

## EXPLORING PARENTAL RISK FACTORS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF DELINQUENCY AMONG CHILDREN

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### Abstract

**Purpose of the study:** To explore and analyze the influence of various parental risk factors contributing to the development of delinquency in children.

**Methodology:** A total of hundred and sixteen juvenile delinquents (100 boys and 16 girls) in the age range of 11- 18 years, residing in the four Government-run Observation and Special Homes (O&SHs) of Odisha. Descriptive statistics (i.e., percent) and qualitative method (i.e. narrative) have been used to analyze the data.

**Main Findings:** Absence of proper parental guidance and supervision is found to be the major cause of delinquency in children. Parental rejection and deprivation i.e. mother's love and emotional support is the major cause of delinquency in girls. Lack of parental involvement and less quality time spent by parents with boys are the main reasons behind their delinquency.

**Applications of this study:** The results of this study imply the need to conduct further research about parenting behavior and their attitude towards their children from a gender-based perspective. It also implies the need for a greater number of studies to be carried out on Indian parents and their attitude and behavior towards their children in general and based on the child's gender in particular.

**Novelty/Originality of this study:** The present study tries to address one of the many gaps existing in the literature regarding the matter of parenting style adopted by parents leading to delinquency in children. It further shows the difference in parental attitude and behavior towards their son's and daughter's leading to delinquency.

**Keywords:** *Delinquency, Juvenile, Parents, Parental Risk Factors, Parental Support, Supervision, Guidance.*

### INTRODUCTION

Juvenile Delinquency has registered exponential growth throughout the globe causing concern and needing utmost attention. The term denotes any offense/crime committed by children under statutory age i.e. 18 years. A juvenile delinquent refers to a child who is 18 years or below and has committed crime/offense such as theft, murder, rape, drug-related crimes, or any other antisocial behavior. According to Section 83 of IPC, 1860 – “nothing is an offense done by a child between 7 and 12 years, who has not attained sufficient maturity to judge the nature and consequences of his/her conduct, and did not know that what he/she was doing was wrong” (as cited in [Agarwal, 2018](#)). Juvenile delinquents are thus, children who are in their teens or adolescent phase i.e. between 11 -19 years and have committed an offense/crime.

In the report titled “Adolescent: An Age of Opportunity” by UNICEF, it is stated that millions of children who are in the adolescent phase are involved in the conflict with law throughout the world ([The State of the World's Children, 2011](#)). A similar trend is evident in India too. According to [National Crime Record Bureau \(NCRB\)](#), 2016 majority of the juvenile delinquents apprehended for various crimes in India are in the age category of 16-18 years. The adolescent phase is, therefore, a crucial phase in a child's life. Several factors contribute to the development of criminal behavior in children, especially during this phase. There are several factors like family structure and processes in general ([Steinberg, 2008](#)) especially parenting styles ([Baumrind, 2005](#)), poverty ([Das, 2017](#)), peer influence ([Haynie & Osgood, 2005](#)), and nature and characteristics of the community ([Vazsonyi et al., 2008](#)) in particular which have maximum significance.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Parenting and Parenting Style

[Hoghghi and Long \(2004\)](#) defines parenting as the adoption of certain values, beliefs, and attitudes by the parents and replication of these factors (i.e. values, beliefs, and attitudes) in their behavior towards their children, as primary agents of socialization. [Darling and Steinberg \(1993\)](#) explained parenting style as a collection of “perceivable attitudes” of the parents towards their children (as cited in [Mowen, 2011](#)). [Baumrind \(1966\)](#) has explained two kinds of parenting behavior such as responsiveness and demandingness. These two parenting behaviors form different combinations leading to the formation of four types of parenting styles ([Baumrind, 2005](#)). These parenting styles are authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful ([Kausser&Pinquart, 2016](#)). Out of the four parenting styles, three parenting styles have a maximum impact on the development of criminal behavior in children.

In an authoritarian parenting style, parents use brute force or other power affirming techniques i.e. harsh corporal punishment to control the behavior of their children, but they hardly ever provide any clarification for giving harsh punishment nor do they allow voiced reciprocation (Bi et al., 2018). Authoritarian parenting style is characterized by a lack of emotional support and rejection of the child by the parents. This indicates that these parenting styles would, in theory, be harmful to a child growing up in such a hostile, unloving, and autocratic environment.

