
THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN PARENTING AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

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Abstract

Parents have the primary responsibility to provide their children with an appropriate upbringing. In our study, we examine the role of the family in later socialisation, the relationships between parental behaviour, involvement in child rearing, parenting styles, and juvenile delinquency. To gain a thorough understanding of the topic, the scientific literature on the role of the family in the lives of juvenile offenders was reviewed, with a primary focus on the psychological, educational, and criminological aspects of the topic. Families are central to children's socialization; however, problematic family dynamics remain a significant risk factor for behavioral difficulties and later delinquency. Beyond family structure alone, exposure to intrafamilial aggression, low parental involvement, weak family cohesion, and maladaptive parenting styles - particularly neglectful and authoritarian approaches - substantially increase the likelihood of adverse behavioral outcomes and offending among children. We can highlight that strengthening the prevention of juvenile delinquency requires a comprehensive approach that combines parental competence building programs, effective early detection and intervention within educational and social institutions, and the development of community-based support networks to ensure stable and emotionally secure family environments.

Keywords: juvenile delinquents; parenting style; parental involvement

Introduction

Family is the primary source of support, emotional security, and love for children. The kind of bond between parents and their children can predict whether the latter will become a criminal. Loving, nurturing and empathetic families are likely to foster appropriate and compliant attitudes, as a supportive family climate promotes sound character formation. In contrast, a absence of parents' love and encouragement, or in more extreme circumstances, parental disinterest, hostility or refusal, can lead to emotional instability in children, which can lead to inappropriate personality development and thus result in antisocial or

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delinquent behaviour (Akinyi, 2015). Another form of bad parenting is authoritarian parenting, where over-control leads to stiff, strict, commanding behaviour that takes away children's freedom of self-expression. The restriction of self-expression and the lack of affection can drive children to rebel strongly against their parents and separate from their family members and even embark on a path that leads to criminality (Mwangangi, 2019). In our study, we examine in detail the role of the family in later socialisation, and the relationships between parental behaviour, involvement in child rearing, certain parenting styles, and juvenile delinquency.

The role of the human, social and economic capital of the family, especially for juvenile offenders

The family is one of the most powerful socialising factors in life, with a crucial supportive and empowering role for children (Nisar et al., 2015). Parents have the primary responsibility to provide their children with an appropriate upbringing, as the values they impart and the parenting style of their children, through the transmission of norms and values such as understanding the difference between right and wrong behaviour, respect, fairness, compassion, and responsibility, seem to have a significant impact on their future life choices (Mary, 2016; Mwenda, 2012). Children acquire these values through the teaching of their parents and by observing and imitating their behaviour, and the importance of parental role models is therefore unquestioned. Parents therefore help their children to develop specific behaviours, and these patterns, once established, are hard to change or break. Those parents who exhibit anti-social behaviour and instil such behaviours in their children contribute to the perpetuation of these behaviours in their children into adulthood (Chaffin et al., 2004).

Children are most benefited by being nurtured in a complete family, and children raised with both parents are best positioned for academic achievement and emotional development (Mwangangi, 2019). Wardle argues that children need a strong marital bond between mother and father to prepare them as well as possible and to give them the best chance of achieving success and joy in life (Wardle, 2004). Marriage has a consistently positive impact on children's well-being and contributes to their later happiness (Waite, 1995). Parental divorce is a strong indicator of youth offending and a significant parental determinant of child and adolescent delinquency (Burt et al., 2008). According to Klein (1997), two-parent households provide greater supervision, while single-parent households increase the likelihood of delinquency and victimization simply by having one less person supervising adolescent behaviour. Children living in dysfunctional families are more likely to exhibit behavioural problems such as defiance toward adults and aggression toward peers (Robert, 2002). This results in adverse consequences in the short term, such as rejection by peers and teachers, poorer school performance, and a higher risk of premature contact with alcohol and involvement with drugs. Such situations can easily result in school

drop-out, negative and destructive behaviours such as violence and crime (Robert, 2002).

