

Situational Factors Impacting Juvenile Delinquency

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Abstract

Juvenile delinquency is a significant social problem that affects the lives of young people and their families. This study explores the situational factors that influence juvenile delinquency and examine the policy implications of incorporating effective courses in schools to minimize delinquent behavior among youth. This research also provides an overview of the prevalence of juvenile delinquency and the factors that contribute to it. The study highlights that situational factors such as poverty, family dysfunction, lack of parental supervision, peer influence, and substance abuse are some of the key factors that contribute to delinquent behavior among juveniles. This research also discusses the importance of early intervention and prevention programs, including the incorporation of effective courses in school curriculum, to address juvenile delinquency. It is vital to provide youth with opportunities to learn and develop positive social and behavioral skills, including problem-solving and decision-making. Incorporating effective courses in school curriculum can help promote positive youth development and reduce delinquent behavior among juveniles. This research concludes with a call to policymakers to prioritize the development and implementation of effective prevention and intervention programs that address the situational factors contributing to juvenile delinquency.

Keywords: delinquency, factors, situational factors

1.0. Introduction

Juvenile delinquency is a widespread issue that has been extensively studied by criminologists and sociologists. These disciplines have sought to understand the situational factors that contribute to youth involvement in criminal activities. This research will provide an introduction to the sociological and criminological theories and theorists who have made significant contributions to our understanding of juvenile delinquency and conclude on how to incorporate meaningful programs to reduce delinquency. Juvenile delinquency can be understood through the lens of sociological theory, which highlights the role of social factors in shaping individuals' behaviors and actions. According to social disorganization theory, delinquency is more likely to occur in areas with high levels of social disorganization, where community institutions and social controls are weakened (Shaw & McKay, 1942). This theory suggests that environmental factors such as poverty, lack of educational and employment opportunities and weak social networks contribute to delinquent behavior among youth. Sociologists have emphasized the role of social structure and social inequality in shaping the likelihood of juvenile delinquency. According to Merton's (1938) strain theory, young people who experience blocked opportunities for legitimate success are more likely to turn to criminal activities. Similarly, social disorganization theory (Shaw & McKay, 1942) suggests that individuals living in disadvantaged and disorganized neighborhoods are more likely to engage in delinquent behaviors. Another sociological theory that explains juvenile delinquency is strain theory. According to Merton (1938), individuals experience strain when they are unable to achieve their goals through legitimate means. This strain can lead to deviant behavior, including delinquency. For example, youth who face limited opportunities for education and employment may turn to delinquent behavior as a means of achieving their goals. Social learning theory is another useful framework for understanding juvenile delinquency. This theory suggests that individuals learn behaviors through observation and modeling, and that delinquent behavior can be learned in the same way (Bandura, 1977). According to this theory, youth may learn delinquent behaviors from peers, family members, or media influences, leading to a cycle of delinquent behavior.

In conclusion, sociological theory provides useful insights into the causes of juvenile delinquency. Social disorganization theory, strain theory, and social learning theory highlight the role of environmental factors, strain, and social learning in contributing to delinquent behavior among youth. By understanding these theories, policymakers and practitioners can develop more effective interventions and prevention strategies to address juvenile delinquency.

Criminologists have also made substantial contributions to our understanding of juvenile delinquency. For example, classical criminologists such as Cesare Beccaria (1764) and Jeremy Bentham (1789) emphasized the importance of free will and the deterrent effect of punishment. On the other hand, positivist criminologists such as Cesare

Lombroso (1876) and Enrico Ferri (1887) focused on the role of biological, psychological, and environmental factors in shaping criminal behavior.

