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Contributing Factors Of Juvenile Delinquency

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Abstract:

In the India, juvenile delinquency is a social problem affecting families, communities, and society as a whole. Sociological thinkers, too, have identified a variety of factors that they believe contribute to juvenile delinquency. These factors include the lack of parents supervision; a lack of discipline; a lack parental monitoring; the lack of attachment to prosocial institutions such as school, community, and church; low income; poor housing; a large family size; low educational attainment; associations with other delinquents; drug or alcohol abuse; and the criminal behavior of parents and siblings. The role of the family as a social institution is essential to prepare children for adulthood. The family is comprised of values and norms and different statuses and roles, all of which are devoted to achieving the goals of the family as well as that of society. However, this is no easy task. Families are often scrutinized when a child displays delinquent behavior of particular concern are the ways that families might promote or prevent juvenile delinquency. Among the areas of concern when examining the link between family and delinquency are traditional family values, child-rearing practices, the influence of the mass media, and parental responsibility. Children need parental affection, support, love, cohesion, acceptance, and parental involvement. When these elements are missing, the risk of delinquency increases.

1.Introduction

The role of the family as a social institution is essential to prepare children for adulthood. The family is comprised of values and norms and different statuses and roles, all of which are devoted to achieving the goals of the family as well as that of society. However, this is no easy task. Families are often scrutinized when a child displays delinquent behavior of particular concern are the ways that families might promote or prevent juvenile delinquency. Among the areas of concern when examining the link between family and delinquency are traditional family values, child-rearing practices, the influence of the mass media, and parental responsibility.

Sociological thinkers, too, have identified a variety of factors that they believe contribute to juvenile delinquency. These factors include the lack of parents supervision; a lack of discipline; a lack parental monitoring; the lack of attachment to prosocial institutions such as school, community, and church; low income; poor housing; a large family size; low educational attainment; associations with other delinquents; drug or alcohol abuse; and the criminal behavior of parents and siblings. Sociological thinkers suggest that it is not just one single factor, but many factors working together, that increase the likelihood of juvenile delinquency.

In the India, juvenile delinquency is a social problem affecting families, communities, and society as a whole. National Crime Records Bureau statics show that violent crime accounts for approximately 12 percent and that property crime accounts for approximately 88 percent of all serious crime in the India. The NCRB's Reports estimate that about 1.4 million violent crimes and 9.8 million property crimes occurred nationwide in 2008, with 2.3 million people arrested for both types of offences. Of those arrested in 2008 for violent and property crimes, about 415,000 (approximately 18 percent of the arrests) were persons under the age of 18, and of these arrests, about 118,000 (approximately 28 percent) were of persons under the age of 15. Given these statistics, it is understandable why there is concern over juvenile delinquency.

Juvenile delinquency refers to persons under a state-established age limit who violate the penal code. This means the law breaking was done by a child. In the eyes of the law, the only difference between a criminal and a delinquent is the persons's age, and the state-established age limit varies from state to state. In the eyes of the law, a juvenile officially becomes an adult at 16 in 3 states, at 17 in 7 states, at 18 in 13 states, and at 19 in 1 state (NCRB). Furthermore, delinquency is comprised of two parts. The first part includes property crimes like arson, burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft, while violent

crimes include assault, robbery, rape, and murder, all of which would be considered crimes if committed by adults. The second part includes status offences that are law violations that only apply to juveniles. This would include curfew violations, running away, and truancy, these status offences are not violations of criminal law but are undesirable behaviors unlawful only for juveniles. It is believed that these offences, if not dealt with, may lead to more serious delinquent behaviours in the future.

Therefore, the juvenile justice system takes steps to correct the behavior of juveniles and to try to change their behavior before they get involve in more serious property or violent crimes it is the goal of juvenile courts, and has been since the first juveniline court was established in 1899, to prevent delinquent behavior and rehabilitate young offenders as opposed to just punishing them. This is why juveniles are not labeled criminal and their hearings are conducted in an informal atmosphere, where testimony and background data are introduced as opposed to a trial that determines guilt or innocence. In addition, the juvenile-court judge plays more of a parental role, reviewing the behavior of the juvenile offender in a less threatening environment than that of a adult criminal court. The juvenile court judge then determines an appropriate form of discipline, if any, and a course of action designed to prevent future delinquent behavior. Interestingly, many researches believe that the majority of serious delinquent offences are committed by a relatively small group of offenders and expect this delinquent population to maintain the antisocial behavior into adulthood.

