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Family Environment as a Predictor of Adolescents Delinquency

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Abstract:

The family is one of the major socialization agencies for children and its environment shapes the foundation of each and every human individual. The study attempts to explain the role of family environment in developing Juvenile delinquency among adolescents. Data for this study were collected from a juvenile observation home in the state of Odisha. The data revealed the following significant relationships: (1) most delinquent children come from the lowest socio-economic layer of society; (2) most of the juvenile delinquents come from homes where parents have low paid jobs which keep them away from home for long periods. (3) Most of the children were left unattended by family members and they themselves make arrangements for their daily food; (4) there were very low or no scope for moral education of the delinquent children; (5) due to poor family communication and cohesion among the family members there were more opportunities for children to engage in delinquent activities. Hence, the paper suggests for taking necessary policy decisions regarding strengthening and protecting family solidarity and values for reducing delinquency and engaging adolescents constructively for better productivity for themselves and for the society.

Keywords: Family, communication, Juvenile delinquency, cohesion.

1. Introduction

The family is considered the basic unit of the society to meet the needs of individuals and those of other societal institutions. It is a link between continuity and change. It determines the development of individuals; it is a major source of nurturance, emotional bonding and socialization. It has the major potential to provide stability and support when there are problems from the environment. Human development can therefore, be best enhanced by enriching family life (Desai, 1995). Indian family is often understood as an ideal homogenous unit with strong coping mechanisms. It is a basic, cohesive, and integral unit of large and culturally diverse country such as India have plurality of forms that vary with class, ethnicity, and individual choices. Its members are bound by interpersonal relationships in a wider network of role and social relations. It is the basic and important unit of society because of the role it plays in generation of human capital resources and the power that is vested in it to influence individuals, household, and community behavior (sriram, 1993). It is therefore, a basic unit in human being's life span and culture beings here. In our society its position has been central and critical. The family performs important task, which contribute to society's basic needs and helps to perpetuate social order. In the last few decades the size, composition living arrangements and inherent values giving shape to families continue to evolve as apparent in families based on consensual unions, single parent units, female headed household, etc. The family structure, parental attitudes towards children and parenting methods are changing, like increasing divorce and separation rates, family violence, inter-generational conflicts, social problem of drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, etc. these changes indicate the inability to cope with the pressures of modern life. Despite the profound change brought in by industrialization and urbanization, the family survives as the primary institution of all society basically because, first, it meets basic survival needs, facilitating adequate biological functioning of its members, second, it maintains the cycles of reproduction and socialization of new members, third it creates a socially sanctioned space for enduring interpersonal relationships, and forth, and the most important it promotes social cohesion and for many, it is a "heaven in a heartless world", (Mukherjee, 2003). There are a number of problems that families are facing today (Jayapalan,2000:110-111). Some of the major causes of change in the family are –

1. Increasing awareness, education employment of women demands equal rights and privileges in the family, thereby making difficult to make better adjustment between husband and wife.
2. Contemporary marriage pattern identifies fatherless as the leading cause of declining child well-being in our society and the major cause behind many social problems like adolescent pregnancy to child sexual abuse to family violence, (Judith Stacy, 2011:84).
3. Changes in the age of marriage, freedom in mate selection and change in the attitude towards marriage have mostly affected the family. The role of parents in mate selection has diminished the definition of marriage has changed marriage no longer considered as a religious affair but only a social ceremony.
4. Some of the other causes included, influence of western values, increasing awareness, education and employment among women with the breakdown of joint family system people are subject to less parental control which lessens social control, increase in divorce rate, etc., thereby favoring family disintegration.

2. Consequences of Change to the Society

The impact of urbanization can be seen as societies become increasingly urbanized, social emphasis is placed on achievement rather than on ascription, urbanization has brought about many changes in various sphere of family life such as: -

- Industrialization has resulted in an increase in urban population which creates further pressure on urban land. As a result, there is a dearth of space consequently causing over crowd.
- The continuous expansion of cities has led to the growth of suburbs or slum areas in the edges of the cities, where there is undeveloped land.
- Change in the social structure affects the status of the family members, basic functions of the family are now performed by secondary institutions.
- Urbanization, rapid economic liberalization, violent conflict and inadequate policy are the basis of crime in urban areas; this can also lead to unemployment, poverty, prostitution, beggary, alcoholism, etc.