In the permissive parenting style, parents do not set any kind of boundaries for their children and rarely enforce any rules. Due to this, they fail to monitor and control their children's behavior and punish their deviant behavior leading to low self-control in children, which in turn increases the risk of delinquency (Hoeve et al., 2008). Improper supervision, no discipline, inadequate emotional support, and parental rejection are the most significant factors in predicting delinquency in adolescents (Mwangangi, 2019). Permissive parenting style can be explained in terms of coaxing, cajoling, and molly-coddling along with a lack of supervision and discipline from the parents.

Neglectful parenting is associated with the increased involvement of adolescents in delinquent acts owing to poor relationship i.e. lack of parental warmth and absence of rules and regulations between children and parents (Bi et al., 2018) Parents in this parenting style detach themselves emotionally from their children and do not provide the necessary attention to the needs of the children (Lee et al., 2006).

Out of the four parenting styles, children who are brought up in neglectful parenting styles are more than likely to get involved in delinquent activities during their adolescence (Tapia et al., 2018; Hoeve et al., 2011; Simons & Conger, 2007).

### Gender Difference

Parental attachment and the mode of parenting act as important predictors for the development of delinquency in both boys and girls. Parenting styles can vary from child to child within the same household. The gender of the child influences the parenting style. Parents supervise girls more closely than boys (Kausar & Pinguart, 2016). Boys become more vulnerable to committing offense/crime due to neglectful parenting style whereas girls mostly get involved in criminal activities due to the permissive parenting style (Hoeve et al., 2009). Parenting style varies from one culture to another (Chang, 2007). In some cultures, an authoritarian parenting style works best for girls (example- India) whereas in some other cultures (i.e. western countries) authoritative parenting works. A similar pattern in parenting style for boys exists across cultures.

### Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical perspectives i.e., *Social Bonding Theory* and *Social Control Theory* along with the related empirical studies are discussed in the context of parenting and their possible role in the development of delinquency among children. Hirschi's (1969) *Social Bonding Theory (SBT)* states that social bonds and attachments are the two main protective factors against delinquency. He further states the social bond that exists between individuals and society has four components i.e. attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. Social bonding theory explains that delinquency in children is more likely to occur due to the weakening of the bonds existing between individuals and society; due to weakening of parental attachment; lack of commitment to conventional goals; involvement in illegitimate activities; and disbelief in the law. The style of parenting used by the parents is one of the crucial socializing agents, besides other socializing agents like school that can transform an impulsive person into a norm-abiding person. Some social bonds like attachment to parents, attachment to school, and family stability (both economically and socially) can curb impulsive desires and deviant behavior. When a child's attachment to parents decreases due to negative parenting styles, the social bonding between them starts to wither away. This weakening of the social bond between the parents and their children paves the way for engagement in deviance and later delinquency by the children (Cicerali & Cicerali, 2017; Mowen, 2011).

Following social bonding theory, Hirschi formulated social control theory in the year 1969. According to *Social Control Theory (SCT)*, the social disadvantages (like coming from a broken family, poor parental attachment, lack of proper parental supervision and guidance, criminal parents, low education level, low income) have a positive link with the commission of the crime (Cicerali & Cicerali, 2017) as there is lack of social control. Lack of involvement of parents in a child's life, lack of belief in social norms due to poor social bonding, and lack of positive attachment to parents are the main reasons behind a lack of social control and non-conformity to the law by the children. Lack of social control, in turn, leads to deviance and later delinquency in the children (Mowen, 2011). Wesley and colleagues (2009) thus state that when bonds to conventional order of an individual are broken, then that individual engages in delinquent activities.

Williams (2006) found that a good relationship between parents and adolescents, good communication between parents and children; proper monitoring of children's behavior by the parents, and setting a limit for children play a significant role in controlling the involvement of the adolescent in delinquent activities. The result of the study can be interpreted in terms of both social bonding and control theories. The attachment existing between parents and their adolescent children due to greater parental involvement leads to having a certain degree of control over the deviant behavior of children.

