

The “Broken Home” or Broken Society
A Sociological Study of Family Structure and Juvenile Delinquency

By

Hillary R. Sheehan

Advised by

Professor Chris Bickel

SocS 461, 462

Senior Project

Social Science Department

College of Liberal Arts

CALIFORNIA POLYTECHNIC STATE UNIVERSITY

Winter, 2010

© 2010 Hillary Sheehan

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
Research Proposal.....	3
Annotated Bibliography.....	5
Outline.....	10
Abstract.....	14
Introduction.....	15
The “Broken Home”: Truth or Trend.....	15
Statistics on Single-Parent Families and Juvenile Delinquency.....	21
Case Study.....	23
Theories.....	27
Criticisms.....	32
Conclusion.....	34
Bibliography.....	36

Research Proposal

The goal of this research paper is to explore the topic of juvenile delinquency and to analyze the cause of such behavior. The topic of most interest is how the family structure plays a role in delinquent behavior and what can be said about the so called broken home. There is a lot of research in criminal justice that tries to explore the reasons behind people's behavior and this paper is intending to address youth who have been involved in the system. By exploring this topic I hope to get a better understanding of juvenile delinquency facts and trends as well as see what issues play a role in this behavior.

There is a lot of research required to narrow my topic so that I can focus in on a point of interest. By looking at the history of juvenile delinquency and particularly the broken home theory a lot insight can be gained on this topic. I will also need to take a look at juvenile delinquency statistics to get an idea of the magnitude of this problem as well as see how these numbers have changed over time. Finding out the causes and or triggers of such behavior is what I'm really interested in. After researching the history, causes and statistics of juvenile delinquency a better understanding can be reached. I want to find a few case studies that will aid in making the topic of my paper stronger. My intent is to find some existing data on juvenile delinquency and perform a secondary analysis on this topic to see if I can answer my hypothesis which I think will be, "Single-parents are not more likely to have their adolescent children involved in delinquency, than are two biological, married parents." At this point I will need to take a look at some theories to explain this problem from a sociological or criminologist perspective.

The main goal of the project is to become more knowledgeable about juvenile delinquency in general to aid me in my career goal of becoming a probation officer or social worker.

Annotated Bibliography

Adams, M S, Robertson, C T, Gray-Ray, P., & Ray, M C (Spring 2003). *Labeling and delinquency Adolescence*, 38, 149. p.171(16). The authors investigate the association of delinquency to symbolic interaction theories as well as the labeling theory. They conclude that delinquency is related to labeling in that youth who receive negative labels are more likely to be involved in delinquent behavior. They emphasize the fact that peer groups have a big impact on criminal involvement. This work will be helpful to my project because it supports my thesis that family structure does not play the biggest role in delinquency. It will also be helpful because many different theories can be applied to youth crime and better explain this problem.

Adler, F., Mueller, G., & Laufer, W. (2007) *Criminology*. Seventh Edition. McGraw Hill. New York, NY. Pgs 88-173. This book is a study of criminology as well as social and behavioral science. It explores the definitions, law, measurements, theories, subcultures, and types of crime. The authors discuss many different ways to look at, define, describe and explain crimes with many different approaches. This work will be helpful to my project because it explains the difference between crime and delinquency, contains tons of statistics and discusses the predominant competing theories in criminology.

Harris, Kathleen Mullan. (2008). *The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health)*, Waves I & II, 1994–1996; Wave III, 2001–2002. Chapel Hill, NC: Carolina Population Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Harris

investigates the relationship of many different characteristics with juvenile delinquency. This data will help my project because I am going to try and do a secondary analysis with the variables juvenile delinquency and family structure. I am going to do a cross tabulation to examine if there is a relationship between the two as well as other variables that could potentially contribute to crime.

Jencks, Christopher. (March 21, 1990). *The Real Welfare Problem*. The American Prospect, Inc. Jencks investigates the welfare system of the U.S. His research discusses the problems with the current welfare system as well as welfare reform and its implication. He suggests that single mothers turn to welfare because they cannot get a good enough job to pay their bills. He addresses the stereotypes of single mothers on welfare and provides evidence for why these beliefs are incorrect. This work will help my project in addressing the problems faced by single parent families, the ridicule and stereotyping they are subjected to and the problem with our social and political systems in addressing and dealing with these issues.

Mack, Kristin Y. (2007). *Reassessing the family-delinquency association: Do family type, family processes, and economic factors make a difference?* Science Direct Journal of Criminal Justice, Vol. 35, Issue 1. Mack studied the relationship between family structure and delinquency, and found that family processes and economic factors played a more significant role than family type. To be more specific she found that maternal attachment was the most significant predictor of juvenile delinquency. This work will help my project because it supports the argument that family structure is not

the leading cause of delinquency. It also addresses Travis Hirschi's social control theory and social bonds. This theory helps to explain causes for delinquency because of weak social bonds.

