You Can Choose Your Friends, But You Cannot Choose Your Family:

How Peer and Family Factors Impact Delinquency

By

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How Peer and Family Factors Impact Delinquency

Ashley Ross

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__________________________________________  Date

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this thesis is on the relationship of deviant peer association, parental structure, parental support, and parental maltreatment with delinquency. According to Edward Sutherland, criminal behavior is a learned behavior. His theory explains how associations can lead to criminal activity. In the same ways we learn through socialization the norms of society, we also learn criminal behavior. Data for this thesis were from a secondary analysis of information collected via a survey of students (N=39) at a small college in northeast Ohio. The value of this thesis is in examining the role of both family and peer factors in the potential influence they have on delinquency. Four of the six hypotheses proposed were supported by the data. Overall, the more delinquent the peers of the respondent the more delinquent the respondents are. Respondents with supportive parents reported less delinquency than those respondents with less supportive parents. Unexpectedly, family structure did not impact delinquency in a statistically significant manner. Future work may benefit on looking at other family and school dimensions in order to understand more completely and influence programs that address delinquency.
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To all of my closest friends and family,

this would not be possible without your love and support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This endeavor would not be possible without the following people:

Dr. John Hazy, my thesis committee advisor, for his guidance and support throughout my project as well as my masters program at Youngstown State University.

Dr. Allen Pierce, my thesis committee member, for his knowledgeable input and acceptance to stand on my thesis committee.

Attorney Patricia Wagner, my thesis committee member, for her recommendations and acceptance to stand on my thesis committee.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to understand how peer and family factors influence delinquency. Special focus will be on the influence of deviant peer association, parental structure, parental maltreatment, and parental support and its relation to delinquency. Deviant peer association has a strong connection to aggressive and deviant actions found in adolescents. Self-reports and surveys show that most deviant activities are committed in groups. These studies illustrate the strong connection between deviant behavior and the influence of peers.

Parental structure can have an effect on a child’s deviant behavior as well. If a child lacks a positive mother or father figure, they can be deprived of benefits from that type of relationship. Parental maltreatment can also play a major role in delinquency. Research shows that early childhood abuse experiences can lead to short and long term behavior problems. Parental support could also affect delinquency because a child should be provided an equal balance of praise and punishment. Parental acceptance is important to many people, especially as a child and as an adolescent.

I believe the topic of delinquency is important to study for multiple reasons. The dynamics of delinquency and how the criminal justice system deals with these children have changed over the last couple of decades. One change found in delinquency is the increase of female offenders.
There has also been a change in the way that police stations deal with juvenile offenders. In previous generations, communities safeguarded their members and assisted each other in childrearing. During these times, police officers were known to drive juvenile offenders to their parent’s home instead of to the police station for less serious offenses, such as status offenses, because they had a close relationship with the child’s parents. Police officers today are less likely to take such action, especially in urban communities because the officer may not have a relationship with members of the community, or the community is so transit that a relationship was not yet formed. There are also fewer officers that make up the juvenile unit in most police agencies. Years ago, depending on the size of the city, there could be five to eight officers who dealt solely with juveniles. Today, we may see two to five main officers who deal with juveniles, but they most likely have other responsibilities within the police agencies.

Another major change in delinquency is found in the belief that parents are inadequately raising their children which is considered one of the causes of juvenile delinquency. This belief is reflected in the increase of legislation that punishes parents of juvenile offenders. For example, Amsterdam, the capital of the Netherlands, is a city whose government is holding parents responsible for behaviors they did not perform themselves (Le Sage, & De Ruyter, 2008).

Lastly, statistics show that the earlier a person begins committing crimes, the longer it takes for them to age out of crime. If we can find out what is causing delinquent behavior in children there are countless benefits for the criminal justice system. This chapter discussed the importance of studying juvenile delinquency and how peer and
family factors influence delinquency. The next chapter will discuss previous studies done on delinquency and theories that guided this research.
Chapter 2

Delinquency and Deviant Peer Association

Rebellion and control problems of youth and other familial relationships may indirectly lead to delinquency by negatively affecting a child performance in school and/or increasing the likelihood for developing deviant peer associations. Some research indicates that peer relationships may be affected more by the amount of time spent with the family than by the juvenile’s emotional attachments to parents (Shoemaker, 1996).

A study done by Steinberg (1986) showed that being in places that lack parental supervision increases the pressure on children to take part in problem behavior. There is a sharp increase to exposure to antisocial behavior in middle adolescence due to the fact that children begin to become unsupervised more frequently compared to in early adolescence. The analysis of this study shows that parental supervision is especially important in middle adolescence (Patterson, 1991).

A study compared delinquent youth peer relationships with non-delinquent youth relationships. There were similarities such as both contained elements of caring and trust and that they can be open and intimate with their friends. Differences were evident as well such as more jealousy and competition between each other and more pronounced feelings of loyalty in the face of trouble. Peer relationships of delinquents seem to suggest that adolescents are influenced by social relationships as they go through their life cycle and that these relationships can influence behavior patterns (Senna, 1994).
Delinquency and Family Structure

There are many factors in the family structure that can contribute to delinquency. Preski and Shelton (2001) found that parent and sibling criminality was significantly related to juvenile offending. Some people would predict that the probability of a delinquent child coming from a single-parent home is higher than a child that comes from a dual parent household. It is difficult to gauge how parent incarceration affects children. There are a host of factors to take into account, such as the age the child was during incarceration, duration of the incarceration, the number of incarcerations, the strength of the parental bond between the parent incarcerated and the child, and the reintegration and adjustments post incarceration. A child can be directly influenced by parental incarceration because it causes abrupt changes and multiple transitions that disrupt the socialization process during child development. The more frequent and severe the disruption in a child’s development, the more likely the child is to display negative behaviors (Dannerbeck, 2005).

