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UNRAVELING THE DYNAMICS OF JUVENILE DELINQUENCY: A STUDY OF LIVED EXPERIENCES OF YOUTH

Mubeshera Tufail¹ & Madiha Ashfaq²

¹Department of Early Childhood Education & Elementary teacher Education, AIUO, Islamabad

²MPhil Scholar, Allama Iqbal Open University (AIUO), Islamabad, Pakistan

KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
<p>Child Delinquency, Juvenile, Delinquent Acts, Social Factors, Family Factors, Elementary School Students</p>	<p>Juvenile delinquency, the participation of minors in illegal activities, remains a critical social issue affecting communities worldwide. The purpose of the study was to assess the factors affecting child delinquency for the students enrolled in elementary grades. For this study, qualitative research design with phenomenological inquiry was adopted. In this regard, the purposive sampling technique was used to select 4-participants who were involved in delinquent acts. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants. The duration of one interview was 30-35 minutes. The audio recording of interviews was transcribed. The data were analyzed through coding and thematic analysis. The result of the study found that there were personal, family and social factors that causing or triggering the delinquent youngsters for socially/legally disapproved acts. Dealing with the causes of child delinquency is important for effectively resolving problem. As there were multiple factors involved in the child delinquency, and multi-sectoral intervention may be adopted by involving the delinquent youngster, their family, their peer group, community, school and environment. The findings of study provide significant information in reaching the conclusion and thus contributing the existing knowledge on the issues under consideration in particular context.</p>
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<p>Corresponding Author</p>	<p>Mubeshera Tufail: mubeshera.tufail@aiou.edu.pk</p>
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INTRODUCTION

Education system of a country aims to equip the children with knowledge, attitude and skills that are beneficial for the them and the society in long run. However, there are various factors, which may affect the process of educating the children such as the school environment, family, and friends, society and community related factors, economic factors, resources, and the life experiences of the children. Juvenile delinquency is one of these factors. Juvenile delinquency

refers to negative or deviant acts performed by teenagers that are not approved by the society (Miric, 2021). These acts have adverse effects on education of the children, education system and the society. It can lead to disrupted learning experiences for child, his/her poor academic performance and an increased risk of the child drop-out from the school. It can also result into wastage of school resources, lower school performance, increased social cost of dealing with juvenile acts, community safety & well-being. Juvenile delinquency is of increasing concern in many countries across the globe (Marshall & Enzmann, 2012, cited in Bobbio, Arbach & Illescas, 2020).

Because it is a complex phenomenon (Najafi, 2000 as cited in Nourollah, Fatemeh & Farhad, 2015), it is quite challenging to cover it. Nourollah, Fatemeh and Farhad (2015) reported effect of various factors i.e., demographic, social and family related factors such as education, job, separation from family etc., on juvenile delinquency. These factors are crucial to be addressed in order to deal with juvenile delinquency. The juvenile delinquency requires an urgent need of attention keeping in view its causes and mitigation strategies; failing which, this phenomenon will prevail in society and will affect the society in longer run (Nourollah, Fatemeh & Farhad, 2015). The phenomenon of child delinquency can be explained through various lenses such as social, biological and psychological perspective. Still, it is significant to view this phenomenon keeping in view social factors affecting it. Understanding personal narratives of individuals can provide deeper insights into the social, emotional, and environmental pressures that shape their behavior. Social lens view juvenile delinquency as a function of environment and settings where the child spends his/her life. It means that various social factors affect the child who commits juvenile act(s) perspective (Keller et al., 2002: as cited in Nisar, Ullah, Ali & Alam, 2015).

The juvenile delinquency is a social problem as it involves the delinquent offences, which are disapproved by the society and/or law. Social problems involve violation of social and moral values because it includes behavior and acts which are destructive and immoral for the society. Consequently, the social problems can be studied in an effective way after considering the characteristics of the society and, the acts which are painstaking good and bad by the society (Soekanto & Pengantar, 2010: as cited in Widayati, Winanto, Arpangi & Rahmawati, 2022). The study of juvenile delinquency for elementary school children is crucial because it would be helpful to deal with its causes and to adopt strategies for resolving this social problem. If unaddressed, it can negatively affect the child and the society. Keeping in view the importance of juvenile delinquency and its impact on the teenager during the fragile period of his/her life, researchers planned to conduct this research study and explore the factors causing/affecting the juvenile delinquency for students studying in elementary grades. In this connection, this study involved the data collection from young offenders in order to shed light on their context, reasons to commit these juvenile acts and challenges faced by them in various aspects related to it.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The word 'juvenile' is derived from the Latin word 'Juvenilis' that means children or young people. Delinquency is derived from Latin word 'delinquere' that means neglected, ignored,