Delinquency is a universal problem and it is seen all over the world without exceptions to any specific cultures or religions. Generally, delinquency refers to illegal acts, whether criminal or not, committed by youth under the age of 18. The term juvenile delinquency was officially developed in the United States in 1899, when the first code of juvenile delinquency was enacted in Chicago, Illinois (Shoemaker, 2005). The Merriam Webster dictionary defines a delinquent act as “conduct that is out of accord with accepted behavior or the law” (Merriam-Webster, 2006). If delinquent behavior is viewed from a behaviour disorder perspective, it encompasses two broad dimensions internalizing and externalizing. Internalizing disorders are directed inward and involve behavioural deficits, such as withdrawal, isolation, and depression. On the other hand, externalizing disorders are directed outward and involve behavioural excesses, such as disturbing others, verbal and physical aggression and acts of violence (Nelson, Rutherford, & Wolford, 1996).

India is home to millions of impoverished children. Many of them are illiterate, sick, and malnourished, live in neglect with wretched families who cannot take care of them. Millions of them forced to work there and there by the time they should be learning how to read and write. Millions still live in the streets as a result of the loss of their ones, the breakdown of their families, on simply because they no longer could endure the abuses inflicted upon them by parents, relatives and employers.

According to Wright and Wright (1994), the family is the foundation of human society. Children who are rejected by their parents, who grow up in homes with considerable conflict, or who are inadequately supervised are at the greatest risk of becoming delinquent, adolescence is a time of expanding vulnerabilities and opportunities that accompany the widening social and geographical exposure to life beyond school or family. According to Cashwell and Vacc (1996), understanding the nature of relationships within the family, i.e. family adaptability, cohesion, and satisfaction, provides more information for understanding youth behaviour. Cohesiveness of the family successfully predicts the traditional families (Matherne & Thomas 2001). Family behaviours, particularly parental monitoring and disciplinary, seem to influence association with deviant peers throughout the adolescent period (Cashwell & Vacc 1994).

There are three major theories that explain the relationship between disrupted families and delinquency, trauma theories, life course theories, and selection theories. (Juby and Farrington, 2001). Trauma theories suggest that the loss of a parent has a damaging effect on children, most commonly because of the effect on attachment to the parent. Life course theories focus on separation as a long drawn out process rather than a discrete event, and on the effects of multiple stressors typically associated with separation. Selection theories argue that disrupted families are associated with delinquency because of pre-existing differences in family income or child rearing practices.

Some environments restrict certain behavioral responses of adolescents, while other environments tend to promote a wide range of behavioural adaptations. According to (Kubrin, Stucky, & Krohn, 2009) there are movements from restricted (e.g. school, family) to unrestricted environments (e.g. peers, gangs) in adolescence. During this period, teenagers begin to exercise choices independently and try to disconnect from the restricted environment, while considering the social factors contributing to delinquent behavior refer to studies dating back to the 1950's that examined the role of social institutions in delinquent behavior (Glueck & Glueck 1950). These studies found a relationship between the vital role played by family and schools and delinquent behaviour. According to (Hirschi, 1969) delinquent acts occur when an individual's bond to society is either weakened or broken. The weakening of social bonds frees the individual from constraints, which may open an avenue for committing delinquent behavior.

3. Family Environment and Delinquency

Family is important throughout the period of early adolescence. During early adolescence, the developmental transformations are likely to result in changes in adolescents needs within the family. Controlling parents and adolescents who strive for more independence are likely to clash with one another. In this context, parental influence among adolescents is mostly seen as a matter of concern. According to (Glueck & Glueck, 1962), “bad” parenting is very much a compelling cause for delinquent behavior parents who demonstrate extreme restlessness and destructiveness are more likely to play the part of antecedents to delinquency in their teenagers. A lack of emotional ties between parents and adolescents also contributes to involvement in maladaptive behaviours, certain facts like family instability, deficient family cohesion, and lack of quality relationships between parents and children resulted in adolescent delinquency. Out of many, the four main factors discussed for this particular study are neglect, conflict, deviant behaviors and attitudes and disruption.

