academically or extracurricular-wise) and bullying/harassment on campus strongly control the rate of crime conviction in juveniles. Longtime accompany with other anti-social friends and social distancing are the major peer-related factors that play a huge part in leading to offending in the later adolescent stage. Current studies can certainly be a knowledge basis for finding solutions to juvenile crime. Further research can be done in further study of how these factors correlate, and whether slight alternations to them can reduce the rate of crime in those under the age of 18.

Keywords: Juvenile crime, family, school, peers, childhood maltreatment

1. Introduction

Crime, or simply breaking the law, are phrases generally put together with the actions of a grown-up over the age of 18. Yet nowadays, the rate at which adolescents commit crime has brought much attention. Juvenile crime has continued to be a trending problem around the world, with its beginnings dating all the way back to the late 20th century, specifically in the 1990s, where the number of juveniles in jail reached its peak in the world [1]. Although youth criminal arrestments have declined over the decades, reports have shown that in 2020, there were still an estimated 424,300 juvenile arrests involving those younger than 18. Individuals younger than 18 accounted for 7% of all arrests for violent crimes. Less than 10 percent (8%) of these juvenile arrests were for a crime involving violence [1]. Intensified assault took up 5% of all arrestments of young adults in 2020; property robbery committed by young adults took up 3%, and murder took up 0.25% [1]. Research and analysis of these reported cases have shown that these illegal actions are mostly committed under pressures of family, school, and peers/social life [2].

2. Discussion

In previous literatures, factors considered to be important factors in juvenile delinquency are mainly divided into three categories; Family, school and peers. Family structure, parental attachment, and treatment of children in early childhood are major factors in determining the likelihood that adolescents are predisposed to inflicting harm. In terms of school-related factors, underperformance (both academically and in extracurricular activities) and school bullying/harassment strongly control the rate of crime among young adults. Long-term companionship and social distance from other antisocial friends are major peer-related factors that lead to delinquency in later adolescence.

2.1. Family

Factors about family, for instance, family structure, parental attachment, and childhood maltreatment have been identified in the previous literature as a contributor worth notice to juvenile offending. Impacts of these have also been identified in many previous research articles.

2.1.1. Family Structure

Family structure, or the ratio of the number of parents or guardians to that of children, is one of the most important predictors of juvenile delinquency; 51% of participants in an investigation reported there to be problems and trouble in the organization of their families [3]. Findings of Alboukordi's study indicated that parental absence, also known as broken homes, is in positive association with adolescent delinquency, showing that parental monitoring plays an indirect predict role of delinquency, which is same as what Dishion's research demonstrated, even though parental monitoring could not accurately predict delinquency [4]. The possible essence of this hypothesis is that the loss of parental monitory increases the rate of meeting between children and delinquent peer in order to form juvenile delinquent.

Previous studies have established that children from impaired homes show a noteworthy higher level of delinquent offending than children from intact families. Professor Ryan D. Schroeder first hypothesized that this may mainly be a result of the lessened amount of parents' care in the family and the attachment they give to their children; transition such as changing from a household of two parents to one with only a single aprent would accompany a significant increase in wrongdoing [5]. He also discovered that adolescents who have permanent residentials in a two-parent household show lower levels of offending than adolescents who resided with a single parent, which is the same result as the previous study. However, according to S. L. Brown's findings, there were no clear relationship between the increase in delinquency and the decline in time spent with family and parental attachment [6]. A more likely explanation is that family issues which has already exist before the break-up of the intact homes led to the high level of of offending among adolescents.

2.1.2. Parental Attachment

Previous research has shown that before learning to talk and learn a language, infants have already developed connections with their caregivers that are called Internal Working Models (IWMs) during time spent with their guardians, and such mature into children, and later on into teenagers [7]. Humans rely much on their caregivers to not just provide basic needs of survival, but along with mental and emotional support. Studies have shown that a lack of emotional and mental support from parents or guardians during childhood has found to foreshadow the outcome of forming both physical and mental health problems, and this continues on even when reaching middle and older adulthood [8], showing how important a positive and effective parental emotion support is throughout life. A lack of this support, or negative, abusive actions that the parent commits to the child at an early age can

result in the outcome of developing mental health conditions such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), anxiety, depression, and other mood and mental disorders [9]. A secure and steady parental attachment, whether physically or mentally, can produce the results of a positive personality, such as well adaptation to school life, strong confidence in social interactions, and motivated continuation of academic and dream achievements [10]. On the other hand, a weak or brutish parental attachment leads to problems such as depression, stress, anxiety, suicidal thoughts or behaviors, legal violation, drug abuse, or other forms of crime [10]. What has also been discovered is that it is likely that children of incarcerated parents are more likely to become incarcerated themselves [11].

