

## A Study of Factors Affecting Juvenile Delinquency

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### ABSTRACT

Children and juvenile delinquency is considered as one of the problems and concerns of different countries. This phenomenon has a growing trend in our country as one of the youngest countries in the world. This study aims at investigating the factors affecting juvenile delinquency. This research is a cross - sectional study performed on 250 subjects including 200 male juvenile delinquents and 50 female juvenile delinquents aged 9 - 18 years and sentenced in juvenile institution and tribunals responsible with addressing the children's offenses in Tehran. The data collection tool was an information form completed through interviews and studying the records of the subjects. SPSS software for data analysis and frequency distribution tables and chi-square test were used. In this study, 62% of young people aged 17-18 years were studied among which 80% is male and 20% female. Besides, 48% of them were educated at guidance school level and 50.8% of them did not live with their parents. The crimes committed in order of frequency were: Theft, evil-doing, drugs, mischief, mayhem and 40.8% of them were addicted. Moreover, gender and education level as well as occupation and education level of their mothers were significantly associated with delinquency ( $P < 0.05$ ). Additionally, no significant relationship was observed among the marital status, place of residence, family size, birth order, educational backwardness, performing religious duties, education level, fathers' job, level of income and criminal background of their family members. A significant correlation was observed between the separation from family and addiction, with delinquency type, as well as addiction of families with the addiction of the juveniles ( $P < 0.05$ ). In this study, various demographic, social and familial factors, such as education, occupation, separation from family and drug addiction have turned out to be influential on the development of juvenile delinquency.

**Key words:** Delinquency, Juveniles, Influential Factors.

### INTRODUCTION

Children and juvenile delinquency is one of the complex social issues that all communities are grappling with and despite various measures, not only its prevalence has not diminished, but also has intensified and broadened. Delinquency should be considered a sort of behavioral imbalance. While it originates from the internal and individual motivations of people, takes effect from social and environmental factors as well. Therefore,

delinquency is caused by multiple reasons, i.e., biological, psychological and social environmental factors<sup>1</sup>. Statistics indicate that in 1997 there were approximately 8.1 million delinquent juveniles in the United States and 49% increase in the delinquency rate has occurred during the years 1988 to 1997<sup>2</sup>. In our country, during the years after the Revolution for various reasons, such as war, cultural and economical consequences of rapid population growth and its disorders, the number of juveniles and young people experiencing social

deviance increased significantly<sup>3</sup>. Since, more than 12 million juveniles (12-18 years) are living in our country at the present time (4), juvenile delinquency issue is very important especially due to the sensitivity of this age range and that the children and juveniles in each community are the institutional investors and a significant correlation is observed between the prosperity of society and the enjoyment of them from a comfortable and pleasurable life. So if you do not pay attention to the roots of juvenile delinquency at the present time, in addition to wasting efficient resources of the community and jeopardizing the individual and social health of other members of the community you will create an underlying for their delinquency in adulthood as well<sup>3</sup>. Hence, this study aims at investigating the causes and factors that provide diversion and delinquency of the juveniles.

**METHODS**

This descriptive-analytical study is a cross-sectional one conducted on more than 250 subjects, including 200 male juveniles and 50 female juveniles aged 9-18 years and sentenced at juvenile institution and special tribunals responsible for addressing offenses of children in Tehran. The data collection tool is information form containing 38 questions related to personal and identity information and the objective questions were along with open and closed questions and multiple choice answers that were completed through interviews and reviewing their documents and records. After data collection, SPSS software for analyzing data and statistical techniques such

as frequency distribution tables and chi-square test were used.