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (2007). *Juvenile Population Characteristics*. This is a great source on juvenile characteristics. It addresses things such as juvenile population, living arrangements, teen mothers, poverty and education characteristics. This source gives the facts on the juvenile crime problem as well as things that influence youth involvement in the criminal justice system. This source will help my project because it gives a great perspective on the juvenile delinquency problem and is a great starting point for research.

Ritzer, George. 2008. *Sociological Theory*. Seventh edition. McGraw-Hill. New York, NY. Pgs. 347-386. This book addresses all the leading sociological theories as well as their application, implementation, strengths and weaknesses. They explore many sociological issues and give the main theories for trying to come to a conclusion on social problems. This work will help my research because it contains information on many leading theorists. Two theorists who would be great to use are George Herbert Mead (Symbolic Interaction) and Charles Horton Cooley (looking-glass self). Both of their theories can be applied to juvenile delinquency and help explain the causes associated with this problem.

Snyder, Howard N., and Sickmund, Melissa. 2006. *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. This report gives all the national statistics on juvenile offenders as well as their victims. It addresses issues such as ethnicity, gender, age, education, poverty and demographics. This source will help my project by painting a picture of the juvenile crime problem and explain away many myths associated with this issue.

Wells, Edward L. & Rankin, Joseph H. (February, 1991). *Families and Delinquency: A Meta-Analysis of the Impact of Broken Homes*. *Social Problems*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 71-93. Published by University of California Press. This article addresses the fact that research on family structure and juvenile delinquency has been inconclusive and incomplete. The authors try to clear up problems with prior research. This article will help my project because it explains other variables such as family context, variation in people, and types of delinquency.

Wilkinson, Karen. (1974). *The Broken Family and Juvenile Delinquency: Scientific Explanation or Ideology?* *Social Problems*, Vol. 21, No. 5. Wilkinson investigates the history of The Broken Home Theory all the way back to the beginning of the 1900's. Her article gives the reasons for acceptance and rejection of this theory throughout time and emphasizes the fact that cultural and social forces have shaped these periods. This article will help my project because it will give a foundation for the reason

why family structure (the broken home, i.e. single parent home) has been used throughout history to explain juvenile delinquency.

Outline

I. Abstract

- Thesis

II. Introduction

- Statistics
- Summary

III. The Broken Home

- Definition: a single-parent family that is not as effective as a two-parent family.
- Period of acceptance: 1900-1932
 - Child-Savers
 - Women's Rights Movement
 - Traditional views
- Period of rejection: 1933-1950
 - Institutions taking over the role of the family
 - Education
- Current rejection
 - Changing views, beliefs and values
 - Women in the workforce

IV. Statistics

- Juvenile living arrangements
 - Proportion of juveniles living in single-parent homes

- Changes in living arrangements
- Juvenile Crime Trends
 - Arrest rates
 - The Superpredator
 - Youth crime epidemic?
 - Overall trends compared to the rest of the population

V. Discrimination and Social Policies

- Welfare
 - Aid to families
 - Myths about single mothers on Welfare
- Workforce
 - Male dominance
 - Unequal wages
 - Discrimination and Sexism

VI. Case Studies

- The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health
 - Relationship of juvenile delinquency and family structure
 - Surveyed 132 middle/high schools
 - Maternal attachment

VII. Methodology

- Secondary analysis
 - Data from Add Health
 - Recoding, Frequencies and Crosstabulation using SPSS

- Hypothesis
 - Single-parents are more likely to have their adolescent children involved in delinquency, than are two biological, married parents.
(Trying to prove this wrong but can't use null hypothesis in data analysis)
- Definition of variables
 - Single-parent: a biological parent who cares for one or more children, without the assistance of another [the other biological] parent in the home.
 - Juvenile Delinquency: conduct by a child, younger than 18 years old, characterized by antisocial behavior that is beyond parental control and therefore subject to legal action (i.e. arrested or convicted of a crime).

VIII. Analysis

- Supports Hypothesis or not
- Problems, strengths, weaknesses, etc.
- Future research

IX. Theories

- Labeling Theory
 - Tannenbaum, Lemert, & Becker
 - Definition: "The deviant is one to whom that label has successfully been applied; deviant behavior is the behavior that people so label"
(Leighninger, 1996).

- Application
- Theory of Looking-glass self
 - Charles Horton Cooley
 - Definition: “The concept of the looking-glass self can be broken down into three components. First, we imagine how we appear to others. Second, we imagine what their judgment of that appearance must be. Third, we develop some self-feeling, such as pride or mortification, as a result of our imagining others’ judgments” (Ritzer, 2008).
 - Application
- Combining other theories
 - (Still need to do more research)
- Criticisms

X. Conclusion

- Restate Hypothesis
- Support or reject
- Future research

XI. Bibliography

Abstract

Despite the great interest in the relationship between family structure and delinquent behavior generally, very little agreement among researchers as well as the general public has been reached on the issue to this day. The present study examines whether family structure plays a role in juvenile delinquency. More precisely, it explores whether single parents are more likely to have their adolescent children involved in delinquency than are two parents. This analysis does not support the structural hypotheses, which argues that single parents have children who are at an increased risk of being involved in delinquent behavior. While these finding provide further evidence that children living with single parents are not at an increased risk of being involved in delinquent behavior, additional research is needed to further evaluate the causes and risks associated with involvement in delinquent behavior.