Children in one-parent homes are at increased risk of having behavioural difficulties and are at greater chance of committing crimes (Mwangangi, 2019). Experts have also pointed out that the chances of becoming a delinquent are higher when children live with the mother, so the role of the father is of paramount importance. In particular, researchers discovered that the isolation of children from their fathers is a significant contributor to several societal difficulties, such as crime (Mwangangi, 2019). It should also be noted that a growing body of research suggests that children's developmental outcomes depend less on family configuration (such as living in a single versus two parent household) and more on the quality of parental oversight and family relationships. Notably, recent studies indicate that persistent conflict between parents poses a greater risk to children's development than parental separation or divorce alone (Amato, 2010; Cummings & Davies, 2010; Kelly & Emery, 2003).

After examining the role of the family as a socialization factor, the following section presents the relationship between juvenile delinquency and parenting in the context of relevant theory.

The relationship between juvenile delinquency and parental behaviour: social control, attachment, and interaction theory

For decades, researchers have been concerned with the relationship between parental behaviour and parenting and the child's potential delinquency, initially assuming a unidirectional relationship but then increasingly focusing on a bidirectional, reciprocal relationship.

The social control or attachment theory focuses on the impact of parental behaviour on juvenile delinquency, assuming a unidirectional relationship, and ignores the impact of adolescent delinquency on parental behaviour (Gault-Sherman, 2012, p. 121). The social attachment theory was developed by Hirschi (1969), who emphasised traditional relationships and connections to parents. This nowadays classic criminological view suggests that crime is considered more likely to occur if the ties between individuals and society are weakened. Hirschi (1969) examined four elements of social attachment: attachment to parents, engagement in traditional goals, participation in lawful activities and belief in the law. These components are all linked in some way to offending behaviour.

Hirschi stated that the more strongly a person is connected to a community by one of these components, the more likely they are to be connected to the community by the other elements (Hirschi, 1969; Gault-Sherman, 2012). He found that attachment to parents was the strongest indicator of delinquency (Hirschi, 1969; McCluskey & Tovar, 2003), and later, Alarid, Burton, and Cullen (2020) found that this was particularly true for young women accused of delinquency. As a result, children who are bonded to their parents are less likely to become delinquents as they are likely to stay with their parents more; in parallel to spending time together, strong parental bonding can also result in in

what Hirschi calls "psychological presence" in parents (Hirschi, 1969, p. 88). In other words, even if the parent is not present with the child when the possibility of a crime emerges, the child already knows what the parent would say or mean if they were present, because of their firm bond with the parent. The framework of social attachment theory is based on the assumption that deviance should be taken for granted, as people are naturally inclined to behave in ways that are self-serving, exploitative, and potentially harmful to others (Hirschi, 1969). The question arises: what is the reason why some individuals do not commit crimes? Hirschi (1969, p. 34) argued that "we would if we dared". What prevents us is the system of social attachments, the ties that bind us to society to conventional beliefs. He explains in detail that, in accordance with the control or social bond theory, an individual can offend freely due to the fact that his or her attachment to the conventional system is broken in some way (Hirsch, 1969). This is the essence of the social attachment framework.

Sampson and Laub (1993) formulated an age-based theory of informal social control, drawing on Hirschi's theory of social control. Like Hirschi, they maintained the importance of the role of the family in the development of antisocial behaviour, and the temporal stability of such behaviour, with informal ties, *i.e.*, the interpersonal relationships that create reciprocal relationships between individuals (*e.g.*, family, school, marriage), being key to their theory (Sampson & Laub, 1993). They also stressed the importance of longitudinal research, as did Blumstein (1988), to investigate the relationship between childhood antisocial behaviour, adolescent delinquency and adult delinquency. They theorise that delinquency and offending are inversely related to an individual's attachment to society (Sampson & Laub, 1993). Strong social connections, such as bonds formed through family, work and community ties, act as informal social controls that deter young people from committing crimes (Laub, Sampson, & Sweeten, 2017). The theory recognises both continuity and change in offending behaviour over the life course. While early antisocial behaviour may predict later offending, major life events and turning points (such as marriage, employment, military service, and further education) can alter this trajectory (Laub, Rowan, & Sampson, 2018; McCuish & Lussier, 2023). These events can lead to a move away from a life of crime, or if they are detrimental (*e.g.*, a longer prison sentence), they can alter offending behaviour in a negative direction, further worsening it (Laub, Rowan & Sampson, 2018). Sampson and Laub emphasise the role of individual choice in offending, arguing that human behaviour is not constant but can change over time as a result of personal experiences and life events (Laub, Rowan, & Sampson, 2018).

