

Family Environment and Juvenile Delinquency

Alok Kumar

Associate Professor in Sociology,
C. C. S. University, Meerut

Email Id: dralokccsu@gmail.com

Abstract. As the child spends most of the time in the family his early life experiences in that family lay the ground work for the type of future behaviour and the development of attitudes values and a life style. He may turn into a delinquent or a good citizen of a nation. So the aim of the present article is to focus on the family factors associated with juvenile delinquency.

Introduction

Family is the basic unit of society. It is one of the major factors influencing personality and all round development of an individual .It is the family which lays the foundation for patters of adjustment, attitude development, and finally personality and cognitive development. The influence of family is important not only childhood but also during all stages of development. However, family members exert greater influence at some stages than others. The time spent with the family members, the control family members have over the child's behavior, the emotionally toned relationship the child develops with his/her family and the secure home environment all combine to make the family most important for the child or the individual (Sharma, 2012).

The early life experiences of the child lay the basis for the type of future conduct and values. It is the families which provides feeling of security, meet the physical and psychological needs, guides and help in times of problems and caters to all the wishes and whims of children. Not only this, family is a source of affection, acceptance and companionship. A warm trusting and accepting home environment leads healthy personality development. Whereas parental hostility, rejection and inconsistency leads to poor personality development and can all contribute to delinquent behaviour. The child feels emotionally insecure and feelings of being

unwanted and rejected also facilitate the development of behaviour which in course of time leads to juvenile delinquency and adult criminality.

It is the family in which the child learns to deal with emotions and drives and to handle problems in a socially acceptable manner. When the family does not help their wards to adjust to the environment, they lose the most important means of psychological support and the most effective agent for socialization. According to Kaufman and Reiner (1964), “Early childhood experiences within the family determine in great part how the youngsters will be moulded and will eventually adapt to the external environment.”

Juvenile delinquency means youthful offence. It means any law breaking behavior in a youth presumably below 18 years of age and above 10 years of age. Studies on juvenile delinquency reveal that the maximum number of delinquents comes from those homes where family ties are shattered. The Glueck and Glueck (1968) after 10 years of their intensive research on the casual factors of delinquency concluded that, “among the forces that count most in determining whether or not, a boy will be conditioned to antisocial behaviour is the home atmosphere”.

The family is a basic social institution and is considered to be, “the cradle of personality”, because during the early formative years, the basic reaction patterns of thinking and feeling and the norms and values that assert a durable and persisting influence upon the individual is through the family. The family being the chief socializing agent controls or contribute to delinquent behaviour.

In order to understand the influence and importance of family as a potent cause of juvenile delinquency, it is necessary to comprehend the following factors:

Broken Homes/Families: A study of juvenile delinquency has revealed that the greatest numbers of delinquents come from broken families (Pope, Lovell & Hsia, 2002). A broken family as the term indicates is one in which family bonds have been destroyed. A family is not constituted by a number of people living together but by their mutual intimate relationship. Absence of this intimacy results in the breaking up of a family, and it is in broken families that juvenile delinquents come to live. In any such family a child is not looked after properly. Broken homes are associated with parental separation, divorce, death or parental absence. In a broken family, the relationship of husband and wife, parents and children brother and sisters lose their healthy

nature. Hence, it is only natural if the children choose the wrong path that ruins their lives. Glueck and Glueck (1968) found that half of the delinquents were reared by one parent, whereas only 10% of the non-delinquents were reared by one parent.

Attitude of Parents: In the family factor in juvenile delinquency another important condition is the relations between the parents and children. According to the preface writer of women of the street, a probing and searching analysis of the prostitutes of London, the problem of the prostitutes has its origin in the relationship between the child and the parents. Often when the child is deprived of love and scolded constantly of revolt and hatred so that runs away from the house at the earliest opportunity and falls into a life of crime. Disregard on the part of parents induces feelings of insecurity in the children with the result that they develop mental complexes. If the parents try to conceal many facts of their own life from children, the tendency towards crime is only aggravated. When the queries of the children are not solved by the parents and on the top of it when lies are told and they learn the truth from their servants or other people outside the family, they feel emotionally and socially insecure which injures their feelings and may indulge in crimes.