Moitra and Mukherjee (2010) in their study on both adolescent delinquent and non-delinquent boys found that lack of parental support, care, and attention leads to the rise of deviance in children. Lack of time spent by parents with their

children owing to large family size, their working status as well as their poor economic condition are also found to play a decisive role in the development of deviant behavior in children and their subsequent association with delinquent peers. To sum up, neglectful and authoritarian parenting styles used by the parents are the main reasons behind the commission of delinquent activities by children. The findings of the study can be interpreted in terms of both social bonding and control theories. Poor family bonding, parental apathy, and harsh disciplinary practices lead to deviant behavior in children which later becomes difficult to control through various social agents, like schools, family and peers, etc.

Authoritative parenting style (i.e. positive parenting practices) is the best way to impose social control on the delinquent behavior of juveniles ([Mowen, 2011](#)). He further states that when there is a shift from one parental practice to another i.e. from positive parenting practices to negative parenting practices (like neglectful or permissive or authoritarian parenting style), the social bond existing between the parents and children weakens which results in poor social control leading to delinquency in juveniles.

[Poduthase \(2012\)](#) in his study used four parental behavioral paradigms (i.e. neglect, conflict, deviant behavior and attitude, and disruption) developed by [Lober and Stouthamer-Loeber \(1986\)](#) to show the negative effects of these factors on the behavior of adolescents. Lack of interaction, the inability of the parents to address adequately to the problem behavior of their children along with absolute freedom to boys, and lack of supervision and guidance have seen in neglect paradigm explain lack of control and high delinquency. In the case of conflict paradigm use of harsh, abusive punishment by the parents to control delinquent behavior in early childhood often leads to an exhibition of violent behavior and violent crime during adolescence and adulthood. The harsh punishment received from parents reduces the attachment to parents and thereby, complete loss of control leading to increased association with deviant peers. Parental deviant behaviors and attitude paradigms state that deviant parents often support the deviant and violent behavior of their children. Due to the strong social bonding between deviant parents and children, the parents ignore the wrongful acts of their children, thus leading to complete loss of control over their children. Family disruption i.e. conflict within the family and absence of either one parent can cause the behavioral problem in children due to lack of attachment and involvement. This, in turn, can foster negative behavioral outcomes like delinquency.

[Moitra, Mukherjee, and Chatterjee \(2017\)](#) in their study on juvenile delinquents from low-income families found that the permissive parenting style along with low parental control is the main reason behind increased involvement of children belonging to low-income criminal families indulging in delinquent activities. Lack of control i.e. restrictions and absence of set parental rules as well as low self-control of youth are the major factors responsible for their involvement in and commission of delinquency.

Parental attachment is alone not sufficient to protect a child against delinquency. Neglectful and authoritarian parenting styles along with other “criminogenic factors and situations” are found to play an influential role in the commission of a crime by the children (i.e. both boys and girls) ([Tapia, Alarid & Clare, 2018](#)).

Therefore, based on these two theories (SBT and SCT) and findings from several empirical studies, it can be deduced that inadequate parenting practices and negative parenting styles may be directly linked to delinquency. Not only parenting styles and practices but also parental attachment is a strong predictor of delinquency ([McCluskey & Tovar, 2003](#)) especially for young female delinquents ([Alarid, Burton & Cullen, 2000](#)). The parental attachment includes love and affection, respect, and communication between parents and a child. It can also include guidance and supervision and quantity or quality of communication between the parents and the child. When a person’s attachment with the social unit fails, involvement in deviant activities begins. Therefore, parent-child attachment is better predictors of future Delinquency in comparison to other social indicators, such as income or family type ([Collishaw et al., 2011](#)) as well as other parental risk factors.

## Research Question

The current study explores and analyses various parental risk factors like criminality of parents, their marital status, and the relation between parents, working status of parents, the relation between parent and child, parental support, guidance, and supervision in the development of delinquency in children.