Many studies extend beyond social bonding theory and argue that a reciprocal relationship exists between children's behaviour and parenting (Thornberry, 1996; Coley & Medeiros, 2007).

Research has found that the criminal behaviour of the child reduces the level of parental supervision, involvement and support, suggesting a reverse causal relationship (Keijsers, Frijns, Branje, & Meeus, 2009). Once children have

committed a crime, they lose the affirmative focus of their parents as they cease to encourage them to reform this behaviour (Coley & Medeiros, 2007).

Interaction theory (Thornberry, 2003), which also posits a reciprocal relationship, suggests that poor attachment between children and their parents raises the chances that children will commit crimes, and that these offences in turn lead to a greater probability of poor parent-to-child bonding (Thornberry, 2003). The reciprocal parent-child relationship, as described by Thornberry and explored in later studies, emphasises the impact of children on parents, and the reciprocal effects. Previous studies have examined the three strands of the relationship separately; interaction theory combines the study of these strands.

Interaction theory encompasses two key aspects relevant to our topic: the developmental process and the reciprocal relationship. According to the developmental process approach, children's delinquent behaviour changes during the transitional stages of the early, middle and later phases of adolescence (Thornberry, 2003). For instance, when a young person moves from early to middle adolescence, the influence of peers and the educational environment are more probable to affect their possibly criminal behaviour than that of their own parents (Thornberry, 2003). The second hypothesis assumes a mutual interaction between children and their parents, formed by six main factors: children's bond with their parents, their attachment to school, their faith in traditional values, their relationship with criminal counterparts, their risk taking, and their risk-taking attitude (Thornberry, 2003). Supporters of interactionist thesis argue that delinquency has several adverse impacts on children and young people and their interactions with their parents (Thornberry, 2003). They argue that offending behaviour weakens the relationship between children and parents, as children must maintain distance and secrecy in order to engage in delinquent behaviour, and raises the chances that children may come into contact with their criminal counterparts, as offending conduct provides them with a common trait through which they can develop social ties. Moreover, delinquency reduces children's engagement in school by providing them with a mode of behaviour which seems to be perceived as less demanding and more satisfying than norm-following behaviour in class, and also makes it relatively simple for these youngsters to validate future offending behaviour, as they have already started to break social rules. The results of other research confirm the supposed links between weak parental bonding and delinquency (Thornberry, Lizotte, Krohn, Farnworth, & Jang, 1991, 1994), as well as the reduction in delinquency among children due to parental supervision (Jang & Smith, 1997).

After reviewing the theoretical background on the relationship between juvenile delinquency and parenting, the next section will explore the relationship between parenting, parenting, and delinquency.

The relationship between parenting, education and crime

As discussed in the previous chapter, social science has long been interested in the connection between the family and crime. The scientific research literature on this connection is wide-ranging, as parenting and the family are

complex phenomena, with different studies focusing on different aspects. Some researchers have conducted meta-analyses to investigate the impact of parenting on crime, studies that provide a relatively concise review of the literature by reviewing several research reports and summarises the most powerful and easily comparable findings from each study.

The first meta-analysis on the relationship between childrearing and crime was carried out by Loeber and Dishion (1983), with special emphasis on early predictors of men's criminality. The researchers concluded that control techniques of parents (for example, absence of control) were the strongest predictors of criminality. In 1994, Simourd and Andrews performed a meta-analysis of sixty studies on juvenile delinquency. The authors concluded that weak child-parent relationships, for example difficulties with bonding or custody, were one of the strongest determinants of criminality. A different meta-analysis by Cottle and colleagues (2001) looked at risk predictors related to youth recidivism. Looking at twenty-three papers and eight sets of predictive factors, the researchers discovered that offending history was the most significant indicator of reoffending, although the familial dimension was also found to be associated with reoffending. Hoeve (2008) performed a meta-analysis of 144 studies, published between 1950 and 2005. The results revealed a positive association between the two variables of family attachment quality and offending behaviour. This finding of a meaningful impact was observed for nineteen out of twenty different aspects of parenting behaviour and parent-child relationships, providing clear evidence that parenting behaviour has a strong effect on offending, but also that no single parental characteristic is solely accountable for the correlation.