Neglect is one of the major causative factors in the delinquent behavior of adolescents. Parents who have no or less control over their children may show delinquent tendencies. Examples of lack of parental control include ignoring the delinquent behaviors of their children, such behaviors may be seen among parents who are afraid to create tension in the family or parents do not take violations seriously and who never punish the child. (Patchin, 2006). Such parents may fail in setting boundaries and creating a proper structure for their children's behavior. While children from these types of families love their parents, they often have trouble developing

friendships and lack the ability to regulate their emotions (Cobb, 2001). Further, these behaviours place them at risk for frequent quarrels inside and outside home or incorporating delinquent behaviours in the process of attempting to draw attention.

On the contrary parents using harsh, abusive, and aggressive measures towards their children will likely result in rebellious behavior among the children. A review of varied literature shows that the children of parents who discipline by using very harsh behaviour tend to look towards their peers for support and, later on tend to display higher rates of delinquency and substance abuse. Parents who utilize these behaviours can be harsh in many different ways, physically, sexually, and emotionally. Even without causing physical injury to children, such parental abuse may impact children emotionally as well as cognitively. Some children experience a pattern of extreme discipline from their parents are more likely to have an increased risk for violence in adolescence or a greater risk of future delinquency (Miller & Knutson, 1997). Additionally, parents who are inconsistent in their punishment pattern may influence children to become oppositional and confused as to what is acceptable and is not (Whaler, 1987).

According to (Eddy & Reid, 2002), children of antisocial parents are at greater risk of violence of delinquency than the youth with least antisocial parents. These studies show an apparent link between parents with deviant behavior and future deviant behavior in their children. According to (Joby & Farrington, 2001) Family disruption which can take various forms such as arguing, mental illness and single parenting can lead to delinquency and are common among these types of families. Youth from single parent families are more likely to use drugs or engage in delinquent behaviour.

The dominant family pattern in Odisha in the joint or nuclear family is mainly patrilineal. Although the basic form and functions of the family have survived across history and cultural evolution they now co-exist, sometimes competing the multiple images from "modernity", particularly in urban areas. The present study is an attempt to find out the extent the Odia family structure have changed, and the incidence of this evolution on the phenomenon of Juvenile Delinquency.

4. Family Assessment

Based on the ecological perspective of family centered research work practice, a holistic scheme of family assessment is proposed for this particular study. This is visualized as a process shared by the delinquents and the investigation, which would help to identify the role of family environment as one of the predictor of adolescent delinquent behavior. The following three areas are identified for assessment of Family Environment: -

4.1. Personal Demographic Profile

In order to study a family's socialization pattern, it is essential to study the demographic profile of the sample. Socialization of authoritarian or permissive family norms may lead to violation of an individual's rights within the family. In these families, an individual member or members may be in a state of conflict with other members, or the family as a whole, implying an area of family intervention. The indicators of such situations are as follows: -

- An individual denied basic necessities for development and health.
- Unequal treatment of individuals based on gender, age and economic differences.
- If the individual's needs are not met by the environment, he/she may be in a state of conflict.

4.2. Assessment of Family Dynamics

Study of family dynamic may cover the following aspects about family as a system and its subsystems: -

(a) Family communication: Family communication is defined by Lewis (1979) as all verbal and non-verbal behavior that occurs within the family, and between the family and its social environment.

(b) Family cohesion: Family cohesion is defined as the emotional bonding that family members have towards one another. There are four levels of cohesion, ranging from disengaged (very low to separated (low to moderate) to connected (moderate to high) to enmeshed (very high). It is hypothesized that the central levels of cohesion (separated and connected) make for optimal family functioning. The extreme levels (disengaged and enmeshed) are generally seen as problematic (Olson, 1988).

(c) Family function: Family functions refer to the roles and duties that family members have towards each other. It includes fulfilling basic necessities of food, clothing and shelter to providing psychological and emotional care. When family functions are not carried out properly the individual seeks support from outside which may not be conducive for children's social development.

(d) Family interaction: Family interaction refers to the distinctive character of interpersonal relationships which occur between members of the family. An interpersonal relationship is a relationship based on personal interaction rather than on any legal or structural basis (Schvaneveldt, 1966). The main characteristic of family interactions may include understanding, role performance, decision making and adaptability.

