

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

**CORRELATES OF JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AMONG JAILED
DELINQUENTS IN GONDAR, ETHIOPIA**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationships among neighborhood condition, school problems, parent adolescent communication, peer relation and religiosity on juvenile delinquency. Self-reported questionnaires were collected from 107 juvenile delinquents aged 11-18 years. Six standardized instruments of Amharic versions were administered. The rate of juvenile delinquency was significantly and positively correlated with the neighborhood condition, school problems, poor family communication, and peer relation. Negative significant relationships were also observed between juvenile delinquency and religiosity and open family communication. All variables together accounted for 88.6 % of the explained variance. More specifically, the strongest influence was from neighborhood condition followed by open family communication and school problems. The paper concludes that to tackle delinquent behavior proactive interventions are essential at family, school and community levels.

Keywords: correlates, juvenile delinquency, jailed delinquents, Gondar Correction Center.

INTRODUCTION

Juvenile delinquency is a recognized social problem across many societies (Junger-Tas et al., 2010) and a popular issue of social research. Juvenile delinquency can be defined as illegal behaviors of a person under the age of 18 (The Cambridge Dictionary of Psychology, 2009). It encompasses a range of norm-breaking behaviors for which adolescents are criminally responsible such as, among other instances of delinquency, drug use, violent offenses against other persons and carrying weapon (Marte, 2008). It has been found that most of the criminals began to engage in criminal act at the age of thirteen years (Steve, Maurice, Veronica & Jane, 2005).

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There is no universally accepted definition of juvenile delinquency at least for two reasons. First, the minimum age for criminal responsibility varies from country to country (e.g. 7 in Sudan, 9 in Ethiopia or 18 in Belgium). Second, some of the behaviors identified as juvenile delinquency such as use of alcohol or not attending the school in some countries are not illegal in others.

Juvenile crimes slow down the development of a society and cause major distress and damage to victims, perpetrators, and the society at large (Nas, DeCastro & Koops, 2005; Shamim, Batool, Zafar & Hashmi, 2009). Adolescent crime has been studied using many labels. The most common label that has been used is delinquency. The study of delinquency literature highlights the role of some prominent factors, the most important of which are family-related and peers factors (Brendgen et al., 2000; Pearce & Haynie, 2004). Among family process variables, parental monitoring has been identified in the literature as one of the proximal determinants of early development and maintenance of antisocial and delinquent behavior in children and adolescents (Singer, Flannery & Guo, 2004). Others indicate socio-economic conditions, especially poverty, are of the prime importance in a young person's life (Nisar, Ullah, Ali & Alam, 2015).

Psychologists, sociologists and criminologists the world over have long debated on the various causes and determinants of delinquency (Nisar et al., 2015). Research findings on causes and contributing factors of juvenile delinquency are mixed, contradictory and inconclusive. Understanding the true cause of crime remains a difficult problem (Seigel, 2003). Searching for a single cause in crime studies often leads to wrong conclusions by attempting to deal with only parts of the issue. Such attempts would eliminate the possible causal explanation of a variety of phenomena. This view of causation is inappropriate because of the existence of multiple causes or factors in human behavior (Shoemaker, 1996). Indeed, it is quite difficult to identify a single factor that independently determines the features of a crime. Only possible explanations could be provided on the identifiable aspects of crimes (Nega Jibat & Berhanu Nigussie, 2015).

Taken all together, at different setting and situations there are different reasons for juvenile delinquency. This also holds true in the present study site, where the possible factors have not been well investigated yet. Consequently, there is a need to examine correlating variables of juvenile delinquency in the Ethiopian context.

Correlates of juvenile delinquency

The family is believed to be the most significant agent of socialization and to have a positive impact on the behavior of its members through open communication of values, beliefs, norms and other codes of conduct. The reverse might be true for those families characterized by potential theft, vandalism or robbery. Such families may at least indirectly instruct their members to behave in their traditional way (Regoli & Hewitt, 2006). Additionally, it is believed that families which are characterized by poor communication among members may fail to teach their members what is

believed to be good conduct.

