

Original Research Article

Effect of family factors on juvenile delinquency

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ABSTRACT

Background: Juvenile delinquency is multifactorial with risk factors operating at multiple levels namely individual, micro environment and macro environment levels. The objective of this study was to determine the effect of family factors on juvenile delinquency.

Methods: This was a case control study done from January 2009 to December 2009. Adolescents present in the Government run Special observation home were cases, while boys of 10, 11, and 12 standards in a government school served as controls. Data on demographic details, offence committed and family factors were collected using a structured proforma. Univariate and multivariate analyses were performed to determine which of the factors acted as risk factors for juvenile delinquency.

Results: Totally sixty juveniles and an equal number of school students were interviewed. Paternal age above 50 years, paternal smoking, alcohol intake, substance abuse and involvement in crime, maternal education and employment, being born as a single child, having separated parents or single parent were significant family factors identified in univariate analysis. Paternal age more than 50 years, paternal smoking, maternal employment and single parent emerged as significant risk factors in regression analysis.

Conclusions: Paternal age more than 50 years, paternal smoking, maternal employment and single parent are significant independent risk factors of juvenile delinquency.

Keywords: Family factors, Juvenile delinquency, Maternal employment, Paternal smoking

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a transitional period of development from childhood to adulthood characterized by biological and emotional changes. The word 'juvenile delinquency' refers to involvement of children less than 18 years of age in unlawful behavior which would be considered as a crime.¹

A delinquent young person is disobedient and wayward, runs away from home and school, cannot be controlled by the parents and teachers, is not amenable to any kind of discipline, is self-willed and habitually acts in a manner

injurious to the welfare and happiness of others and himself.

Juvenile delinquency is thought to arise out of socio-personal dysregulation. Sociological theories of juvenile delinquency put emphasis on the environment, social structures and the learning process.

Multiple factors operate at the individual, micro social and macro social levels leading to juvenile delinquency.² Family is considered the micro social environment of prime importance which influences the behavior of any individual. Relationship with family members and their

personality traits operate at micro social level which may contribute to juvenile delinquency.³

Juvenile delinquency and the problems related to it have been faced by all societies, all over the world; however, in the developing world the problems are all the more formidable.

The process of development has brought in its wake a socio-cultural upheaval affecting the age-old traditional ways of life in the congenial rural milieu. Clear understanding of risk factors of juvenile delinquency is a pre requisite to initiate remedial or preventive measures. This study was done with the objective of studying the effect of family factors on juvenile delinquency.

METHODS

The study was commenced after the approval of institutional ethical committee. Permission was obtained from the director, department of social defenses of the state Government, director of public instructions and headmistress of school. Informed consent was obtained from parents of school children and assent was obtained from all participants.

This was a case control study done at special observation home run by state Government and a state run school from January 2009 to December 2009. Boys from a state Government run special observation home who were convicted for acts of juvenile delinquency and found guilty, who assented to take part in the study were included as cases. Boys studying in tenth, eleventh and twelfth standards in state Government run school who were never convicted for any acts of juvenile delinquency were selected as controls so as to match the age of cases. Equal number of cases and controls were recruited. The sample size was limited by the number of delinquents in the special observation home. Questionnaire was constructed in English, translated to local language (Tamil) and back translated to English. The translation and back translation were done by two different bilingual people. Questionnaire was administered in local language and responses were recorded.

Doubtful parts of questionnaire were explained in detail to the participants and their responses recorded subsequently. The questionnaire consisted of demographic details, information on crime committed by the delinquents as well as number of times they were there and family factors. School students were interviewed in a similar manner in local language, with due respect to their privacy.

Family factors that were considered were parental age, education, employment, parental personal habits like smoking, alcohol intake and substance abuse, involvement in crime, number of children at home,

family disharmony, single, separated and punitive parents.

All variables considered were categorical variables; hence they were expressed as frequencies with percentage. Univariate analysis to determine association between factors and juvenile delinquency was done using chi-squared test and significance level was fixed at 5%. The factors found to be significant in univariate analysis and for whom none of the four entries in 2×2 table was zero were subjected to multi variate analysis using logistic regression.⁴ Odd's ratios with 95% confidence interval of significant risk factors were calculated.

RESULTS

Totally sixty boys were present in the special observation home and all of them assented to participate in the study. Hence sixty boys were recruited from a state run school as controls. Totally there were sixty cases and sixty controls.

Majority of delinquents were charged with theft, while murder and causing hurt were other offences; one boy was charged with marrying a minor girl. Two-thirds of them (63%) were there for the first time, while 27% were there for the second time, 8% for third time and 2% for fourth time. Most of them, 49 (82%) were above 15 years of age while only 11 (18%) were below 15 years. All of them were boys. 54 (90%) were from urban locality and rest from rural locality.

Univariate analysis of family factors was done and results are shown in Table 1.

There were no juveniles in both groups whose mother smoked/ consumed alcohol/ abused substance or was jailed. Paternal age above 50 years, paternal smoking, alcohol intake, substance abuse and involvement in crime, maternal education and employment, being born as a single child, having separated parents or single parent were significant risk factors while paternal education and employment, maternal age and family disharmony were not significant. Surprisingly, punitive parenthood was a significant protective factor.