Introduction

Juvenile delinquency has been declining since 1994. According to The Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, juvenile incarceration declined by 50 percent between 1980 and 2004 (Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, 2008). Yet the media portrays as more violent than ever. The question that comes to mind is why or what causes juvenile delinquency? The first thing most people think of is the family.

By first exploring the concept of the “broken home,” we can see where this widespread belief has come from. Then looking at its periods of acceptance and rejection we can see how this idea has been upheld and abandoned throughout history. With the family being the number one excuse of delinquent behavior many other influences such as peer groups, politics, economics, social stratification, etc. get diminished or ignored. There are many problems with a single-dimensional explanation of delinquency because it ignores the fact that there are many things that contribute to acts and definitions of crime. Single parent families have become more common yet youth crime has declined. Bringing in theories can help to get a better understanding of juvenile delinquency while at the same time acknowledging their downfalls and shortcomings is an important thing to look at.

The ‘Broken Home’: Truth or Trend

The broken home theory has been used throughout history in American society by numerous sociologists to explain why juveniles are delinquent. This theory has been the most widely used and accepted explanation until recently. Karen Wilkinson, from the University of Arizona, defines this theory as follows:

The broken family is generally considered a family structure which deviates from the ideal family structure. In American society the ideal family structure is the

two-parent (one-male, one-female) nuclear family. In the broken family one or both parents are absent because of death, divorce, separation or desertion. This kind of family is expected to have adverse effects on the child because of lack of proper role models, failure to control the child and insufficient paternal or maternal love (Wilkinson, 1974).

The broken home theory is therefore a single-parent family that is believed by early sociologists as well as the government, to be not as effective as a two-parent family. This idea is based solely on the structure of the family and the fact that two parents are better than one. One source that helped encourage this view was the “child-savers” movement. Between 1630 and 1830 many delinquent children immigrated to the U.S. not as citizens but as agriculture workers, indentured servants, and apprentices (Senna, 1994). After independence and industrialization apprenticeships were dissolved. Children still had extremely low social status and were treated very harshly including being punished as adults. In 1838, the State finally felt that they needed to intervene because causes of delinquency were seen as a direct result of a poor home and bad parenting. The *Parens Patriae* doctrine was introduced which means “the state is the father” (Senna, 1994). This doctrine recognized children as needing intervention and guidance from the State in the form of treatment and not criminalization. Separate courts for children were also put in place by the State. Women played a big role in this movement because the home was their place and therefore their responsibility to be a good parent and provide a stable home. They recognized these miserable social conditions and fought to bring them to the public’s attention. The “child-savers” were the first to say that children should be treated differently than adults and made juvenile delinquency a “visible social problem” (Wilkinson, 1974). The child savers got children out of almshouses for the poor, fought against child labor, pushed for public education

and probation as well as adoption. Their efforts brought many issues to the public's attention which resulted in new beliefs and ideas about children. For example, people started seeing children as individuals who needed protection and different treatment than adults. By seeing youth as children whose brains were not fully developed yet techniques involved intervention and rehabilitation instead of incarceration. Their ideas and values helped in the creation of juvenile delinquency as well as well as the invention of many other movements.

The Women's Rights Movement also started and showed women that they could do things outside the home. Because of the attitudes and values at this time (1900-1932), ideas of what was normal or right or wrong was key. For example, divorce is seen a "threat" by mainstream society and great emphasis is put on the family. Ideological concerns were the basis for everything and traditional views and moral standards played a huge role (Wilkinson, 1974). Religious beliefs were very dominant throughout U.S history. According to Dr. Robbins,

American values have in the past, included a faith in God, prayer and the Bible, which has for a large part, been the foundation of other national traditions, such as: honor and respect for the family, diligent work ethics, absolute values of right and wrong, honesty in business practices, wholesomeness in leadership, respect toward authority, moderation rather than excess, marriage as a prerequisite before having sex or bearing children, a family which consists of both a father and mother, taking responsibility to provide for our own — such as one's spouse, family and children, and so forth (Robbins, 1990).

People were taught by the State as well as socialized by religious institutions to have these values and if they weren't followed than they were seen as deviant, abnormal or wrong. Individuals were judged by the elite and those in power based on these beliefs and traditions resulting in being looked down upon by the mainstream society.

Early sociologists described the family as the most important institution because it

was in control of the development of children. For example John Bowlby (1946) claimed that coming from a broken home caused delinquency (Sturt, 2008). Later Ivan Nye (1958), as well as Walter Reckless focused on the family as the most important source of social control where if juveniles were lacking one parent they were more likely to have complete freedom and participate in deviant activities (Jensen, 2003). Because these early sociologists were from rural communities, with very traditional values, they believed the unstable family was problematic. The unstable family is defined as being defective and unable to provide adequate moral training. It is often thought of as being unsafe, unpredictable and chaotic. Their views encouraged acceptance of the broken home theory.