Scholars in psychology and sociology have demonstrated the impact of peers on adolescent behavior. For instance, Regoli and Hewitt (2006) revealed that having peers who are involved in delinquent behavior is the most significant predictor of juvenile delinquency. Similarly, Regoli and Hewitt (2006), summarized studies of religiosity which depict mixed results. Some revealed that religiosity is negatively related to delinquency while some others claimed that there is no link between religiosity and delinquency. However, a meta analysis of 60 scientific studies conducted over the last 30 years showed that religiosity can have significant deterrent effect on criminal behavior. Juvenile delinquency is also assumed to be determined by the extent of juvenile bond with their social settings such as schools. This assumption is held by social bond theory. This can be seen in terms of the attachment of juveniles to their school. Regoli and Hewitt (2006) have stated that children who like their school conform to its rules and regulations and are less likely to commit crime. Several other studies argue that neighborhood conditions such as social structure, bond to school and control determine juvenile delinquency. For instance, Sampson (1997) found that neighborhood control is significant inhibitor of adolescent delinquency. Social disorganization (i.e. social structure) is also strongly related to juvenile violence (Rhodes & Jason, 2005).

To date, very limited effort has been made to characterize the situation of juvenile delinquency and its correlates in Ethiopia. This study aims at opening social science research in Ethiopia to this important area of study and therefore turning into the stepping stone to assess the correlates of juvenile delinquency in the Ethiopian context. In this study, correlates of juvenile delinquency refer to factors associated with criminality. They include only juvenile family interaction, peer influence, neighborhood, bond to school, and religiosity.

Local studies on juvenile delinquency

The literature on criminality and related issues in Ethiopia is scant. Moreover, the studies available mainly focus on adult criminality and disregard juvenile delinquency, while using secondary data, and charactering profiles of criminals (e.g. age, gender, occupation, educational level and marital status). Hence, no detail of personal offender or victim is obtained which, in turn, hampers statistical manipulation to determine relationship between crime and its correlates (Nega Jibat & Berhanu Nigussie, 2015). Besides, most of these studies are conducted in the Oromia region and in Addis Ababa (e.g. Andargatchew, 1988, 2004; Daniel Wondimu, 2004; Nega Jibat & Berhanu Nigussie, 2014, 2015).

For instance, Nega Jibat and Berhanu Nigussie (2014, 2015) analyzed secondary data in the Oromia region. The total number of criminals reported in their study was 96,300 (2011/2012), 85,100 male and 11,200 female offenders. About 37% of those criminals committed violent crimes. The ratio of male to female offenders was 7.6:1. The dominance of male over female both in criminality and victimization is the extension of their social position with

the social structure and the result of gender role socialization. Age group 19 to 30 was found to be the most criminal population with the criminal rate of 828 per 100,000 people. Unfortunately, the relationship between educational statuses, types of occupation/employment and marital status, on the one hand, and criminality, on the other, were less than conclusive mainly because of the lack of adequate information on such variables for individual criminals and victims or the fact that police data consisted only on aggregates. Victimization rate was higher for males and for the 31-50 age categories (Nega Jibat & Berhanu Nigusie, 2015).

In the present study area there are many juvenile adolescent in the correction center and the problem also exists in the youth population. Nevertheless, no study on the correlating factors of adolescents' criminal act has been conducted or published. This has also hampered devising any intervention to tackle this social problem. For this reason, it is a pressing need to investigate empirically this issue and to suggest feasible interventions. The very purpose of this study is to fill this gap and to address the following questions: What is the relationship between juvenile delinquency and associating factors (juvenile family communication, bond with school, peer relationship, neighborhood condition, and religiosity)? Which one of the above proposed factors influences juvenile delinquency at most?

METHODS

The major purpose of this study was to assess associating factors of juvenile delinquency employing correlational study design. The study was conducted in Gondar, north western Ethiopia. Samples were taken from one of the largest correction centers in the city. Although, the correction centre mainly hosts adult offenders, a significant number of juvenile offenders who were less than 18 years old are jailed together with adults. Among the 2,060 inmates of this correction center, 110 of them were below the age of 18. About 110 juvenile were taken for this study.

There were about 81 males (78.2 percent) and 26 females (21.8 percent) in the sample. The age range was from 11 to 18 years, with $M = 14.25$, $SD = 3.04$ for males and $M = 16.90$, $SD = 1.77$ for females. More than half (57.94%, 62) of the respondents were second cycle students (grade 6, 7 and 8) while 37.38% (40) of the respondents were first cycle students (grade 4 and 5), and the remaining 4.67% (5) were illiterates. Except for five respondents (who were daily laborers), all respondents were (95.23%, 102) students.