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

A total of 116 juvenile delinquents present during the time of the study in four Government-run Observation and Special Homes (O&SH) are considered. The age range varies from 10-18 years with a mean age of 15.92 and an SD of 1.57 years. The mean age of boys (n=100) is 16.02 with an SD of 1.53 years, while the mean age of girls (n=16) is 15.37 with an SD of 1.74 years. Out of the four OSHs, three are for boys; at Rourkela, Angul and Berhampur, and one separate OSH for the girls Behrampur. The children present in these Homes at the time of the study had been apprehended for involvement in violent crimes (murder, kidnapping, robbery, and rape), property crime (theft, trespassing, and burglary).

## Method of Data Collection

The information was collected from the juvenile delinquents with the help of a researcher designed semi-structured questionnaire seeking information on various parental risk factors criminality, marital status, occupation and income, the living status of parents, parent-child relationship, parental guidance and supervision, and maltreatment of the child by the parents. These factors were then coded for ease of scoring and performing statistical analysis. The data thus generated were categorical. Descriptive statistical analysis (e.g. percentage) is carried out in MS-Excel 2010 to find out the most influential parental risk factors on the development of criminal behavior in children. Narrative analysis is conducted to explain the role played by various parental risk factors in the commission of a criminal act.

## Procedure

Before data collection ethical permission from the Institute's Ethics Committee of National Institute of Technology, Rourkela was obtained. Due permission for conducting the study in the Government based O&SHs was taken from the Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD), Government of Odisha. Further, permission from the individual superintendent of each O&SH is taken. Complete information about the juvenile delinquents was obtained from the official records (Individual Care Plan Reports on the juveniles) present in O&SH. Following an informal talk and rapport building, each child was interviewed separately where the interviewer tried to understand the reason behind his/her committing a crime. The WCD guidelines were adhered to during the entire process of data collection and in the presence of the superintendent of the O&SHs.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

We have considered the possible influence of various parental risk factors on the children prodding them to get involved in various crimes. As stated earlier, the parental risk factors include criminality of parents, marital status, the relation between parents, working status of parents, parent-child relationship, and parental supervision and guidance. Each of these factors is discussed below.

### Parental Risk Factors

Six parental risk factors are studied in detail in the current study. Further, gender-based investigation of the parental risk factors is carried out.

**Table 1:** Parental Risk Factors and Juvenile Delinquency

Parental Variables	Number of Juvenile Delinquents (N=116)	Percentage (%)	Number of Boy Juvenile Delinquents (n1=100)	Percentage (%)	Number of Girl Juvenile Delinquents (n2=16)	Percentage (%)
<b>Working status of Parents</b>						
Working Father	92	79.4	79	79	13	81.3
Working Mother	68	58.6	60	60	8	6.9
<b>Criminality of Parents</b>						
Yes	15	12.9	8	8	7	43.8
No	101	87.1	92	92	9	56.2
<b>Marital Status of Parents</b>						
Married Relationship	89	76.7	8	8	9	56.2
Single Parent	27	23.3	20	20	7	43.8
<b>Parental relationship</b>						
Good Relationship	100	86.2	87	87	13	81.3
Bad and Abusive Relationship	16	13.8	13	13	3	18.7
<b>Parent-Child Relationship (PCR)</b>						
Good PCR	68	58.6	61	61	7	43.8
Poor and Strained PCR	38	32.8	36	36	2	12.4
Bad and Abusive PCR	10	8.6	3	3	7	43.8
<b>Parental Guidance and Supervision</b>						
Improper Guidance and Supervision	109	94	94	94	15	93.8
Proper Guidance and Supervision	7	6	6	6	1	6.2

Parents of juvenile delinquents are mostly engaged in the workforce. Most of the juvenile delinquents have a working father (79.4%) as well as a working mother (58.6%). The engagement of both parents in the workforce usually leaves a child unsupervised and unmonitored for a long period. Lack of monitoring and feeling of loneliness due to the absence of parents can lead to involvement with deviant peers ([Kim et.al, 1999](#)), which further opens the door to their involvement in criminal activities ([Ngale, 2009](#)).