Peng et al.'s study [10] produced results showing that parental attachment can affect how childhood maltreatment impacts the Callous-Unemotional (CU) traits which are the key affective features of psychopathy [12]. This study expands the outcomes of how childhood maltreatment is of significant correlation with CU traits. It depicts the progression from childhood maltreatment, which in turn develops into insecure parental attachment, and later on leading to stunted emotional intelligence, in turn giving increase to CU traits. Previous studies have suggested that individuals with higher CU traits are more prone to criminal behaviors, especially when it comes offences involving violent actions [13].

2.1.3. Childhood maltreatment

Maltreatment of the child at an early age by the parent also potentially affects the rate of crime conviction.

The evidence that are present in Yao, X.'s study prove a relationship between physical abuse victimization of the child and crime conviction, including violent chronic offending among Chinese juvenile offenders [14]. Researchers did this investigation on juvenile offenders and got the data from a juvenile reformatory in an minor ethnic autonomous region located in Southwest China [14]. The predictor indicators they used were the overall maltreatment victimization and five commonly carried out child maltreatment methods: physical abuse (PA), emotional abuse (EA), sexual abuse (SA), physical neglect (PN), and emotional neglect (EN) [14]. A shortened form of the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ-SF) developed by Dr. Bernstein [15] was used to measure child maltreatment levels in this investigation. According to this questionnaire, the average rating of physical abuse victimization among chronic violent offenders ($M = 1.35$) was significantly higher than that of non-violent chronic offenders. This is proof that child physical abuse may have a stronger negative impact on violent chronic offending than on non-violent chronic offending [14]. The finding of the present study is partly uniform with that of Fox et al. [16] and Jung et al. [17]. Overall, participants rated themselves as having experienced less than moderate or moderate child maltreatment [14]. The score of medical abuse is 1.64(out of 4), which shows that participant did not think they highly dependent on drugs [14]. Although the average scores for specific types of maltreatment were low, the vast majority of participants (93.2%) experienced maltreatment [14]. A conclusion from the above researches would be that physical abuse from parents or guardians likely exerts a more significant impact on general chronic offending among juvenile criminals [14].

2.2. School

2.2.1. Poor Performance at School

The level of education and teaching methods in schools greatly affect both the behaviors and thoughts of adolescents. Adolescents commonly undergo periods of externalized behaviors, behaving with conduct problems and hyperactivity [18], and these actions correlate with poor academic performance, constant school suspension and expulsion, and regular dropouts, which are among the most well-

known school-related risk factors for delinquency and legal violation [19]. Increase in educational attainment between young adults is associated with reductions in conviction rates for most legal violations such as burglary, stealing, and drug-related offences, yet this does not apply for violent crimes [20]. Escalation in unauthorized time outside of and away from the academic campus is associated with higher chances of committing theft-related crimes [20]. Much research has done to prove that a lack of time spent in school or an inefficient education could lead to higher rates of juvenile crime, yet few research has been conducted to show whether different educational courses of styles affect juvenile crime conviction rates.

2.2.2. Bullying

Bullying, a typical factor that contributes to mental health problems in teenagers, accounts for a main reason in having the motivation to commit crime in juvenile criminals.