In summary, four separate meta-analyses conducted concluded that the association between parental background and offending is strong. Studies have found that different parental characteristics are better predictors of delinquency, such as parental delinquency, poor school performance or socioeconomic status (Loeber & Dishion, 1983), lower social class, anxiety or family structure (Simourd & Andrews, 1994), and school performance, substance abuse or serious clinical pathologies (Cottle et al., 2001).

Interesting correlations can also be found for family cohesion, family violence and parental involvement in children's lives.

Family cohesion relates to the level of psychological attachment and support within the family, encompassing the quality of relationships between family members, effective communication, and mutual respect (Mwangangi, 2019). High family cohesion is a protective factor against juvenile delinquency, and supportive and understanding homes promote constructive social behaviour and healthy personality development (Mullens, 2004). Emotional closeness within the family prepares young people for independence and provides the support they need to explore, learn and connect with others, a lack of attachment can make children more prone to delinquency (Smith, 2021). Low levels of family cohesion lead to a greater likelihood of juvenile delinquency (Shields &

Clark, 1995). Likewise, Sarantakos (1997) concluded that 73% of youth perpetrators come from low-cohesive families, compared to only 27% of delinquents from high-cohesive families. His results also showed that 91% of non-defenders were from high-cohesive families, while only 9% of non-offenders were from low cohesive families.

The extent of violence experienced between parents and their children can also have an impact on the level of youth offending, which is associated with the abuser-abuser cycle. The 'abuser-abuser cycle' refers to a pattern whereby individuals who experience abuse, particularly in childhood, are more likely to become perpetrators of abuse themselves, and this is strongly associated with juvenile delinquency and subsequent offending (Gold, Sullivan, & Lewis, 2011). Sarantakos (1997) found that 78% of child offenders come from a family with a history of child abuse and physical aggression, whereas 22% of juvenile delinquents come from a non-abusive family. Young people who do not turn to crime are more likely to have lived in a non-violent family than in a family where they have been exposed to violence, either physical or emotional.

The level of involvement of the parent in the upbringing of the child influences the juvenile's delinquency. Involved parenting is defined as parents who deliberately are emotionally remote from their children, express scarce feelings of warmth and affection for them, offer poor guidance, have low demands or requirements, never participate in school-related activities, and are usually too busy with their troubles to attend to their own children (Hearne, 2015). Sarantakos (1997) has noted that juvenile perpetrators are more likely to have lived earlier in families where the parent is not involved with the children than from families where the parents are actively engaged. He concluded that around 70 % of offenders were from families where children felt that their parents showed no parental involvement. In contrast, only 30 % of the delinquents were from families where the parents showed interest in the children (Sarantakos, 1997). A similar finding was reached by Loeber (1986), who reviewed some 300 studies on families and crime and found that the most significant indicators of future offending are parent control, parental abandonment and parental involvement in bringing up children. Family relationships, parental delinquency, parental control and parental absence also determinants, and these factors have been found to have a moderate influence on children's later behaviour (Loeber, 1986).

Parenting styles

In addition to examining the relationship between the family and juvenile delinquency, it is worth devoting a separate chapter to parental parenting styles, as they have a significant influence on the child's later life. Parenting styles encompass various aspects of parents' supervision, care, emotions, and reactions to their children, providing a more comprehensive understanding than the study of a single parenting skill (Lee, 2020).

Developmental researcher Baumrind (1971) was the first to study the behaviour of parents in the home and within the family, and how different

behaviours influence children's socialisation. In her now-classic typology, he referred to the warm-hearted and supportive parenting qualities of caring for their children as responsiveness. She called the supervision and control of children's behaviour through rule-making and consequences demandingness (Baumrind, 1971). Baumrind (1971, 1976) identified four parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful.