Hirschi (2002) argues that broken homes should have no impact on a child if the child and the custodial parent have a strong bond. He concludes that strong ties to both parents were not necessary to provide an effective buffer against delinquency (Rankin, 1994). Although Hirschi presented this hypothesis, he did not provide empirical evidence.

D.P. Farrington, Loeber, Yin, & Anderson (2002) believe the most important cause of delinquency is referred to as within-individual correlations, which is not only the
personality features but also the changes over time that the child endures, poor parental supervision, low parental reinforcement and low involvement in family activities.

Another study published in Donald Shoemaker’s book *Theories of Delinquency* (1996) differentiated between racial and economic effects of family factors on delinquent behavior. Sociologists Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber (2002) looked at the models of this study, which include neglect, conflict, deviant behavior and attitudes, and disruptions, and concluded that several conditions can produce an "at risk" child, especially when these conditions accumulate. These conditions include a behaviorally disruptive child, poor parenting skills, marital disharmony, lack of support from relatives, and ill physical and/or mental health of parents (Shoemaker, 1996).

**Delinquency and Parental Support**

It is apparent that parents play a major role in their children’s lives. Therefore, if there is a lack of parental support, that disparity may lead to the increased likelihood of delinquent behavior in their children. Delinquency is inversely related to child-parent involvement, such as the amount of intimate communication, confiding, sharing of activities, and seeking of help (Wright & Cullen, 2001).

Hirschi (1969) created a model called the attachment model which says the bond that a child shares with their parents will affect the child in many areas of their life as they get older. According to this model, parental support affects many relationships the child has with others in their life, including peer relationships. This support sets a basis of interpretation of actions in relationships of peers (Hirschi, 1969).
Delinquency and Parental Mistreatment/Maltreatment

Emotional and physical abuse provides more explanations for delinquency. A child subjected to excessive physical and/or emotional abuse at an early age “may” be at greater risk for several varieties of violent and antisocial behaviors. Maltreatment of children inhibits their ability to cope with stress and makes them vulnerable to aggression and violence in the culture. A 1975 study found that 82 percent of delinquents were abused as young children; 43 percent remembered being knocked unconscious by a parent (Senna, 1994). The alarming number of cases reported of child abuse and neglect has made observers of this information consider this a problem that is growing to epidemic proportions in the United States.

A recent study focused on the effects of children witnessing violence in the home. Studies examine the effects of witnessing verbal hostility and physical violence between parents compared to witnessing verbal hostility alone. There was evidence to suggest that witnessing parental hostility had no effect compared to being a victim or witnessing physical abuse (White, 2001).

Delinquency and Parental Attentiveness

Hirschi’s and Gottfredson’s General Theory of Crime says that supervision is crucial for the development of self control. Supervision prevents criminal activity and also provides training for the child to act and think in a socially acceptable manner. The problem is that parents do not recognize their lack of self control which causes the child to be deficient in self control as well. In order to teach the child self control, parents must
(1) monitor the child’s behavior, (2) recognize deviant behavior when it occurs, and (3) punish such behavior. If the parent is doing these three things, the child will be more capable of delaying gratification, more sensitive to the interests of others, more independent, more willing to accept restraints of their activity, and more unlikely to use force or violence to attain their needs (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990)

**Delinquency and Parental Regard**

Most people like to believe that all parents naturally love, nurture, and hold their children to the highest regard possible. Unfortunately, for a number of reasons, this is not true for a lot of children. A study by Glueck and Glueck (1950) reported that compared to the fathers of delinquents, fathers of non delinquents were twice as likely to be warmly disposed towards their sons and one-fifth as likely to be hostile toward them. In the same study, 28 percent of the mothers of delinquents were characterized as “indifference or hostile” toward their child as compared to 4 percent of mothers of non delinquents. The positive attachment a child feels toward a parent is necessary for successful child-rearing. One can argue that parents who have a positive attachment with their child, tend to have a high regard for their child. Attaining a positive attachment with children, especially as they get older, involves a lot of work on behalf of both the child and parent. There is a lot of listening and compromising involved in this type of relationship. Parents who hold their child to a high regard would also require a certain level of supervision over the child.

There are different levels of supervision required for different ages of children, but a concerned parent will provide the appropriate amount of supervision. Some parents
allow their children to do as they please with little or no supervision. Hirschi and Gottfredson’s theory believes social control and self control cannot be more direct than in the case of parental supervision over the child since such supervision tends to prevent criminal acts and at the same time trains the child to avoid them on their own.