**RESULTS**

According to the results, the majority of the surveyed juveniles (62%) were in the age group 17-18 years, 80% males and 20% were females and 4.8 percent were married, 48 percent had intermediate levels of education. In 58.8% of cases the families were consisted of 6-9 members and had birth order of 1-3 in 58.4% of cases. The majority of them (81.2%) were residents of urban areas and (65%) owned private residential homes. their fathers were self-employed in 37.2% of cases and 88% of them had housewife mothers. 30.4% of them had illiterate fathers and 36% of them had illiterate mothers. 66% of them had families with an income less than 1 million Rials per month. Most delinquent

**Table 1: Frequency distribution of the type of crimes committed by the subjects studied**

Type of crime	Frequency	Percentage
Theft	74	29.7
Drugs	41	16.4
Mischief and Mayhem	41	16.4
Murder	14	5.6
Evil-doing	55	22
Two or more crimes	10	4
Other crimes <sup>1</sup>	15	6
Total	250	100

1-Other crimes mean traffic offenses, fraud, etc.

**Table 2: Determining the relationship between gender and type of delinquency**

Gender Delinquency	Males		Females	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Theft	69	34.5	5	10
Drugs	36	18	5	10
Mischief and mayhem	39	19.5	2	4
Murder	13	6.5	1	2
Evil-doing	23	11.5	32	64
Two or more crimes	6	3	4	8
Other crimes	14	7	1	2
Total	200	100	50	100

juveniles (50.8%) did not live with their parents. The reason for the separation of 18.4% of them from family was divorce of parents. 80.4% of them were suffering educational backwardness and the most common cause for this (60.8 percent) was dropout. The entertainment of majority of them (53.3 percent) in the leisure time was Radio and Television. The majority of them did the religious duties of prayer (48.4%) and fasting (72.8 percent). 24.8% suffered from physical diseases and 72.4% were experiencing mental disorders among which 33.6% suffered from a variety of depression. 29.6% were convicted of theft (Table 1), 33.8% had a previous history of crime.

The first crime of mass majority of them (64.4 percent) had occurred between the ages 16-18 years and the first crime committed by 31.6% of them was theft. 38% were fully aware of the crime they were committing. And 39.2% mentioned bad friends as the reason for committing the crime.

Total of 40.8% of delinquent juveniles were addicted to smoking, and 18.8% were drug addicted and 18.8% were experiencing *less than 1 year* of addiction. In 26.2% of the subjects under study, family members were addicted and in 21.2% the drug was opium. Furthermore, in 32.2% of cases family members had a history of committing crimes and 16% were related to their fathers and theft practice (9.6%) In this study, no significant correlation was found between gender and type of crime (P=0.000) (Table 2). There was a significant relationship between the levels of education of juveniles with the type of delinquency (P=0.000) (Table 3). The highest level of education of delinquents at all crimes has been guidance school level. Percent of murder in high-school education group was noticeable. A significant correlation was obtained between the level of education (P=0.016) and mothers' occupation (P=0.025) with the type of delinquency.

In addition, a significant correlation was obtained between the type of *juvenile residential* home with the type of delinquency (P =0.032). No significantly relationship was obtained (P>0.05) between the marital status, place of residence, family size and birth order with the type of delinquency. Between the educational

**Table 3: Determination of the relationship between the level of education of juveniles under study with the type of delinquency**

Level of education Delinquency	Illiterate		Primary School		Guidance School		High School		Diploma		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Theft	10	13.5	27	36.5	26	35.1	10	13.5	1	1.4	74	100
Drugs	5	12.2	11	26.8	22	53.7	2	4.9	1	2.4	41	100
Mischief and mayhem	1	2.4	7	17.1	22	53.7	9	22	2	4.9	41	100
Murder	2	14.3	-	-	7	50	3	21.4	2	14.3	41	100
Evil-doing	-	-	5	9.1	33	60	14	25.5	3	5.5	14	100
Two or more crimes	1	10	5	50	3	30	1	10	-	-	10	100
Other crimes	4	26.7	2	13.3	7	46.7	-	-	2	13.3	55	100

backwardness, family income, educational level and occupation of the fathers with the type of delinquency there was no significant relationship ( $P>0.05$ ). Between the separation from family and the type of delinquency a significant correlation was found ( $P=0.005$ ). (Table 4).

