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## Analyzing Socio-Psychological Factors Related to Juvenile Delinquency: A Case Study of Province Punjab

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### ABSTRACT

This research was conducted to reveal the role of socio- psychological factors related to juvenile delinquency. The main objective of this study was to explore factors contributing to delinquency and their influence on juveniles' behavior, how certain juveniles are affected by them and others not. Convicted juveniles of Punjab province were the population of research from which 15 delinquent juveniles were selected for in-depth interviews through purposively sampling. Interview guide and diary were used as tool to collect information. Research was only focused on factors related to family, school, and community and peers which cause delinquent at early age. Study revealed that juveniles living in delinquent or non-supporting families and criminal neighborhood are more likely to have inclination towards criminality. Likewise, juveniles who are weak students and have criminal associations becomes delinquent at later adolescent age due to peer pressure. Criminal tendencies developed at early age are more chronic than those at later adolescence. Therefore, juvenile delinquency prevention programs should focus on socio-psychological factors related to early age to curb the delinquency. It was also found that juvenile-living in delinquent environment may not indulge into delinquency.

**KEYWORDS:** Socio-psychological, later adolescence, delinquents, juveniles

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

Juvenile delinquency has long been recognized as a significant contributor to criminal behavior. Traditionally, studies on delinquency have focused on adolescents aged 16 to 18, when criminal tendencies are often well-established and difficult to intervene. However, research from the early 1900s suggests that delinquent behavior in younger adolescents, particularly between the ages of 13 and 16, tends to be more chronic (Simons et al., 1994). While juveniles are more likely to commit serious crimes around the age of 18, an important question arises: what factors lead them to criminality in the first place? Why do some individuals exposed to similar circumstances become delinquent while others do not? How do different factors interact at an early age to shape future criminal behavior?

Understanding these dynamics is crucial for effective prevention. Intervening at an early stage may help curb juvenile delinquency before it escalates into more serious criminal activities. Although a juvenile living in an environment associated with delinquency may not necessarily

engage in criminal acts, he may develop an inclination toward delinquent behavior, which, under vulnerable circumstances, could lead to criminality.

Among the various influences on juvenile delinquency, socio-psychological factors play a crucial role (Kamaluddin et al., 2015). However, it is also observed that some juveniles raised in stable social environments exhibit delinquent behavior, while others exposed to risk factors do not necessarily turn to crime (Relvas & Vaz, 2007). In recent years, extensive research has been conducted to examine the psychological factors contributing to delinquency. Yet, further investigation is needed to understand why some juveniles from normal social backgrounds engage in delinquent behavior and why some individuals, despite being exposed to risk factors, do not become criminals.

This study aims to explore the socio-psychological factors that contribute to juvenile delinquency, with a particular focus on early childhood influences. A deeper understanding of these factors can provide valuable insights into preventing delinquency at an early stage. Identifying and addressing specific influences during childhood and adolescence may help reduce the likelihood of criminal behavior later in life. The study seeks to provide a multidimensional perspective on how socio-psychological factors shape delinquent tendencies and how targeted interventions can help mitigate these risks.

However, it is important to note certain limitations. Psychology is a broad field with various branches and this study specifically focuses on social psychology. Additionally, while many socio-psychological factors contribute to juvenile delinquency, this research is limited to examining the role of family, schooling, community and peer influences. Despite these limitations, the findings of this study may contribute to a better understanding of juvenile delinquency and offer practical strategies for early intervention.

## **2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Juvenile delinquent is defined as, “an adolescent who breaks the law or engages in behavior that is considered illegal” (Santrock, 2011). Children who come under the age of 18 are considered juveniles and delinquents are the ones who exhibit behavior deemed illegal for adults. However, the term "delinquent" is not used for children below the age of 7 years who commit similar acts, as they lack the ability to differentiate maturely between right and wrong (Vijayanath et al., 2010).

Juvenile delinquency is a major issue worldwide. Despite efforts to minimize it, the rates are increasing. This review examines the fundamental socio-psychological causes of delinquent behavior from an early stage.

