

THE RELATIONSHIP OF FAMILY STRUCTURE, GENDER AND PLACE OF RESIDENCE WITH DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR OF JUVENILES

Miranda Gashi

European University of Tirana - UET
ALBANIA

ABSTRACT

This study examines the correlation of the family structure, gender, and place of residence with delinquent behaviours of juveniles. A total of 372 students of secondary school of the town of Pristina with vicinity, of age 14-17 years, of which 229 male and 143 female students, participated voluntarily in this study. The instrument we used for the collection of data on delinquent behaviours was adapted from *Section 28: Delinquency Scale of Wave II* questionnaire. The value of Chronbach alpha for the questionnaire was .612. The questionnaire contained one part of the questions related to the gender of the students, the structure of their families, their grade level and their place of residence. The Chi-square test showed differences of statistical significance for the gender of the participants, their place of residence and the structure of their family. The differences related to their grade level were of no statistical significance. In order to see the differences among the responses we received, we used the chi-square goodness-of-fit test, while in order to discover potential correlations between demographic variables and delinquent behaviours we used the Pearson's chi-square of association test. The results of our research sample showed no statistically significant correlations of the family structure, their place of residence, and their grade level with delinquent behaviours of juveniles. The correlation of statistical significance was found only with the gender of the juveniles. Such results indicate that the cultural factor should certainly be treated as a variable in future studies.

Keywords: Impact, family structure, juveniles, delinquent behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

According to Wright and Wright (1994), the family is the foundation of human society. Changes in family arrangements emerge for reasons including separation, divorce, sudden death of a parent, unemployment, and sequel of substance abuse (Demuth & Brown, 2004). Many studies have linked family dysfunction with the tendency for a criminal future, partly because of the failure to meet the responsibilities within the family, which could result with children being implicated in criminal activities (Murry et al, 2006). In most of the cases delinquents were seen as individuals coming from families often referred to as 'broken homes', a term meaning children residing in single-parent households or any type of household other than a household in which both biological parents are present (Geismar & Wood, 1986). In contrast, an intact family usually refers to a nuclear family arrangement in which both biological parents reside in the household with their biological children (Kierkus & Baer, 2002).

Many researchers and policymakers nowadays consider juvenile delinquency as one of the most critical social issues in the world (Tarolla, Wagner, Rabinowitz, and Tubman, 2002). In our country there is an evident lack of proper research dealing with potential correlations or impacts of different variables on the emergence, distribution or prevalence of juvenile delinquent behaviours. Current studies or reports refer to statistics, which in many cases do not provide consistent data.

This study aims to unveil the correlation of the structure of family of the juveniles, their gender, their place of residence and the grade level they attend with the delinquent behaviours. We hypothesised that:

H₁ = There is correlation of statistical significance among juveniles who live in families with different structures (divorced families vs. intact families),

H₂ = There is correlation of statistical significance among juveniles across gender;

H₃ = There is correlation of statistical significance among juveniles across the place of residence;

H₄ = There is correlation of statistical significance among juveniles across the grade level they attend.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on the correlation between family structure and juvenile delinquency are not a recent phenomenon. Seven decades ago, Shaw and McKay (1932) evaluated the significance of “broken homes” in juvenile delinquency. Nowadays, the literature provides a considerable number of studies which increasingly focus on the role of the family, its impact on and its correlation with juvenile delinquent behaviours. According to Apel & Kaukinen, (2008) and Price & Kunz, (2003), one of the main factors affecting juvenile delinquency is the structure of the family of juveniles with delinquent behaviours. Also in the study carried out by Fagan, (2001) the results showed that the likelihood that children of divorced parents develop delinquent behaviours was 12 times higher than for children who lived in families with both parents.

Most of the research has revealed that juveniles who lived in families with divorced parents reported an increased level of delinquency (Juby and Farrington, 2001). In their meta-analytical study Prais & Kunz (2003) also showed that children from families with divorced parents had a higher rate of delinquent behaviours such as criminal offences, crimes against other persons, theft, general delinquency, and consumption of tobacco and narcotics in comparison to children from intact families, except for the consumption of alcohol. In their study, Burt, Barnes, McGue, and Lacono (2009) specifically showed that parental divorce was the main cause for delinquency.

Other researchers have found that behaviours of the juveniles are affected by many family characteristics and family environment, such as the number of people in the family, familial problems, child neglect and children’s attachment to parents (Derzon & Lipsey, 2000; Wasserman & Seracini, 2001). In a comprehensive multivariate analysis of the influence of non-intact homes, Rebellon (2002) examined the relationship between family structure and a variety of forms of delinquency. His research indicates that single parenthood does not directly impact involvement in delinquency. In contrast, parental divorce/separation has a relationship with all types of delinquency. Other research examined the lack of a parental figure, generally the father, as a potential source of juvenile offending. Boys who were raised in the absence of their fathers were twice as likely to end up in prison as boys who were raised in the presence of their fathers and 70% of adult prisoners came from one-parent families (Gjeorgji, 2004). Another study showed that adolescents who were raised by one parent were considerably more likely than adolescents from intact families to report behaviours which are considered delinquent (Franke, 2000).