Character and Conduct of Parents: The child's personality is considerably influenced by the character and conduct of its parents. One rarely comes across a child who has been able to mould his behaviour according to socially accepted values and conceptions in the face of his parents telling lies, hypocritical behaviour, sexual immorality, thieving and cheating others. If the mother is already involved in prostitution, the child will have little hesitation in following suit and with the worst conceivable consequences. If a father is smuggler, it is most likely that the child will be a smuggler because of his imitating nature (Savignac, 2009).

A child's personality is also susceptible to the influence of his brothers and sisters personality apart from the personality and mutual relationship of the parents. This influence is more potent in the case of girls as they are not exposed to external influences as much as boys who remain in the home for a considerably less period of time. If the senior children in the family manifest criminal tendencies or are engaged in immoral behaviour, the youngsters are invariably influenced by it. If the elder sister shows criminal tendencies, the younger sister is more likely to follow it i.e. is more apt to follows her example (Wright & Wright, 1994).

Family Tension: Family tension is one of the potent causes of delinquency. Abrahamsen (1960) believes that family tension greatly contributes to delinquent behaviour. The tension that exists in many 'intact' families of delinquents results from hostility, hatred, bickering, etc. This type of tension-filled family environment is definitely not suitable for making the youngster feel secure and content long term tension in the family reduces its cohesiveness and affects the parent's ability and capacity to provide a suitable and congenial atmosphere for child rearing and family problem solving family tensions and conflicts produce psychologically broken homes. Andry (1960) found that tension in homes of delinquents is more manifested through inter- sibling quarrels.

McCord and Zola (1959) agreed that cohesive homes produce few delinquents, whereas homes and families where tension and hostility exist are good breeding grounds for future delinquents. Similarly, Rodman and Grams (1967), found that disruptive, quarrelsome and tension producing relationships between parents not only affect the marital relationship but disrupt the entire family which often contributes to juvenile delinquency.

Parental Rejection: Parental rejection produces hazardous effects on the child's personality. Child develops feelings of inadequacy followed by reactions of unhappiness and resentment towards parents who do not provide adequate care and love to the child and also who do not recognize his achievements. Due to this he becomes unresponsive to others and tends to be hostile, aggressive, uncooperative and disobedient. According to Trojanowicz and Morash (1987), from the psychological standpoint, emotional deprivation as a result of lack of parental love has much to do with juvenile delinquency. A child who is subjected to emotional deprivation due to parental rejection is normally deprived of the environment and opportunities for experiencing pleasant emotions like curiosity, happiness, joy, love and affection, rather this environment provides enough potentialities for the development of unpleasant emotions like anger, fear, hatred, jealousy and envy an sowing the seeds for delinquency. The rejection may be through the following types of parental behaviour:

- Emphasis on the child's physical and mental shortcomings.
- Negative attitude showing scorn, humiliation, threats and ridicule.
- Severe punishment

- Desertion or eviction
- Unfavourable statement to the child that he is unwanted. Bandura and Walters (1977), found a direct correlation between rejecting hostile fathers and delinquent behaviour.

Parents' rejection means overt behaviour towards a child leading him to believe that he is neither loved nor valued by his parents. All this leads to delinquency and other behavioural disorders.

Family Economics: The majority of the criminals and delinquents come from poor homes and are either unemployed or engaged in unskilled and low income occupations. Economic status of family is very much related to delinquency and other antisocial acts Peterson and Becker (1965) have supported the above view that lower the socio-economic status, greater is the probability of their children to turn into criminals or sociopaths. They turn to crime as a solution to their economic difficulties. In other words poverty acts as a powerful motivator for delinquent activities in many cases. Low income compels children of such families to share the economic burden and to neglect their education. They are forced to go for work in canteens, hotels, etc., where they are allured to commit various types of delinquent activities. Girls working in such hotels or restaurants are easily lured to sex crimes since their wages are poor, residences are dirty, and homes of work are long. In fact many times the desires of boys and girls in poor families remain unfulfilled and they want to gratify them by fair or foul means. Yet there is no reason to conclude that poverty surely leads to delinquency, because there are instances where it is found that delinquency abounds in many affluent families on the other hand, it is found to be remarkable absent in a number of poverty stricken families.