### **2.1 Family Factors**

The family is the fundamental building block of human society. The home is the natural school for children, where they learn moral values that shape their future conduct. Children rejected by their parents, raised in homes with conflict or inadequately supervised are at the greatest risk of becoming delinquents. Families serve as one of the strongest socializing forces, helping to teach children self-control, delay gratification and respect for others. Conversely, families can also influence children towards aggressive, antisocial and violent behavior.

#### **2.1.1 Family Size**

Family size significantly impacts child development. Large families often lack proper supervision, sustenance, education and attention, making children more vulnerable to delinquency (Kierkus & Hewitt, 2009). The economics of the family suggests that family size influences educational attainment and development (Becker, 1960; Becker & Lewis, 1973). Research highlights the role of family as a privileged environment for personality formation (Berry et al., 2006; Relvas & Vaz, 2007).

### 2.1.2 Discord Home

Children from discordant homes are more likely to engage in delinquent activities. Single-parent families have a positive correlation with delinquency (Le Amato Flore, 1988). Parental divorce is associated with psychological problems, reduced academic performance and increased delinquency (Amato, 2001, 2010). Marital discord and child abuse also contribute to delinquency (Wright, 1993).

### 2.1.3 Child Rejection

Children raised in supportive, affectionate and accepting homes are less likely to become deviant. Children rejected by parents are more likely to become delinquent due to an escalating cycle of rejection and behavioral issues.

### 2.1.4 Child Maltreatment

Child maltreatment affects children both physically and psychologically. Parental rejection is a significant predictor of delinquency. Excessive strictness and domestic violence contribute to delinquency (Widom, 1989). Adolescents facing neglect from their families are more prone to delinquent acts (Gluecks, 1950; Khursheed & Urooj, 2012).

### 2.1.5 Poor Parenting Skills

Parental supervision is a key factor in controlling delinquency. High supervision correlates with lower delinquency rates. Neglectful parenting leads to low self-esteem, poor self-control and delinquent behavior (Santrock, 2012).

## 2.2 School and Community Factors

Schools play a significant role in shaping students' values and norms. Academic success is critical in determining social and economic mobility.

### 2.2.1 Academic Performance

Students derive much of their identity from school. Emotional problems contribute to academic difficulties and low self-esteem, which can lead to delinquency. School failure is linked to psychological and behavioral dysfunctions (Gold, 1978; Meese, 1996). Adolescents who fail academically are often involved in drug use, depression and delinquency (Farrington, 1992).

### 2.2.2 School Location

Delinquency rates are higher in schools located in high-crime urban areas. Schools in impoverished communities have fewer resources, lower academic performance and higher dropout rates (Santrock, 2001). Crime in schools reflects the patterns of crime in surrounding neighborhoods (Siegel et al., 1997).

### 2.2.3 School Leadership

Teacher-student relationships influence delinquency. Schools with positive teacher attitudes and disciplinary cooperation report lower delinquency rates. Conversely, schools with punitive discipline policies see increased delinquency rates (Agnew, 2001).

### 2.2.4 Socialization at School

Adolescents spend considerable time with their peers, who significantly influence their behavior. Peer groups often reinforce delinquent behaviors and reduce the fear of social sanctions (Warr, 1996). Adolescents with a strong need for excitement are more likely to be attracted to delinquent peer activities (Thomberry et al., 1998).

## 2.3 Peer Influence

Peer groups, consisting of individuals with similar ages and backgrounds, play a crucial role in delinquent behavior. Unstructured socializing, prolonged absence from home and bad peer influences contribute to delinquency (Bayer et al., 2009). Children from conflict-ridden families or crime-prone neighborhoods are more likely to associate with delinquent peers. According to

social learning theory, peers significantly impact child behavior (Simpson & Akers, 2000; Bernasco et al., 2013).

Research suggests that popular youth are influenced by their social networks, both positively and negatively. Delinquent behavior spreads through peer influence and social network positioning (Andrews et al., 2017).