Summary

Children are very vulnerable to acceptance of any kind of behavior, whether it is law abiding or law breaking. Peers have a big influence in how they will view deviant behavior. If a child surrounds themself with well-disciplined peers, there is a better chance they will have a similar outlook. When good parental support is present, it will not only benefit the child, but also make it easier and provide for a better relationship between the child and parent in the long run. If there is poor parental support, a child might rebel against the parent for the simple fact that they think they do not care. As far as the environment in which these children are raised, availability of guns, alcohol, and drugs can encourage delinquency if the child is continually surrounded with these negative factors. There are various elements of a child’s family life, personality characteristics, and environment that are very influential, which either increases or decrease the probability of that child participating in delinquency.

This chapter focused on previous studies on delinquency and how family and friends influence that child’s delinquency. The final section of this chapter focuses on the theoretical approach to this research and how it guided my research, as well as the six hypotheses to be tested in this study. The next chapter discusses the methods section of
this research. It will contain information that explains where and how I obtained my data.

**Theories and Hypotheses**

Edwin H. Sutherland (1939) created the Differential Association theory, which says that criminal behavior is a learned behavior. This theory explains how associations can lead to criminal activity. In the same ways that we learn through socialization the norms of society, we also learn criminal behavior. If law-breaking influences exceed the number of law-abiding influences, Sutherland predicts this individual will turn to criminal activity. These individuals learn how to carry out certain criminal acts, the rationale behind why they commit the crime, attitudes, and motives. If a person is subjected to peers or loved ones who involve themselves in criminal activity, depending on the how long they interact and how important those people are in that person’s life, that person could potentially become involved in the same criminal activities as their peers. This chance increases the earlier they are exposed to the criminal behavior. Because family and peers are primary sources of socialization, they have the most influence.

A theory that focuses primarily on the parental aspect of delinquency is Hirschi’s and Gottfredson’s General Theory of Crime. According to this theory, low self control provides an explanation of whether a person will commit or abstain from criminal activity. Hirschi and Gottfredson define elements of self control. First, criminal acts provide immediate gratification of desires. There is a “here and now” orientation that expects or demands immediate results where as people with high self control tend to
defer gratification. Secondly, criminal acts provide simple or easy gratification of desires. For example, theft is a quick way of obtaining a wanted item without putting forth the effort, time, or energy to earn that item. Thirdly, criminal acts are exciting, risky, or thrilling. People lacking self control are adventurous and live for the thrill of breaking the rules and getting away with it. Fourth, crimes provide few long term benefits. Like previously mentioned, since people who lack self control live for the moment, they do not care or strive for long term commitments. Therefore, people who lack self control usually have unstable marriages, friendships, and job histories. Fifth, most crimes require little skill or training.

Consequently, it is easy for people who lack self control to commit these crimes. Lastly, crimes often result in pain or discomfort for the victim. Consequences of crimes such as lost property, bodily injuries, violation of privacy and broken trust are all experienced by victims and not the perpetrator. This leads to the understanding that people with low self control tend to be self-centered, indifferent, or insensitive to the suffering or the needs of others. However, this does not mean that they do not benefit from the immediate and easy rewards of charm and generosity. According to this theory, since crimes require interaction between the offender and the victim, outgoing and social people are more likely involved in criminal acts (Gottfredson, & Hirschi, 1990). All characteristics associated with low self control tend to show themselves in the absence of nurturance, discipline, or training.

The major benefit of criminal acts is not always pleasure but momentary relief from irritation. The proof of power and ability to quiet a screaming spouse leading to domestic violence, or a screaming baby being the stimulus of physical abuse or neglect
are two examples of not necessarily pleasure for the person but an avenue of momentary relief. Following this belief, people with low self control tend to have minimal tolerance for frustration and little ability to respond to conflict through verbal rather than physical means (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990).

**Hypotheses:**

**Table 1:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Deviant Peer Association is related positively to delinquency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Parental structure is related to delinquency, with kids from single parent homes being more delinquent than kids from homes with both parents present.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Parental support is related negatively to delinquency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Parental maltreatment is related positively to delinquency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Parental attentiveness is related negatively to delinquency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Parental regard is related negatively to delinquency.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 3

Methodology:

The purpose of this study is to describe how peer and family factors influence delinquency. Specific focus is on deviant peer association, parental structure, parental maltreatment, parental support, and its relation to delinquency. What follows in this chapter is a description of how the evidence was collected in order to address the purpose of this thesis. In doing so, the hypotheses that serve to guide this thesis are introduced, and the design is described along with the other essential methodological elements including the sample, the sampling procedure, the instrument, and the analysis.

Hypotheses:

There are six hypotheses that will be tested in this study: 1) deviant peer association is related positively to delinquency, 2) parental structure is related to delinquency, with children from single parent homes being most delinquent, 3) parental maltreatment is related positively to delinquency, 4) parental support is related negatively to delinquency, 5) parental attentiveness is related negatively to delinquency, and 6) parental regard is related negatively to delinquency. In order to test these hypotheses, secondary analysis was performed. Details of this venture are described below.

Design:

This thesis uses a secondary analysis of survey gathered previously. The data from this secondary analysis are theoretically rich. They include items that reflect elements of Hirschi and Gottfredson’s (1950) General Theory of Crime. The data are from a random sample (N=38) of students who were attending a small college in
northeast Ohio at the time of the survey in 2001. Overall, secondary analysis was chosen for three reasons. First, the data are theoretically appealing to those with a criminological perspective and inclusive of my ideas as to the most interesting factors when examining juvenile delinquency. Second, secondary analysis allows researchers to be efficient in their efforts. Given the limited resources (i.e. time, money, and expertise) available to a graduate student such as I, using a secondary analysis is appropriate. Lastly, the data were gathered originally by me and I merely summarized the data previously. This thesis allows me a follow-up, in-depth examination of the data.