2. Arenas For Debate

2.1. Family Values

The debate over the family's role in juvenile delinquency covers a variety of areas such as family values, child-rearing practices, the influence of the mass media, and parental responsibility. The central focus of this debate is on the lack of traditional family values in a so called traditional family. Conservatives believe that alternative family forms like single-parent families, blended families, cohabitating families, and gay and lesbian families fail to instill traditional values in children. They believe that the traditional family is the foundation for strong values, norms, and an overall healthy society. Therefore, they push for a return to the traditional family, where mothers stay home and fathers are bread winners, with a focus on traditional family values. In addition, they encourage parents to spend more time with their children and focus more on the family's

needs as opposed to the individual's needs. For them, anything that threatens the family is considered a social problem. As a result, they believe that living together without marriage (i.e. cohabitation), premarital child bearing, divorce, and single parenting are social problems that weaken society and place children at risk. Conservatives point out that children are most affected by these social problems in that these factors not only increase their chances of ending up in a single-parent family, but they also increase their likelihood of living in poverty and put them at a higher risk for divorce as adults. The solution, according to the conservatives, is to abolish no-fault divorce laws and discourage couples from living together in low-commitment relationships that favour so-called me-first values that support individualism over commitment.

Liberals, on the other hand, are more tolerant and supportive of the various alternative forms of families such as singlehood, cohabitation, single-parent families, blended families, and same-sex families. They believe people have the right to choose what type of family is right for them. They point out that family diversity is not new and that a variety of family forms have existed throughout history. In addition, liberals believe that this diversity is actually a solution to the historical problem of male-dominated households. They believe that the traditional family limits the opportunities of women and traps them in a male-dominated environment, which, in some cases, can be an abusive environment. According to liberals, alternative family forms are not the problem. The problem lies in the lack of tolerance for alternative family forms, in the push for the ideal traditional family (which discourages opportunities for women), and in poverty—all of which have a greater impact on women and children. Therefore, liberals feel the solution is to encourage more tolerance for alternative family forms, expand affordable child care programs so more women can work, and to enforce antidiscrimination laws so working women will be paid as much as men.

2.2 Child Rearing

Much of the debate over child rearing in single-parent families is focused on the lack of parental supervision and the lack of guidance. Critics point out that, in many cases, single parents simply do not have enough time to meet the demands of adequate child rearing because of the demands placed on them to be the bread winner and head of household as well as still maintain somewhat of a personal life. Unfortunately, the result is that children may not receive the parental supervision, guidance, and emotional support they need to develop into law-abiding adolescents. Consequently, more

delinquent children come from single-parent families than two-parent families. Estimates are that children from single-parent families are about 10 to 15 percent more likely to become delinquent than are children with similar social characteristics from two parent families (Coleman and Kerbo 2006). Children who are raised in an affectionate, supportive, and accepting home are less likely to become delinquents. Moreover, children whose parents model pro-social behavior in addition to adequately supervising and monitoring their children's behavior, friends, and where about, as well as assist their children in problem solving and conflict resolution are less likely to engage in delinquent behavior. The bottom line is that parents have the ability to teach their children self-control, right from wrong, and respect for others, or they can teach their children antisocial, aggressive, or violent behavior. Therefore, children who grow up in a home with parents who are uninvolved or negatively involved are at greater risk for becoming juvenile delinquents.

Of course, critics of child rearing in single-parent families are not simply advocating more discipline. If parental discipline is too strict or too lenient, it can promote delinquency. There is strong evidence to show that children raised in single parents families –specifically, mother-only homes-are at a greater disadvantage than those raised in two-parent families. Single-parent neighborhoods, particularly with high levels of mother-only households, have a higher rate of delinquency, because working single-mothers have less opportunity to adequately supervise their children, leaving them more vulnerable to the influences of deviant peers. Critics also point out that, in addition to higher rates of delinquency, children reared in single-parent families, specifically mother-only homes, are more likely to live in poverty, score lower on academic achievement tests, make lower grades, and drop out of high school.

2.3 The Mass Media

Another area for debate is the influence of the mass media on juvenile delinquency. The mass media refer to television, movies, music, video games, print media, sports, and the Internet. All of these have considerable influence over attitudes and behavior, especially among those under the age of 18. Not surprisingly, the mass media are a controversial agent of socialization because of how much they influence attitudes and behavior. Because we live in a society that seems to crave violence, it is no surprise that these different forms of mass media cater to the desires of the public by producing violent television shows, movies, music, video games, and overzealously cover violent incidents

in the news. This excessive exposure to violence not only desensitizes us as a society, but for those in under the age of 18, these influences seem to have a number of serious effects. Some of the effects include:

- Aggressive behavior: media violence teaches children to be more aggressive so they tend to be less sensitive to pain and suffering;
- Fearful attitudes: Media violence causes children to be more fearful of the world around them; and
- Desensitization: media violence desensitizes children to real-life and fantasy violence, making it seem a normal part of everyday life.

Exposure to media violence also increases a child's desire to see more violence in real-life and in entertainment, influencing them to view violence as an acceptable way to handle conflicts.