METHODOLOGY

The participants in this study were 372 students of secondary schools of the town of Pristina, who are considered juveniles according to the Juvenile Justice Code of the Republic of Kosovo. The mean age of the participants was MA=15.5 years (SD=1.12). 143 or 38.4 % of participants were females (MA= 15.29; SD=1.09) and 229 or 61.6 % of them were male students (MA=15.63; SD=1.11). 89 of the student participants are in grade nine, 105 in grade ten, 81 in grade eleven and 97 in grade twelve. Chi-square goodness-of-fit test showed no differences of statistical significance in their distribution across grades ($\chi^2(3, N=372)=3.441, p=.329$). Differences of statistical significance were found across the gender of the juveniles ($\chi^2(1, N=372)=19.882, p=.000$); the structure of the family they lived with ($\chi^2(1, N=372)=222.968, p=.000$) and their place of residence ($\chi^2(1, N=372)=232.355, p=.000$). The complete data on the characteristics of the participants of the study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Characteristics of the participants of the study

		N	%
Gender	M	229	61.6
	F	143	38.4
Place of residence	Town	333	89.5
	Village	39	10.5
Grade level	9	89	23.9
	10	105	28.2
	11	81	21.8
	12	97	26.1
Family structure	Divorced	42	11.3
	Married	330	88.7

Data collection instrument and method

The data on delinquent behaviours of juveniles were collected through *Section 28: Delinquency Scale* based on Wave II questions, adapted to and validated in our context. The questionnaire asks how often the adolescent engaged in the certain activities within the last 12 months. Responses range from 1 (never) to 4 (more than 5 times). The Chronbach Alpha is .612. The questionnaire was supplemented with the second part, which collected data on the place of residence, gender, grade level, and family structure of the students. The data were collected in direct meetings between teachers and students, who were informed in advance about the purpose of the study and agreed to voluntarily participate in the study. The questionnaire was completed individually by each student and was returned to the author on the same day.

The procedure of data analysis

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α) was used as the index of internal consistency of the questionnaire. In order to detect the difference among the responses we received we used the chi-square goodness-of-fit test, while in order to detect the potential correlation between the demographic variables and delinquent behaviours we used the Pearson's chi-square of association test. The statistical package used in the present study is SPSS Ver. 19.0.

RESULTS

In order to find the correlation between the place of residence and the delinquent behaviours of juveniles we used the Pearson's chi-square of association test. The results we obtained $\chi (2, N=372) = .507$, $p = .776$ showed that there was no correlation of statistical significance between the place of residence and delinquent behaviours, which means that juveniles from the villages and juveniles from the town can equally develop delinquent behaviours. The values obtained from Phi and V Cramer test, two tests of the correlation strength, also show a very weak correlation ($r=.037$) between those two variables.

The same analysis was done in order to detect the potential correlation between the grade level study participants attended and the delinquent behaviour. The obtained values $\chi (6, N=372) = 10.361$, $p = .110$ showed no correlation of statistical significance. However, the analysis showed that students of grade ten, which is the beginning grade of the upper secondary school, reported higher values for delinquent behaviours in comparison to students of other grade levels. In grade eleven we see a decrease in the occurrence of those behaviours, which again increases in grade twelve. In this analysis, too, the values obtained from Phi and V Cramer test show a very weak correlation ($r=.118$) between the variables.

When we evaluated the correlation between gender and delinquent behaviours, the result obtained $\chi (2, N=372) = 11.999$, $p = .002$, showed a correlation of statistical significance between gender and these behaviours, which means that boys and girls do not have the same predispositions for developing delinquent behaviours. From the results obtained on *MA* and *SD* values, girls show higher values for the occurrence of those behaviours in comparison to boys (14.7 % vs. 4.8 %).

Pearson's chi-square of association test showed no correlation of statistical significance between the structure of the family of the juveniles and delinquent behaviours $\chi (2, N=372) = .384$, $p = .825$, indicating that juveniles living with intact families and juveniles living in families with divorced parents can equally develop delinquent behaviours. In this analysis, too, the values obtained from the Phi and V Cramer tests, that show the strength of the correlation, show that there is a very weak correlation between the two variables ($r=.032$).

DISCUSSION

Our study examined the correlation of the family structure, gender, grade level juveniles attended and their place of residence with delinquent behaviours. The results obtained did not prove three of the hypothesis we raised in this study. Only the second hypothesis which referred to statistical differences among juveniles across their gender was proved.

The results disproved the first hypothesis of the study, showing that regardless of the structure of the family they live with, juveniles are equally likely to develop delinquent behaviours. In fact, this result contradicts a considerable number of studies the results of which claimed the opposite (Prais & Kunz, 2003; Burt, Barnes, McGue, and Lacono, 2009). Our results may have been influenced by many factors, such as the number of the participants in the study, subjectivity in responses given by the juvenile participants and the focus on only one municipality in the country. In addition, I believe that the culture and the conception of the role and the responsibilities of parents towards their children, regardless of divorce, should certainly be taken into account as a very important factor. Further studies which would consider these and other factors are strongly recommended.