4.3. Family Violence

Family violence comprises all acts of intimidation and aggression, which forces a person to seek redressal by breaking the silence imposed on him/her by the perpetrator. Family violence is a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviour including physical, sexual and psychological attacks as well as economic coercion used by adults against their family members. Family violence in a broader sense often used to include child abuse, elder abuse and other violent acts between family members.

5. Objectives

- To study the educational and socio-economic profile of the respondents under study.
- To find out the correlation between family environment and delinquent behaviour among the adolescent respondents.
- To study various factors responsible for stimulating delinquent behaviour among adolescents.
- To suggest measures for improving healthy family environment suitable for healthy physical, mental and cognitive development of children.

6. Hypothesis

- Delinquents usually come from broken homes through divorce, separation, desertion, death of one or both the parents;
- Delinquents have had inconsistent moral values;
- Delinquents come from families in the lowest socio-economic level of society;
- Parents of delinquents spend little or no time with children due to negligence or job constraints.

7. Methodology

The research design adopted for this study is the evaluative survey research method, in the sense that it seeks to present family structure as a source of delinquency. The sample for this study is made up of hundred adolescents of a boy's observation home, in Berhampur town of Odisha. The instrument for data collection is a schedule questionnaire; most of the questions are close-ended to facilitate answering and scoring, some being open-ended for provision of supplementary information. The items in the questionnaire include personal data, family communication, family cohesion, family functions, family interaction and family violence, and crime committed. Data analysis was through simple quantitative analyses, i.e. percentage, means, and modes.

8. Finding of the Study

8.1. Sample

The location of the study is Berhampur, the commercial centre of south Odisha, currently, the population of the city is 355,823 (census Report, 2011). The data has been collected from a boy's observation home for Juvenile Delinquents. The age range was from 11 to 18 years, and 100 samples were taken for the study. In terms of education level 30% had no education, 42% had primary education, 26% had middle school education and only 2% had high school education, and 96% participants were from low socioeconomic background, with an average income of 5600 Rupees per month. In terms of family structure, all the adolescents had been residing with their parents and an average of them in slum areas. The average space available for living was only one room without toilet and proper water facility. The average number of children in the home was three; the majorities of parents of the respondents were daily wage workers and forced their children to earn their livelihood.

Family dynamics of the adolescents shows 92% of them have poor family communication, 87% adolescents very rarely share their feelings with their parents. Most of the respondents sometimes share their feelings with their sister or grandmother. The major reason behind this hesitation or the inability to interact was parental ignorance and neglect. When they were asked to give reason behind their hesitation they said-

- "My father comes home late at night, shouts at my mother and sometimes beat her".
- "I sell water bottle in train, so usually I stay away from home".
- "My father is ill, my mother and me, work as daily wage workers"
- "I don't know"

Family cohesion of the respondents reflect a very unhealthy parent-child bonding between the delinquents and their parents where 93% of the respondents very rarely comfortably spend time with their parents and other family members. Most of the parents are so deeply involved in earning their livelihood that they hardly had time to spend with their children, as daily wage workers they left home early in the morning and come home late. Girls were expected to look after their siblings, do household chores, whereas boys had duty to make arrangements for fuel (wood, for cooking) and to add to family income. 61% of the respondents sometimes attended family functions and other social gathering. 73% of them sometimes celebrated different festivals with family members. However, they were very dissatisfied for becoming a part of that society or the way they were living.

Family members of the respondents mostly fail to perform their duties towards their children and also maintain very poor level of interaction mainly due to ignorance and very low socio-economic life. As parents 83% of them never supported their children at the time of need or understood their physical and emotional needs. But on the contrary 87% of the respondents were expected to assist in household chores and contribute to family income. 82% of the respondents cheated their family members and run away from home to escape, when they were asked to say something about their family relations they said,

- "I feel happy to spend time with my friends, rather than my parents, because they ask me, 'How much did you earn today'? I don't want to work now; I want to enjoy as my friends do".
- "I have not done anything my father beats me if I don't steal objects from the nearby shops".
- "I want to go back home, I miss my mother, I will not repeat such mistakes again, please tell my father to forgive me, and take me home".