**Sample:**

I obtained a list of full-time students, excluding part-time, post secondary, adult studies, and international students. There were approximately 2,300 students enrolled at the college used in the primary data collection. Removing part-time, post secondary, adult studies, and international students, there should be approximately 2000 students left. I chose every thirteenth person from the list, which gave me approximately 150 participants. This procedure allowed a random sample of students for my study.

**Sampling Procedure:**

I chose to send questionnaires to only full time students because I wanted a high response rate and I believed that was the best option to follow. I chose to exclude part-time students because they would be more likely to be from the area, currently living in the area, having part-time jobs in the area, and may still be associating with people from their childhood. Post-secondary students are still in high school. These students are most likely under 18 years old. Minors will be excluded from this study as parental consent
will not be a feasible option. Adult studies students may not be able to provide me accurate information since their teen-age years may be 5 or more years ago. International students were excluded because they may have different cultural beliefs not reflected in the theories representing the six hypotheses.

Once the sample was selected, subjects were sent an e-mail cover letter which requested their participation. At the conclusion of the cover letter, there was a link to the survey. When they clicked on the link, they came to the consent form. After reading through the consent form, subjects were asked whether or not they are willing to participate in the survey. If the subject clicked yes, they were sent directly to the survey. At the conclusion of the survey, there was a debriefing letter thanking them for their participation. If the subject clicked no, they were sent to the “Thank You Anyway” letter that thanked them for considering participation. I sent a follow-up reminder 10-14 days after I sent the original copy if I had not received a response. This allowed time to get back to the survey whenever their time permitted them, but also reminded them if they had forgotten.

**Instrument:**

This survey was 80 items long comprising four pages (single-sided, double-spaced). It inquired about deviant peer association, parental structure, parental maltreatment, parental support, and then asked questions concerning the respondent’s personal delinquency. This survey was completely anonymous. Subjects were not asked their name or any other identifying items.
Participants were first asked about their own delinquency. The score was calculated by adding all answers together and coming up with a total score. Participants have the ability to score 21-84. Any missing data were entered with the median value on ordinal and interval level variables and the mode on nominal variables.

Question two addressed Deviant Peer Association. The score was calculated by adding all 21 items together and coming up with a total score. Participants had the ability to score from 21-84 because each item had a 1-4 rating with 1 meaning never and 4 meaning the most.

Question three addressed parental structure. The score was calculated by adding all fifteen items together and coming up with a total score. Participants had the ability to score 15-45.

Questions on parental support followed. The score was calculated by adding all answers together and coming up with a total score. There was a set of eleven questions asking about each parent. Participants had the ability to score 11-33 for each parent support scale variable because the responses varied from 1 to 3, with 1 being no support and 3 being the most support.

Analysis:

Questionnaires were sent out to 150 people. There were 53 respondents, but 9 participants did not complete the survey enough to adequately analyze the data. After the initial questionnaire was sent requesting participation, two follow-up letters were sent out in attempt to obtain a better response rate. I received 44 responses with a return rate of 29%. Participants were asked their sex. Seventy-six percent of participants were females and 24% were male. Participants were also asked what socioeconomic class they would
consider their parents to be in, or what class they would say they spent a majority of their childhood. Seventy-six percent of respondents considered their family to be middle class, 20% working class, and 4% to be upper class.

This thesis focuses on six variables; one dependent and five independent. The dependent variable is self-reported delinquency. For this question, I asked the respondents a series of questions in attempt to gauge their level of delinquency during high school. The first variable was deviant peer association. My hypothesis says deviant peer association is positively related to delinquency. A Pearson’s r correlation coefficient was calculated to test the relationship between deviant peer association and delinquency. Throughout the analysis, an alpha of ten percent was used as the cutoff in order to determine statistical significance.

The second variable was parental structure. My hypothesis says that parental structure is related to delinquency, with kids from single parent homes being most delinquent. A Pearson’s r correlation coefficient was calculated to test the relationship between parental structure (living in a single parent home while growing up or not) and delinquency.

The third variable is parental maltreatment. Parental maltreatment was broken down into two variables: influence of a mother-figure and influence of a father-figure. Both variables were included in order to determine if one was more influential than the other. A Pearson’s r correlation coefficient was calculated to determine the relationship between parental maltreatment and delinquency. A positive correlation was expected between both parental maltreatment variables and delinquency.
The fourth hypothesis poses that parental support is related negatively to delinquency. A Pearson’s r correlation coefficient was calculated to test the relationship between parental support and delinquency.

The fifth hypothesis says that parental attentiveness is connected negatively with delinquency. A Pearson’s r correlation coefficient was calculated to test the relationship between parental attentiveness and delinquency.

My last hypothesis says that parental regard is connected negatively with delinquency. A Pearson’s r correlation coefficient was calculated to test the relationship between parental attentiveness and delinquency.

