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FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH DELINQUENCY: AN ANALYSIS OF WHAT CONTRIBUTES THE MOST TO DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR IN SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to identify the greatest risk factors associated with delinquent behaviour among school children: 468 students aged 13–15 years completed measures of parental involvement, family conflict, involvement in school, classroom climate, victimisation, and television violence. Regression analysis demonstrated that low parental involvement ($B = -.17, p > .05$), high family conflict ($B = .21, p > .01$), involvement in school ($B = -.26, p > .001$), classroom environment ($B = -.31, p > .001$), high victimisation ($B = .28, p > .01$) and TV violence ($B = .20, p > .01$) were significant predictors of delinquent behaviour. However, the classroom environment was identified as the leading predictor ($R^2 = .33, p > .01$) for delinquent behaviour at school. Considering the present findings, it appears essential that classroom environment should be examined extensively in respect of its effects to decrease delinquent behaviour.

Keywords: delinquent behaviour, parental involvement, family conflict, classroom climate, victimization

INTRODUCTION

The initial five years of a child's life is a strong determinant of behaviour, attitude, personality traits, etc.; when these characteristics are merged with child's environment then there is possibility that the child may become delinquent due to exposure to certain risk and protective factors. However, it is also difficult to identify these risk factors. Though there is no magical way to prevent or correct child delinquency, to prevent delinquent child from becoming criminal it is essential to identify risk and protective factors associated with delinquency (Wasserman et al., 2003).

The Latin root from which "delinquency" is derived means "to omit". The term delinquency is not only related to illegal acts; it includes all the problematic behaviour of children that forces them to take pleasure or remove sources of irritation without controlling their natural impulses, ranging from disrespecting the teacher, hostile behaviour towards class fellows and peers, stealing, fighting, bullying or victimising others, and this attitude leads to criminal activities such as offensive acts and robbery, even murder (Gottfredson, 2001). Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) stated that even though the behaviour is according to the law it ought to be considered as delinquency if disobedience, troublemaking, use of force or deception and causing harm to others or oneself, are involved in the behaviour.

Children consider their parents as their models. According to Simons, Whitbeck, Conger and Conger (1991), for children the major source of admiration and reinforcement is their parents. Thus, if parents display a negative attitude then there is a possibility that their child copy their parents' negative behaviour too and will also make generalisation of this act in their behaviour towards the rest of the people. Parents have greater impact on their child attitude. Through childrearing parents' behaviours are shaped and moulded according to society's norm and values. Certain parenting practices have a greater influence on child

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behaviour, such as parental support (Barnes et al., 2006). In parental support, a child is praised, encouraged and given affection; the child is given value and love. Many researchers have suggested that parental support attaches the juvenile to its institutions and also helps it to develop self-control (Barnes et al., 2006). Thus, deviant behaviours will be hindered through self-control.

Peer association is greatly affected by parenting quality. Parents are also capable of influencing their child's choice of peer relationship. Child association with a deviant peer is influenced through efficient monitoring and discipline (Simons et al., 1991). Parents can keep a record of their child's location through effective supervision. Effective supervision and discipline also make parent-child bonding stronger. A child values a parent's opinion regarding their friends if that child is close to its parents. Forceful parenting weakens the parent-child bond. Youth externalises a higher level of problem when their bond with parents is weakened through parental conflict (Buehler, 2006). Parents' divorce may cause child externalisation of problems, e.g. a child fights with a peer might be a result of anger caused by the divorce of the parents. These externalisations of issues may lead a child towards deviant behaviour.

Usually child delinquency is a developmentally later influenced by peers as compared to family and individual influences. For example, even before joining school aggressive and disruptive attitude is shown in many children. However, an association with deviant peers and peer rejection are the main sources of peer influence in delinquency. In social science, socialisation is the main concept and after the family, school is the most important socialising agent. Thus, delinquency on the individual, family, peer-group, school, community and society is associated with negative factors related to school.