Family Control: Control refers to how much set rules, and procedures are used by the parents to run a family life. Parental control is an important aspect of child rearing. This can be direct as well as indirect. Indirect control is through the identification process, which ultimately results in development of an adequate conscience structure whereas direct control is by the use of rewards and punishments. Several studies have revealed that methods of control, processes and forms of discipline play an important role in the development of delinquent behavior, just as tension, rejection and a broken home affect the stability of the family. Autocratic type of control is the worst kind of child rearing practices which results in outward adherence and compliance and inward resentment against parents. McCord and Zola (1959) found that loose or erratic

discipline involving punitive methods was strongly related to delinquency, whereas consistent discipline either by punitive or love-oriented methods, was significantly related to non-delinquency. For people control among children, strict discipline i.e. both the parents shall exert a single and united approach in controlling their children. Faulty parental discipline and lack of proper control leads to delinquency (Reiss, 1951).

Parental Relationship: The attitudes which parents hold towards each other definitely affect the attitudes and behaviour of children. A number of studies have been conducted on parental relationships which have invariably proved that the problem children and adolescents come from (a) broken homes (b) homes with marital friction or those with a step mother, or a step father. If the parents maintain cordial relationship with affection, mutual respect for each other and cooperation in the solution of problems they create a desirable atmosphere for the development of feelings of security and self-esteem in their children which leads upon the attitude and behavior of children leading them to indulge in anti-social activities by becoming delinquents. They do so for achieving personal and social gratification which they lack in their homes. They get lured by the activities outside the home and thus become victims of violence (Cashwell & Vace, 1996).

Conclusion:

Families play a vital role in the development of children and youth. Studies of juvenile delinquency have shown that the family environment can present as either a risk or protective factor. Understanding the family factors that influence delinquent behaviour can help to enhance the design and development of effective crime prevention programs for vulnerable families.

References

- Abrahamsen (1960). *The Psychology of Crime* 129.
- Andry, R. (1960). *Delinquency and parental pathology*. New York: Methuen.
- Bandura, A. & Walters, R. (1977). *Social learning and personality development*. New York: Holt Rinehart.
- Cashwell, C.S. & Vace, N.A. (1996). Family functioning and risk behaviors: influence on adolescent delinquent. *Journal of School Counselor*, 44,105-114
- Glueck, S. and Glueck, E. (1968). *Delinquents and non-delinquents in perspective*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- Kaufman, I. & Reiner, B.S. (1964). Character disorders in parents of delinquents. Family Service Association of America, New York.
- McCord, W., McCord, J., & Zola, I.K. (1959). Origins of Crime: A New Evaluation of the Cambridge-Somerville Youth Study. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Peterson, D.R. & Becker, W.C. (1965). Family Interaction and Delinquency. In H.C. Quay (Ed.), Juvenile Delinquency. Princeton, N.J. Van Nostrand
- Pope, C. E., Lovell, R., and Hsia, H.M. (2002). Disproportionate minority confinement: A review of the research literature from 1989 through 2001. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Reiss, Albert J. (1951). Delinquency as the failure of personal and social control. *American Sociological Review*, XVI, 196-206.
- Rodman H. & Grams P. (1967). Juvenile delinquency and the family: A review and discussion. In *President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, Task Force on Juvenile Delinquency, Task Force Report: Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Savignac, J. (2009). Families, youth and delinquency: The state of knowledge, and family-based juvenile delinquency programs (Research Report 2009-1). Ottawa: National Crime Prevention Centre, Public Safety Canada.
- Sharma, A. (2012). Aggressive behavior in students: the role of family environment. *Advances in Asian Social Science*, 3(1), 622-628
- Trojanowicz, R. & Morash, M. (1987). Juvenile delinquency: concepts and control. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Simon and Schuster.
- Wright, K.D. & Wright, K.E. (1994). Family life delinquency and crime: A Policy Makers Guide. Research Summary. Washington, D.C. 4-21