This chapter discussed the methods section of this research which explained where and how I obtained my data. The next chapter will discuss the results relative to each of the six hypotheses put forth.


Chapter 4

Results and Findings:

The purpose of this study is to describe how peer and family factors influence delinquency. The secondary analysis used contained survey data that inquired about deviant peer association, parental structure, parental maltreatment, parental support, and then asked questions concerning the respondent’s personal delinquency. This survey was completely anonymous. Subjects were not asked their name or any other identifying items.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into two sections. The first section describes the sample profile. It profiles the gender, parental structure and social class distributions within the sample. The second section discusses each hypothesis relative to the Pearson’s r correlation coefficient analysis. Correlations report three findings: 1) whether a pattern exists between the two variables, 2) the strength of the pattern, 3) and the direction of the pattern, which means if both variables are going in the same direction then it is a positive correlation, but if one is increasing while the other is decreasing, then it is a negative correlation. The six hypotheses that were tested are 1) deviant peer association is related positively to delinquency, 2) parental structure is related to delinquency, with children from single parent homes being more delinquent than children from homes with both parents present, 3) parental maltreatment is related positively to delinquency, 4) parental support is related negatively to delinquency, 5) parental attentiveness is related negatively to delinquency, and 6) parental regard is related negatively to delinquency.
Section 1: Sample Profile

Gender of Respondent:

This questionnaire asked for the gender of the respondent. Women accounted for 79.5% (n=31) of the respondents who participated, while men accounted for 20.5% (n=8). The table below illustrates the gender frequency and percentage of men verse women.

Table 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender of Respondent (79.5% female):</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>79.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parental Structure of Respondent:

The parental structure of my sample was composed of primarily two biological parent households. Almost 95% (n=37) of my sample grew up in a two parent household. The table below illustrates the frequency and percentages of two biological parents versus the other available combinations of parental structure on the questionnaire.
Table 3:

Parental Structure (5.1% are from broken homes):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two Biological Parents</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>94.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another Combination</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Social Class of Respondent:*

Social class was also a question asked on the questionnaire. Over 82% (n=32) of respondents considered their family to be either middle or upper class, while 17.9% (n=7) considered themselves working class. The chart below illustrates the frequency and percentage of working class respondents verse upper and middle class respondents.

Table 4:

Social Class (82% middle and upper class):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working Class</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper or Middle Class</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>82.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section 2: Hypotheses

This thesis focuses on six variables--one dependent and five independent. The dependent variable was self-report of delinquency. For this question, I asked a series of questions in attempt to gauge the respondent’s level of deviance during high school. The following is what was found for the independent variables.

**H1. Deviant Peer Association is related positively to delinquency.**

The first variable was deviant peer association. My hypothesis says deviant peer association is positively related to delinquency. A Pearson’s $r$ correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between deviant peer association and delinquency. A medium-sized correlation was found ($r=.56$, $p<0.00$) indicating a significant positive connection between the two variables. Respondents with delinquent peers were more likely to report higher levels of delinquency than the reverse. Therefore, the research hypothesis was supported.

**H2. Parental structure is related to delinquency, with kids from single parent homes being more delinquent than kids from homes with both parents present.**

The second hypothesis involved parental structure. My hypothesis says that parental structure is related to delinquency, with kids from single parent homes being more delinquent than kids from homes headed by two parents.

Table 8, illustrates the Pearson’s $r$ Correlation for parental structure and delinquency. There was a small, insignificant correlation found ($r = .09$, $p< .6$). This
means that there is no support for the hypothesis that parental structure impacts delinquency.

**H3. Parental support is related negatively to delinquency.**

The third variable was parental support. My hypothesis states that parental support is related negatively to delinquency. A Pearson’s r correlation coefficient was calculated to test the relationship between parental support and delinquency. A small insignificant negative correlation was found \( r = -.24, p < 0.15 \) indicating no statistical support for the research hypothesis.

**H4. Parental maltreatment is related positively to delinquency.**

The fourth variable is parental maltreatment. My hypothesis asserts that parental maltreatment is related positively to delinquency. Parental maltreatment was measured for each potential parent—a mother-figure influence and an influence of a father-figure. These correlations were used to determine if one was more influential than the other. The father-figure data found a weak correlation \( r=.24, p<.15 \), indicating there is not a significant relationship between paternal parental maltreatment and delinquency.

The mother-figure data found a strong correlation \( r=.31, p<.06 \), indicating a significant relationship between the two variables. The research hypothesis was supported. Therefore, as the maternal parental maltreatment increases, delinquency increases.
**H5. Parental attentiveness is related negatively to delinquency.**

The fifth variable is parental awareness. My hypothesis proposes that parental attentiveness is related negatively to delinquency. The question that gauges parental attentiveness was extracted from the parental support section of the questionnaire. A Pearson’s r correlation coefficient was calculated to test the impact of parental attentiveness on delinquency. A medium-sized negative correlation was found (r= -.497, p<.001), indicating a significant relationship between the two variables. The research hypothesis was supported.

**H6. Parental regard is related negatively to delinquency.**

The last variable is parental regard. My last hypothesis says that parental regard is related negatively to delinquency. The question that gauges parental regard was extracted from the parental support section of the questionnaire. A medium-sized negative correlation was found (r= -.35, p<.027), indicating a significant relationship between the two variables. The research hypothesis was supported. Therefore, as parental regard increases, delinquency decreases.