The authoritative parenting approach is constructive and supportive, and the child has rights as well as responsibilities (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). The parent has high expectations of the child, but this is coupled with a warm, supportive attitude. The parent is responsible and committed to the child's behaviour, helping the child to be autonomous and independent, but at the same time teaching the child to conform to norms (Darling, 1999). The parent directs and controls the child's behaviour, but is responsive to the child's needs, with frequent parent-child interaction. Two controlling parents provide the largest support against crime commitment, but even one such parent offered some protective measures (Simons & Conger, 2007). Directional parents tend to have high sensitivity and warmth toward their children (Baumrind, 1966, 2013). Directional style has been associated with positive child outcomes, including independence (Baumrind, 1968) and social responsibility (Baumrind, 1971). Several studies have shown that children of authoritarian parents are sociable, highly cooperative, resilient and have good learning outcomes (García & Gracia, 2009; Maccoby, 1992).

Authoritarian parents lay down rigid guidelines for their children and require them to follow them. These parent shapes, controls and evaluates the child's behaviour according to his or her own standards, which are absolute and do not consider the child's needs (Trinkner et al., 2012). They have high expectations of the child and cannot tolerate when the child's behaviour does not conform. Demands obedience from the child, expects respect for authority. The rules are unquestionable, the parent enforces them strictly but pays no attention to the child's understanding of the meaning of the rules (Lauren & Collins, 2009). Authoritarian parents are dismissive, highly demanding, highly commanding, psychologically and dominantly controlling (Baumrind, 2013; Baumrind et al., 2010).

This less optimal parenting style has been associated with, among other things, lower self-efficacy (Baumrind et al., 2010), more externalizing and internalizing problems and rebellion (Baumrind, 1971). As children resist the control of freedom, rebellion becomes increasingly likely to turn to delinquency (Darling, 1999; Hovee et al., 2008).

In permissive parenting, parents do not set clear limits for their children and rarely enforce rules; they adopt a *laissez-faire* approach to discipline, lacking effective leadership (Laurson & Collins, 2009; Trinkner et al., 2012). Although permissive parents are generally very supportive, approachable, and permissive, children have too much say in what happens in the family. Young people who perceived their fathers as permissive were less able to exhibit reasonable social

adjustment compared to those who regarded their father as controlling or authoritarian (Kausar & Shafique, 2008). When parents are unable to follow up and check on their children's behaviour and fail to recognise and penalise offending behaviour, it has a detrimental effect on the child in the long term, as it results in a loss of self-control, which increases the greater chance of criminal behaviour (Hoeve et al., 2008). Lastly, Church and colleagues (2015) observed that juvenile black men who reported loose familial discipline and poor parental supervision had high offending rates.

In neglectful behaviour, parents are unresponsive to the emotional and physical needs of the child and often lack supervision by adults (*e.g.*, leaving small children for long periods of time). Neglectful parents are generally disengaged emotionally from their children and minimally responsive to their expressed needs (Hirschi, 1977; Lee et al., 2006). They are often unconcerned about their children's access to drugs, weapons and/or pornography, and exercise no control or supervision over them (Samuels, 2011). Among all parenting styles, neglectful parents were found to be at the highest risk of youths embarking on a path of delinquency and engaging in criminal behaviour (Simons & Conger, 2007; Hoeve et al., 2011).

When looking at parenting styles, researchers agree that the authoritative parenting style is the most favourable for the children, but there is not such complete agreement on the most harmful parenting style, with a split between authoritarian and neglectful styles.

The authoritative parenting style has been defined as the optimal parenting style by several researchers, including Baumrind (1966, 2013a), García and Gracia (2009) and Luyckx et al. (2011). Research has shown that controlling parental behaviour reduced the likelihood of children's delinquent behaviour (Hoeve et al., 2011; Trinkner, Cohn, Rebellon, & Van Gundy, 2011).