In addition to classical and positivist theories, contemporary criminologists have developed various biosocial theories of crime. For example, Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) self-control theory argues that individuals with low levels of self-control are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior. The theory of self-control counters opposite of social control theory, which proposes that individuals are less likely to engage in delinquent behavior when they have strong bonds to conventional society (Hirschi, 1969). These bonds can include attachment to family, involvement in school or work, and commitment to societal values. Lack of these bonds may lead to delinquent behavior, as youth may not feel a sense of obligation to conform to societal norms. Similarly, Agnew's (1992) general strain theory posits that individuals who experience negative life events, such as abuse or poverty, are more likely to engage in criminal behavior. Rational choice theory, which suggests that individuals engage in delinquent behavior when they perceive the benefits to outweigh the costs (Cornish & Clarke, 1986) plays a significant role in youth engaging in delinquency. For example, a youth may choose to engage in delinquent behavior if they believe it will provide them with social status or economic gain. Criminological theory provides a useful framework for understanding the causes of juvenile delinquency. Rational choice theory, social control theory, and strain theory offer valuable insights into the decision-making processes and social factors that contribute to delinquent behavior among youth.

1.1 Factors that Influence Delinquency

Family environment is one of the key situational factors that can influence juvenile delinquency. Research has shown that parental conflict, neglect, abuse, and poverty can increase the risk of delinquent behavior among juveniles (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983). Family factors can affect a juvenile's sense of attachment and commitment to conventional values and norms, which can in turn lead to delinquent behavior. For example, juveniles who experience neglect or abuse may be more likely to engage in delinquent behavior as a way to cope with their experiences (Chung & Strauss, 2002).

Peer influence can contribute to juvenile delinquency; juveniles who associate with delinquent peers are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior (Sutherland, 1939). The influence of peers can be both positive and negative. On the one hand, peers can provide support and help to reinforce pro-social values and behaviors. On the other hand, peers can also encourage or pressure juveniles to engage in delinquent behavior. This highlights the importance of positive peer relationships in promoting positive development among juveniles.

School plays a significant and important role in the development of youth. Poor academic performance, school dropout, and negative relationships with teachers and peers can increase the risk of delinquent behavior (Finn, 1989). Schools play a critical role in shaping the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of juveniles. A positive school experience can help juveniles to develop a sense of attachment to conventional values and norms, while a negative school experience can increase the risk of delinquent behavior.

Neighborhoods the community at large contributes to the psychological, emotional, and mental health of an individual. Neighborhoods characterized by poverty, crime, and gang activity can increase the risk of delinquent behavior (Shaw & McKay, 1942). Neighborhoods can provide a context for social interaction and can influence the attitudes and behaviors of juveniles. For example, juveniles who grow up in neighborhoods with high levels of crime and violence may be more likely to engage in delinquent behavior themselves (Sampson & Groves, 1989). Neighborhoods and the community at large play a significant role in shaping the psychological, emotional, and mental health of individuals. Research has consistently shown that individuals living in neighborhoods with higher levels of social cohesion and support have better mental health outcomes compared to those living in areas with lower levels of social support (Phongsavan et al., 2006). One way in which neighborhoods can impact psychological health is through the provision of social support. Social support has been shown to buffer the negative effects of stress on mental health (Thoits, 1995). When individuals have access to social support networks, they are better equipped to cope with stressors, such as financial difficulties or relationship problems. Neighborhoods can also impact emotional health through the provision of safe and stimulating environments. Children growing up in neighborhoods with high levels of crime and violence may experience fear and anxiety, which can impact their emotional well-being (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). In contrast, neighborhoods with safe parks, playgrounds, and recreational facilities can provide opportunities for physical activity and social interaction, which are important for emotional development and well-being. In addition, neighborhoods can impact mental health by providing access to resources such as healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. Individuals living in neighborhoods with limited access to these resources may experience greater levels of stress and anxiety related to their ability to meet basic needs (Cutter et al., 2003).

Neighborhoods and the community at large play a critical role in shaping the psychological, emotional, and mental health of individuals. Through the provision of social support, safe and stimulating environments, and access to resources, neighborhoods can promote positive mental health outcomes.

