

Predictive Factors for Juvenile Delinquency: The Role of Family Structure, Parental Monitoring and Delinquent Peers

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Abstract

The aim of this research was to investigate the role of family structure, parental monitoring and affiliation with delinquent peers in predicting juvenile delinquency. In this Cross-sectional study, 96 delinquent adolescents and 91 non-delinquent adolescents, chosen through a convenient sampling in Tehran, completed parental monitoring inventory and affiliation with delinquent peers scale. Data was analyzed using Logistic regression analysis. Reliability of the questionnaires verified using internal consistency and test-retest methods. Regarding Logistic regression analysis results, among predicting variables, family structure and affiliation with delinquent peers were significant predictors of juvenile delinquency. These factors could explain 29 to 39 percent of delinquency variance. Parental monitoring was also unable to predict delinquency, but it could significantly predict affiliation with delinquent peers. The results of the present study were in line with results of the previous researches and showed that distress in family structure and affiliation with delinquent peers have a significant role in the delinquency phenomenon. Therefore, it seems necessary to consider these factors as influential factors in promoting delinquency.

Introduction

Juvenile delinquency is a major problem in many societies as it causes major distress and damage to victims, perpetrators, and society at large (Nas et al., 2005). Adolescent crime has been studied using many labels. The most common label that has been used is delinquency. Delinquency encompasses a range of norm-breaking behaviors for which adolescents are criminally responsible; Drug use, violent offenses against other persons and carrying weapon are just some instances of delinquency (Mart, 2008). The negative psychosocial and economic consequences of delinquency along with its developing expansion have caused experts' concerns. The current statistics reiterates necessity of these concerns. In 2006, for example, there were 1,626,523 arrests of juveniles reported in the USA; this number accounts

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for only about 16 percent of all arrests (Shoemaker 2009). According to a report of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), in 2001, adolescents committed over 185,000 crimes, and almost 19,000 adolescents were sentenced to prison (Koposov et al, 2005). While in Germany it was violence against people of a non-German cultural background that caused deep concern in society, in the US the public became alarmed by news about weapons at schools. In Great Britain the appearance of hooligans during football games was an issue of public debate and even in Japan, which is known for its well-integrated youth, an increase in bullying and violence at schools was reported (Jost, 2003).

Many adolescents today, and perhaps increasing numbers in upcoming years, are at risk for adverse health outcomes stemming from their behavior. To organize preventive programs, recognizing factors that influence these phenomena like juvenile delinquency is very important (DiClemente et al., 2001). The study of delinquency literature highlights the role of some prominent factors, the most important of which are family-related and peers factors (Pearce & Haynie, 2004; Brendgen et al., 2000). Among family process variables, parental monitoring has been identified in the literature as one of the proximal determinants of early development and maintenance of antisocial and delinquent behavior in children and adolescents (Singer et al., 2004).

Parental monitoring typically is defined as parent's knowledge of the whereabouts of their teenager when they are not with them, and knowing whom they are spending time with (Patterson, Dearshe, & Ramsey, 1989). Parents are expected to know their children's whereabouts, activities, and playmates (Laird et al., 2003). Research on parental monitoring has traditionally focused on adolescent norm-breaking behavior such as delinquency, antisocial behavior, smoking and substance use (Frojd et al., 2006). These studies showed that parental monitoring has been associated with less delinquent behavior (Brendgen et al., 2000; Romero & Ruiz, 2007; Thornberry & Krohn, 2003; Heilbrun et al, 2005; Caldwell et al., 2006; McShane & Williams, 2007) and is a protective factor for adolescents against delinquency and other high risk behaviors (Crosnoe et al., 2002). Parental monitoring is associated with different factors including cultural poverty and dual carrier parents (Zahn, 2009). Furthermore, low levels of parental monitoring may be resulted from family structure distress (Jost, 2003; Demuth & Brown, 2004; Shoemaker, 2009; Shoemaker, 2010) and also lead to adolescent affiliation with delinquent peers (Brandt, 2006; Brendgen et al., 2000); in fact the aforementioned factors are related to delinquency themselves.