In the study, a few of the juvenile delinquents (12.9%) have a criminal parent. Having criminal parents ([Van de Rakt et al., 2008](#)) is generally linked to either commission of crime or involvement in crime by adolescents. Parents involve their children in criminal activities willingly, thereby, teaching a child to commit criminal activities without any compunction visiting of conscience. A crime like murder is committed by male juvenile delinquents along with their family members for keeping up the family's name or for the economic prosperity of their family (i.e. human sacrifice). As stated by a juvenile delinquent (male):

*"I killed the boy along with my father. Despite belonging to other caste groups, he was having an affair with my elder sister. This affair would have brought shame to our family."*

Another male delinquent explained that:

*"Our village priest told us to give "Naara Bali" (human sacrifice) to Mother Earth so that she would give better crops. Therefore, my father, mother, and I kidnapped my cousin brother's son and chopped his head off and let his blood seep into the soil."*

Girls have committed violent crimes against their abusers or under duress of the family (i.e. poisoning someone). A delinquent girl averred that

*"I killed the man, who was trying to rape me again by hitting him on his head with a brick, lying nearby."*

Based on the explanations provided by the delinquents, the conclusion can be drawn that parents especially fathers include their son/s in such activity as they consider their son/s to be mentally and physically superior to their daughters.

The maximum number of juveniles (76.7%) belongs to two-parent families rather than single-parent families (where their mother acts as the head of their family after the death of their father or abandonment of them by their father). That the children belonging to intact families (i.e. living with both biological parents) are less prone to crime causation than children belonging to the single-parent family ([Sogar, 2017](#)) contradicts with the present study. Parents staying together cannot alone provide a loving stable family environment. Several factors like parent's relationship with each other, parent-child relationship, parental control and guidance, and financial stability of the family are also essential for the proper upbringing of children and preventing them from criminal activities ([Cernkovich & Giordano, 1987](#)). The absence of any of these factors may affect a child's committing crime despite belonging to the two-parents family.

Violence or abuse experienced at home, hostile and punitive parenting practices, or growing up in a family where parents are not adequately involved in their child's life are found to be the predominant risk factors in the involvement of children in violent or another kind of deviant behavior ([Cauffman & Steinberg, 2000](#)). Juvenile delinquents reported few cases (13.8%) of abuse occurring in their families.

A child stated that:

*"My father comes home drunk. He argues with my mother over petty things and hits her often. When we initially tried to stop him we got beaten too. This is a daily occurrence in my home. I do not try to stop it anymore. When my father comes home and starts behaving rudely, I just go out to my friend's house or just sit with my friends at our place of gathering."*

A child perceives violence and abuse as normal if he/she has experienced it for long. This apathy may be one of the reasons behind less reporting of abuse seen or experienced. A few delinquents have reported having a bad and strained relationship with their parents. A bad parent-child relationship is found to have a negative influence on the children and leads to the development of anti-social behavior and involvement in criminal activities ([Zingraff, Leiter, Johnsen & Myers, 1994](#)). Children who have committed offenses/crimes despite having a good relationship with parents may be explained due to extreme permissive parenting, which never interferes, but they are either protective or apathetic to the child irrespective of the desirable or undesirable consequences of their actions. In addition to bad peer association, this unbridled love may make parents turn a blind eye to their wrongdoings leading to the commission of the crime by children. A large number of girls have reported being abused and neglected by their parents especially by their mothers. A female juvenile delinquent stated that:

*"I am always beaten up and scolded by my mother for small mistakes. Once I was raped and I told my mother about the incident. She thrashed and scolded me a lot using foul language. She blamed me for bringing shame to my family. But, she never rebuked my elder brother when she brought a girl to our house to marry her. She was silent on the issue. But I was chatised for no mistake of mine."*

Another male delinquent reported that:

*“My father was never happy with my friend circle. He always reproached me when I came home late. He and my mother always argued about it. My mother decided to kill my father as he used to scold and beat me always. My mother loves me a lot. She believes me and can never bear to see me ever getting hurt. So she killed my father to protect me from my father.”*

But only a few boys reported any kind of violence or ill-treatment by the parents. It is again culturally linked, as son/s is/are valued more than daughter/s in Indian society. Therefore, boys in Indian families are generally treated with love, care, and are pampered a lot in comparison to girls. Those juvenile delinquents who get abused, in turn, commits a violent crime which can be explained as the cause and effect of a bad relationship. The victim becomes the perpetrator, when the caregivers (parents) disrupt the bond that exists, by maltreating the children ([Zingraff, Leiter, Johnsen & Myers, 1994](#)). We found that many children who are boys have never been maltreated in the family, yet have committed a crime. A possible reason behind less reporting of maltreatment of boys in the family could be attributed to hiding the truth of being maltreated, to prove their masculinity.