From 1933 to 1950 was the period of rejection of the broken home theory. One of the reasons for this was that political and educational institutions were taking over the role of the family. According to Karen Wilkinson, “with other institutions gaining control over the development of children, the family was considered less capable of influencing the behavior of its children and was therefore less likely to be considered responsible for juvenile delinquency” (Wilkinson, 1974). The state and education systems took over many roles the family had previously possessed. For example, with children educated outside the home, families were no longer in complete control of what their children were exposed to. They are taught roles, values, rules, and morals through the educational system which is controlled by the government. Therefore the family could not be solely held accountable for what their children did. The political system defines what is right or wrong in society through the sanctioning of laws and policies which in turn controls individual actions and activities within the family. Also, with the

State taking on the role of being children's parents or guardians the family is at the mercy of the State to decide what's best for their child. No longer are children educated by their parents and in turn parents are told how they should educate and raise their children.

During this time, change was starting to occur throughout society with divorce no longer being as big of a threat. Women starting to get jobs outside the home and urban life changed, resulting in less traditional ways of life with children no longer working for and getting educated by their families (Wilkinson, 1974).

The current rejection of the broken home theory is based on the fact that the family is viewed very differently now. According to the National Center for Juvenile Justice, 69 percent of children were living in two-parent families compared to 88 percent in 1960 (Snyder, 2006). Most of the remaining children are in single parent homes but this statistic is misleading since the Census Bureau only takes into account two parent families that are legally married. The National Center for Juvenile Justice proceeded to explain that "the proportion of children living in single parent households increased from 9 percent in 1920 to 27 percent in 2002" (Snyder, 2006). This shows that family structure has been changing for a long time and single parents are becoming more and more predominant. Since it is becoming more common in our society, it is not as abnormal as it used to be in the past and not as detrimental to children's lives and development.

There are different periods of time where the broken home has been used to explain why juveniles are delinquent. This theory reflects changing cultural and ideological biases, more so than scientific evidence. It shows that we are socialized to accept or reject these most widely held beliefs. People are influenced by the institutions

that serve them and they in turn respond with similar ideas. The political and educational institutions have a tremendous amount of power over our thoughts and beliefs because we internalize the things that they tell us about our society and ourselves. Through public education and the laws enacted by congress we are taught to abide by the rules or else we will be punished and we learn what is to be considered normal. Normal is getting married, having children, paying taxes and following all the rules.

Times have changed in today's society and what was seen as normal back then is not always the case today. Many people still have a lot of similar ideas about what is considered appropriate, but with more and more exceptions to the rule these attitudes are changing. It becoming more okay to be different and stand out in today's society with single parents being accepted into the mainstream. There is a more relaxed attitude towards the institution of marriage than previous generation but marriage continues to be widely viewed as desirable when children are involved. One reason for changing views is that the definition of a family today doesn't fit with the traditional perception of a married couple with children. Traditional values of a marriage union persist because a good portion of the public doesn't think that taxpayer should have to pay to raise someone else's child and that parents should take more responsibility for their children's actions. Many studies, which will be discussed shortly, have shown that there is little significance between the broken family and juvenile delinquency, yet some still claim that the dysfunctional family (i.e. broken families) plays a role. Much controversy still exists because of religious and traditional values. By looking at some alarming statistics that show the nature and trends of juvenile delinquency in our society today we can gain a better understanding of these problems.

Statistics on Single-Parent Families and Juvenile Delinquency

According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), “the proportion of children living in single-parent homes more than doubled between 1970 and 2007 from 12% to 29%” (OJJDP, 2008). OJJDP also states that the juvenile arrest rate “for all offenses reached its highest level in the last two decades in 1996, and then declined 30% by 2007” (OJJDP, 2008). How is it possible to say that the reason behind youth crime is single-parent families? While crime rates are dropping the single-parent home is becoming more pronounced. These are contradictions. It would be expected that crime go up with the rise of more single-parent homes. There is no way that single parents can be blamed for the rise in delinquent behavior if in fact youth crime has been dropping. The fact is that even with raw data to prove something is not true, traditional values and beliefs still dominate. These values are so ingrained in people that they don’t question them even if they have proof that they are not correct. Socialization is so strong that the truth lies buried and innovative is stunted. For these reasons, it is useful to understand differences and trends in youth living arrangements. However, it is important to note that family structure may not be the proximate cause of the youth behavior, but rather the conditions often linked with it.