The results proved the second hypothesis, showing that there are differences between boys and girls in demonstrating delinquent behaviours. The results are consistent with a large bulk of other studies (Stahl et al, 2007). What was specific in our study was that girls reported higher level of delinquent behaviours, a result which is consistent with the findings of Puzzanchera, Charles, and Hockenberry (2013), according to whom while the population of delinquent females remains significantly lower in comparison to males, the number of female delinquents is increasingly growing at a faster rate than that of male delinquents. Stahl (2008) also showed that the percentage of delinquent girls is increasing more than among boys.

The third hypothesis, which refers to the place of residence, showed that there was no correlation of statistical significance with delinquent behaviours, which contradicts the results obtained in the study carried out by Osgood and Chambers (2000), showing that there were differences between towns and villages in predictors of norms of violent and delinquent behaviours among adolescents. Also, the grade level they attended showed no correlation with the emergence of delinquent behaviours of juveniles participating in the study, indicating that such behaviours are present throughout adolescence. Considering the characteristics of the sample cover by this study and the results obtained, it is more than recommendable to develop further studies, with a broader geographic presentation of this phenomenon and an inclusion of other variables that are important for examining and presenting this phenomenon in our country.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author gratefully acknowledges the participants in the study.

REFERENCES

- Apel, R., & Kaukinen, C. (2008). On the relationship between family structure and antisocial behavior: Parental cohabitation and blended households. *Criminology*, 46, 35-70.
- Burt, S.A., Barnes, A.R., McGue, M., & Lacono, W.G. (2008). Parental divorce and adolescent delinquency: Ruling out the impact of common genes. *Developmental Psychology*, 44, 1668-1677.
- Demuth, S., & Brown, S.L. (2004). Family structure, family processes, and adolescent delinquency: The significance of parental absence versus parental gender. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 41, 58-81.
- Derzon, J.H., & Lipsey, M.W. (2000). *The correspondence of family features with problem, aggressive, criminal and violent behavior*. Unpublished manuscript. Institute for Public Policy Studies: Nashville.
- Fagan, P. (2001). Encouraging Marriage and Discouraging Divorce. The Heritage Foundation. Retrieved on June 02, 2015 at <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2001/03/encouraging-marriage-and-discouraging-divorce>
- Franke, T. M. (2000). Adolescent violent behavior: an analysis across and within racial/ethnic groups. *Journal of Multicultural Social Work*, 8: 47-70.
- Geismar, L.L., & Wood, K.M. (1986). *Family and delinquency: Resocializing the young offender*. New York: Human Sciences Press.
- Georgia Supreme Court Commission on Children, Marriage, and Family Law (2004). Strategic Plan citing Cynthia C. Harper and Sara S. McLanahan, "Father Absence and Youth Incarceration," *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 14, no. 3: 369-397.
- Juby, H. & Farrington, D.P. (2001). Disentangling the link between disrupted families and

- delinquency. *British Journal of Criminology*, 41, 22-40.
- Kierkus, C., & Baer, D. (2002). A social control explanation of the relationship between family structure and delinquent behavior. *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, 44 (4), 425-458.
- Murry, C. L., Williams, J., & Salekin, R. T. (2006). *Juvenile delinquency and family structure: Links to severity and frequency of offending*. University of Alabama McNair Journal.
- Osgood, D. Wayne, and Jeff M. Chambers, "(2000). Social Disorganization Outside the Metropolis: An Analysis of Rural Youth Violence," *Criminology*, Vol. 38, No. 1, February 2000, pp. 81–116.
- Price, C., & Kunz, J. (2003). Rethinking the paradigm of juvenile delinquency as related to divorce. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 3, 109-133
- Puzzanchera, Charles, and Sarah Hockenberry.(2013). *Juvenile Court Statistics 2010*. Pittsburgh: National Center for Juvenile Justice.
- Rebellon, C. J. (2002). Reconsidering the broken homes/delinquency relationship and exploring its mediating mechanisms. *Criminology*, 40, 103-135.
- Stahl, A. L., Puzzanchera, C., Livsey, S., Sladky, A., Finnegan, T. A., Tierney, N., et al. (2007). *Juvenile court statistics 2003–2004*. Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice.
- Stahl, A. (2008). *Delinquency cases in juvenile courts, 2004*. Washington, D. C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Shaw, Clifford R. and Henry D. McKay. 1932. "Are Broken Homes a Causative Factor in Juvenile Delinquency?" *Social Forces* 10:514-24.
- Tarolla, S., Wagner, E., Rabinowitz, J., Tubman, J. (2002). Understanding and treating juvenile offenders: A review of current knowledge and future directions. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 7 (2), 125-143.
- Wasserman, G.A., & Seracini, A.M. (2001). Family risk factors and interventions. In R. Loeber and D.P. Farrington (Eds.), *Child delinquents: Development, intervention, and service needs* (pp.165- 169.) Thousand Oaks: Sage
- Wright, Kevin N. and Karen E. Wright. 1994. *Family Life, Delinquency, and Crime: A Policymakers Guide*. Research Summary. Washington DC: OJJDP. 4-21.