On an individual level, aggression, impulsivity, a lack of self-control and conduct problems are predicted by failure and successes in school. Low level of IQ in verbal tests, a weak performance in school and a lack of emotional intelligence (Lynam, Moffitt and Stouthamer-Loeber, 1993; Schutte et al., 1998) may cause delinquency in school. Educational and behavioural issues in school can also be caused by perinatal complexities, physical distress to infants, small physical defects and brain injuries (Hawkins, Farrington and Catalano, 1998).

Violence in adolescence can result from poor family organisation practices such as a lack of supervision and monitoring, unkind and unfair punishment, unclear expectations of parents towards children, hostility in the family, and insulting or careless parenting (Hawkins, Farrington and Catalano, 1998). On a peer level, the major factors leading towards delinquency are peer rejection or interaction with delinquent peers, disobedience and positive attitude for violence, for example, learning violent norms and values, or fighting for status in school group (Hawkins, Farrington and Catalano, 1998).

On school level delinquency can be caused by extremely departmentalised institutions where there is a lack of purposeful interaction between student and teachers, and where teachers are only concerned with the subject and there is a lack of responsibility towards non-subject elements (Gottfredson, 2001). There are also other risk factors that contribute to delinquency, such as huge schools, having no discipline, rule and regulation are not followed consistently, and illogical and unwanted disciplinary reinforcement of rules. In schools where there are high levels of completion, a lack of rewards and unjust allocation of rewards, students may then experience aggression if they fail to achieve rewards. Where educational syllabi and teaching are not associated with the needs and wants of the students, and when they also think that they cannot have control over the things which influence them, then higher levels of violence are observed in students (Gottfredson, 2001; Stewart, 2003).

Considering delinquency on a community level, the factors and characteristics of community determine the school climate. Withdrawal from school, problematic behaviour and an increase in delinquency is affected by concentrating on educationally and socially deprived

students (Maguin and Loeber, 1996). Delinquency is also increased when a school is in a disorganised community and there is lack of social values, bonds, normative atmosphere and teacher satisfaction (Gottfredson, 2001; Sampson, Raudenbush and Earls, 1997).

METHOD

Participants

This study was completed with a sample of 468 male school students aged 13–15 years (mean = 14.09, SD =1.02), who were randomly recruited from six public elementary schools in Multan.

Measures

All the study participants provided data on six measures (Dahlberg et al., 2005). Parental involvement was assessed using 18 items measuring three dimensions: Parent Involvement with Child's Schoolwork (PICS) (items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7); Parent Involvement with Teacher/School (PIT/S) (Items 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13); and Teacher Involvement with Parent (TIP) (Items 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18) rated on 0–4 scale indicating "Never" to "Very often". Prosocial involvement in school was measured with nine items evaluating the perception of students in terms of how many opportunities and rewards are accessible in their school. Items are rated on 1–4 options: very true to very false. Higher scores indicate greater opportunities and/or rewards for prosocial involvement in school. Classroom climate was assessed with 18 items rated on 1–4: "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Classroom climate quantified three subscales measuring student–student relationship (SSR), student–teacher relationship (STR), and awareness/reporting (A/R). Victimization and aggression factors were evaluated with 11 items rated on 0–6 items. These items assess the frequency of being victimised (six items) or displaying self-reported aggressive behaviours (five items). Family conflict and hostility was measured with three items rated on 1–4: "Often" to "Never". A higher score indicates a higher degree of hostility and conflict within the family. TV attitudes were assessed with six items rated 1–5, indicating "very harmful" to "not at all harmful". Higher scores explain the notion that violence presented on TV is realistic and harmless for children.

Procedure

After obtaining institutional permission, parents' consents, and respondents' willingness, the data were collected during the class time with the help of teachers. Students were provided comfortable testing environment and clear instructions about the response style on each questionnaire. Confidentiality of the responses was assured to both teachers and students. Results were analysed on SPSS-21.

RESULTS

The hypothesized model was analysed by computing zero-order correlation among independent and dependent variables (Table1); and a series of ordinary least squares regression analysis to measure the expected prediction from independent factors for dependent variable of delinquent behaviour.