Measures

Juvenile-family interaction

To measure juvenile-family interaction, the parent-adolescent communication scale (PAC) of Barnes and Olson (1982) was adopted. The scale consists of two subscales: 1) open family communication, which measures positive aspects of parent adolescent communication and 2) problems in family communication, focusing on the negative aspects of communication. The scale consists of 20 items, for example: "My mother/father is always a good listener" and "My

mother/father insults me when she/he is angry with me". The items are arranged along a 5-point Likert-type scale and respondents rate themselves on each item, from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. In the present study PAC scale has Cronbach $\alpha = .87$ for open family communication, Cronbach $\alpha = 0.78$ for problems in family communication and Cronbach $\alpha=0.82$ for the global scale.

Peer relationship

To measure the level of pressure of peer relation, problem with friends' subscale of the Multi Problem Screening Inventory MPSI (Hudson, 1990) was adopted and used. Sample items were "I get along very well with my friends" and "My friends act like they do not care about me". The items are arranged along 8-point Likert-type scale and respondents rate themselves on each item, from 1 = none of the time to 7 = all of the time and X = does not apply to me. Its reliability is Cronbach $\alpha=.80$ for this subscale. The subscale produces a score ranging from 0 to 100 where a low score indicates the relative absence of the problem being measured, and higher scores indicate the presence of a more severe problem.

Neighborhood condition

To measure this variable the neighborhood subscale of the multi problem screening inventory (Hudson, 1990) was adopted and used. Sample items were "I really feel that I am disliked by my neighbors" and "I wish I had a different group of neighbors". The items are arranged along 8-point Likert-type scale and respondents rate themselves on each item, from 1 = none of the time to 7 = all of the time and X = does not apply to me. Its reliability was Cronbach $\alpha = .80$ for this subscale. This subscale produces a score ranging from 0 to 100 where a low score indicates the relative absence of the problem being measured, and higher scores indicate the presence of a more severe problem.

Problem with school

To measure this variable the problem with school subscale of multi-problem screening inventory (Hudson, 1990) was adopted and used. Examples for items include "I hate school" and "I enjoy my school work and studies". The items arranged along an 8-point Likert-type scale and respondents rate themselves on each item, from 1 = none of the time to 7 = all of the time and X = does not apply to me. Its reliability was Cronbach $\alpha = .80$ for this subscale. This subscale produces a score ranging from 0 to 100 where a low score indicates the relative absence of the problem being measured and higher scores indicate the presence of a more severe problem.

Religiosity

To measure religiosity, the spiritual assessment inventory (SIA) developed by Hall and Edwards (1996) was adopted and used. The scale consists of seventeen items. Examples for items include "I have a sense of how God is working in my life" and "God's presence feels real to me". The items arranged along 5-point Likert-type scale and respondents rate themselves on each item, from 1 = Not at all to 5 = Very true. The reliability of each subscale was

estimated using Cronbach’s coefficient alpha measure of internal consistency. Its reliability was Cronbach $\alpha = .89$ for this subscale.

Juvenile delinquency

To measure this variable, frequency of delinquent behavior scoring instrument (FDBSI) developed by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (2005) was used. The scale consists of twenty five items. Examples for items include “Cheated in school tests” and “Taken something from a store without paying for it”. The items arranged along 5-point Likert-type scale and respondents rate themselves on each item, from 0 = Never to 4 always. Its reliability was Cronbach $\alpha = .80$ for this subscale.

Procedures

This research was totally based on the consent of participants and willingness of North Gondar Correction and Gondar University administrative bodies. At the outset, the researcher gave brief orientation about the objectives of the study, the instructions of the tool and assured confidentiality to the respondents.

Data collection was done in collaboration with different people in the correction centers such as, the administrator, the guards and lawyers. But, before the administration of the questionnaire to the inmates, training was given to the coworkers who helped in data collection processes. Respondents were also told that they had the right to withdraw whenever they felt discomfort at any time. They were also assured of the anonymity of the responses and their responses would be only used for research purpose. The questionnaire was translated and presented in an Amharic version. A pilot test was conducted so that the questionnaire attains a desirable level of validity and reliability.

Analysis

Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to see the relationships among the variables (family juvenile interaction, peer relation, neighborhood condition, bond with school, religiosity) and juvenile delinquency). Regression analysis was done to examine which factor was more decisive in influencing

Table 1: *Correlation between juvenile delinquency and associating factors*

	RJD	PWN	PWS	PWP	RWG	OFC
PWN	.888**					
PWS	.749**	.711**				
PWP	.761**	.674**	.709**			
RWG	-.357**	-.325**	-.207	-.245*		
OFC	-.818**	-.764**	-.574**	-.637**	.260*	
PFC	.812**	.756**	.583**	.658**	-.290**	-.772**

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ $n=107$.