The other problem is that youth crime has been declining yet we see our youth as more violent than ever. This was the trend in the 1990’s where predictions of a new wave of violence, from “a new breed of juveniles—the superpredator—was now a threat to U.S. society” (OJJDP, 2008). These predictions heightened people’s perception of juvenile crime and nearly every state in the U.S. changed their laws to make it easier to handle more youth as adult criminals (OJJDP, 2008). What is interesting is that all crime

went up for this time period not just juvenile crime. Ironically, The Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice claims that, “In fact, white adults 30 and older show the largest increase in felony arrest and imprisonment of any racial or age group” (Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, 2008). This shows that youth are not the ones we need to worry about nor are minorities. We are creating more problems by assuming this is the case. When youth and minorities are targeted wrongfully as the major cause of our crime problems, the real causes go unnoticed and we end up with more problems that we started with. If the real issues aren’t addressed than the whole reason why the criminal justice system was made is meaningless. We lock up people who are seen as a threat and the people who are causing the real problems slip through the radar. This is a big flaw that is going to result in a major catastrophe if ignored. The Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice explains:

“Data from state crime reports directly contradict the public image created by numerous authorities, politicians, leading institutions, and the news media of a law-abiding adult generation saddled with inexplicably violent, wayward youth. As a result, California's fixation on a supposed "youth crime epidemic" that never materialized has left the state unprepared to confront the real crime problem: tens of thousands of aging offenders and prison inmates, most with neglected drug problems and many in declining health, whose incarceration, treatment, and medical costs represent a fiscal time bomb of enormous proportions as well as severe damage to families and communities (Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, 2008).

The mass media plays an enormous role in public opinion and attitude especially when the topics are emotional and moving. By instilling fear in people of a ravaged youth epidemic they shift the public’s attention away from the real problem. Many institutions, especially the media and political sphere, work together to mislead the public into thinking that there is some other problem (i.e. youth crime spree) so that they don’t have to address and deal with the true issues. The real problem is the fact that older white

males are the ones responsible for the crime wave problem and not juveniles. The media, fueled by the elite in power, have a vested interest to persuade the general public into believing otherwise. Since the government keeps making new laws for more and more acts seen as deviant, juveniles are targeted instead of older white males. It's a way to trick people into not demanding action for a problem that needs to be faced or otherwise would be disastrous if not confronted. This is a huge part of the problem with our society and in turn results in youth being seen as something they're not. After all these statistics and trends, we can take a look at some case studies to get an idea of what research has already been conducted on this topic.

Case Study

Tons of research has been done to look at the relationship between family structure and juvenile delinquency. One study that was particularly interesting was done by Kristen Mack at The University of Iowa, in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Criminology. This research used data from The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, which surveyed 132 middle/high school students across the U.S. It took place in three waves- from 1994 to 2002 and consisted of in-home and in-school questionnaires (Mack, 2007).

Mack studied the relationship between family structure and delinquency, and found that family processes and economic factors played a more significant role than family type. To be more specific she found that maternal attachment was the most significant predictor of juvenile delinquency (Mack, 2007). Attachment was defined as a strong parent-child bond that plays a role, as well as supervision and control over their child/children. This study shows that it's not necessarily the family structure that plays a

role, but rather family processes.

Another study is that of Kevin Beaver and John Wright from Florida State University. This study used data from the longitudinal Cambridge Study in Juvenile Delinquency, which surveyed 411 boys ages 8-9 year old from working class families in London starting in 1961. It took place in three waves with subjects getting reinterviewed once they turned 10 and 15 respectively. There was also follow up interviews done once the respondents were 21 and 25. By covering over 6 years of their lives and following up into adulthood, the study allowed for extensive examination of family relationships and processes.

Beaver and Wright studied the reciprocal effects between family risk and involvement in antisocial lifestyle (Beaver, 2007). They found that the structure of the family did not have a significant effect on the boy's involvement in an antisocial lifestyle. Their study revealed that it's antisocial lifestyles of the boys that affected family risk and not the other way around. More specifically the family was seen to suffer only after the youth was involved in delinquent behavior. Further, results revealed that the family doesn't cause delinquency but rather family processes are affected by their children acting out (Beaver, 2007). These results show that a more accurate cause of crime and delinquency needs to involve the effects the child has on processes within the family after a deviant act is committed. Or, a better explanation is the effects the criminal justice system has on youth and how it affects the family. Once a juvenile goes through the criminal justice system it causes problems for the functioning of the family. This added stress then puts pressure on the relationships and dynamics of the family and can cause youth to commit even more deviant acts. In turn, the criminal justice system has more of

an affect on youth crime than family structure does.

Another interesting study was done by Liqun Cao, Jian Cao and Jihong Zhao from Eastern Michigan University, in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Criminology. This study used data from a from a five wave probability sample of approximately 2,100 families in Washington state. Data from the Family Income Study was also used to test the effects of public assistance on children's well being within the family. From 1987 to 1992 the families were interviewed annually. The questions for the children were modeled after the National Longitudinal Study of Youths.