On average, bullying in school affects 1 student in 4, and the impact comes in the form of either as a bully, a victim, or a bully-victim. Bully-victims include those belonging to the group of teenagers both committing bullying and being victimized at school [21]. A study done by Professor Reeve S Kennedy found that youth involved in high amounts of both infliction and victimization are on average more at risk of mental trauma and non-victimization adversity than those involved in less bullying behaviors [22]. At the same time, murderous ideation and behaviors were more likely to be reported from those individuals. Moreover, the variation in types of bullying and victimization had an almost addiction-like association with murderous ideation and behaviors, as did the frequency of involvement in committing bullying and suffering from victimization. In general, being a bully-victim was a risk factor for murderous and suicidal thought and behavior formation, and those individuals were more likely to commit illegal actions in their future adulthood [23]. Another study conducted by Andre Sourander, PhD, built upon this theory, with results displaying that individuals who were bullies for long-term and those who were frequently bullied (8.8% of the sample) belonged to 33.0% of all juvenile crimes during the 4-year study period. The bully-only status predicted both occasional and repeated offending in different participants, whereas the bully-victim status predicted repeated offending only. When under the control of education from parents or guardians, bullying predicted most types of crime (violence, property, drunk driving, and traffic offenses)[24]. These researches depict how being a bully, a victim of bullying, or a bully-victim are all factors of contributing to young adults' infliction.

2.3. Peers

2.3.1. Interaction with Anti-Social Friends

Young adults gradually perceive the importance of a strong bond with their peers especially with respect paid to identity and intimacy issues throughout adolescence [25]. Adolescents who have supportive friends that understand and respect their lifetime decisions score themselves lower on subscales in an investigation, them being Withdrawn, Anxious/Depressed, Social Problems and internalizing behavior on pre-coded questionnaires [26]. Based on these results, it is likely that adolescent behaviors are most commonly derived from those of their friends or who they spend the most time with. For instance, actions that are considered illegal before the age of 18, such as smoking, done by friends was one of the most important predictors of smoking among young adults [27]. Alcohol and marijuana abuse and racial or ethnical offending increased in the year after adolescents, especially young boys, began interacting with peers who engaged in similar behaviors [28]. Substance use, such as drugs, were of the strongest association during adolescence [28].

2.3.2. Social Distancing

For 3 years, COVID-19 has been a massive impact to the world. Other than the wide range of physical health problems that the virus caused, mental and social problems were also a question of concern. Many showed increased levels of stress and anger during the pandemic compared to the years before [29]. Economic and psychosocial stressors (e.g. lifestyle and economic disruptions), feelings of hopelessness, and pre-pandemic social stressors (e.g. bullying victimization and stressful life events) were the strongest predictor of emotional distress during the pandemic [29]. In researches conducted in Israel, although other types of criminal action were of significant decrease, findings indicate an escalation in domestic violence calls made to police stations during the first few weeks when social distancing restrictions were first enforced [30][31], meaning that as families stayed at home, domestic violence became a constant crime. In addition, discoveries and reports of cybercrime increased during the lockdown periods in China [32] as well as in the UK [33], where the most significant trend is the amount of fraud associated with online shopping programs and social media hacks, including cyberbullying. The increase in cybercrime is mainly directed at individual victims [32], but altogether can affect a large group of individuals at once.

The closure of schools and academic institutions as part of the efforts to stop the spread of the disease has taken an emotional and mental toll on youth in general. For example, at-risk youth experience increased anxiety and depression during periods of lockdown [34][35]. Youth at risk are termed for those who are at a greater vulnerability for abusive acts, both physically and substance-wise, such as substance and drug abuse, domestic violence, school failure, and bullying, along with mental health disorders, such as depression and anxiety [36]. To escape from physical and mental damage, those who are part of the youth at risk group chose to remain far from home despite the lockdown and dangerous possibility of virus infection to avoid domestic abuse and further mental damage. Instead, at-risk youth run away to hide in abandoned houses or stay on the street [35]. This absence of social services and treatment may lead to an increase in emotional trauma and juvenile crime behavior [35].

3. Conclusion

It is shown widely that parental, school, and peer influences significantly impact the crime conviction rate of young adults. Most youth at risk ultimately became juvenile criminals mostly due to abusive factors in their early childhood, such as domestic violence, school bullying, anti-social peer influence, and longtime exposure to an environment without legal treatment for mental health problems. Further research could be done in examination of whether changes to the above factors could reduce the rate of juvenile infliction. For instance, a change in the parenting method could direct a child away from legal violation; an alteration in the education system of the school could change the behaviors and thoughts of a student positively; teaching young adults how to determine whether a friendship is toxic could significantly reduce rates of theft, alcohol and drug abuse, or violence. Although juvenile crime is still an issue around the world waiting to be relieved, further studies in this field could potentially significantly reduce the rate which young adults become involved in the area of illegal interactions.

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