Most of the people who live with family had committed mischief and mayhem. Also, the most frequency in the group that lived separated from the family was for the thieves group. Because between the reason for committing a crime by the juveniles according to themselves with the type of delinquency a significant relationship was observed ( $P =0.000$ ). The perpetrators of the crime of theft

have introduced poverty as a main reason. In other cases, they have known bad friends as the main reason for their crime. Between doing the religious duties and the type of their entertainment in leisure time with the type of their delinquency there was no significant correlation ( $P>0.05$ ). And the relationship between physical illnesses and psychological disorders by type of delinquency was not significant ( $P>0.05$ ). Between parents' drug addiction with juveniles' addiction ( $P=0.000$ ) and juveniles' addiction with the type of delinquency ( $P =0.045$ ) there was a significant correlation. And between the history of crime, *criminal family background* and parent's addiction with the type of delinquency no significant relationship was obtained ( $P>0.05$ ).

**Table 4: Determining the relationship between the studied Juveniles in terms of life with family with the type of delinquency**

Living with family Delinquency	They live with family		They do not live with family	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Theft	28	22.8	46	36.2
Drugs	17	13.8	24	18.9
Mischief and mayhem	29	23.6	12	9.4
Murder	9	7.3	5	3.9
Evil-doing	26	21.1	29	22.8
Two or more crimes	3	2.4	7	5.5
Other crimes	11	8.9	4	3.1
Total	123	100	127	100

## DISCUSSION

Based on the results of this study, the majority of delinquent juveniles were placed in the age group 17-18 years old. In a study by Sadafi<sup>6</sup>, Hussaini<sup>7</sup> and Seif<sup>8</sup> the same results were obtained and unlike Shokoohijam's study<sup>9</sup> the ages of majority of juveniles were obtained 14-16 years. Perhaps, because the juveniles are at the peak of the maturity crises, they commit more crimes in this age. Most juveniles under study had families with 6-9 members that is similar to the results of other studies conducted by Sadafi<sup>6</sup>, Hussaini<sup>7</sup>, and Pyrasteh<sup>10</sup> and may be indicative of the fact that most delinquent juveniles are living in crowded households. In this study, most Juveniles did not have sufficient literacy (due to their age). Therefore, this has been associated with their delinquency

and in studies conducted by Sadafi<sup>6</sup>, Ansarinezhad<sup>11</sup> and Seif the same results were obtained. Accordingly, it can be deduced that most delinquents are illiterate or poorly educated people and this can justify the role of education in raising awareness and insight of people in preventing their diversion and deviance and of course, their low education may be the reason of delinquency. The majority of delinquent juveniles had illiterate parents, that is, similar to Sadafi<sup>6</sup>, Hussaini<sup>7</sup> and Seif's results<sup>8</sup>. In this study, majority of juveniles did not live with their parents and this has been an important factor in the development of delinquency. While in the study of Sadafi<sup>6</sup> and Seif<sup>8</sup> most of them were under the supervision of their parents. Problems resulting from their separation from parents may affect their personality, psyche and ultimately their behavior and norms and play role