leave or abandon, which may result a deviant act, offence or crime (Tjukup, Putra, Yustiawan & Usfunan, 2020: as cited in Widayati, Winanto, Arpangi & Rahmawati, 2022). Previously, this term was simply referred to the parents who neglected their children. Now, juvenile is used to refer to a child who has committed a harmful, criminal or illegal act. There are a number of the definitions of juvenile delinquency (Miric, 2021). In addition to criminal & illegal acts, juvenile delinquency also includes acts, which violate religious, moral, cultural, customary and social norms in society (Miric, 2021; Widayati, Winanto, Arpangi & Rahmawati, 2022) and/or various groups in society. Juvenile is a term used for young criminal offender whereas minor refers to a person who has not reached a legal age for legal purposes such as making contracts. It is not appropriate to label a delinquent child as criminal or deviant. In order to focus on behavior and avoid negative label on character, it is more right to call them 'juveniles displaying delinquent conduct'.

There are various perspectives such as criminology, psychology, criminal policy and the social perspective to explain about the juvenile delinquency. While it is important to distinguish an illegal or delinquent act from other behaviors, it must be noted & unnecessary or inappropriate labels may cause feelings of rejection, emotional distress, anxiety and even depression among the delinquent offenders (Miric, 2021). Thus, various kinds of juvenile acts are mentioned in the literature such as disobedience, frequent visits to cinema, coming late home at night, vulgar language at the public places, habitually truant at school, lying, immoral conduct at the school (Maheshwari, 2016 as cited in Miric, 2021), beating, theft, running away from school, begging on street, bullying, brawls, extortion, drinking alcohol, etc. It also includes anti-social conduct which is not included in the legislation as a crime (Miric, 2021) e.g., missing homework or not following the instructions for a class task as required. The children, who commit juvenile acts, may consider these acts as normal, consider it something to be proud of delinquency (Tjukup, Putra, Yustiawan & Usfunan, 2020: as cited in the Widayati, Winanto, Arpangi & Rahmawati, 2022).

The delinquent offenders are not mentally impaired people; instead, they are physically and psychologically 'normal' individuals who commit certain crime or anti-social act. Delinquent acts are not only problematic for the young offenders themselves but it also affects the order, security and peace in society. Various stakeholders such as parents, teachers and community members, and police department were concerned about the juvenile delinquency (Hidayah & Remaja, 2020: as cited in Widayati, Winanto, Arpangi & Rahmawati, 2022). The social response to juvenile deliquency is important since it is related to future of society (Miric, 2021). Luther, Leatherdale, Dubin and Ferro (2024) found one quarter delinquent children were victim of delinquent behaviors across environments so, it must be noted while planning intervention for delinquent children. The maltreatment faced during adolescence period, is rather greater risk factors as compared to other developmental stages for delinquency due to low monitoring and parental supervision. Another reason may be that maltreated children acquire values related to the crime through experiencing household violence, or other antisocial acts (Font & Kennedy, 2022).

There are number of factors that can contribute to child delinquency (Choi, 2022; Shader, n.d.) such as aggression, following school rules, relationship with teachers, peer relationships, social withdrawal, involvement in learning activities at school and academic confidence in various subjects like Mathematics and English language (Choi, 2022). Social network model can helpful to understand the factors affecting delinquent conducts of young offenders. Young offenders, just like other people, are influenced by their desire to fit and stay connected with their social group. Another phenomenon related to social networking is conformism. Conformism refers to blending with the people in your circle and avoiding anything that looks unusual or stands out. The young offenders are connected to a group of close friends. The social norm or normal behavior of social group is shaped by network of friends. Young offenders liken behavior to people they are connected with. They try to conform to group behavior & activities (Patacchini & Zenou, 2012). Neurodevelopmental challenges, mental health & substance abuse challenges on part of children correlated with the child delinquency as reported by Baidawi and Sheehan (2019).

