

Exploration of adolescent criminal psychology and psychological intervention

Sicheng Xiang

Columbian College of Art and Science, The George Washington University,
Washington, District of Columbia, United States, 20052

jennyxiang_2001@gwu.edu

Abstract. This literature review delves into adolescent criminal psychology and investigates the potential effectiveness of psychological interventions in reducing youth crime. The issue of teenage delinquency is a pressing societal concern with far-reaching consequences. This paper thoroughly examines this complex subject by synthesizing existing literature. The review assesses key findings in adolescent criminal psychology, including the impact of family dynamics and social factors on crime rates. This review sheds light on the multifaceted nature of juvenile delinquency by illuminating the complex interplay of factors that contribute to it. It emphasizes the importance of addressing individual psychological determinants in addition to broader socio-environmental contexts. This literature review explores adolescent criminal psychology and evaluates the effectiveness of psychological interventions in reducing youth crime. The paper provides insights into the psychological underpinnings of childish criminal behavior and the potential strategies for intervention. It delves into the complexity of juvenile delinquency, highlighting the interplay of factors that contribute to it, such as family dynamics, mental health, and social influences. The findings emphasize the importance of addressing these factors to develop more effective approaches to mitigating youth crime.

Keywords: Adolescent Crime, Education and Youth Crime, Prevention of Adolescent Crime, Restorative Justice in Youth Crime

1. Introduction

Adolescent crime is still a significant concern and is intricately linked to social, economic, and psychological factors. Despite extensive research, we continue to have gaps in our understanding of adolescent criminal behavior. Recently, regions worldwide, including Brazil, have faced alarming rates of youth crime, which have serious societal consequences. Data from 5,560 Brazilian municipalities from 2006 to 2013 show an alarmingly high number of violence-related deaths among people aged 15 to 19. Furthermore, the rates of violent crime per 10,000 people aged 15 to 19 emphasize the gravity of the situation [1]. This study aims to investigate the psychological factors that underpin adolescent criminal behavior and assess the effectiveness of psychological interventions for crime prevention.

The paper is divided into three sections. First, I will examine how family environments, mental health issues, and social support systems influence juvenile delinquency by synthesizing existing research findings in the section on psychological factors of adolescent crime. Next, we'll look at education and restorative justice and how they can help reduce youth crime rates. This paper has high research value

because it provides comprehensive insights into adolescent criminal psychology. It helps bridge existing knowledge gaps in research while supporting evidence-based policy formulation and intervention projects to reduce crime rates, improve societal security, and improve the lives of adolescents. Finally, it provides critical insights for future research endeavors and practical applications, empowering academia and practitioners.

2. Analysis of psychological factors of youth delinquency

2.1. Family Environment

The family environment has a large impact on juvenile delinquent behavior. Adolescents in non-traditional families, such as single-parent households, are likelier to engage in delinquent behavior. Divorce has also been linked to higher rates of juvenile delinquency. Parental factors such as psychological control, warmth, and conflicts impact adolescent behavior. A supportive family environment can effectively deter delinquent behavior even in adversity. Attachment to parents and peers is important; secure attachments and quality family time help to reduce offending behaviors. On the other hand, peer pressure and economic factors such as poverty can contribute to the development of delinquent behavior. Finally, the family environment, which includes structure, parental behaviors, attachment patterns, and economic conditions, is critical in shaping the emergence of delinquent behaviors [1, 2].

2.2. Mental health and crime

According to research, juvenile offenders have a higher prevalence of mental illness than the general adolescent population, emphasizing the importance of addressing mental health issues in reducing offending and recidivism rates among juvenile delinquents. Research indicates that the prevalence of mental health disorders among juvenile delinquents significantly exceeds that of the general adolescent population. While approximately 20% of the general teenage population experiences mental health issues, the prevalence rates among young offenders are at least twice as high. The most common mental health disorders among young offenders include conduct disorder, mood disorders (such as major depressive disorder and dysthymia), substance use disorders, and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Factors like gender, ethnicity, and environmental stressors influence the occurrence of mental health-related problems among juvenile offenders. Insufficient social support and histories of physical and sexual abuse, commonly experienced by juvenile delinquents, may predispose them to mental health disorders and suicidal behavior. The relationship between delinquency and childhood depression is complex, with depressed children more likely to engage in delinquent acts. Moreover, they exhibit higher conduct problems, impulsivity, and hyperactivity rates. Suicidal ideation and behavior rates among juvenile delinquents significantly surpass those of the general adolescent population, ranging from 17% to 61%. Completed suicides among young offenders are also more prevalent [3].

2.3. Social Support Systems in Youth Crime

Social support networks play an important role in juvenile delinquency. Contact with delinquent peers can aggravate criminal behavior, whereas support from family, mentors, and friends can deter delinquent behavior. These networks provide stability and direction, particularly during adolescence and early adulthood. Due to the involvement of the criminal justice system, delinquent youths frequently have their social connections disrupted. According to studies, support networks are small and homogeneous, but expanding these networks can promote positive outcomes and reduce criminal activity [4].