1.2 Substance Abuse

Substance abuse can contribute to juvenile delinquency, particularly alcohol and drug use, is strongly linked to juvenile delinquency (DeVries, 1989). Substance abuse can impair judgment and decision-making, leading to impulsive behavior and increased risk of involvement in delinquent activities. It is important to address substance abuse as a risk factor for juvenile delinquency in order to reduce the negative impact of substance use on young people. Mental health is another important situational factor that can contribute to juvenile delinquency. Juveniles with mental health problems, such as depression or anxiety, are at increased risk of engaging in delinquent behavior (Frith & Hagan, 1991). Mental health problems can affect a juvenile's ability to form positive relationships and to cope with stress and adversity, which in turn can increase the risk of delinquent behavior. Addressing mental health needs is critical in reducing the risk of delinquent behavior among juveniles. Access to weapons is a situational factor that can contribute to juvenile delinquency. Juveniles who have access to weapons are more likely to engage in violent behavior (Cook, Ludwig, & Slater, 2000). Access to weapons can increase the risk of serious harm, both to the juvenile and to others. Studies have found that youth who have access to firearms are more likely to engage in violent behavior compared to those who do not have access to weapons (Monahan et al., 2014). The presence of firearms in the home can also increase the risk of accidental shootings or suicide attempts, particularly among children and adolescents (Brent et al., 2013). This risk is compounded when firearms are not stored safely, such as when they are kept loaded or easily accessible. Moreover, the presence of weapons in the community can contribute to a culture of violence and increase the perceived need for self-protection. This can lead to a cycle of retaliation and further violence, particularly in neighborhoods with high levels of crime and gang activity (Lopez & Sarabia, 2016). Policies that restrict access to firearms, particularly among youth, have been shown to be effective in reducing rates of violent crime and juvenile delinquency. For example, laws that require background checks for all gun purchases and restrict access to firearms for individuals with a history of violent behavior or mental illness have been associated with reductions in gun violence (Webster et al., 2013).

2.0 Statistic on Juvenile Delinquency:

Juvenile delinquency is a significant social problem that affects many young people in the United States. The impact of juvenile delinquency on individuals, families, and communities is widespread and long-lasting. This section provides statistical information on the prevalence and consequences of juvenile delinquency in the United States.

According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), in 2019, approximately 1.8 million juveniles were arrested in the United States (OJJDP, 2020). The most common offenses committed by juveniles were larceny-theft, simple assault, and drug abuse violations (OJJDP, 2020). Males accounted for the majority of juvenile arrests, and the rate of arrests was highest among 15- to 17-year-olds (OJJDP, 2020).

The OJJDP also reports that in 2019, approximately 51,000 juveniles were held in residential placement facilities in the United States (OJJDP, 2020). The majority of juveniles held in these facilities were males, and the largest racial/ethnic group was Black or African American (OJJDP, 2020).

The impact of juvenile delinquency on victims is also significant. According to the National Crime Victimization Survey, in 2019, approximately 1.6 million juveniles were victims of violent crime (U.S. Department of Justice, 2020). The most common forms of victimization were simple assault and aggravated assault (U.S. Department of Justice, 2020).

In terms of economic costs, the National Institute of Justice estimates that the total annual cost of juvenile delinquency in the United States is approximately \$158 billion (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2020). This includes costs related to the justice system, such as police and court costs, as well as the cost of victimization, such as medical expenses and lost wages (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2020).

Juvenile delinquency is a significant social problem in the United States that affects individuals, families, and communities. The statistical information presented here highlights the prevalence and consequences of juvenile delinquency, including the number of arrests and victims, the costs associated with delinquent behavior, and the demographic characteristics of juveniles involved in the justice system. Understanding these statistics is critical in developing effective policies and interventions to prevent and reduce juvenile delinquency. Sociological and criminological theories and theorists have made significant contributions to our understanding of the situational factors influencing juvenile delinquency. Future research should continue to explore these theories and test their validity to deepen our understanding of this complex and important issue.

3.0 Policy Implications:

Juvenile delinquency is a significant social problem that requires the attention of policymakers and the public. Understanding the situational forces that contribute to juvenile delinquency is critical in developing effective policies and interventions to prevent and reduce delinquent behavior among juveniles. One of the key situational forces influencing juvenile delinquency is family environment.

Research has shown that parental conflict, neglect, abuse, and poverty can increase the risk of delinquent behavior among juveniles (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983). To address these family-related risk factors, policies should focus on strengthening family relationships, promoting family stability, and reducing poverty. For example, policies aimed at supporting families through parenting programs, early childhood interventions, and job training programs can help to reduce the risk of delinquent behavior among juveniles.