It has been well established that the incidence of juvenile delinquency in non-two-parent families, also called broken homes, is much higher than in two-parent families (Jost, 2003). Distress in family structure, if specially resulted from divorce, not only may increase delinquency (Thornberry & Krohn, 2003; Demuth & Brown, 2004; Dehghani et al., 2008; Paschal et al., 2003; Eitle, 2006; Zimmermann, 2006, Changizi, 2007) but also may lead to low level of parental monitoring (Jost, 2003, Demuth & Brown, 2004; Dehghani et al., 2008; Shoemaker, 2009; Shoemaker, 2010) and affiliation with delinquent peers (Paschal et al., 2003). Affiliation with delinquent peers is described as the relationship with adolescents who are committing behaviors like weapon carrying, offending, and drug abuse (Paschal et al., 2003). With respect to social learning theory, relationship with delinquent peers can impress adolescents' problem behaviors (Meldrum, 2009). Recent research shows a significant relationship between affiliation with delinquent peers and delinquent behaviors (Brendgen et al., 2000 ;Laird et al., 2003 ;Heilbrun et al., 2005 ;Queen, 2004).

Given the fact that in developing countries, in comparison with developed countries, adolescents form remarkable portion of society, it demands to pay much attention to the adolescents (Changizi, 2007). The aim of the present study was to investigate the role of family structure, parental monitoring and affiliation with delinquent peers in predicting juvenile delinquency. In an effort to fill this gap in the literature, this study also contributed to the limited body of research on the effects of parental monitoring, family structure and delinquent peers on delinquent behaviors among Iranian adolescents.

Methods

This study investigates the relationships among Parental monitoring, family structure and affiliation with delinquent peers with delinquency. The delinquent sample consisted of 96 adolescents, aged 14 to 18 years, convicted of major crimes. The sample was recruited from Correction Service Center in Tehran, Iran. The control sample comprised of 91 non-delinquent, community participants, selected with regard to delinquent sample's age, gender and residential area. All participants completed individually administered Questionnaires with regular supervision to provide reliable and valid data. The following instrumentations were applied to collect data.

Parental monitoring was measured through a seven-item parental monitoring scale that previously had achieved a Cronbach's α of .76 (Singer et al., 2004). Parental monitoring items included questions about adolescent's whereabouts, friends and activities. The six-item version of this scale was previously used by Flannery et al. (1994). Singer et al. (2004) added a question regarding punishment by parents to the original six items.

The scale translated into Persian was improved and adapted to daily language usage. The corrected version was translated back into English to be checked for meaning changes. To establish test-retest reliability, the scale was administered with two weeks interval. For this study Cronbach's α were .81 and .72 for delinquents and non-delinquent adolescents, respectively.

Affiliation with delinquent peers was measured using 8-item scale. The adolescents were asked for delinquent behaviors committed by their peers, like drug and alcohol use, carrying knife or gun and physical fighting during the past six months (Paschal et al., 2003). The possible responses were "none of them" (0) to "all of them" (4). The total response score was computed for each adolescent, with the higher score indicating more affiliation with delinquent peers. After translation and back translation, the scale test-retest reliability was confirmed. The Cronbach's α of scale were .88 and .84 for delinquents and non-delinquent adolescents, respectively.

The demographic questionnaire was used for assessing variables including adolescents' age, education and socioeconomic status. To measure family structure, the adolescents categorized their families as intact (two- biological parents) or broken/disturbed families (single-parent etc.). Moreover, to examine the relationship between variables, we conducted Chi-square test and Logistic regression analysis. The acceptable level of significance was set to $p < .05$.