There was gender wise difference in child delinquency. Girls were involved in non-aggressive delinquency. Social institutions such as family and school) can play positive role in protecting the youngsters from delinquent acts. Parents must manage the leisure time of children with some productive activities. The parents' monitoring strategies can help to protect girls & boys from delinquency factor (Liu & Miller, 2020). Warm and positive relationship between parents and their children can assist the children to adjusting to their environment in future. Positive parental practices can positively affect psychological well-being of children (Bowes, Maughan, Caspi, Moffitt & Arseneault, 2010 as cited in Alnasir & Al-Falaj, 2016). Children, who could not receive physical and verbal affection, are more prone to commit delinquent acts (Tyler & Melander, 2012 as cited in Alnasir & Al-Falaj, 2016). Use of hostile treatment, strict behavior of parents, yelling, rejection by parent (mother or father), neglect, threat of rejection, controlling, and corporal punishment, instead of verbal explanations, reasoning & retraction of privilege or reward, are related to child delinquency (Bakken & Romig, 1989 as cited in Alnasir & Al-Falaj, 2016).

Thus, family conditions can predict the risk of child committing delinquent acts (Alnasir & Al-Falaj, 2016). In addition to the above-mentioned factors, there are other factors responsible for child delinquency i.e., personal (low self-control, substance use), social (parenting & anti-social peers) and environmental factors (neighborhood) (Bobbio, Arbach & Illescas, 2020). One factor may trigger the other factor, which can lead to juvenile delinquency. Negative parenting practices like poor supervision can lead to low self-control among children. Emotionally and socially weak bonds with parents can lead the children for diverging from societal norms and commit juvenile acts. Thus, it is important to develop parental supervision and guidance along with building positive parent-child relationships (Sun, Wang, Zheng & Wang, 2024). Averse childhood experiences is a term referred to the trauma or neglect experienced by young people under age of 18. Young people with higher amount of ACEs were likely to be involved in youth delinquency (Baglivio et al., 2015, cited in Piggott, Spray, Mason & Rhind, 2024). The friendship

network play vital role in involvement of immigrant children in delinquent acts (Chen & Jiang 2020).

Kremer, Poon, Jones, Hagler, Kupersmidt, Stelter, Stump and Rhodes (2020) conducted a study to interpret the behavioral and social problems faced by children with incarcerated parents. In this study, four profiles were identified for children with incarcerated parents: well-adjusted youngsters having minimal behavioral issues and little connection with the antisocial peers, overactive youth with hyperactive and disruptive behavior, isolated youngsters with higher levels of loneliness and depression, & aggressive youngsters with frequent aggressive behavior & behavioral issues at school, stronger linking with anti-social peers. There are diverse views to look at child delinquency. Psychologists, sociologists, political scientists, criminologists and economists provide a numbers of reasons for delinquent acts. It included peer pressure, family, community, socioeconomic status (Agnew & Brezina, 2012), adverse childhood experiences, neighborhood and personal factors. As origin of child delinquency is complicated in nature, the intervention must be planned for implementation at individual, family, school and society level (Agnew & Brezina, 2012). Therefore, a multi-sectoral intervention strategy needs to be adopted.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research study involved qualitative research design and phenomenological inquiry as the research method. The purposive sampling technique was used to select four elementary school students who were involved in the socially and legally disapproved acts. The age range of the participants were 15-17 years. They were enrolled in elementary grades (grade 6-8). All of the participants were working part-time after school hours. Three participants were living with their parents & one participants was under guardianship of his grandparents. All participants belonged to the low-middle class and poor families. The father of three participants and the mother of three participants were working. Thus, the father of one participant was orphan. The fathers of the participants were working as the rickshaw driver, truck driver as well as security guard.

The mothers of participants were working as house helper whereas mother of one participant was a full-time homemaker. Two participants did not have a criminal record in their family whereas two participants indicated about the prevalence of criminal acts committed by other members of their family. The participants belonged to the nuclear and extended family system. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from the participants in Urdu language. The purpose to select the interview as data collection tool was to obtain in-depth and context specific information about cases and factors affecting child delinquency. The duration of one interview was 35-40 minutes. Pseudonyms were used to protect identity of participants. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The data were analyzed over coding and thematic analysis.

FINDINGS OF STUDY

After the analysis of interviews, all the factors behind the offences committed by participants were grouped into the five factors: physical factors, mental factors, home conditions, school

conditions, neighborhood and friends circle. The study findings were categorized to following themes.