Cao and Zhao studied the effects of female headship and welfare on involvement and frequency in juvenile delinquency (Cao, 2004). They found that there was not a direct relationship between female headed households or receiving public assistance on the juvenile delinquency involvement or frequency. They explained that family structure did not play a significant role per se. Instead, the numbers of adults present in the home and attachment to school was found to significantly reduce delinquency involvement (Cao, 2004). If the child has insufficient supervision and a lack of interest in school, they were found to participate more in deviant acts. With this said, the family structure of single parents can be just as effective if they in fact provide sufficient supervision and involvement in promoting education. Thus the family's structure is minimized and family processes are more important.

Another study was done by Lizabeth Crawford from Bradley University Illinois and Katherine Novak from Butler University Indiana. They used data from the 1988 National Education Longitudinal Survey which was collected over 6 years in three

waves. They surveys started when respondents were in 8th grade with subsequent interviews once they were sophomores and seniors in high school.

Crawford and Novak studied the effects of the extent of parental attachment and supervision in relation to delinquency involvement as mediating the effects of family structure (Crawford, 2008). They argued that high levels of attachment would be associated with low levels of deviant behavior and less supervision with more opportunities for deviant acts would come from children in single parent families (Crawford, 2008). What they found was that family structure has a moderate effect on delinquency. They went on to explain that parental attachment and peer relations are better explanations of juvenile delinquency than family structure. These results show that the parent child bond plays a significant role as well as peer pressure. Being a single parent does not mean that the parent child bond and supervision is insufficient. Single parents can provide just as much support, love, guidance and supervision when compared to families with two parents.

One last study that explores the family structure and juvenile delinquency correlation is by Sokol-Katz and Dunham. This study uses data from the longitudinal study of adolescent development through the South Florida Youth Development Project. From 1990-1991, approximately 1,195 students from 48 different school in Date County, Florida were surveyed. They were followed for three years then interviewed later in life as well.

Sokol-Katz and Dunham studied the relationship between family characteristics and deviant behavior among youth (Sokol-Katz, 1997). They found that family structure does not have a significant effect on delinquency but rather parental attachment plays a

role. They claim that it is the type and quality of parent child relationships that play a bigger role in juvenile involvement in delinquent activities (Sokol-Katz, 1997). They go on to claim that the structure of the family is not as important as the family processes and interactions that take place. According to Sokol-Katz and Dunham, “we can conclude that it is possible to have a broken or reconstituted family that provides attachment and belief better than do some intact families, resulting in lower levels of delinquency” (Sokol-Katz, 1997). Juvenile delinquency can be found in many different types of family structures. Relationships with children that are healthy, lasting, supportive and strong can play a bigger role in reducing delinquency than just the sheer number of relationships. Having better relationships is the answer no matter what type of family structure is present.

Overall, these studies show that family structure alone has little effect on juvenile delinquency. Family processes such as attachment, parent-child bond, and supervision are better explanations for deviant behavior. The broken home theory is proved to be an insufficient explanation for juvenile delinquency. Now we turn to some theories that better explain juvenile delinquency and the relationship it has with not only family structure but with every other aspect of a juvenile life.

Theories

One theory that is usually referenced by labeling theorist is Charles Horton Cooley’s theory of looking-glass self. Cooley is a symbolic interaction theorist, who is best known for his concept of looking-glass self. Ritzer defines this concept as follows:

The concept of the looking-glass self can be broken down into three components. First, we imagine how we appear to others. Second, we imagine what their judgment of that appearance must be. Third, we develop some self-feeling, such as pride or mortification, as a result of our imagining others’ judgments (Ritzer, 2008).

This theory is very similar to labeling theory, except it's an internalization of what we perceive others to think of us. Personal beliefs change to match what others feel or say. For example if someone sees you as an honest and loving person, you are likely to see yourself as an honest and loving person. If someone sees you as a delinquent you are likely to see yourself as a delinquent. The internalization is more predominant if it comes from a person in power. Formal organizations thus play a big role in shaping self-concepts.

When looking at juveniles on probation, it's clear that their self-concepts are a reflection of what powerful others think of them. They not only internalize formal opinions of being a drug addict or criminal but they also internalize informal opinions from friends and family. The probability of accepting these labels is much higher when it comes from someone in a position of power. When fear is instilled in people and consequences put in place, people are reminded over and over of who they are and they are likely to act out in accordance. For example, a lot of juvenile on diversion explain that they internalize opinions about themselves that come from their parents. When their parents are disappointed and disgusted with them, they too are disappointed and disgusted with themselves.

Their self-concepts are formed by what they think others would say about them.

The looking-glass self concept could also apply to single-parent families. With single-parents being looked down upon and judged throughout history, these families could see themselves as others have seen them in the past. For example single-parents could see themselves as terrible parents because that's what they

think other people see them as. This theory applies more to juveniles and their self-concepts but it could apply to anyone in any situation.