Results

The participants were 96 delinquent and 91 non-delinquent adolescents. 4 non-delinquents were not eligible due to having convicting background. Therefore the non-delinquent sample size was reduced to 87. The participants mean and standard deviation (SD) of age were 16.82 and 1.04 years for delinquents and 16.52 and 1.22 for non-delinquents, respectively. Most of the participants ($n = 78$, 81.2%) were spending their first term in prison. Also a large proportion of the delinquents (78/96, 81.2%) and non-delinquents (52/87, 54.1%) had vocational experiences.

The reasons why the delinquents were confined to the juvenile corrective institutions included violent offenses such as fighting or threatening (16.7%), homicide and rape offenses (9.4%), property offenses such as theft and burglary (44.8%), alcohol and drug related offenses (16.7%), mixed type offenses (5.2%) and other offenses (7.3%). Descriptive statistics for variables used in the chi square test are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The results of chi square test for the two group's comparison in demographic variables

Variable	Delinquent	Non-delinquent	Chi square
Family Structure			
Intact	47(49)	83(95.4)	47.85**
Broken Family	49(51)	4(4.6)	
Parental condemnation			
Yes	21(21.9)	9(10.3)	4.43*
No	75(78.1)	78(89.7)	
Parental addiction			
Yes	30(31.2)	3(3.4)	23.87**
No	66(68.8)	84(96.6%)	
Family Income			
More Than 1000\$	0(0%)	17(19.5%)	36.21**
Sibling			
1-2	22(22.91)	42(48.28)	24.66**
3-4	41(42.71)	39(44.89)	
5-6	24(25)	4(4.6)	
6<	9(9.38)	2(2.3)	
Job record			
Yes	78(81.2)	35(40.2)	32.51**
No	18(18.8)	52(59.8)	
Drug And Alcohol			
Cigarette Abuse	43(44.8)	11(12.6)	22.68**
Alcohol Abuse	49(51)	12(13.8)	28.50**
Drug Abuse	27(28.1)	5(5.7)	15.84**
Education			
Primary School	12(12.5)	1(1.15)	32.67**
Secondary School	47(48.96)	17(19.54)	
High School	37(38.54)	69(79/31)	

*P<.05. **P<.001

The results of independent sample t test are shown in table 2. This findings showed that delinquent and non-delinquent adolescents were significantly different in scores of parental monitoring (P<.05) and affiliation with delinquent peers (P<.001).

Table2: Comparison of self-rating questionnaire scores of adolescents in parental monitoring and affiliation with delinquent peers

Variable	Delinquents		Non-delinquents		df	T	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
Parental monitoring	12.09	5.18	13.44	3.81	173.93	2.01	.046
Affiliation with delinquent peers	12.77	8.77	6.84	6.25	180	5.29	.000

Logestic regression analysis was used to investigate the predictive role of family structure, parental monitoring and affiliation with delinquent peers for delinquency. The results showed that family structure and affiliation with delinquent peers, among predictor variables, could significantly predict delinquency occurrence. The results of omnibus test showed that the theoretical model used in the study is fit to predict juvenile delinquency variation (Chi Square= 64.86, P<0.001).

Also the presented model could truly predict the delinquency occurrence in 74.7 percent of time. Results presented in table 3 showed that among predictive variables, family structure ($B= 2.736$, $P<.001$) and affiliation with delinquent peers ($B= 0.091$, $P<.001$) were significant predictors of delinquency.

Table 3. Logistic regression analysis predicting delinquency with Family structure, parental monitoring and affiliation with delinquent peers

Variable	B	Wald	df	sig	Exp(B)
Family structure	2.736	27.675	1	.001	15.432
Affiliation with delinquent peers	.091	11.506	1	.001	1
Parental monitoring	-.048	1.114	1	.291	.953
Constant	.686	.705	1	.401	.503

Due to the fact that parental monitoring couldn't significantly predict delinquency, its effect was investigated indirectly. To inquire into this hypothesis, and regarding the significance of the relationship between parental monitoring and affiliation with delinquent peers ($R= -0.408$, $P<0.001$), linear regression analysis was used. The results revealed that parental monitoring was a significant predictor of affiliation with delinquent peers ($P<0.001$) and could explain 16.2 percent of its variance.