**Summary:**

Overall, four of the six hypotheses were supported. The next chapter will discuss how to interpret these findings. Also, presented in the next chapter will be limitations of my research, aspects I would change if I redid the study, and recommendations for future researchers.
Chapter 5

Conclusion and Discussion

The purpose of this study is to describe how peer and family factors influence delinquency. The data used contained information on deviant peer association, parental structure, parental maltreatment, parental support, and self-report of delinquency. Deviant peer association, parental attentiveness, and parental regard were all hypotheses that were supported with the data collected in this research. Unfortunately, parental structure and parental support were not statistically significant in this research. Parental maltreatment was divided into two parts with correlations run to find significance for each; maltreatment experienced from the respondent’s mother figure and maltreatment experienced from their father figure. Maternal maltreatment was supported while paternal maltreatment was not supported.

The conceptual context of this thesis is grounded in the work of Edwin Sutherland’s Differential Association Theory and Hirschi and Gottfredson’s General Theory of Crime. According to Sutherland’s Differential Association, deviant peer association has a strong connection to aggressive and deviant actions found in adolescents. The results of this thesis support the connection between an individual’s delinquency and the delinquency of the individual’s peers.

Research says there is a relationship between parental structure and delinquency. In my research, parental structure could not be supported possibly due to lack of single parent family representation. There was a very small percentage (5%) of respondents from single parent homes.
Research shows that parental support can have an effect on a child’s deviant behavior. My parental support analysis had a low significance and was therefore unsupported. Although my research did not support this notion, literature says it is important to understand that children greatly benefit when they receive support at home. My findings contradict the general societal belief that the earlier that support is established, the better off the child will be.

The effect of parental maltreatment was also a focus in my research. Since parental maltreatment was divided into two parts, the hypothesis as a whole was both supported and not supported. Maternal maltreatment and its relation to delinquency were supported, but paternal maltreatment was not supported. There are a few possible explanations for this finding. One possible explanation could be that society at times expects women to possess a primal instinct to nurture, protect, and provide for their children. Whereas men are expected to learn how to properly care for their children over time, women are sometimes held to higher standards and expectations when the topic of child rearing and nurturing is in question.

Another explanation is what children see when visiting their friends’ homes and viewing maternal relationships on television. These children may witness and observe love and compassionate acts from a friend’s mother when visiting while carrying out everyday responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, or car pooling to extracurricular activities that they know their mother does not do. They are more likely to see sitcoms or movies where mothers provide the nurturing and compassion that their child desires and needs. When a child witnesses deficiencies they perceive to be naturally given to others, they may be more emotionally and physiologically affected when they do not witness that
in their lives. The examples listed above are what I believe to be the origin of where the deviant behaviors commence. The lack of maternal support is the catalyst of deviant behavior. The child’s lack of maternal support could lead to rebellion and if not addressed could develop into delinquent behaviors.

According to Hirschi and Gottredson’s General Theory of Crime, parental attentiveness can improve the self control in children which in turn decreases delinquency. My research supports this notion. Most children enjoy being the center of attention. It is important to emphasize positive accomplishments and accolades to show that their negative behaviors are not the only way to gain that desired attention. This finding is also beneficial to serve as reminder to parents to “stop and smell the roses” once in awhile. Parents are sometimes so busy in their day to day life that they forget to show appreciation and support for the things that their children do correctly.

Lastly, Hirschi and Gottfredson say that parental regard for their children gauges the amount of self control their child possesses. The research supports my hypothesis for parental regard. I believe these findings would be useful to parents for a couple of reasons. Parents who require meeting their child’s friends and their parents are showing concern in their child’s life. By getting to know their child’s friends, they will have a decent understanding of where and who their child spends their time. If these friends were not good influences, it would not be ideal to allow their child around that family. Another way these findings are beneficial, would remind parents to stay involved in their child’s academics and extra-curricular activities. Attendance to these types of activities that a child is involved in means a lot to that child.
Limitations of Study

This section will discuss limitations of my thesis and possible remedies to solve them. I did not have trouble selecting a sample to test because I had no problems obtaining an email directory of full-time students that included all the exemptions that I needed.

First, I presumably should have sent my questionnaires to more than 150 people; perhaps I would have managed a better response rate than 29%. It is possible with a more diverse sample, the outcomes of my research may be different. I also believe, however that the response was somewhat out of my control. At the time my questionnaire was sent out, there were several fellow classmates conducting their research, as well as other departments. This meant students received a few questionnaires a week. If my questionnaire was not one of the first few they received, the response rate decreases with each questionnaire following. This limitation could perhaps be improved if this research was conducted during the first couple of weeks of school, at a time of year that was not as busy as the middle of the semester. I also could have performed a different way of gathering data. Instead of sending out emails, I could have perhaps asked permission to enter classes and have them fill out questionnaires.

Secondly, I found a lack of diversity on the campus in my research, which I believe had an effect on my outcomes. This college is a homogenous population, the majority consisting of middle to upper class Caucasians. Seventy-five percent of my respondents were of the middle class; this population is not representative of other
college and university populations or the population of the world. I could choose a campus that had a more diverse population.