Peer influence - Juveniles who associate with delinquent peers are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior (Sutherland, 1939). To address this risk factor, policies should focus on promoting positive peer relationships and reducing negative peer influence. For example, policies aimed at providing after-school programs, mentoring opportunities, and positive youth development activities can help to reduce the risk of delinquent behavior among juveniles.

School - Poor academic performance, school dropout, and negative relationships with teachers and peers can increase the risk of delinquent behavior (Finn, 1989). To address this risk factor, policies should focus on improving the quality of education, reducing school dropout, and promoting positive relationships between juveniles and teachers. For example, policies aimed at providing high-quality early childhood education, reducing class size, and improving teacher training and support can help to reduce the risk of delinquent behavior among juveniles.

Neighborhood - Neighborhoods characterized by poverty, crime, and gang activity can increase the risk of delinquent behavior (Shaw & McKay, 1942). To address this risk factor, policies should focus on reducing crime and gang activity and improving economic opportunities in disadvantaged neighborhoods. For example, policies aimed at increasing community policing, providing job training programs, and promoting economic development can help to reduce the risk of delinquent behavior among juveniles.

Substance abuse - Substance abuse, particularly alcohol and drug use, is strongly linked to juvenile delinquency (DeVries, 1989). To address this risk factor, policies should focus on reducing substance abuse among juveniles and increasing access to treatment for substance use disorders. For example, policies aimed at providing school-based prevention programs, improving access to substance abuse treatment, and increasing substance abuse education can help to reduce the risk of delinquent behavior among juveniles.

Mental health - Juveniles with mental health problems, such as depression or anxiety, are at increased risk of engaging in delinquent behavior (Frith & Hagan, 1991). To address this risk factor, policies should focus on improving access to mental health services and reducing the stigma associated with mental illness. For example, policies aimed at providing school-based mental health services, improving access to mental health treatment, and increasing mental health education can help to reduce the risk of delinquent behavior among juveniles.

Situational forces influencing juvenile delinquency are complex and multifaceted. To effectively address delinquent behavior among juveniles, policymakers must take a comprehensive approach that addresses multiple risk factors. This requires a sustained effort by government, communities, and families to create safe and flourishing environments.

Effective policy implications that schools and communities can implement to reduce juvenile delinquency involve addressing the root causes of delinquent behavior, which are often related to social and economic factors. Sociological and criminological theories can provide insight into these factors and suggest effective interventions. One policy implication based on sociological theory is to invest in education and after-school programs to provide opportunities for youth to engage in positive activities and develop skills. According to social disorganization theory, neighborhoods with high levels of poverty, unemployment, and social disorganization are more likely to have high rates of delinquency (Shaw & McKay, 1942). By providing resources and support for youth in these neighborhoods, such as tutoring, mentoring, and job training programs, schools and communities can help to reduce delinquency rates (Elliott, 2014).

Another effective policy implication based on criminological theory is to implement restorative justice practices in schools and communities. Restorative justice focuses on repairing harm and rebuilding relationships between offenders and victims, rather than solely punishing offenders (Braithwaite, 1989). This approach has been shown to be effective in reducing recidivism rates and promoting positive behavior among youth (Umbreit & Armour, 2011). Schools and communities can implement restorative justice practices, such as peer mediation and victim-offender conferencing, to address delinquent behavior and promote positive relationships among youth.

Finally, policies that promote community policing can also be effective in reducing juvenile delinquency. According to social control theory, individuals are less likely to engage in delinquent behavior when they feel connected to their community and have strong social bonds (Hirschi, 1969). Community policing involves building relationships between law enforcement and community members, with an emphasis on problem-solving and prevention rather than solely enforcing laws (Cordner & Scarborough, 2010). By promoting community policing, schools and communities can build trust between youth and law enforcement and reduce delinquent behavior.

In conclusion, effective policy implications to reduce juvenile delinquency involve addressing social and economic factors, implementing restorative justice practices, and promoting community policing. These interventions are based on sociological and criminological theories and can help to promote positive behavior among youth.

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