

A case control study on aggression criminology essay

[Law](#), [Criminology](#)



1. MBBS Students, AFMC2. Prof & Head, Dept. of Psychiatry, AFMC3. Assoc Prof, Dept. of Community Medicine, AFMC4. Dean and Deputy Commandant, AFMC5. Prof, Dept. of Internal Medicine, AFMC

INTRODUCTION:

Children's Act 1960 defines a delinquent as " a child who has committed an offence". A " juvenile" means a boy or a girl who has not attained the age of 18 years (1). In a broad sense though, juvenile delinquency is not merely " juvenile crime". It embraces all and any deviations from normal youthful behavior and includes the incorrigible, the ungovernable, the habitually disobedient and those who desert their homes and mix with immoral people, those with behavioral problems and indulging in antisocial practices(2). In United States it is reported that almost 2% of children between 7-18 years attend juvenile courts (2). With a population of around 300 million and a per capita income higher than India they have a juvenile delinquent population of 1. 65 million (3) whereas in India with a population of over 1. 2 billion out of which 40% are children and a much lower per capita income, the number of juvenile delinquents is reported at just under 24, 000(4). What this small number reflects is not a low crime rate, but just that juvenile delinquency in India is a case of under reporting. These figures are only the tip of the iceberg. Even though the incidence of juvenile delinquency has increased in the past decade, cases in rural areas largely go unreported and even in urban areas the records do not reflect a true scale. The increase in number of delinquents has been attributed to a variety of bio psychosocial factors such as rapid urbanization with resultant migration of poor families to towns, poor law enforcement, the influence of violence in cinema, parental death, or

abandonment and poverty leading to environmental encouragement to stealing. (2, 3, 4).

AIM:

To assess the socio demographic characteristics as well as the aggression quotient of juvenile delinquents in observation homes across the country and compare it with non-delinquent children.

METHODOLOGY:

A questionnaire-based study on socio demographic characteristics and aggression quotient of the delinquent children was conducted in 5 juvenile homes in 3 cities of Hyderabad, Lucknow and Pune. Cases (Juvenile delinquents) Inclusion criteria: children present in the observation home on the day of study with: An existing criminal record and/or Involved in an ongoing criminal case and/or Undergoing rehabilitation for a proven crime committed. Exclusion criteria: children living in the observation home under the causes of welfare and protection, without any previous or ongoing criminal case. Sample: the sample selected was a sample of convenience consisting of a cross-section of juvenile delinquents from observation homes across India. The questionnaire was administered in interview format and their answers were noted. Controls Control group: a control group of children was selected from a nearby government school in Pune who were matched for age, sex and socioeconomic characteristics with the delinquent children. They were also administered survey in a verbal, question-and-answer format. The socio-demographic questionnaire was modified appropriately to suit the needs of the control population (the section dealing with the details of the

crime in which the child was implicated was deleted). However, the aggression questionnaire was administered unchanged as it was to the delinquent children. Duration of study: June 2012-July 2012 Study instruments: For aggression quotient: A modified Buss and Perry aggression questionnaire was used for this estimation. 19 questions were asked under four heads: Anger Hostility Physical aggression Verbal aggression. Each question was rated with points from 1 to 4 depending upon how characteristic or uncharacteristic the situation given is to the individual. The total so calculated was compared with peers and the control group and a final conclusion was drawn. For Socio-demographic characteristics: A questionnaire containing questions concerned with the child's age, education status, family conditions, economic and environmental background was compiled with the help of Dept of Community Medicine, AFMC. The questions asked were regarding: Child's particulars: age and education status Socio-economic background: occupation of the parents and the number of dependent people in the family. Factors responsible: history of broken family, addictions (self and in family), parents in jail and physical and sexual abuse. Repentance and recidivism: whether the child felt his actions were wrong and history of any previous crime committed. Statistical analysis: The results obtained were compiled and compared to obtain the relative aggression quotient in consideration with the socio-demographic background. P values were calculated by Fischer's exact test, Manwhitney U test and Chi square test RESULTS: RESULT: A total of ninety inmates were studied of which seventy four were boys and sixteen were girls. five

observation homes were visited in three cities- Hyderabad, Pune, Lucknow.

