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Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency in Ventura County, California

A Case Study of Youth in the City of Oxnard, CA

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Literature Review

Background of Study

There have been several studies conducted on juvenile delinquency in recent years. Different factors have been studied to determine what causes youth to become involved in delinquency, in order to create early intervention programs for those individuals in hopes of steering them away from delinquency. There is good evidence that early interventions in childhood (e.g., nurse home visiting, preschool intellectual enrichment programs, and parent management training) are effective in preventing delinquency (Loeber, Farrington, and Petechuk, 2013). Fomby and Sennott (2013) hypothesized that where family structure transitions are related to changes in residences and school enrollments, youth will be more likely to develop negative peer networks that are associated with a higher likelihood of problem behavior. Here, changes in the family structure can have a negative impact on the youth's behavior. Schroeder, Osgood, and Oghia (2010) state that family structure transitions can be detrimental to children's well-being and family functioning and have the potential to contribute to juvenile delinquency. Studying family structure is an important factor in order to determine what in that factor causes youth to become involved with delinquency.

Data has shown that a substantial proportion of children now spend time in single or cohabiting parent households and these households tend to be less stable than marriages (Fomby and Sennott, 2013). As a result, much of the effect of family instability on children and adolescent behavior has been attributed to economic stress and changes in parenting behavior (Fomby and Sennot, 2013) after a change in family structure. In addition, according to Theobald, Farrington, and Piquero (2012), conflict between parents can also have deleterious effects on the

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children where they can experience inconsistent parenting, reduce affection and warmth, and reduced supervision, all which have been found to be predictive of late delinquency.

Economic stress can also be an indicator why youth become delinquent. It has always been assumed that youth who have low socioeconomic status are more vulnerable to be involved in delinquent acts. Agnew, Matthews, Bucher, Welcher, and Keyes (2008) explain that these youth experience frustration with their status and as a result may turn to delinquency to achieve economic success, to make themselves feel better, to seek revenge against those who frustrate them or to achieve status in the eyes of their peers. Economic stress can also be triggered by the neighborhood these youth reside in. As stated by Sampson (1986), lower class areas tend to be characterized by a much more active street life than middle life. As a result, there is higher presence of law enforcement in these neighborhoods and what each juvenile does, is carefully watched over by law enforcement. It is unfortunate that this occurs, but the reality is that higher crime exists in lower income neighborhoods. Moreover, in addendum to Agnew et al (2008), their study explains that poor individuals may have moderately higher levels of serious delinquency but the relationship between socioeconomic status and economic problems may be weaker than imagined because the estimated values of the goods and services lower-income families in the United States obtained by government and other sources of aid averages more than twice the annual income of such families (Agnew et al, 2008). Similarly, Kierkus and Hewitt (2009) found that the relationship between family structure and delinquency was essentially invariant to socioeconomic status.

Peers are an important factor to be considered in youth who become involved with delinquency. Adolescent spend much time with their friends, attribute great importance to them,

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and are more strongly influenced by them during their adolescent years than at any other time in their life course (Haynie and Osgood, 2005). Knowing the importance of peer associations to adolescents, it is important for parents to monitor who their children are associating with. Tilton-Weaver, Burk, Kerr, and Sattin (2013) suggest parents should first attempt to find out what their adolescent are doing and whom they are with. That is, they should monitor, seek information, solicit, or make rules about their friendships. When parents are aware of problematic peers, they should limit adolescents' involvement with these peers by prohibiting contact or communicating disapproval of these peers (Tilton-Weaver et al, 2013). However, it doesn't always work this way. Parent usually gain knowledge of who their children are associating with once they have already developed a friendship, instead of parents monitoring whom their children are going to be with. Fergusson, Strain-Campbell, and Horwood (2002) found clear and consistent trends for increasing affiliations with deviant peers to be associated with increasing rates for crime and substance abuse at all ages. Their finding clearly suggest that affiliating with deviant peers has adverse outcomes for young people. However, Tilton-Weaver et al, (2013) state selection of delinquent peers is reduced when parents communicated disapproval of friends. However this would require parents to be actively involved in their child's life. As mentioned, when there is a change in the family structure, parents have other priorities in mind rather than monitor who their children are with. This can also lead to disregarding their child's education.