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a **qualitative research design**, utilizing **in-depth interviews** to explore the socio-psychological factors contributing to juvenile delinquency in Punjab. The **population** consisted of convicted juvenile offenders from two districts **Sheikhupura** and **Lahore**. A **list of 30 delinquent juveniles** was compiled using data from the **Police and Prison departments**, from which **15 juveniles** were **purposely selected** for in-depth interviews.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, guided by an interview guide and supported with field notes. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher and analyzed using thematic analysis, focusing on socio-psychological dimensions associated with family, peers, school and community.

Ethical considerations were strictly followed. Informed consent was obtained, participation was voluntary and confidentiality was ensured. Participants were encouraged to share experiences only if they felt comfortable.

To ensure validity, interviews were conducted impartially and findings were interpreted in context to participants' responses, minimizing researcher bias.

### 4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This study was aimed to explore the socio- psychological factors that contribute to juvenile delinquency and which can escalate to chronic criminal behavior at later adolescence. In this research, the experiences of participants showed that socio-psychology delinquent factors at early age of juveniles incline them towards delinquency. It is found that there are following major factors related juvenile delinquency in the Punjab, Pakistan.

#### 4.1 Family

Family is the basic socialization unit. It plays major role in pulling or pushing the child into delinquency. A child behavior is largely influenced by his family environment. We found in our study that a juvenile living in a delinquent family experience socio- psychological factors which alters his behavior and inclines him towards criminality. A juvenile living in poor family experiencing maltreatment from parents is more likely to indulge in criminal activities when he is triggered by delinquent environment.

##### 4.1.1 Family Size

Family size is one of the contributor to juvenile delinquency. In large size families, parents could not establish strong bonds with their children. This issue is more severe in joint families. Juveniles are deprived of attention and care in large size families. One respondent said:

"We, four brothers, three sisters, father, mother and grandfather live together in single house."

##### 4.1.2 Discord Home

Separated parents is also a main contributing factor to juvenile delinquency. Discord home may also be due to family issues. In these circumstances children lack affection and care from their parents and/or family. Separation of parents at early age of juvenile is a risk factor for delinquency. During interviews, it was observed that juveniles living in discord homes had weak bonds with family and had criminal associations. One of the respondent said:

"My parents live separately and I live with my mother."

#### 4.1.3 Child Maltreatment

Child maltreatment also leads to juvenile delinquency. During research it was revealed that participants were suppressed by the maltreatment from parents and siblings. Juveniles turn hostiles to members of the family who are strict to them. It leads to weak bonds with the family and juveniles may join criminal associations. One respondent said:

“My father used to beat me, therefore, I could not engage my mind at home. I started spending more time with my friends and was involved in such activities.”

#### 4.1.4 Poor Parenting Skills

Parents' behavior with child is more crucial. A child is closely attached with parents especially at early age. If they lack parenting skills, it will affect their child's behavior. During interviews delinquent juveniles revealed that they were not satisfied with the behavior of their parents. They blame their parents' lack of affection for their aggressive behavior. One respondent said:

“My parents could not understand my feelings. That's why I was furious to them.”

#### 4.1.5 Family Environment

Family environment has huge impact on juveniles. If a family supports criminal activities, juveniles are likely to incline towards criminality. Poverty is one of the major causes. Most of the juveniles indulge in criminal activities due to their low socio-economic status. Poor family environment is a social factor which results into criminality under vulnerable circumstances.

Respondent said:

“My family supported me (in delinquent acts). When I gave some money at home, my parent didn't say anything knowing (that I have committed crime).”

#### 4.1.6 Criminal Behavior

Criminal behavior of family members also influence the juveniles. If parents have criminal mind set and they support their children in illicit activities, juveniles will develop criminal behavior.

Respondent said:

“I used to steal things from my uncle's room for my mother.”

Siblings also play a major role. One of the participants responded that he involved in stealing because his siblings use to do it.

Respondent said:

“We usually didn't pay shopkeeper for things or steal things when he was not looking.”