My parental structure hypothesis was supported with statistically significant results. One possible reason why this hypothesis was not supported could be the lack of single parent family representatives in the database. Another, more theoretical reason is that these residents were not typical single parent families. There were no major differences in delinquency in this small group of people when compared to the rest of the group.

If I were to change aspects of my research, there are a few adjustments I would make. First I would ask more indebt questions about parental relationship such as changes within the relationship as the respondent grew older and how that affected their delinquency. The other major change I suggest would be to distribute it to a larger, more diverse population. In doing so, the statistical power would be enhanced and some of the correlations that were insignificant, most likely would become statistically significant with a larger sample size.

There are two suggestions that I could offer to future researchers that perhaps could be helpful in their study: send questionnaires out as soon as possible and try to obtain as much diversity as possible (not just race, but also gender, class, family structures). I believe these problems had the most influence on the data used in this secondary analysis.
**Recommendations to Future Researchers**

Future researchers may benefit from examining other family and individual factors in relation to delinquency. Education concepts such as grade point average and school aspirations seem important. Also, family structure items such as whether their parents are married, cohabitating without marriage, separated, or divorced, how many siblings they have, and what birth order they are in their family may be influential in impacting delinquency. Items beyond the family and individual realm may also deem to be important as well.

This chapter presented interpretations of the results, caveats of these findings, aspects I would change if I redid the study, and recommendations for future researchers. While not all of my hypotheses were supported, there is overwhelming evidence that peer and family play a huge role in delinquency. The value of this thesis is useful for all parents concerned about the well being of their child. For any person who has children or works with children, these types of relationships are questioned on a daily basis. The focus behind this thesis was to help find the answers to those questions.
References


APPENDIX A: Human Subjects Committee Approval

MOUNT UNION COLLEGE
HUMANSUBJECTS COMMITTEE (HSC)

REVIEWER RESPONSE FORM

Date of Review: Nov/28/2007
Title of proposal reviewed: Causes of Delinquency

Principal Investigator(s): Ashley Ross
Faculty Supervisor (if PI is student): Dr. Jeffery Hahn

Type of Review (check one):
☐ Full
☒ Exempt
☐ Expedited

Outcome of Review (check one):
☐ Approve as submitted
☒ Approve with Minor Revisions (see below)
☐ Revise and Resubmit (see below)

Note: In reviewing the research proposal, use the following sections to evaluate and make comments/suggestions on the proposal’s completeness, comprehensibility, and/or errors in formatting, grammar, and spelling in concordance with the HSC Policy and Guidelines packet.

(check all that apply; if checked, please include 1) changes required, and/or 2) any suggestions for improvement of proposal):

☒ Purpose and Significance:

Changes required prior to approval:

Suggestions for improving the proposal:

“...strong connection deviant behavior has to the influence...”

Methods and Procedures: Changes required prior to approval:

Investigator states that a “follow-up reminder” will be sent “if I have not received a response” from a potential participant. Two (related) questions:

(1) How will the investigator know which students have responded and which have not, if the data collection is anonymous? Perhaps the IC process is not anonymous, but the data collection process is? Please clarify.

(2) The text of the follow-up letter implies that the letter will be sent to ALL potential participants, regardless of whether they have responded or not. Please clarify. (Who
will receive follow-up letters? If the answer is “everyone”, then this might also answer the first question above.)

Suggestions for improving the proposal:

☑ Participants: Changes required prior to approval:

Suggestions for improving the proposal:

“I will choose...”. Otherwise, this section is especially well done.

☐ Potential Benefits and Compensation:

Changes required prior to approval:

Suggestions for improving the proposal:

☐ Potential Risks to Subjects:

Changes required prior to approval:

Suggestions for improving the proposal:

☐ Elimination or Minimization of Potential Risks and Confidentiality Protection:

Changes required prior to approval:

Suggestions for improving the proposal:

“For the participants that if they feel”

☑ Informed Consent Procedure:

Changes required prior to approval:

On the IC Form:

Basis for Subject Selection: “You will be one of approximately...” is the standard phrasing.

Procedures: Potential participants should be informed as to the length of the survey – about how long should it take to complete? Also, within the boundaries of what is
allowed by your “deception”, potential participants should be given a general idea of
the kinds of topics they will encounter on the survey (This could be copied from the
initial invitation: “You will be asked questions about your high school...etc.”).

Potential Risks: Give the actual phone number for Counseling.

Withdrawal: “participate will not affect” and “please do not hesitate”

Suggestions for improving the proposal:

☐ Permission for Off-Campus Data Collection:
Changes required prior to approval:

Suggestions for improving the proposal:

☐ Copy of Funding Proposal:
Changes required prior to approval:

Suggestions for improving the proposal:

Additional Comments:
On the Debriefing Form, please add a statement regarding Counseling, including the phone
number again. (Participants may not have retained a copy of the IC Form with this
information on it.)
APPENDIX B: Questionnaire

Causes of Delinquency Questionnaire

Please circle the answer that best applies.