(Fig 1)

Fig 1: Distribution of Boys and Girls studied in various cities

All of the 16 girls were from the observation home in Hyderabad. All of the sixteen girls were from the observation home in Hyderabad. Mean Age of boys was 16. 25 years (max was 18 years and minimum was 13 years) and of girls was 17. 31 years (Max was 18 years and min was 13 years). Median education level of boys was seventh standard (Max was twelfth and min was illiterate) and of girls was eighth standard (Max was eleventh and min was fifth). A total of ninety children (74 boys & 16 girls), matched for age and education were selected from neighborhood locality belonging to similar socioeconomic status. They were also administered the same questionnaire and acted as controls. The variety of criminal activities that the interviewed children were involved in is shown in Figure 2:

Figure 2: Crimes committed by the delinquents

The crimes committed included theft, murder, assault, rape, gambling, eloping, counterfeit notes etc. Socio-economic status: 100% of the delinquents surveyed belonged to the lower socio-economic strata as per the Kuppuswamy scale (6). Therefore, the control population was also taken to match the case children socio-economically. Various factors explored in the study are shown in the table 1:

Table 1: Socio demographic factors

Factors

Case

Control

p value

Odds Ratio

Broken Family

34%8%0.0006.15

Addictions

26%3%0.0009.95

Jailed Family Members

6%

-

0.02

-

Physical Abuse

42%

-

0.000

-

Sexual Abuse

7%

-

0. 02

-

Aggression quotient: The aggression quotient was calculated from the sum total of scores of four factors- Anger, Hostility, Physical aggression and Verbal aggression. The scores, compiled separately for girls and boys of case and control groups are tabulated in Table 2:

Table 2: Aggression Quotient of Delinquents

Factors

Case

Control

Anger

(Max= 24)

Boys

12. 455. 81

Girls

16. 59. 86

Hostility

(Max= 20)

Boys

11. 426. 34

Girls

10. 887. 26

Physical Aggression

(Max= 20)

Boys

12. 016. 56

Girls

10. 635. 41

Verbal Aggression

(Max= 12)

Boys

5. 513. 26

Girls

6. 133. 41Rate of repentance and recidivism: Out of the ninety delinquents in the study, twenty one of them were known repeat offenders and while almost 50% repent their actions, many of them openly denied having taken part in any sort of criminal activity. DISCUSSION: The Juvenile Justice act was

passed in 1986. Then, it was amended in 2000 that increased the upper age limit from 16 to 18yrs. There have been very few studies on juvenile delinquents in India as shown in table 3:

Table 3: Studies done on Juvenile Delinquents

Study Parameter

No. of Studies

Authors

Population size

Factors associated with juvenile delinquency

3Ganga et al 1989 Dayal et al 1986 Shastree et al 1968 n= 225 n= 100 n= 200

Parental Deprivation

1Tandon et al 1978 n= 50

Drug Usage

1Malhotra et al 2007 n= 34

Medicolegal Aspects

1Nagarajaa et al 2011 n= 60

Oral Health

1Vyas et al 1991 n= 74

Our study: Sociodemographic factors and aggression questionnaire, 2011, n= 90, 16 girls

The sample size of 90 delinquents was a size of convenience. It included all the delinquents who were present at the point of study in the homes that we were permitted to visit. We had intended to include an almost equal number of girls as boys. However, the final count was 16 girls out of a total of 90 children. Ours is the first Indian study regarding juvenile delinquency to include girls. The reason for this lack is due to the noticeably low numbers of delinquent girls in most welfare homes. According to earlier studies by Dayal (7) and Bonger (8), this is attributed to their biological characteristics, differences in cultural training and further, greater exposure of men to crime and greater leniency towards female offenders. Also, as stated by the warden of the Girls Observation Home, Pune, many of the so-called delinquent girls are more often victims of the situation rather than the main perpetrators. But, as noted in our study, few girls were also apprehended for crimes like murder. The mean age of boys as well as girls in the observation homes we visited was between 16 and 18. This shows how vital understanding this adolescent age group is to understand juvenile delinquency and its relations. It is at this age that the child lives with a combination of well-developed physicality and immature mentality. He is easily guided by principles of pleasure and reward which lead to him/her committing the crime. The most frequently committed crime though, we found, was theft. This finding was corroborated by the national statistics compiled by The Registrar of India. Socio-demography: One of the most glaring finding we came across in our study was that all the children we

interviewed were from the lower socio-economic strata. A similar pattern has been reported by Dayal et al (7). This might be because these children, being of an impressionable age, do not mind employing unlawful means as long as they get their heart's desire. Though this factor provided our study with skewed data, it also highlighted an important loophole in our current legal system. When we asked the wardens of observation homes about this, they said it is not that children from the higher socio-economic strata don't commit crimes. But, such children, even when caught are easily bailed out due to the nominal bail amount. However, they confirmed that rich or poor, it was the same factors like lack of a caring adult presence and peer pressure that provide motivation for the crime. A broken family indicated that the parents were either separated or divorced or unable to live in mutual harmony. They also included children with a single parent or under the care of a guardian. Lack of a caring adult presence, we found, is one of the most important environmental factors that drives a child to commit a crime. In our study delinquent children hailing from broken homes is 34% as compared to the mere 8% of control. A similar observation was made by Ganga (9) and Tandon (10) that the frequency of broken homes was almost 4 times in the delinquent population as compared to the controls. This, we believe, is because a juvenile is just a child in the formative years of his/her life. It is at this stage that children are in most need of love, care and security, in the absence of which they either resort to antisocial behavior to gain attention or they grow up with a devil-may-care attitude that holds no respect for any rules and regulations. The questions pertaining to addictions (tobacco, alcohol, paan/ghutka or any banned drugs) asked about their presence in