Table 2: Regression results of study variables to predict rate of juvenile delinquency

Variables	B	SE	β	R	R ²	F	t
Constant	-8.922	3.612		.941	.886	103.19**	-2.470**
TPWN	.246	.047	.387				5.276**
TPWS	.120	.049	.148				2.458**
TPWP	.197	.083	.142				2.358**
TRWG	-.028	.017	-.065				-1.626
TOFC	-.109	.036	-.203				-3.047**
TPFC	.093	.038	.164				2.455**

Note: *p < .05; **p < .0, n=107.

juvenile delinquency.

RESULTS

Table 1 showed that a statistically significant positive correlation emerged between rate of juvenile delinquency (RJD) and problem with neighborhood (PWN) ($r = .888$, $n = 107$, $p < 0.01$), problem with school bond (PWS) ($r = .749$, $n = 107$, $p < 0.01$), relationship with peers (PWP) ($r = .761$, $n = 107$, $p < 0.01$) and poor family communication PFC) ($r = .812$, $n = 107$, $p < 0.01$). However, negative correlations are found between juvenile delinquency and religiosity (RWG) ($r = -.357$, $n = 107$, $p < 0.01$), and open family communication (OFC) ($r = -.818$, $n = 107$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 2 depicts how much of the variance in the dependent variable (TRJD = total rate of juvenile delinquency) is explained by the model (which includes the predictor variables of total of problem with neighbors TPWN, total of problem with school TPWS, total of problem with peers TPWP, total of relationship with God TRWG, total of open family communication TOFC and total of poor family communication TPFC). So these factors explain 88.6 percent of the variance in total rate of juvenile delinquency TRJD.

The table also shows that problem with neighbors ($\beta = 0.387$, $F=103.19$, $t = 5.276$, $p < 0.01$), open family communication ($\beta = 0. -203$, $F = 103.19$, $t = 0. -3.047$, $p < 0.01$) and problem with school ($\beta = 0. 148$, $F = 103.19$, $t = 0. 2.358$, $p < 0.01$) significantly influence juvenile delinquency in the first three ranks respectively. When we look at the beta column to find which beta value is the largest (ignoring any negative signs out of the front), PWN made the strongest unique contribution to explaining the dependent variable, when the variance explained by all other variables in the model is controlled for. The beta value for Total of RWG was lowest ($\beta = 0.065$), indicating that it made less contribution.

DISCUSSION

In this study there was a strong and positive rate of delinquency associated with high levels of problem with neighbors. This result is congruent with that

of other studies (Sampson & Byron, 1989; Sampson, 1997) that categorized the neighborhood effect as two dimensional, control and ties. These studies emphasize the importance of neighborhood ties as the main measure of neighborhood effect in addition to neighborhood control in explaining the impact of neighborhood context on crime.

Previous studies have established an association between neighborhood ecology and delinquency (Johnson, Larson & Jang, 2000; Sampson, 1997). Jang and Johnson (2001) found that perceived neighborhood disorder, which is a sign of lack of social control, is significantly related to adolescent use of illicit drugs, marijuana and hard drugs. Such similarity with other findings could be attributed to the similarity in study subject (juveniles) and neighborhood influence.

The present study found out a positive correlation between the rate of delinquency and the problem with peers. The finding is supported by previous studies like Wellman and Berkowitz (1988). Consistent with the premise of differential association theory, a great number of empirical studies have shown that there are strong associations between peer delinquency and delinquent behavior (e.g. Agnew, 2001; Jensen, 1995). Empirical studies also support that delinquent peers are related to both initiation and contribution of adolescents' delinquent behaviors (Matsueda & Heimer, 1987). Furthermore, Gottfredson, and Hirschi (1990), who are major supporters of the importance of social bonding in explaining delinquency, acknowledged the strong influence of deviant peers on delinquency. The significant association consistently evidenced in this research gives credence to the idea that delinquency is best understood in the context of the peer group where common norms and behaviors emerge from locations in structured patterns of relationships.

This study showed that there was a strong, positive correlation with high levels of rate of delinquency associated with high levels of problem with school. Not surprisingly, the effect of the school social bond on delinquency has generally been supported by previous studies (Hawkins, Catalano & Miller, 1992; Joseph, 1996; Krohn & Massey, 1980; Lawrence, 1985; Thornberry et al., 1991). One possible explanation in the present study is that the lack of attachment to school, less social bond and greater deprivation of rights may lead to more delinquency among participants.