Out of the significant factors, three of them, namely paternal drug abuse, involvement in crime and separated parents had one of the four entries in 2×2 table as zero. Hence neither could Odd's ratio be calculated for them nor were they included in logistic regression. The result of logistic regression is shown in Table 2.

Paternal age more than 50 years, paternal smoking, maternal employment and single parent emerged as independent risk factors for juvenile delinquency after logistic regression.

Table 1: Univariate analysis of family factors and Juvenile delinquency.

Factor	Categories	Cases n (%)	Controls n (%)	χ^2	p value
Father age	> 50 years	16 (27)	5 (8)	6.984	0.007
	< 50 years	44 (73)	55 (92)		
Father education	Uneducated	21 (35)	25 (42)	0.564	0.573
	Educated	39 (65)	35 (58)		
Father employment	Unempl.	2 (3)	0 (0)	2.034	0.496
	Employed	58 (97)	60 (100)		
Father smoking status	Smoker	40 (67)	16 (27)	19.286	<0.001
	Non-smoker	20 (33)	44 (73)		
Father alcohol consumption	Regular	37 (62)	7 (12)	32.297	<0.001
	Not regular	23 (38)	53 (88)		
Father drug abuse	Present	12 (20)	0 (0)	13.3	<0.001
	Absent	48 (80)	60 (100)		
Father jailed	Yes	12 (20)	0 (0)	13.3	<0.001
	No	48 (80)	60 (100)		
Mother age	>40 years	13 (22)	14 (24)	0.048	1
	<40 years	47 (78)	46 (76)		
Mother education	Uneducated	25 (42)	39 (65)	6.563	0.017
	Educated	35 (58)	21 (35)		
Mother Employment	Employed	41 (68)	16 (27)	20.886	<0.001
	Unempl	19 (32)	44 (73)		
Only child	Yes	8 (13)	1 (2)	5.886	0.032
	No	52 (87)	59 (98)		
Family disharmony	Present	25 (42)	18 (30)	1.776	0.253
	Absent	35 (58)	42 (70)		
Separated parents	Yes	11 (18)	0 (0)	12.110	<0.001
	No	49 (82)	60 (100)		
Single parent	Yes	23 (38)	7 (12)	11.378	<0.001
	No	37 (62)	53 (88)		
Punitive parents	Yes	8 (13)	37 (62)	29.902	<0.001
	No	52 (87)	23 (38)		

Table 2: Multivariate analysis of family factors and Juvenile delinquency.

Factor	Crude OR	Adjusted OR	95% Confidence interval	Significance
Paternal age >50 years versus <50 years	4	5.842	1.257-27.158	0.024
Father smoking status smoker versus non-smoker	5.5	4.313	1.078-17.252	0.039
Father alcohol consumption regular versus not regular	12.18	1.298	0.314-5.360	0.718
Maternal education educated versus uneducated	2.6	0.434	0.142-1.328	0.144
Maternal employment employed versus unemployed	5.93	5.680	1.808-17.851	0.003
Only child yes versus no	9.07	3.112	0.266-36.609	0.365
single parent yes versus no	4.71	6.491	1.636 -25.751	0.008
Punitive parents yes versus no	0.096	0.068	0.018-0.248	<0.001

DISCUSSION

This case control study on juvenile delinquency identified advanced paternal age, paternal smoking, maternal employment and single parenthood as significant independent risk factors. Limitations of the study are all the biases inherent to case-control design, most important of which is recall bias.⁵ In addition, present cases were

selected from special observation home which represents severe form of delinquency whereas milder forms were not included.

Previous studies have identified poor parenting skills, family size, home discord, anti-social parents, single parent and punitive parenthood as risk factors of juvenile delinquency operating at family level.^{6,7} The surprising

finding of punitive parenthood having a protective effect may be explained by the hypothesis that the negative effect of punitive behavior was negated by parental supervision and goal setting which led to the punishment. Research has shown poor parental supervision to be the strongest predictor of juvenile delinquency.^{8,9} Factors like advanced paternal age, maternal employment and single parenthood result in poor parental supervision making them more prone for juvenile delinquency.

The multiplicative effect of several risk factors is a well-known fact. There are reports that a ten-year-old exposed to six or more risk factors is 10 times more likely to commit a violent act by the age 18 as compared to a ten year old boy exposed to only one risk factor.¹⁰ The study of risk factors is essential for development of prevention program for any condition. Hence studies like ours which identify risk factors, pave way for planning preventive strategies against juvenile delinquency. Preventive programs should target at risk adolescents and remedial measures in the form of coping strategies to be taught to them to prevent juvenile delinquency. Regression analysis which negates the effect of confounders has helped us generate reliable data on risk factors.

CONCLUSION

Advanced paternal age (more than 50 years), paternal smoking, maternal employment and single parenthood are significant independent risk factors operating at family level for juvenile delinquency.

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Ethical approval: The study was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee

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