Parental involvement in children’s matters, attachment, guidance, and supervision is a sine qua non for preventing crimes. Lack of parental supervision and guidance is found to be a significant risk factor for the commission of violent crimes by juveniles. A child expressed that:

*“My parents go out to work at dawn. They have to travel to distant places in search of work. Since I am growing up, I am always left with my elder sister. She has virtually raised me. I hardly get to see my parents. By the time they return from work, they are usually very tired. Sometimes, Mom cooks and at other times we eat the leftovers/whatever is available. My mother hardly gets time to talk to me and my father goes to sleep or goes out to drink. I have always loved my sister and I do care for her a lot. I do not know whether I love my parents as much as I love my sister.”*

Most of the juvenile delinquents have expressed that their parents do not spend quality time with them, nor do they take care of them properly.

A male delinquent stated that:

*“When I gave money to my mother, she was very happy. She never asked me wherefrom I got the money and how I came across so much. She just kept the money and kissed me a lot. She just served me food and we never talked about it.”*

Parents do not reprimand their children or rectify their mistakes. They do not refrain from mixing with bad peers and getting involved in delinquent activities. Mothers usually turn blind eyes to their sons’ mistakes or try to cover up their mistakes, whereas fathers usually remain aloof from the affairs of the children and spend most of their time outside the home, doing jobs or drinking. [Osgood & Anderson \(2004\)](#) found a similar trend that explained that poor parental supervision weakens the social control parents have on the behavior of the children. Therefore, without proper parental supervision, love, affection, and discipline, the child does not acquire the necessary internal control to avoid mixing with delinquent peers and getting involved in anti-social activities.

## CONCLUSION

In fine, parental neglect has a strong relation with delinquency and can lead to recidivism in children ([Trulson & Caudill, 2017](#)). Lack of proper monitoring and mentoring coupled with apathy and neglect at home leads children to get involved with bad peers, which in turn leads them to the path of deviancy. Control of parents during childhood especially during adolescence is imperative and obligatory. It is during the adolescent phase that the influence of parents on the children decreases and the influence of peer/s increases. Adolescence being a period of asserting independence and awaking of rebelliousness in children, parents should rather use a careful combination of both authoritarian and authoritative parenting style with moderation. Sometimes, parents have to be like friends and sometimes authoritarian to prevent a child from getting involved in criminal activities or with deviant peers. Complete freedom or complete neglect is linked to causing delinquent behavior in children. In the study, molly-coddling of sons, lack of communication, and improper guidance and supervision of the parents are found to be the reasons behind a boy’s delinquency. Parental neglect, lack of support, and insufficient monitoring are responsible for the commission of criminal activities by girls. Thus, it can be concluded that improper guidance and supervision, lack of parental support and communication, excess love, or complete neglect are some of the parental risk factors that positively contribute to the development of criminal tendencies in children.

## LIMITATION AND STUDY FORWARD

The present study was carried out in a limited period as per the instruction of the Superintendent of the O&SHs. The verbatim provided by the juvenile delinquents could not be further verified from external sources (i.e. parents of the juvenile offender or from the victim’s side) due to the restriction imposed by WCD. Parents of the juvenile delinquents could not be contacted and interviewed due to the confidentiality clause imposed by WCD. The study provides scope for further research in the area of parenting practices and its impact on juvenile delinquency, especially in the Indian context. Further research is needed to consider the gender-specific attitude of the parents towards their children and find out the reason behind such perceptions.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

First Author Contribution was involved in drafting the manuscript, collecting the data, and designing the tables analyses the data and interpreting the results. The second author was involved in planning and supervising the work, processing the work, helped in drafting the manuscript, corrected and revised the manuscript for improving the quality of the manuscript.

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