Education is also another indicator that has been studied in juvenile delinquency literature. Felson and Staff (2006), attempted to determine whether academic performance affects delinquency or whether the two behaviors have a spurious relationship. They believed that weak students turn to crime for enjoyment, money, status, and self-esteem because they cannot or do

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not obtain these rewards in school (Felson and Staff, 2006). Blomberg, Bates, Mann, Piquero, and Berk (2011) look into life events that occur during young adulthood that may lead youth to transition away from criminal behavior. If youth experience education success, it can lead them to a decreased likelihood of delinquency. As a result, Blomberg et al (2011) believe that school may potentially serve as one of the more positive and influential institutions for incarcerated youth. Their studies focused on youth who are incarcerated and asked if higher levels of school attendance following release among incarcerated youth reduce their likelihood of recidivism following their release. Although this study does ask how delinquency can be prevented, it does demonstrate the importance of schooling. They found that return to and sustained attendance in school following release appears to serve as an intervention for recidivism (Blomberg et al, 2011). That is why Felson and Staff (2006) examined the effects of grades, social bonds, test scores, and effort on delinquency. However, their results suggest that the relationship between academic performance and delinquency is spurious, not causal. Delinquency did not appear to be a response to the negative social evaluations that adolescents receive in form of grades. However, Hoffmann, Erickson and Spence (2013) found that better academic performance is associated with both less delinquency and stronger attachment to school. Overall, their findings provide important evidence that academic achievement is negatively related to involvement in delinquent activities.

This study will examine if **factors discussed above**: academic performance, family structure, peer association, and socioeconomic status, play a role in juvenile delinquency. There has been inconsistent finding among many theorists and researchers and this study is an attempt to bring clarity to the inconsistency in studying factors related to juvenile delinquency.

Purpose of Study

In this study, I attempt to determine if academic performance, family structure, peer association, and socioeconomic status is related to delinquency. However, this study will be focused on Oxnard, California as a case study. Oxnard is the most populous city in the County of Ventura. It is composed of 74% Hispanic and 15% White. In 2011, there were 8 murders, 26 rapes, 274 robberies, and 311 assaults (City Data 2013). However, in recent months, there has been an escalation of crime in this city. In one month, there have been at least a dozen gang-related violent crimes. Thus far, there have been 12 murders. An increase compared to 2011. Many of these murders have occurred in low-income neighborhood where juvenile crime is rising. Being a professional in this field and supervising juveniles who reside in Oxnard, I have personal knowledge of the crime that exist in this city. Determining if academic performance, family structure, negative peer associations, and socioeconomic status are related to delinquency is important in order to address the issues that can possibly arise from these factors at an early age to prevent these individuals from becoming delinquent.

Research Question

What is the role of academic performance, family structure, peer associations, and socioeconomic status on youth's involvement in delinquency?

Data Sources

Much of the data will be obtained from a survey that will be administered to the sample. In addition to the survey, data from each respective school will be acquired to obtain last semester grade point average (G.P.A) and school disciplinary reports. The sample will be

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selected from the four public high schools in Oxnard: Pacifica, Oxnard, Channel Islands, and Rio
Mesa High School. The participants will be from ages 14-18.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Youth with low grades are more likely to be involved in delinquency than youth with average grades.

Hypothesis 2: Youth who come from nontraditional families are more likely to be involved in delinquency, than youth who come from traditional families.

Hypothesis 3: Youth who associate with negative peers are more likely to be involved in delinquency.

Hypothesis 4: Youth from low-income families are more likely to be involved in delinquency than youth from high-income families.

Defining Variables

Dependent Variable

Delinquency

The task of operationalizing delinquency is difficult as juvenile delinquency varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. For the purpose of this paper, a similar scale of delinquency to Olczak, Parcell and Stott (1983) will be used. Respondents will be asked a series of questions related to delinquency (See appendix A). The scale will consist of the extent of legal processing: not involved in any acts considered to be delinquent, number of times committing said act but not being caught, cited by police but did not appear in Juvenile Court and referred to Juvenile Court.

Independent Variables

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Grades

I will draw measure of grade point average (GPA) from students' official transcripts for the previous semester and current GPA that will be provided by the school. "Below average" grades and "failure" will be considered low (See data analysis for recoding of GPA).

Family Structure

Family structure is distinguished between traditional and non-traditional. A traditional family structure consists of the respondent residing with both their biological/adoptive parents. Any other arrangement will be considered non-traditional.

Peer Associations

Sampled members will be questioned on a series of items relating to patterns of substance abuse, status offenses, and antisocial behaviors amongst their closest friends. Arthur and Waugh (2008) definition of status offense will be used which states; "a status offense is defined as conduct that is unlawful only because the offender is a minor. Common status offenses include running away, skipping school, and breaking curfew, as well as ungovernability, underage drinking and disorderly conduct (pg 555)."

Socioeconomic status

Socioeconomic status will be determined based on self-reported income for the household. Respondents will be asked the total household income. Using data from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services defining poverty at \$23, 550 for a household of four will be used to distinguish between low, medium and high income. Low income: 0-\$24,000; Low/Medium income: \$24,001-\$48, 000; medium income \$48,001-\$72,000; high income: \$72,001 and above.