Labeling theory sought to explain juvenile delinquency. Labeling theory was first coined by Tannenbaum, Lemert, & Becker. However, Howard Becker is usually cited as the founder of labeling theory (Adams, 2003). Labeling theory claims that rules and laws are made by people in power for acts that are seen as deviant and then these rules are applied to people who go against these rules who are then labeled and seen as outsiders. According to Leighninger, "The deviant is one to whom that label has successfully been applied; deviant behavior is the behavior that people so label" (Leighninger, 1996). Howard Becker sees deviance not as the acts or behavior of individuals but as the creation of social groups. Deviance is simply rule breaking behavior that is labeled deviant by persons in positions of power. Labeling behavior varies from person to person. Becker (1963) describes rules as the reflection of certain social norms held by the majority of a society, whether formal or informal. Rules that are enforced are applied differentially and usually facilitate certain favorable consequences for those who apply the label. People who break the rules are seen as different from the rest of the law-abiding citizens. This results in people seeing themselves at odds with the people who follow the rules. Becker (1963) uses the term "outsider" to describe a labeled rule-breaker or deviant that accepts the label attached to them and views themselves as different from "mainstream" society (O'Connor, 2006). After committing a deviant act the process of being caught and labeled deviant by a person in position of authority is the most crucial step on the road to secondary deviance. If the person accepts this label than they start committing more deviant acts and they in turn could end up on a path of being a career

criminal (O'Connor, 2006). When the criminal justice system applies a label to juveniles, especially at the time in their lives when they are trying to figure out who they are, they are likely to see themselves as such (labeled as a delinquent) and live up to that label.

Labeling theory also explains long-term consequences on a person's identity (Leighninger, 1996, pp. 332). For example, once an individual internalizes being labeled it is hard to change their views of themselves. They are likely to continue to think of themselves in this way which then effects later decisions and actions. In turn, people who are labeled are more likely to commit crimes and surround themselves with other labeled people. This perpetuates the cycle of thinking of themselves as deviant. By surrounding themselves with other like minded individuals they get a sense of belonging and can in turn think of their behavior as normal. The effects peer groups have on juveniles are well documented and this contributes to secondary deviance.

One of the main problems is the way in which laws and rules are made.

According to O'Connor,

Howard Becker coined the term "moral entrepreneur" to describe individuals who lead campaigns to outlaw certain behaviors by making them "criminal." The outlaw's subsequent behavior is therefore not the important thing to study because what is more important is whether the innocent are falsely accused and exactly which outlaws are rounded up and processed through the criminal justice system (O'Connor, 2006).

Many different movements have occurred throughout history in an attempt to make them viewed as immoral and to have laws created surrounding these issues. For example there have been the numerous instances of moral crusades such as witch hunts, the war on drugs, prohibition, etc. that resulted in massive mobilization of authority figure to rid the world of these problems. The people who make and enforce the rules (politicians, congressman, etc.) are in positions of authority and power and they constantly push for

more rules and laws to be put in place. Things in society are made out to be evil by these “moral entrepreneurs” and then brought to the public’s attention through several avenues including the media, police, campaigns, etc. Then the people in authority position whose job it is to enforce these rules take on the fight as though it’s their personal duty and they in turn label people to gain respect. The ways in which people in positions of power make laws and in turn label people plays a huge role in crime in general and juvenile delinquency.

Labeling theory applies very well to more to juvenile delinquency and juvenile delinquents from single-parent homes. Certain juveniles are seen as deviant, then in turn they are labeled as such and are likely to live up to that label. In a broader sense, thinking back to the section on “superpredators,” this is exactly what is happening. When the media makes a claim that there is a new breed of predators with the backing power of political leaders, public opinion shifts to start labeling more juveniles as such. In turn the crime rate for all groups goes up including juveniles. The connection here is that more acts and people are being labeled as deviant by the elite who have power resulting in mobilization to find and prosecute more people who fit in this category. The effort of these “moral entrepreneurs” is magnified to make the public think that the problems that these “superpredators” are causing are under control. This is a perfect example of what labeling theory claims.

Labeling theory could also apply to single-parents and juvenile delinquents. Public opinion has not been too fond of single-parents throughout history. The broken home theory has been used a lot to explain many social problems in the past. Single-parent homes have been seen by the State as dysfunctional, out of control and unstable.

Children from single-parent homes are therefore more likely to be labeled as delinquent because they come from these dysfunctional families. Since the homes are seen as unstable and problematic, juveniles are likely to be seen as problematic and unstable as well. Youth from these homes are likely to be labeled as out of control, wayward, unstable, unsupervised and dysfunctional. Labeling theory fits very well with juvenile delinquency and seems to fit pretty good with single-parents and their children who end up being delinquent.

Labeling theory and looking-glass self combined can give a better understanding of how youth could internalize self-concepts and then act out because of these issues. These theories help us understand more about why juveniles could be delinquent and they also touch on the issue of coming from a non-traditional family structure. The main point of this paper is that single-parents do not have children who are more delinquent than children from two parent families. Family structure does not explain juvenile delinquency very accurately. But labeling theory and looking-glass self both give insight into ideas that are better at explaining this problem. Even though both of these theories do explain juvenile delinquency very well, no theory is ever perfect. Now we can take a look at some of the problems with these theories before coming to any conclusion.