any adults living with the children. However, with little prodding most of the children came forward with a history of self-addictions. It might be in the form of alcohol or whitener abuse or smoking or even drugs like marijuana (depending upon their financial resources). Almost 26% of the children openly admitted to the use and abuse of such things. However the actual figures may be higher. Addictions are many a time an act of rebellion. However, it is also an act that catches children's attention and very quickly becomes a trend. Thanks to the hype created in the media about such things as alcohol and smoking, a child in the group who smokes and drinks is regarded "cool". This belief is further accentuated by the presence of a parent or guardian who does the same thing. It is then only a matter of time until peer pressure and self-motivation turn every child to the substance. However, faster than they realize every abuse turns to addiction and every addiction needs money to be sustained. To this end, the child discovers another motivation to commit crime. In relation to pre-exposure to crime and punishment, 6% of the children in juvenile homes admitted that at least one of their caretakers had been to jail. It is a well-known fact that children learn from what they see. This was irrevocably shown by the Bobo Doll Experiment (11). In our study, we noticed that children whose parents had a history of substance abuse were more liable to addictions and similarly some children trying to emulate their parents who were in jail ended up as delinquents. History of abuse was recorded next; physical abuse (repeated episodes of beating with sticks/lathis/stones by a parent or teacher) and/or sexual abuse. An astounding 42% of delinquent children reported physical abuse while almost 7% reported being exposed to sexual abuse. In the control group

however, no child gave any history of abuse. There were quite a number of children who didn't realize what abuse meant in spite of having gone through it themselves. Then, there were some who rebelled at their breaking point. Aggression quotient: Though there have been studies on aggressive behavior disorders of juvenile delinquents in India, ours is the first in which the aggression quotient of the delinquents was compared to normal children. A Study by Tandon et al(10) showed that 60 out of the 100 children they studied were aggressive using TAT analysis. What we used was the Aggression Questionnaire by Buss and Perry.(5) Our results showed that delinquents were almost doubly as aggressive as controls. However, aggression alone cannot be taken as a factor. There are many people equally aggressive who grow up on the right side of the law. Also, as was concluded by Tandon et al(10)many of the classified-aggressive delinquents in their study were apprehended on charges like vagrancy and ticket-less travel which are not particularly aggressive crimes. On the other hand, we found that girls in case as well as control group had a higher mean aggression score than the boys and this goes against the theory of Yeudall (12). However, this difference might be due to the Indian scenario wherein girls are not allowed to express themselves as much as in the west. This results in much bottling up of feelings which end getting expressed in activities like running away, elopement and other violent crimes. This is reflected by the fact that girls scored significantly higher in anger whereas the physical aggression was lower in girls. Most of the time though, these girls end up as victims of some scheming mind and that is when they get apprehended by the law. Repentance: Although 23% of the children we found were repeat

offenders, 50% of the total also repented what they did. According to them it was either unintentional- in a moment of passion or just the result of unfavorable circumstances. This statement by the children was supported by every warden of every home that we talked to. According to them it is not that they were bad children; it was more of a result of combination of desperation and a momentary lapse of reason. They very strongly believe that majority of the children are not irreversibly injured by this experience and can still grow up to be contributory citizens of the society, if only given a chance. CONCLUSION: At the end of the day, it is very difficult to actually pinpoint one particular factor responsible for juvenile delinquency. The factors responsible may be psychiatric, social or even genetic. They vary from child to child and from situation to situation. But, some collections of factors do overlap like broken homes, addictions and abuse. Delinquents are also relatively more aggressive than normal. What we need to realize though is that: it is in these homes that we get our chance to provide these misguided children with some profitable occupation and thereby prevent them from coming back (to bad world again). Cutting down the number of repeat offenders is one of the effective ways to cut down juvenile delinquency. How to prevent juvenile delinquency is a difficult question to answer. In our country, we will need sustainable development- an education system that can reach every child; an economical plan that reduces the number of families below the poverty line and a community which is made aware to help and accept these children. We should not forget our commitments to these children of our society for at the end of the day, many things may wait, but a child can't. Now is the time his bones are being

formed, his mind being developed. To him we can't say tomorrow for his name is today.