in leading them to inconsistencies and deviations. In addition to this, nearly half of all delinquent juveniles were addicted. In the study conducted by Hussaini<sup>7</sup>, similar results were obtained. In this study, there was a significant relationship between gender types of delinquency and theft is the crime of the most of the males and evil-doing has been the most common case among female juveniles. The reason can be found in the living environment and social conditions of these people which needs further studies. Furthermore, between marital status and singularity of juveniles with the type of delinquency no significant relationship was observed. However, due to the low number of married juveniles no reliable analysis can be presented in this regard. Other studies had not investigated in this regard too. A significant relationship between literacy levels of juveniles with the type of the delinquency was obtained. Shah Hoseyni<sup>12</sup> and Allen- Hagen & Sickmun<sup>13</sup> reported that the relationship was significant. In other words most illiterate juveniles committed theft, and evil-doing has been the crime mostly committed by juveniles with higher levels of education. It seems that act of theft by illiterate juveniles may be due to poor education and entering the labor market, and earning low income and financial need and committing evil-doing by juveniles with higher education level is due to greater participation in community and educational environments and facing with the opposite sex. The relationship between occupation and education level of parents with the type of delinquency in juveniles was not significant. But between the occupation and the level of education of mothers with the type of delinquency of juveniles a significant relationship has been created. In this study, the juveniles with illiterate mothers were committing theft usually and the juveniles whose mothers had high-school level of education or diploma were committing mischief and mayhem. Perhaps because of financial need, the juveniles with housewife and worker mothers committed theft more. Explaining that why juveniles that have staff mothers commit evil-doing, needs more investigation. In addition, there was no significant relationship between performing religious duties with the type of delinquency that is consistent with the findings of Ansarynezhad *et al.* Religion is a powerful deterrent against deviations and deviances. Religious inertia and destabilization

of religious orientations can lead people to delinquency. Although it has not been proven in this study, there was no significant correlation between psychological disorders of juveniles with the type of delinquency which is in contrast with the study of Allen- Hagen & Sickmund<sup>13</sup> in which this relationship was significant. Also between juveniles who lived with family and those who did not live with family and the type of delinquency a significant correlation was obtained. In Ansarynezhad *et al.*<sup>11</sup> and Shah Hoseyni's study, this relationship was also significant<sup>12</sup>. Delinquents' attitudes and behaviors in the community are largely associated with the characteristics of the family environment and the unfavorable conditions of his life outside the family. Additionally, the juveniles who lived with family compared to those who did not live with family have committed mischief and mayhem and theft more because of the inconsistencies and the present deficiencies available in family or financial needs of these individuals outside the family. In addition, the relationship between committing delinquency by juveniles in their views with the type of delinquency was significant. Similarly, Hosseini<sup>7</sup> and Shokoohijam<sup>9</sup> reported such significant correlation. Undoubtedly, inappropriate relationships and friendships, economic poverty and its consequences and improper family environment can have a crime-producing effect on people. A direct relationship between parental addictions with juveniles' addiction can be observed. Furthermore, there was a significant relationship between juveniles' addiction and the type of their delinquency that is similar to Allen-Hagen & Sickmund<sup>13</sup> and Hussaini<sup>7</sup>. Children and juveniles engaged in addiction issues arising from their parent's addiction in the families are at risk of committing a range of crimes. This issue can be justified according to their imitation from their parents. In this study, the addicted juveniles had committed theft more. Obviously, addiction creates needs that satisfying them is not easy and requires a great expenditure. Over a period of addiction and getting more immersed in, it is impossible to escape from it. The addicts because of financial need and the lack of control over their body and mind have no choice but to comply with the demands of their inner demon (i.e. drug addiction) and this is where the drug is considered as a delinquency factor.

### CONCLUSION

Delinquency is a very complex social phenomenon. In recent years a lot of energy and time have been spent for explaining and describing its rationale<sup>1</sup>. The problem of juvenile delinquency is a real case in our society. Obviously, if the predisposing causes of crime and delinquency are not investigated in accordance with the terms and conditions, this phenomenon will become pervasive and will threaten the future-makers of the country and also the country. The present results show the effect of various demographic, social and

familial factors such as educations, employment, separation from family, addiction, etc in the incidence of juvenile delinquency that should be solved. In short, every step toward a healthier society and personality of juveniles and improving the social living environment, ensuring the health and safety facilities and presenting formal and informal educations in all areas of juveniles' development should be taken in particular moral growth based on the true faith criteria and undoubtedly, this will lead to reducing and eventually eradicating this social problem<sup>14</sup>.

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