3. The Effectiveness of Psychological Interventions

3.1. Education

The Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and Reducing Burglary Initiative (RBI) programs in juvenile crime interventions have significantly impacted the conviction rates for burglary among 16 to

18-year-olds. The EMA program aims to increase participation in post-compulsory education by providing financial assistance and has successfully induced a trade-off in time allocation between criminal activity and education. Reducing the opportunity cost of criminal behavior is a promising strategy for discouraging youth criminal behavior. These programs provide alternatives for young people and complement other crime prevention interventions, presenting a comprehensive approach to addressing youth crime [5]. However, addressing youth crime effectively requires a multifaceted approach to education. School-based education imparts moral values, social skills, and a sense of responsibility. Schools should emphasize curricula that foster students' sense of accountability and societal awareness to prevent juvenile delinquency. Equally vital is family-based education, with parents and family members playing a pivotal role in shaping the behavior and values of adolescents. Social education is another significant component, encouraging youth participation in community service and volunteer activities to nurture civic responsibility. Furthermore, educational policies and practices should focus on eliminating inequalities and ensuring equal opportunities for quality education for every adolescent. Investment in teacher training, school infrastructure improvement, and extracurricular activities is crucial. These measures help prevent school dropouts and social marginalization, ultimately reducing the risk of youth involvement in criminal activities.

3.2. The Role of the Justice System in Juvenile Crime Interventions

Restorative justice interventions represent a paradigm shift in how we approach juvenile crime interventions within the justice system. Unlike traditional punitive methods, restorative justice focuses on reintegrating youthful offenders into society and mending the harm created by the offense. Restorative justice is defined by its emphasis on accountability, empathy, and moral growth rather than simply punitive consequences. One of restorative justice's key strengths is its ability to provide a platform for young offenders to understand the consequences of their actions on victims and the community. By participating in victim-offender mediation or family group conferencing, offenders are encouraged to accept responsibility for their actions, express remorse, and make amends.

This process holds them accountable for their actions and fosters empathy, essential in reducing recidivism. However, it is critical to recognize that the adaptability of restorative justice to new frameworks and specific cases can present difficulties. Because not all young offenders are equally motivated to participate in this process, the success of beneficial justice interventions depends on their willingness to participate fully. Furthermore, concerns have been raised about integrating restorative justice with other innovative justice mechanisms and its applicability in cases involving trauma-informed approaches. Finally, beneficial justice interventions offer a promising path forward in juvenile crime interventions because they address the underlying causes of delinquent behavior and emphasize holistic rehabilitation.

While there are challenges, the potential for restorative justice to foster moral agency and reduce recidivism among motivated young offenders makes it a valuable addition to the spectrum of interventions available in the youth criminal justice system. This approach exemplifies a shift toward a more compassionate and accountable approach to youth crime, which aligns with broader societal goals of rehabilitation and reintegration.

Early intervention programs, improved access to mental health services, youth empowerment initiatives, community policing, expanded use of restorative justice, comprehensive family support, investment in education and skill-building, increased funding for after-school programs, ongoing research and evaluation, and cross-agency collaboration are some approaches to addressing youth crime. These strategies are intended to reduce juvenile delinquency, assist at-risk youth, and promote rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

4. Conclusion

Finally, this comprehensive review has delved into the psychology of youth crime, covering the background, significance, psychological factors, psychological interventions, and future research directions. Youth crime is a complex societal issue with far-reaching social consequences.

Understanding the psychological mechanisms and factors contributing to youth crime is critical for developing effective intervention strategies. We have emphasized the importance of family environment, mental health, and social support in shaping adolescent criminal behavior. These discoveries lay a solid foundation for future criminological research and experiments.

Nonetheless, this review has some limitations. We could not delve deeply into all potential psychological factors and intervention strategies due to length and time constraints. Future research can delve deeper into these topics to gain a more complete understanding. Furthermore, while we emphasize the importance of research, some existing studies still need to be improved because of methodological limitations and a lack of data. Future research should concentrate on improving methods and gathering more pertinent data. Subsequent research can investigate different aspects of youth crime psychology.

To begin, more quantitative research can be conducted to quantify the specific impact of various psychological factors on youth crime. Second, for a more in-depth understanding, interdisciplinary research can delve into the interaction of psychological and social factors. More longitudinal studies can also be conducted to understand how youth crime psychology evolves. A deeper exploration of youth crime psychology within different cultural and background contexts in future research can provide a broader perspective. These studies can aid in developing more effective intervention strategies, thereby improving societal security and lowering youth crime rates. We can better understand this critical issue and provide a solid foundation for social policies and practices if we continue to delve into the depths of youth crime psychology. It is expected that future research will continue improving our understanding of youth crime psychology and intervention strategies.

References

- [1] Ali, S. M., & Masood, S. (2018). Role of Family, Neighbourhood, and Peers in the Development of Delinquent Behavior in Adolescents. *Journal Name*, Volume(Issue), Page numbers. <https://doi.org/10.32879/picp.2018.4.2.171>
- [2] Huang, Y., McKeown, S. Examining the Association between Family Environment and Adolescent Delinquent Behaviours in China. *J Child Fam Stud* 31, 2871–2884 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-022-02348-4>
- [3] Goldstein, Naomi and Olubadewo, Oluseyi and Redding, Richard E. and Lexcen, Frances, Mental Health Disorders: The Neglected Risk Factor in Juvenile Delinquency (2005). *Juvenile Delinquency: Prevention, Assessment, and Intervention*, 85-110, 2005, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2398584>
- [4] Naomi A. Zwecker, Anna J. Harrison, Leah J. Welty, Linda A. Teplin & Karen M. Abram (2018) Social support networks among delinquent youth: An 8-year follow-up study, *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 57:7, 459-480, DOI: 10.1080/10509674.2018. 1523821
- [5] Feinstein, Leon and Sabatés Aysa, Ricardo, Education and Youth Crime: Effects of Introducing the Education Maintenance Allowance Programme (January 2005). More comprehensive Benefits of Learning Working Paper No. 14, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=901421> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.901421>