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Data Analysis

The data obtained from the survey and GPA from the schools will be inputted to the IBM SPSS Statistics software in order to analyze the data. The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice “research and planning team uses IBM SPSS Statistics and SPSS Modeler to analyze delinquency at every level, from statewide overviews down to the level of individual programs and even children (2011).” With this software, answers to the surveyed can be imputed to create a data set.

Once the data has been imputed into the program, I will be able to utilize the data set to conduct statistical analyzes. GPA will be recoded as follows: 3.5-4.0 “Excellent”; 2.5-3.40 “Good”; 1.5-2.49 “Satisfactory”; 1.0-1.49 “Below average”; and 0-.99 “Failure.” A contingency table for each variable will be administered and then a measure of association using either Lambda or Gamma will be tested (Babbie, Halley, Wagner, and Zaino, 2011). Since the dependent variable is an ordinal variable, Kruskal Wallis test will be used to analyze academic performance and delinquency. Since the variable’s peer association and socioeconomic status are also ordinal, Kruskal Wallis will also be used.

Family structure is the only independent variable that is nominal, as the questions will be recoded as defined above. Therefore, Wilcoxon-Mann Whitney test will used to analyze family structure and delinquency (See table 1 in Appendix A for Data Analysis).

Sampling Design

This research will use stratified sampling as a means to achieve the sample. The City of Oxnard is comprised of four public high schools. The schools that will be sampled are:

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Pacifica High School, Oxnard High School, Channel Islands High School, and Rio Mesa High School. These schools were chosen, as most youth who reside in Oxnard are required to attend either of the mentioned high schools. The sample will consist of youth from ages 14-18. It will begin at the age of 14 because according to California Penal Code Section 26 (2013), youth under the age of 14 are not capable of committing crimes unless certain criteria is met. For this purpose, the sample will begin at that age. The total population surveyed will consist of 30 youth from each school. Next, I propose to divide students from each school being surveyed into two even groups. One group would be comprised of students who have reported behavioral incidents at school and the second group consisting of all other students who have never been referred for disciplinary issues. I wanted to ensure that I would have students with behavioral disciplinary issues at school in my sample because it is probable that those youth have already been delinquent. Therefore, this sampling method will ensure those students will be part of the sample. In addition, by having two groups, it would allow me to compare them.

Instruments

See appendix A for survey.

Limitations

Several limitations should be noted. First, **in terms of external validity issues**, this is a case study that is specific to the City of Oxnard, Ca. The demographics of the city differ from other cities in the County of Ventura and therefore, cannot be generalized. Thus, replication of the study would be needed to include all youth who reside in the County of Ventura to make it generalizable. Second, only youth from traditional schools were surveyed. The four schools noted on the study are traditional schools; however, when youth become severely credit deficient

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or experience numerous behavioral problems, they are placed in continuation schools or independent studies that were not included in this sample. Moreover, family factors in adolescence or other family history that might influence risk for delinquency was not taken into consideration.

Selection is a threat to internal validity in this study. This refers to the idea that selection in the study is not random or of an equal probability among the study subject (Eller, Gerber, and Robinson, 2013). There may be pre-existing differences between the participants that cannot be accounted for when being selected. In addition, it is impossible to say that the dependent variable, delinquency measures what it is suppose to measure because there is not a set definition of delinquency. What is defined as delinquency in this study may differ from other studies. Likewise, the way the variable family structure is operationalized may differ because others may not agree with how it is defined in this study.

However, this study has more internal validity than external validity. As it is a case study specific to a city, which the demographics are vastly different than other cities in the United States. Therefore, external validity is not strong.

Step-by-Step

1. Preliminary investigation on prior findings on the topic.
2. Talk to subject matter experts
3. Draft survey questions
4. Beta-test. Give to other Deputy Probation Officers to determine if the questions effectively measure the variables.
5. Permission from the school and parents

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6. Informed consent
7. Intermediate analysis
8. Ensure there is a variety of youth who fall in different categories of each variable
9. Execute survey
10. Conduct data analysis and review reliability and validity of gathered data.

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Appendix A

A case study of youth residing in the City of Oxnard, CA is being conducted as my thesis for the Masters in Public Policy and Administration at California Lutheran University. You have been chosen to participate in this survey. The survey asks questions about a number of things in your life, including your friends and family. Your answers will be confidential and anonymous. This means your answers will stay secret. Your name will never be asked. Please do not write your name on the survey form.

Family Structure

1. Who do you live with?
 - a. Both biological/adoptive parent
 - b. One biological/adoptive parent only
 - c. One biological/adoptive parent and one step parent
 - d. Other guardian

SES

2. What was your total household income the last tax year?
 - a. \$0-\$24,000
 - b. \$24,001-\$48,000
 - c. \$48,001-\$72,000
 - d. \$72,001 and above
3. How many people reside in your household including yourself?
 - a. 1-3
 - b. 4-6
 - c. 6-8
 - d. 9 and above

Delinquency

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Please read before answering the following questions in this category. When answering the questions in this group, answers should reflect since the age of 14.