The home which should be a safer place for the family has become a breeding place of violence against its members. Most vulnerable being the women and children, where they are not only unable to voice their opinion but also are denied the basic human rights. The respondents frequently witnessed various types of violence between their parents and other family members. Type of violence

included physical 53%, psychological 86%, verbal abuse accounts for 91%. Father was mostly responsible for a maximum number of times causing violence, where mother and other siblings sometimes perpetrate violence within the family. Major reason for violence provoking situation at home was not obeying or following parental instruction include 27% and fighting with sibling's accounts only 9%, whereas not contributing to family income include 64%. The way these respondents managed to escape from violent situations included cry and suffer only 2%, run away from home and don't eat at home 57%, take alcohol/smoke and spend time with friends 26%, nobody feels like killing themselves. The respondents spent very little time with their family and mostly lived without parental supervision.

9. Discussion and Conclusion

Many theorists consider family as the most significant factor in the development of juvenile delinquency. Class status, power group relations and class mobility, are also directly or indirectly related to the family environment psychological theorists like Irving Kaufman (1959:15), Sidney Berman (1964:142) and August Aichhorn (1969:16) are primarily concerned with the causation of delinquency in early childhood experiences, emotional deprivations and child rearing processes which influence the formation of the personality and development of attitudes, values and a lifestyle. Juvenile Delinquency is the result of these factors according to the psychologists. Whereas the psychologist is concerned with the identification of individual variables, such as motivation, drives, values, and needs, the sociologist is concerned more with the social system, and the functioning of the institutions that promote delinquency. Thus, the psychologists focus on internal control while the sociologists focus on external control.

Children, regardless of whether are from single parent family or dual parent families, whether from poor socio-economic background or good socio-economic background, are likely to become delinquents without proper parental care and attention. From the above study it is clear that these respondents have committed the offences such as theft, murder, rape, and drinking/smoking and it reveals that these juveniles mostly belong to the poor family background, and economic deprivation which has compelled them to become delinquent. The past records of these children in conflict with law also show that there is no criminal record in their family; still they have committed the offences like murder, rape, theft, and drinking. The poor surroundings, family interactions, and anxiety among them and their peer mates have greater influence on delinquency. The above study states that this has happened due to lack of proper socialization and ignorance by their family members and lack of attention towards them has made the way to commit offence. Low financial background and inability to even meet the basic needs has made them for getting money by any illegal means, some of them had worked even while they were attending school only to obtain money. Least interest towards education and motivation by the peer group, have raised the gravity of the offence. The peer delinquent behaviour, and the time spent with peers are the cause for adolescent antisocial behaviour. These offenders are the products of unhappy family life, which force them to join the wrong groups only to satisfy their economic needs. Parents play an important role to satisfy the financial, emotional, and physical needs of their children, but as shared by the respondents, it can be said that they were neglected by their parents. Belonging to the low income profile, their parents worked with low wages, which forced these children to commit the offence. Poor family interaction and communication was mainly because the parents were busy in their daily work, or most of the time disturbed, violent and alcoholic.

Treatment of Juvenile Delinquency needs effective implementation of Juvenile Justice Act, with public awareness and proper orientation and training to professionals and law enforcement agencies. A proper mechanism should be formed to appraise the needs and requirements of the juveniles and it should be reviewed regularly. Longer association of community and voluntary organizations in the schemes of Government programs like good nutrition for all, literacy, health, eradication of child labour, etc. shall help to a great extent to get rid of delinquency. Since juvenile delinquency is mainly the result of lack of parental protection, care and affection, young individuals need to be handled with great care and wisdom. There must be a good family atmosphere for every child to grow. Parents must adopt right attitude towards their wards. They should not be too harsh or loose. Parents must have some knowledge about guidance. Permissiveness will spoil the child. Parents should not be over-protective. Parents should keep an eye on the friends of their children, and keep a track on where they are going and doing. Parents should have some time to spend with their children every day.

“The only effective way to reduce and prevent juvenile crime is to balance enforcement measures with targeted, effective and intervention initiatives”.

- Janet Reno.

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