#### 4.2 School

School is the second most important socialization agent for juveniles after family. Progress and bonds at school determines the behavior of the child. Children need special attention at early age because it is observed if students fail to establish bonds and perform well at early age, then it is more difficult for them to do this latterly. They lack of confidence and hesitate to communicate which also contributes in failure to form bonds with fellows. According to observations, such students are more likely to be bullied and rejected by fellows and teachers. This creates complications for a child in school life.

##### 4.2.1 Failure Bond to School

Juveniles who fail to form bonds at school are at risk of delinquency. It affects their socialization. They lack confidence and avoid participating co-curriculum activities. It influences their progress and creates stresses. It was revealed during research that juveniles who failed to bond to school were inclined towards delinquency. One respondent said:

“I had neither good friend at school nor teachers behaved well with me. That's why I was fed up (with the school).”

#### 4.2.2 Poor Academic Performances

Juveniles who fail to perform well at school suffer from family and peers pressure. We observe during study that juveniles who could not perform well were rebellion to study. They opted for work at early age. This affected their relations with family. They indulged in criminal associations which lead to juvenile offending.

Respondent said:

"I tried my best to get good marks but couldn't get. For that reason, I was disappointed."

#### 4.2.3 Bullying by Fellows

Bullying by fellows at school is also a contributing factor to juvenile delinquency. Bullying affects the socialization and progress of children at school. Juveniles suffer from stresses due to bullying which leads to delinquent behavior.

Respondent said:

"Class fellows used to tease me for nothing. That's why I was afraid of them."

#### 4.3 Neighborhood

Socio-community factors also contribute for juvenile delinquency which may be escalated to chronic criminality at later adolescence. Neighborhood influences the behavior of the juveniles. It was found that juveniles living in criminal neighborhood were exposed to criminality and they were at risk of involvement in delinquent behavior. We explored that juveniles learn deviant behavior like normal behavior in criminal neighborhoods, because it is an accepted behavior in such communities.

##### 4.3.1 Disorganized Neighborhood

Disorganized neighborhood is also problematic for juveniles at early age. It leads to social problems which contribute for predisposition for delinquency at early age which escalates to chronic criminality at later adolescence.

##### 4.3.2 Neighborhood with Accepted Criminal Behaviors

Juveniles living in community with accepted criminal behavior are more vulnerable for delinquent acts because they do not consider it crime. They learn delinquent behavior like normal behavior in such neighborhood.

#### 4.4 Peers

Peer influences on child delinquency usually appear developmentally later than family influences. It is found that negative peer influence also plays a significant role in the socialization of the children. This negative influence of peers tends towards delinquency. Their strong associations with their peers instead of their families become the cause of their delinquent acts.

##### 4.4.1 Association with Negative Peers

Negative peer associations contribute to juvenile delinquency. Associations with deviant peers is a manifestation of a child's predisposition to delinquency. "Birds of a feather flock together". It was found during study that non-delinquent juveniles can become delinquent due to deviant peer influence.

Respondent said:

"One of my friends was involved in illicit activities. But he was very kind to me and supported me in every matter."

Peer influence can also act as maintaining or precipitating factor. A juvenile who has criminal history may be escalated towards serious offending. Involvement of juveniles in gangs provides a source co-offenders.

Respondent said:

"Once I stole from home. My friend supported me. With the passage of time, I became habitual."

#### 4.4.2 Peers Rejection

Peer rejection at childhood is also a risk factor for juvenile delinquency. Young aggressive children, who are rejected by peers at early age, are at greater risk for later chronic anti-social behaviors and associations. They are more likely to persist offending at early adulthood. Peer rejection results in fewer positive options for juveniles.

### 5. CONCLUSION

On the basis of this study, it is concluded that non-supporting family environment, poor and criminal neighborhood, delinquent peers' associations and failure in socialization at school are major socio- psychological factors which alter juveniles' behavior and contribute for delinquency. How socio- psychological factors influence juveniles also depends upon their personal traits. Delinquency usually stems from a combination of factors that varies from child to child.

The study revealed that the focus on risk factors that appear at early age is the key to prevent child delinquency and its escalation into chronic criminality. By intervening at early age, young children will be able to resist risk the factors that results in negative social and personal consequences at later adolescence.

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