Since the age of 14:

4. Have you used marijuana and:
 - a. No, never used
 - b. Yes, used 1-5 times but not caught
 - c. Yes, used 6-10 times but not caught
 - d. Yes, used more than 11 times but not caught
 - e. Yes, and I was cited by Police but did not appear in Juvenile Court
 - f. Yes, and was referred to Juvenile Court
5. Drank alcohol:
 - a. No, never drank
 - b. Yes, drank 1-5 times but not caught
 - c. Yes, drank 6-10 times but not caught
 - d. Yes, drank more than 11 times but not caught
 - e. Yes, and I was cited by Police but did not appear in Juvenile Court
 - f. Yes, and was referred to Juvenile Court
6. Used other drugs other than marijuana and alcohol
 - a. No, never used
 - b. Yes, used 1-5 times but not caught
 - c. Yes, used 6-10 times but not caught
 - d. Yes, used more than 11 times but not caught
 - e. Yes, and I was cited by Police but did not appear in Juvenile Court
 - f. Yes, and was referred to Juvenile Court
7. Damaged property that did not belong to you:
 - a. No, never have
 - b. Yes, 1-5 times but not caught
 - c. Yes, 6-10 times but not caught
 - d. Yes, more than 11 times but not caught
 - e. Yes, and I was cited by Police but did not appear in Juvenile Court
 - f. Yes, and was referred to Juvenile Court
8. Carried or possessed a firearm/weapon
 - a. No, never
 - b. Yes, 1-5 times but not caught
 - c. Yes, 6-10 times but not caught
 - d. Yes, more than 11 times but not caught
 - e. Yes, and I was cited by Police but did not appear in Juvenile Court
 - f. Yes, and was referred to Juvenile Court
9. Stole something that did not belong to you:
 - a. No, never
 - b. Yes, 1-5 times but not caught

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- c. Yes, 6-10 times but not caught
 - d. Yes, more than 11 times but not caught
 - e. Yes, and I was cited by Police but did not appear in Juvenile Court
 - f. Yes, and was referred to Juvenile Court
10. Involved in a fight”
- a. No, never
 - b. Yes, 1-5 times but not caught
 - c. Yes, 6-10 times but not caught
 - d. Yes, more than 11 times but not caught
 - e. Yes, and I was cited by Police but did not appear in Juvenile Court
 - f. Yes, and was referred to Juvenile Court

Peer Association

When answering the following questions, take into consideration your closest friends or those who you associate with the most.

11. How many have dropped out of school?
- a. None
 - b. Some
 - c. About half
 - d. Most
12. How many drink alcohol?
- a. None
 - b. Some
 - c. About half
 - d. Most
13. How many sell drugs?
- a. None
 - b. Some
 - c. About half
 - d. Most
14. How many use drugs?
- a. None
 - b. Some
 - c. About half
 - d. Most
15. How many are gang affiliated or belong to a tagging crew?
- a. None
 - b. Some
 - c. About half
 - d. Most
16. How many have been arrested?

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- a. None
- b. Some
- c. About half
- d. Most

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TABLE 1

Hypotheses	Variables	Level of Measurement/ Statistical Test	Definition	Metric
H1: Youth with low grades are more likely to be involved in delinquency than youth with average grades.	IV: Academic Performance DV: Delinquency	Ordinal Ordinal Test: Kruskal Wallis	1. Grades will be calculated using grade point average (GPA) and then recoded to “Excellent,” “Good,” “Satisfactory,” “Below average,” and “Failure.” 2. wherein the minor is alleged to have committed an act which act would be criminal if he/she were an adult (Superior Court of California: County of Ventura)	1. Provided by youth’s school records. 2. Responses to questions relate to delinquency: Questions 4-10.

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H2: Youth who come from nontraditional families are more likely to be involved in delinquency, than youth who come from traditional families.	IV: Family Structure DV: Delinquency	Nominal Ordinal Test: Wilcoxon-Mann Whitney	1. Traditional vs non-traditional 2. See above	1. Response to question 1 of the survey 2. See above.
H3: Youth who associate with negative peers are more likely to be involved in delinquency.	IV: Peer Association DV: Delinquency Test: Kruskal Wallis	1. Patterns of substance abuse, status offenses, and antisocial behavior amongst youth's closest friends. 2. See above	Ordinal Ordinal	1. Responses to questions related to peer associations: Questions 11-16. 2. See above
H4: Youth from low-income families are more likely to be involved in delinquency than youth from high-income families.	IV: Socioeconomic Status DV: Delinquency Test: Kruskal Wallis	1. Self-reported income for the household 2. See above	Ordinal Ordinal	1. Response to question 2 of the survey 2. See above



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