Discussion

This study was aimed to investigate the role of family structure, parental monitoring and affiliation with delinquent peers in predicting juvenile delinquency. Results supported that family structure was an important predictor of juvenile delinquency so that 51% of delinquents reported distress in the structure of their families. Findings of our study contribute to previous research, which indicated that parental absence, also termed broken homes, is positively associated with adolescent delinquency (Pearce & Haynie, 2004; Thornberry & Krohn, 2003; Demuth & Brown, 2004; Dehghani et al., 2008; Paschal et al., 2003; Eitle, 2006; Zimmermann, 2006; Changizi, 2007).

Given that broken families typically are the result of marital discord preceding the break up, it often seems that it is the exposure to discord and quarreling that impacts the adolescent rather than the actual separation (Brandt, 2006). The absence of one parent can lead to poverty (Jost, 2003), parental monitoring reduction (Demuth & Brown, 2004; Dehghani et al., 2008) and affiliation with delinquent peers (Paschal et al., 2003) and affects adolescents through the mentioned factors. While Iran is a developing country wherein family and community structures are strong and extended family connections reduce the impact of parental loss, contrary to Schoemaker's findings (2009), the results of the present study showed that the connection between broken homes and delinquency is strong.

Our results, similar to those of Brendgen, Vitaro, and Bukowski (2000), Paschal, Ringwalt, and Flewelling (2003), and Meldrum, Young, and Weerman (2009), showed that affiliation with delinquent peers could predict the delinquency occurrence. Consistent with previous research, spending time with delinquent peers as well as its direct effect on juvenile delinquency was associated with family structure (Paschal et al., 2003) and parental monitoring (Brendgen et al., 2000; Brandt, 2006). The results support the basic argument of delinquent peers as an important factor in the development of juvenile delinquency as suggested in the Social Learning Theory (Meldrum et al., 2009).

In our study, we found that parental monitoring was not an influential predictor of juvenile delinquency directly. Previous research suggested that parental monitoring is an important deterrent of

delinquent behavior (Brendgen et al., 2000; Romero & Ruiz, 2007; Caldwell et al., 2006), but this study has not supported this prediction.

Although parental monitoring could not predict delinquency, it appears to be an indirect predictor of delinquency. So regarding the difference of two groups in parental monitoring and its relationship with affiliation with delinquent peers, the effect of parental monitoring on juvenile delinquency was investigated indirectly. Consistent with Brendgen, Vitaro, and Bukowski (2000) and Xiong, Rettig, and Tuicomepee (2008), parental monitoring could significantly predict affiliation with delinquent peers. Dishion et al. (1995) demonstrated that lacking parental monitoring can foster adolescents' affiliation with delinquents by providing children with the opportunity to meet with delinquent peers. In sum, we found that family structure and affiliation with delinquent peers were significant predictors of juvenile delinquency; furthermore parental monitoring indirectly influences delinquency through affiliation with delinquents.

Limitations of this study are worthy of discussion. First, the direct measure of juvenile delinquency was constrained to Correction Service Center inmates, while every juvenile committing delinquent behavior is not imprisoned necessarily. Second, causal relationship cannot be inferred from analyses conducted on cross-sectional data, thus causal relationship between research variables cannot be established. Another limitation is that measurement of research variables was based on participants' self-report, and there was no independent method for testing the validity of their responses. Future studies would probably benefit from using Interview and observational research data to help researchers understand the connections of adolescent delinquency and its connected variables in greater depth. Since studies in Iran have not investigated parental monitoring and affiliation with delinquent peers, the obtained data from the current study cannot be compared with research carried out on Iranian samples.

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