TABLE 1: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND CORRELATIONS AMONG STUDY VARIABLES

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Parental Involvement in School														
1 PICS	17.28	3.90	1											
2 PI T/S	14.56	2.41	.41**	1										
3 TIP	11.37	2.75	.25**	.28**	1									
Involvement in School														
4 Opportunities	12.26	2.71	.34**	.31**	.15*	1								
5 Rewards	9.36	2.12	.29**	.26**	.23**	.17*	1							
Classroom Climate														
6 SSR	18.14	3.01	.14*	.13*	.14*	.07	.17*	1						
7 STR	10.77	2.28	.15*	.17*	.18*	.21**	.25**	.18*	1					
8 A/R	17.68	3.14	.08	.13*	.17*	.31**	.22**	.16*	.13*	1				
Victimization														
9 Victimization	23.57	3.45	-.22**	-.19**	-.14*	-.08	-.06	-.24**	-.07	-.03	1			
10 Aggression	24.16	3.51	-.11*	-.06	-.09	-.05	-.07	-.37**	-.12*	-.06	.37**	1		
11 Family Conflict	07.31	1.56	.21**	-.09	-.03	-.04	-.04	-.12*	-.07	-.09	.31**	.36**	1	
12 TV Violence	22.15	2.67	-.12*	-.16*	-.14	-.17*	-.13*	-.29**	-.11*	-.19*	.34**	.41**	.37**	1
13 Delinquent Behavior	29.23	2.14	-.20**	-.19*	-.16*	-.22**	-.20**	-.27**	-.24**	-.21**	.43**	.38**	.32**	.39**

*p>.05, **p>.00

Analyses of correlation index (Table 1) depicted the means, SD, and inter-correlation coefficients among all variables of study. Descriptive analyses indicated the higher mean score on victimisation, aggression, family conflict and delinquent behaviour. Analysis from zero-order correlations shows the significant positive association between victimisation, family conflict, aggression, TV violence and delinquency; delinquent behaviour is found significantly negatively connected with dimensions of parental involvement, school involvement and classroom environment.

TABLE 2: REGRESSION ANALYSIS FOR PREDICTION FROM SIX CATEGORIES OF FACTORS FOR DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR

Predictors	Predictors of Delinquent Behaviour at School					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Parental Involvement						
Parent Involvement with Child's School Work	-.29**	-.26**	-.23**	-.19*	-.18*	-.18
Parent Involvement with Teacher/School	-.28**	-.25**	-.21**	-.13*	-.10*	-.09
Teacher Involvement with Parents	-.25**	-.22**	-.19*	-.11*	-.07	-.07
Total	-.27**	-.23**	-.21**	-.19*	-.17*	-.17*
Involvement in School						
Opportunities		-.25**	-.21**	-.19**	-.17*	-.16*
Reward		-.21**	-.17*	-.10*	-.08	-.07
Total		-.26**	-.22**	-.16*	-.11*	-.10*
Classroom Climate						
Student-Student Relationship			-.31**	-.25**	-.21**	-.20**
Student-Teacher Relationship			-.21**	-.17*	-.16*	-.15*

Awareness/Reporting					
Total					
Victimisation					
Victimisation					
Aggression					
Total					
Family Conflict					
Television Violence					
Adjusted R ²					
Statistics					

* $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$

Ordinary least squares regression analyses (Table 2) tested the prediction using six factors of delinquent behaviour. To test the hypothesised model, six models of predictors were analysed by entering one model at a time. Model 1 presented the prediction from first category of predictors: parental involvement. Model 1 indicated 17% variance in delinquent behaviour as whole. The second category of predictors of involvement in school was entered in Model 2. Model 2 explained 21% of the change in delinquent behaviour. Likewise, Models 3, 4, and 5 – classroom climate, victimization, family conflict, TV violence – were added one by one in the analysis and increases of .33, .27, .21, and .19 in *R*-square were found that explained the 33%, 27%, 21% and 19% of variance in delinquent behaviour at school, respectively.