- (1) Nature of Offences: The offences in which participants were involved, included teasing other children, not doing homework, stealing, fighting with other adolescents as well as children, beating other boys, smoking cigarette, missing classes & being absent from the school.
- (2) Physical Factors: There were physical factors involved in juvenile acts by participants. Two participants faced physical health issue and people poked fun at their health which made them angry. One participant said, "There is some problem in my left leg by birth. The people make fun of me. So, I got angry on it.' Another participant mentioned, 'I am physically weak. The people make fun of me and call me bad names. So, I quitted social gatherings and started smoking'. One participant had anger management problem so he cannot control his anger when he was treated differently than other e.g., if his mother gave money to his younger brother, he gets angry & beats his younger brother to get the money.
- (3) Mental Factors: There were mental factors behind the juvenile acts by participants. One participant could not recover from childhood emotional trauma which made him hurt and angry. Another participant mentioned that he started doing the 'bad' acts to get rid of his loneliness. He had bad thoughts in his mind. He said, 'People think bad of me and they think that I am poor'. One participant mentioned that he wanted to become a good person, but people always remember what I have done in the past. His past impression on people did not let him to become a 'good' person and behave in a socially appreciable manner. Another participant have low self-efficacy so he gave up on putting effort into his studies. He said, 'I am not an intelligent child. My class-fellows understand lesson well.'
- (4) Home Conditions: There was a lack of close relationship between participants and their parents. Fathers were, most of time, out of their home for job. Father of one participant died when he was 5-6 years old. Mothers of participants used to work outside of home to meet family expenses. One participant said, 'My father is caring but my mother stays in angry mood.'
The relationship between the mother and the father of participants influenced them. One participant mentioned that his father's behavior was very abusive towards his mother. Due to this reason, his mother was angry towards the participant. Another participant shared, 'My father use to come home after 2 weeks. My elder uncle beat me. I worked for his children at school as they are good in studies. I started living with my grandparents as they loved me'. One participant was hurt since of rude behavior of his grandmother towards him so he stayed outside home most of time. One said, 'My grandmother does not treat us well. She is furious towards me and call me bad names.' It was evident that behavior of close family relatives & parents have affected participants' lives emotionally and socially.
- (5) School Conditions: The unpleasant experiences at school has affected the participants' attitude towards school and their interest in studies. Participants got punished at school

because of late arrival in school and incompleteness of home task assigned by teacher. As a result, they avoided going to classes/school and completing homework. One participant said that when his parents beat him for skipping the school and pressurized him to go to school, he misbehaved & decided to continue skipping school. It is vital to look at reason for which participant was skipping school otherwise participant may not be convinced to go to school.

Besides, punishment, teachers' behavior was appropriate, according to the participants due to their low class performance. Thus, one participant shared that if he asked some question about the lesson a couple of times, teachers got angry and asked one of my class-fellows to explain it to me. Another participant said that when his teachers came to know about his bad habits, they started bad about him. Two participants shared that even if they did not steal anything, they were blamed for it because their image was spoiled in front of their teachers and class-fellows. So, they continued with the bad habits.

Another factor at school was the social circle of the participants. One participant said that when he forbade his class-fellows from bad acts such as beating other children and snatching money from other children, they complained to the teacher and his teacher beat him. So, he left those class-fellows.

- (6) Neighborhood and Friends Circle: Besides unpleasant experiences at school and lack of close relationship with parents, another important factor that could affect participants' lives was the friends and settings where they spent most of their time. One participant shared that because of physical weakness, people used to make fun of me so, he avoided social gatherings. He said that he had some friends in the neighborhood who did not get 'angry' on him so, he liked spending time with them.

The friends of participants were involved in the same kind of activities such as smoking cigarette, stealing, teasing other children and beating others. Together, they smoked, stole money/things for selling and teased other people. One participant shared that the academic performance of one of his friends was just like his own performance, and one of my friend was better in studies than him.

The friends of the participants affected their behavior towards the activities they were involved in. For example, one participant said, 'I consider these activities bad but I wanted to stay with my friends. Previously, I used to smoke less than I started smoking more cigarettes because of my company'. Another participant shared that 'I got smoking habit from my friends'. Similarly, one participant mentioned that 'Sometimes I give money for smoking while other times, my friends do it. If we do not have the money for smoking, we steal it.'