Other studies link excessive exposure to media violence to health problems, alcohol and tobacco usage, sexual activity, poor school performance, and more. These studies show that the effects of excessive exposure include: (1) decreased physical activity, which leads to obesity and other health problems; (2) photic seizures; (3) insomnia; (4) a decreased attention span; (5) impaired school performance; (6) decreased family communication; (7) increased sexual activity, which may lead to teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases; and (8) an increased usage of alcohol and tobacco. Children ages 8 to 18 spend, on average, 44.5 hours per week (equivalent to 6.5 hours daily) in front a computer, watching television, or playing video games; by the time a child reaches age 18, he or she will have witnessed on television alone, with average viewing time, over 200,000 acts of violence, which include 40,000 acts of murder (Mulimani 2009). Children will view more than 100,000 acts of violence, including 8,000 acts of murder, by their first day in junior high school. Given the frequency of exposure to violence, children's violence and delinquency should not be surprising.

All media violence is not equal in its effects, however. The violence portrayed in cartoons is usually presented in a humorous fashion (67 percent of the time) and is less likely to depict long term consequences (5 percent of the time). Considering that the average preschooler watches mostly cartoons, this poses a greater risk for younger children because they have difficulty distinguishing between fantasy and reality. Therefore, they are more likely to imitate the violence they have seen. Re-searchers indicate that parents can be effective in reducing the negative effects of violent media

viewing. Some of this can occur by parental understanding and utilization of television ratings. Other suggestions include watching television with one's child to permit discussion of difficult issues, turn the television off if the program is unacceptable, limit the time and type of programs watched, screen programs before hand, and explain the differences between fantasy and reality. The single factor most closely associated with aggressive behavior in children was watching violence on television. In testimony before Congress in 1992, they observed that television violence affects young people of all ages, of both genders, at all socio-economic levels. They noted that the effect is not limited to children who are already disposed to being aggressive (Bhat 2010). It is interesting that this has been a major issue for decades and that many key people, including former Surgeon General Dr. Jesse Steinfeld, have testified in numerous hearings on the topic, yet it is still a major issue.

2.4 Parental Responsibility

Parental responsibility is yet another area of concern regarding juvenile delinquency. Fundamentally, parental responsibility suggests that parents are to ensure that their children are protected, their needs are met, and their behavior is monitored. In addition, parents are responsible for socializing their children by installing in them a sense of right, wrong, and the norms of society, helping them develop the skills they need to participate in society and shaping their overall development so that they are productive, law-abiding adolescents and adults.

However, then parents fail to ensure that their child or children develop into law-abiding adolescents, who is to blame? To what extent are parents responsible for their children's behavior? This has been an issue throughout the history, and over time various types of legislation have addressed this specific question. Historically, the overall objective of these various laws was to require parents to provide the necessities for their children and to prohibit abuse or abandonment of minor children. However, due to the growing concern over juvenile delinquency, legislators have been prompted to expand laws regarding parental responsibility. More recently, parental responsibility goes beyond simply feeding, clothing, and lavaging one's children. Recent laws hold parents accountable for their child's actions by imposing various sanctions, including possible incarceration, fines, community service, and restitution. In addition, many states have enacted laws that required more parental involvement in juvenile court dispositions such as hearings, court-ordered treatment, counseling, training, rehabilitation and educational programs, and

probation. Unfortunately, there is not enough comprehensive research on this subject to fully understand the effectiveness of parental responsibility laws. Whether the laws accomplish their intended purpose and have an effect in juvenile crime rates remains to be seen.

3. Conclusion

Solutions to the problem of juvenile delinquency are varied and have shown limited success at reducing crime among youth. Perhaps the slow pace of change is the result of the different schools of thought regarding the origins of delinquent behavior working in opposition to each other. Family, as the primary institution for rearing children, has been targeted as both the cause of and a preventive measure for juvenile delinquency. For some constituencies, the solution is encouraging traditional two-parent families with traditional values while discouraging other family forms such as single-parent families, cohabitating families, and same-sex families. For others, the solution is tolerance of alternative family forms and more focus on the overall well-being of children regardless of their parent's marital status or sexual orientation.

Sociological thinkers have determined that it is not just one single factor that increases the likelihood of juvenile delinquency, but rather many factors in conjunction. Of the many factors, advocates have determined that healthy home environment is the single most important factor and that adequate parental supervision is the second most important factor in decreasing the likelihood of delinquent behavior. Understandably, parents play a crucial role in a child's moral development, so it is their job to install in their children a good sense of right and wrong and to promote healthy development in a healthy environment. Therefore, adolescents who live in a home environment with a lack of parental supervision and monitoring, poor or inconsistent discipline, a lack of positive support, a lack of parental control, neglect, and poverty are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior. On the other hand, for those adolescents in a positive home environment – which includes family support, nurturance, monitoring, and involvement – statistics show they are more likely to engage in prosocial behavior. In other words, children need parental affection, support, love, cohesion, acceptance, and parental involvement. When these elements are missing, the risk of delinquency increases.

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