1. How many times have you done the following things?

1=never  2=twice  3=3-4 times  4=5 or more times

A.) Has ever vandalized?  
B.) Used alcoholic beverages, beer, wine, or hard liquor?  
C.) Use tobacco?  
D.) Have stolen or tried to steal things worth more than $50?  
E.) Have stolen or tried to steal things worth less than $50?  
F.) Ran away from home?  
G.) Frequently skipped school?  
H.) Involved in gang fights?  
I.) Have used marijuana?  
J.) Sold marijuana?  
K.) Has ever been a drug trafficker?  
L.) Hit or threaten to hit your parent?
M.) Hit or threaten to hit your teacher?  
N.) Hit or threaten to hit another student?  
O.) Have committed armed robbery against someone?  
P.) Broke into a house or an establishment?  
Q.) Have ever trespassed?  
R.) Have ever bought stolen merchandise?  
S.) Have used hard drugs such as heroin, cocaine, or LSD?  
T.) Forced sex?  
U.) Have ever mugged someone?  

Please circle the answers that best apply to the question.

2. How often did your close friends in high school do the following things?

1 = never 2 = twice 3 = 3-4 times 4 = 5 or more times

A.) Has ever vandalized?  
B.) Used alcoholic beverages, beer, wine, or hard liquor?  
C.) Used tobacco?  
D.) Have stolen or tried to steal things worth more than $50?  
E.) Have stolen or tried to steal things worth less than $50?  
F.) Ran away from home?
G.) Frequently skipped school?  1 2 3 4

H.) Involved in gang fights?  1 2 3 4

I.) Have used marijuana?  1 2 3 4

J.) Sold marijuana?  1 2 3 4

K.) Has ever been a drug trafficker?  1 2 3 4

L.) Hit or threaten to hit your parent?  1 2 3 4

M.) Hit or threaten to hit your teacher?  1 2 3 4

N.) Hit or threaten to hit another student?  1 2 3 4

O.) Have committed armed robbery against someone?  1 2 3 4

P.) Broke into a house or an establishment?  1 2 3 4

Q.) Have ever trespassed?  1 2 3 4

R.) Have ever bought stolen merchandise?  1 2 3 4

S.) Have used hard drugs such as heroin, cocaine, or LSD?  1 2 3 4

T.) Forced sex?  1 2 3 4

U.) Have ever mugged someone?  1 2 3 4

3. During high school, whom did you live with the majority of the time?

A.) Biological mother and father
B.) Adoptive mother and father

C.) Mother and stepfather

D.) Father and stepmother

E.) Mother and no father figure

F.) Father and no mother figure

G.) Grandparent(s)

H.) Aunt/uncle/own siblings

I.) Other relative

J.) Stepparent

Please circle the answer that best applies.

4. When you were in high school, how often did your mother-figure (ex. biological mother, adoptive, step-mother) do the following things?

1= never  2=once or twice  3= 3 to 6 times  4=7 to 9 times  5= 10 or more times

A.) Swore or cursed at you?  

B.) Said things that hurt you?  

C.) Threatened to hurt you?  

D.) Intentionally locked you out of your house?  

E.) Spanked you?
F.) Pushed, shoved, or pulled you?  
1 2 3 4 5

G.) Hit you with a hard object?  
1 2 3 4 5

H.) Hit you with a fist and/or slapped you?  
1 2 3 4 5

I.) Beat you up or hit you hard repeatedly?  
1 2 3 4 5

J.) Tried to smother or choke you?  
1 2 3 4 5

K.) Threatened you with, or used, a knife, gun, or a sharp object?  
1 2 3 4 5

Please circle the answer that best applies.

5. When you were in high school, how often did your father-figure (ex: biological father, adoptive father, step-father) do the followings?

1= never  2=once or twice  3= 3 to 6 times  4=7 to 9 times  5= 10 or more times

A.) Swore or cursed at you?  
1 2 3 4 5

B.) Said things that hurt you?  
1 2 3 4 5

C.) Threatened to hurt you?  
1 2 3 4 5

D.) Intentionally locked you out of your house?  
1 2 3 4 5
E.) Spanked you? 1 2 3 4 5

F.) Pushed, shoved, or pulled you? 1 2 3 4 5

G.) Hit you with a hard object? 1 2 3 4 5

H.) Hit you with a fist and/or slapped you? 1 2 3 4 5

I.) Beat you up or hit you hard repeatedly? 1 2 3 4 5

J.) Tried to smother or choke you? 1 2 3 4 5

K.) Threatened you with, or used, a knife, gun, or a sharp object? 1 2 3 4 5

6. What parental figure had the most impact in your life? Circle the number that resembles that person the best:

My mother or father figure is a person who….

1) Not like him or her  2) Somewhat like him or her  3) A lot like him or her

A.) Makes me feel better after talking over my worries with him or her. 1 2 3

B.) Smiles at me often. 1 2 3

C.) Is able to make me feel better when I am upset. 1 2 3

D.) Enjoys doing things with me. 1 2 3
E.) Cheers me up when I am sad. 1 2 3

F.) Gives me a lot of attention. 1 2 3

G.) Makes me feel like the most important person in his or her life. 1 2 3

H.) Believes in showing his or her love for me. 1 2 3

I.) Often praises me. 1 2 3

J.) Is easy to talk to. 1 2 3

K.) Verbally expresses their love for me. 1 2 3

L.) Shows support. 1 2 3

M.) Shows affection towards me. 1 2 3

7. Are you male or female?

Male       Female

8. What social class do you consider you and your family?

A.) Upper class

B.) Middle class

C.) Working class

D.) Lower class