DISCUSSION

Family and parenting both have been considered more significant in child development. Previous studies have identified various factors that contribute towards delinquency. The present research is also an extension of exploring the factors that contribute most to the delinquent behaviour at school. We included six different factors in this study: parenting involvement, involvement in school, classroom climate, victimisation, family conflict, and TV violence.

Findings from the regression analysis related to parental involvement which was entered first in the Model 1 suggested that inadequate parental involvement is a significant predictor of delinquent behaviour at school. These findings are in line with the previous work of Hawkins et al. (1998), who identified poor parenting practices as the most powerful indicator of a child's antisocial behaviour. In particular, three parental behaviours are linked to early conduct problems that later result in delinquency: (1) poor parent-child relationship; (2) poor control; and (3) poor parental involvement (Wasserman et al., 1996). The findings of the present study affirmed the findings of the work by Hirschi (2002), who demonstrated that low control from parents and poor parental involvement increased the tendency towards developing delinquent behaviour in a child at school. Families where children engaged in conflicts of discipline develop more conduct problems than those children who brought up in families where they do not become part of conflicts (Wasserman et al., 1996). These findings also confirmed the present findings of Model 4.

According to Maguin and Loeber (1996), inadequate bonding to school during childhood is a leading factor in delinquency. The present research also presents consistent findings. A child's poor performance in learning at school is a risk factor of developing delinquency. A meta-analysis of more than 100 studies examining the association of poor involvement in school activities and poor academic performance with delinquency has been found associated with the prevalence, onset, frequency and seriousness of delinquency (Maguin

and Loeber, 1996). Children who have poor involvement in school and have weak bonding and low commitment to school show poor academic motivation and become delinquent later in their school (e.g., Hawkins et al., 1998; Le Blanc, Coté, and Loeber, 1991). The findings of the present study also report similar findings from Model 2 that are consistent with work of Le Blanc et al. (1991), who found that male students engaged in delinquency are poorly committed to their school and have more tendency towards “shorter plans” for their schooling.

Models 3 and 4, depicting the findings related to classroom environment and victimisation, also present a significant role of poor student–student relationships, student–teacher relationships and awareness in delinquent behaviour. The study indicates that when students do not experience positive feelings toward their school, they become deviant (Dornbusch et al., 2001). Teachers and parents with poor relationship with the child/student cannot teach them pro-social values and students face problems in school learning. Their fellow group also show a rejection towards them and do not engage in healthy relationship with students (Simons et al., 1991). Our findings also have suggested that poor involvement in school leads to delinquent behaviour among school children.

Another important finding related to television violence from Model 6 demonstrate that viewing TV violence has an impact on the child’s behaviour. Some studies have also reported that antisocial behaviours, such as violence, is learned after viewing violence on TV (Anderson, Gentile, and Buckley, 2007; Loeber et al., 1998). For instance, Huesmann and Miller (1994) provided that a child who is more exposed to TV violence at age eight was found more involved in aggressive behaviours and was found to prefer the more violent programs on TV than the other children.

Though all the factors have been found significant factors in terms of delinquent behaviour at school, the main objective of exploring the one most significant contributing factor amongst the all factors revealed that classroom environment plays an important role in the prevalence and frequency of delinquent behaviour at school. The R^2 (.33**) and adjusted R^2 (.28) show a greater variance in delinquent behaviour as compared to the other factors.

CONCLUSION

This study has added significant findings to the literature available on factors of delinquency. Nevertheless, the significant element of parental involvement, prosocial involvement in school, victimisation, aggression, family conflict and television violence has been affirmed by the findings of the present study, but the greatest contributing factor to delinquency is classroom environment. Poor student–student relationships, inadequate student–teacher relationships and less awareness/reporting lead to delinquent behaviour at school.

IMPLEMENTATION

Some aspects of children’s behaviours, such as temperament, are established during the first five years of life. This foundation, coupled with children’s exposure to certain risk and protective factors, influences the likelihood of children becoming delinquent at a young age. However, the identification of these multiple risk factors has proven to be a difficult task. Although no magic solutions exist for preventing or correcting child delinquency, identifying risk and protective factors remains essential to developing interventions to prevent child delinquency from escalating into chronic criminality.

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