Some research has shown that the authoritarian style is the most negative form of parenting (Baumrind & Black, 1967; Delvecchio, Germani, Raspa, Lis, & Mazzeschi, 2020; Luyckx et al., 2011). Studies in recent years have confirmed Baumrind's theory of authoritarian parenting (Bornstein & Lamb, 2015; Larzelere, Morris, & Harrist, 2013) and confirmed the harmful outcomes of authoritarian parenting. Researchers have found a positive correlation between authoritarian parenting and children's persistent delinquency (Hoeve et al., 2008; Trinkner et al., 2011). A similar result was obtained by Chambers et al. (2001) when they concluded that strong parental supervision, such as authoritarian parenting style, leads to first arrests at a younger age. Lamborn et al. (1991) found that authoritarian parenting does not develop a child's self-confidence and social ability to cope with social stressors so that these deficits may increase children's propensity to delinquency. Another body of research has found that neglectful, overly permissive parenting styles result in children having excessively low levels of independence (Lamborn et al., 1991). Chambers et al. (2001) also assumed that low parental care, such as overindulgent parenting styles, is associated with high levels of anxiety and distress in adolescents. Other research

has identified a positive relationship between youth's offending behaviour and overindulgent, neglectful parenting styles. One study concluded that permissive parenting by mothers was associated with low levels of cognitive and affective empathy in their children, and these factors led to deviant behaviour in these children (Schaffer, Clark, & Jeglic, 2009). Other studies have found that permissive parenting of mothers was positively related to antisocial behaviour in their daughters and neglectful parenting by fathers was associated positively with antisocial behaviour in their sons (Gorman-Smith et al., 2000; Hoeve et al., 2011).

These findings suggest that growing up in an overly permissive, even neglectful or authoritarian home has harmful consequences and that controlling parenting appears to be the most effective parenting style in reducing delinquent behaviour.

Summary

The role of the family in the development of juveniles is crucial for their development, their behaviour and their norm-following behaviour. Families provide emotional and physical security, which is essential for a child's self-confidence. A stable home environment helps children feel safe. Families play a significant role in shaping children's values and behaviours, which are often formed in childhood and persist into adulthood, influencing whether a juvenile will turn to delinquency (Mwangangi, 2019). Whilst a complete family upbringing is important, researchers have pointed to several other factors that are also determinants of compliance behaviour (Burt et al., 2008), such as the aggression that may be present in the family, parental involvement, or the level of family cohesion (Mwangangi, 2019). Parenting style also plays a role in shaping children's behaviour and influencing the likelihood of offending. Positive parental involvement, support and directive parenting are associated with lower rates of delinquency, while neglectful, strict or overly permissive parenting styles may increase the risk of subsequent delinquency. Understanding these dynamics is key to developing effective interventions to prevent juvenile delinquency (Wright & Wright, 1992).

The family, therefore, plays a key role in shaping the behaviour and future of juveniles, with positive family influences preventing delinquency and negative influences increasing the likelihood of delinquency. Therefore, supporting families and promoting a healthy family environment are key strategies for preventing juvenile delinquency. Families should be supported through community programs and social services to provide a stable environment for their children. This includes encouraging positive behaviours and providing resources for families facing difficulties (UNICEF, 2013).

Practical implications

A variety of professional recommendations can be made to strengthen the prevention of juvenile delinquency (Burt et al., 2008; Farrington & Welsh,

2008; Mwangangi, 2019; Wright & Wright, 1992). First, it is advisable to widely introduce and support parental competency-building programs aimed at strengthening positive parenting styles, consistent parental supervision, and constructive conflict resolution, with a particular focus on disadvantaged families. On the other hand, it is necessary to strengthen early detection and intervention systems in educational and social institutions so that signs of family dysfunction, aggression, or low family cohesion can be identified in a timely manner and targeted professional assistance is available. Third, it is recommended to develop community-based support networks that promote families' social integration, reduce isolation, and contribute in the long term to the creation of a stable, emotionally secure environment, thereby mitigating the risk of juvenile delinquency.

Limitations and future research directions

Limitation of the reviewed literature is that it relies primarily on secondary sources and cross-sectional findings, which limits the ability to draw causal conclusions about the relationship between family factors and juvenile delinquency. Additionally, the review focuses mainly on psychological, educational, and criminological perspectives, giving less attention to broader socio-cultural and contextual factors that may also influence juvenile offending.

Ethics statement

This study was carried out in accordance with the recommendations of Code of Ethics of the University of Debrecen.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct and intellectual contribution to the work, and approved it for publication.

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