The present study also showed the strong, negative correlation between juvenile delinquency and open family communication, with high levels of rate of delinquency associated with low levels of open family communication. In addition it established a strong, positive correlation between juvenile delinquency and poor family communication, with high levels of rate of delinquency associated with high levels of poor family communication. Clark and Shields (1997) stated that the importance of positive communication for optimal family functioning has major implications for delinquent behavior. A large body of theoretical and empirical research has supported these findings (e.g. Cernkovich & Giordano, 1987; Hirschi, 1969; Rankin & Wells, 1990; Stern & Smith, 1997). Even though there are various ways of conceptualizing

parental behavior in terms of types and dimensions, parental attachment (affective ties that adolescents form with parents) is considered the key construct of parenting (Hirschi, 1969). This strong relationship may be due to the fact that parental attachment functions as a social support and control in inhibiting delinquent behaviors. The bonding of the juveniles with their family members strongly influences the rate of delinquency.

There was also a moderate, negative correlation with high levels of rate of delinquency associated with low levels of religiosity. For example, Shield (1984) found supportive evidence for religion's deterrent effect on delinquency even when controlling for parental support and educational commitment. However, one previous study (Benda, 1995) revealed that the inclusion of six major demographic variables and social control variables does not change the impact of religious effect on property crimes and crimes against persons. Furthermore, the same author reported that the effect of religiosity increases for crimes against persons when demographic variables and elements of social control theory are included in the model.

Johnson, Jang, Larson and Li (2001) found empirical evidence of an independent effect of religious belief on delinquent behavior for a national probability sample even when controlling for elements of social control and social learning as well as socio-demographic variables. However, the impact of religiosity was partly mediated by social control and social learning factors. However, Elifson, Petersen and Hadaway (1983) found that the independent effect of religiosity was not statistically significant. Burkett and Warren (1987) also reported that the relationship between religiosity and delinquency becomes statistically nonsignificant after controlling for family and peer variables. They concluded that the impact of religiosity on adolescent drug use was not direct but operated indirectly through peer associations.

Thus, it is worth discussing the possible causes of the difference in findings between the present study and some previous ones. A plausible explanation is that the impact of religion on delinquency may vary by religion or denomination and the extent to which the religion disapproves of particular behaviors. For instance, many religions do not teach against alcohol use (e.g., Catholicism, Judaism). Furthermore, even if adolescents have religion, it is possible that they see religion as irrelevant to experimenting with smoking and alcohol. In this case, religious sanctions may not have a strong effect on delinquency.

To compare the contribution of each independent variable the beta values are important. When we look at the beta column to find which beta value is the largest (ignoring any negative signs out the front), the largest beta coefficient is for total of PWN and the strongest unique contribution to explaining juvenile delinquency, when the variance explained by all other variables in the model is controlled for. The beta value for Total of RWG was slightly lowest, indicating that it made less of a contribution. Most previous researches (Jang & Johnson, 2001; Johnson, Larson, Li & Jang, 2000; Sampson, 1997; Sampson & Grove, 1989) gave emphasis on associations rather than

predictors of juvenile delinquency. But in this study neighborhood situation is a strong influence for the rate of juvenile delinquency.

CONCLUSION

Juvenile delinquency has direct and significant relationship with poor family communication, peer relationship, school problems and neighbors. Religiosity and open family communication has negative significant relationship with juvenile delinquency. The strongest influence was from neighborhood condition compared to other factors covered in this study.

Parent-adolescent communication, school problems, neighborhood conditions, delinquent peer association and religiosity should be promoted through various mechanisms as an important determinant of juvenile delinquency. Involving the wider community in appreciating the significance of parent-adolescent communication and identifying interventions to enhance communication on delinquency should be considered.

This study was conducted based on the available sample of delinquents in Gondar Correction Center. Their total number, but for those who volunteered for the study, could not be established. As a result, the statistical assumptions and procedures might not keep for analysis and the results could not be extrapolated. Despite this methodological limitation, the results of this study at least do represent a certain reality about correlates of delinquency in north Gondar zone and the region. Future research should address larger samples to identify the specific contribution of each variable to juvenile delinquency and how different variables mediate and moderate it. Besides, interview should be carried out in order to know what the motivations are behind the delinquents engaging in criminal acts.

Declaration of conflicting interest

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

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