DISCUSSION

The results of study were evident that all the participants of the study belonged to low middle class and poor socioeconomic status and were doing part-time work on daily wages, they needed money to meet their needs. Sometimes they were involved in a delinquent act because they needed money for another socially disapproved act e.g., they stole money for smoking. As they had unpleasant relationship with their family and peers at the school, they liked to spend

most of their free time with their friends, who were engaged in similar kind of delinquent acts. Nisar, Ullah, Ali and Alam (2015), based on a study conducted for delinquent acts, reported that as majority of respondents was doing labor work, un-satisfaction with their income, low socioeconomic status and poor educational background were the reasons for delinquent acts. Another reason reported in the same study was the peer group where they spent most of their time. The researchers explained the reasons of delinquent acts with the help of Merton's strain theory and Sutherland differential association theory. The influence of peer group and family structure, as found in this study, was also reported by Alboukordi, Nazari, Nouri and Sangdeh (2012).

They stated that delinquent peers had a significant role in the delinquent acts performed by a juvenile. These factors may promote child delinquency. Huijsmans, Nivette, Eisner & Ribeaud (2019) reported that relationship between delinquent behavior of a child and delinquent peers is reciprocal i.e., not only delinquent peers affect the delinquent behavior in the youngsters but the delinquent acts also strengthens connection with delinquent peers, creating a cycle which leads to negative results. Gearhart and Tucker (2020) suggested that it is important to address individual needs while implementing community level interventions for preventing the child delinquency. In addition to dealing with roots child delinquency, there are other interventions, which can contribute to support at-risk youngsters. Piggott, Spray, Mason and Rhind (2024) found that physical and sport activities can be helpful for supporting youngsters, who are at risk and involved in delinquent acts. These activities assist in developing personal identity and promoting social connection for youngsters at-risk for primary (for all delinquent youngsters) and secondary interventions (targeting specific delinquent youngsters) (Piggott, Spray, Mason & Rhind, 2024). The participants of study had a weak emotional bond with their parents. Weak relationship amid parent and child may lead to child delinquency (Islam, Shoukat & Ibrahim, 2021).

Jacobsen and Zaatut (2020) found that children having stronger relationship with their parents were at a lower risk of delinquency. Parents' knowledge and monitoring (Steketee, Aussems & Marshall, 2019; Walters, 2020) plays an important role in dealing with the cognitive impulsivity of children thus preventing child delinquency (Walters, 2020). Steketee, Aussems and Marshall (2019) reported correlation amid parental violence and violent delinquency by child. Doelman, Luijk, Marshall, Jongerling, Enzmann and Steketee (2021) confirmed in context of situational action theory (SAT) that physical maltreatment of the child was related to low self-control, low morality and more exposure to the criminogenic environment. It was a small-scale qualitative study. Otherwise, these interventions would just displace child delinquency instead of helping youngsters to refrain from it. Therefore, the result of this study must be interpreted keeping in view the limitations of this study. In this regard, the study involved a small sample size i.e., only four participants with a particular age group (16-18 years). All the participants were male elementary school students, enrolled in grade 6-8. All of the participants were average to struggling students. Thus, participants belonged to the low-middle class to poor families. The participants had 4-8 siblings and the participants were either 3rd, 4th or eldest one among their siblings.

CONCLUSION

This research study focused on examining various factors behind child delinquency for the students enrolled in elementary grades. The offences committed by the participants of study included teasing other children, not doing homework, stealing, fighting with other adolescents and children, beating other boys, smoking cigarette, missing classes and being absent from the school. The study results were evident that childhood trauma, social and family environment may emotionally and psychologically affect child, and weaken their bond with their family and the teachers. It may lead him to join or stay connected with the 'bad' company and commit the juvenile offences. It can affect child in such a way that he cannot change his behavior even when he realizes the need to do so. Labelling and discriminated behavior of other people with child may even worsen the situation. Adults at home & school must realize their responsibility to emotionally connect with children and be empathetic with them. Target the behavior, not the person. A juvenile may seek validation from others for their behavior, particularly from their company, friends or peers. The type of behavior we are seeking validation for, is affected by the company of friends. As there were multiple factors involved in the child delinquency, a multi-sectoral intervention may be adopted by involving delinquent youngster, their family, their peer group, community, school and environment. The future research work may involve larger sample size and mixed-methods research design to explore factors affecting situation. Other data collection tools such as observation, questionnaire, & data collection from teachers, peers and parents of the juvenile may help to interpret the phenomenon in more detail. Thus, a longitudinal study of juvenile may be conducted to understand the phenomenon and factors affecting it.

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