Criticisms

There are many theories that try to explain why things are the way they are. Many theories do a great job at coming to some sort of real and right conclusion. Even when theories can hit the nail on the head, so to speak, they can never fully explain everything. This research paper is no exception to this problem. When it comes to labeling theory and looking-glass self there are some issues that these theories don't take

into account. The first problem is that these theories ignore psychological factors. For example people's needs, motives, intentions, aspirations, desires, etc. are not taken into account by applying these theories. Juveniles from single-parent homes might be delinquent because their families' income is lower and their basic needs aren't being met. They in turn commit deviant acts to fill these needs themselves. Labeling theory does not take this into account.

The second problem with these theories is that they don't take into account personal choice. Critiques claim that people inherently know right from wrong and that they have a choice to be delinquent or not. They claim that people can choose to be delinquent and they should have to pay for these bad choices. These theories assume that people don't have a choice. Certain people will be labeled and then they will act out to live up to this label. People can choose to commit these acts and they can choose to believe these labels or not.

The third problem is that if more youth are getting labeled as delinquent and labeling theory is really what explains how youth commit crimes, then why is juvenile delinquency going down? With labeling being more predominant, the expectation would be that juvenile delinquency would go up if youth are living up to these labels. This is not the case and youth crime is actually declining despite the media's labels and portrayal of wayward juveniles. Incarceration has grown as a result of more crimes being labeled as deviant and in turn the criminal justice system responding to this issue in a very active way. For example, proposition 21 made more crimes punishable by law which resulted in more people getting incarcerated. This is a great example of how labeling theory works. More crimes are getting labeled as delinquent by elite in power, such as juveniles getting

tried as adults as well as gang related offenses, and more people are getting locked up because of it. This is a huge issue that is being enforced by the elite in power who then use the media to persuade the public into agreeing with them. Then those who work for the criminal justice system are complying with the necessary actions to enforce these laws that the public now thinks they need. This means that youth aren't necessarily being more delinquent but that more delinquent acts are being defined as delinquent.

The last problem with these theories is that they apply more to juvenile delinquency in general, than to single-parents having juveniles who are more delinquent. Labeling theory can apply to this hypothesis but it's kind of a stretch. The thing to keep in mind is that this research paper showed that family structure is not a leading cause of delinquency, so therefore these theories are offered as alternatives. These are just some of the problems that these theories could have but overall they do a very good job of explaining youth crime.

Conclusion

Overall there was no relationship between family structure and juvenile delinquency in the current research paper. After taking a look at the history of the "broken home theory," it's clear that our society has stigmatized and looked down on single-parent families because of traditional values and religion playing a major role. The statistics show that youth crime is declining while the single-parent family is occurring more often. Ever since the 1990's there has been a portrayal of youth in the U.S. media as a new breed of criminals or "superpredators" to be exact. Despite many case studies on family structure and juvenile delinquency, there is still controversy as to how much of a role the single-parent plays in adolescent crime. By bringing in labeling

theory and looking-glass self, we can gain a better understanding of the other causes of juvenile delinquency and how juveniles form their self-concepts. Power held by people in positions of authority plays a huge role. This power is used to influence the media who in turn influence the public who then pushes for action back onto the people in power. They then make laws and rules around acts that they pushed the public to view as deviant and in turn more people get these deviant labels attached to them. This results in mobilization to incarcerate and punish people who fit this description. Then the people in power gain respect, re-election, money etc. There were some problems with the current study such as criticisms of the theories. However, there is sufficient results and literature to conclude that the hypothesis, single parents are more likely to have their adolescent children involved in delinquency, than are two parent families, was not supported.

Future research should include an original experiment, surveys or a secondary analysis to come up with more conclusive results and raw proof for a conclusion on this issue. This research has helped gain a lot more knowledge about youth crime as well as public opinion on family types. Juvenile delinquency is a real problem even if youth crime is declining. Anyway that we can help educate, intervene, or rehabilitate youth would definitely be a step in the right direction. The fact that single-parent families are on the rise, is more of a reason to find out about the consequences of such issues and circumstances. It's important to know what types of things put children at risk so that these issues can be addressed and targeted.

Bibliography

- Adams, M S, Robertson, C T, Gray-Ray, P., & Ray, M C (Spring 2003). *Labeling and delinquency*. *Adolescence*, 38, 149. p.171 (16). Retrieved May 23, 2009, from Expanded Academic ASAP via Gale:
<http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.lib.calpoly.edu:2048/itx/start.do?prodId=EAIM>
- Adler, F., Mueller, G., & Laufer, W. (2007) *Criminology*. Seventh Edition. McGraw Hill. New York, NY. Pgs 88-173
- Beaver, Kevin M., Wright, John Paul. (2007). *A Child Effects Explanation for the Association between Family Risk and Involvement in an Antisocial Lifestyle*. *Journal of Adolescent Research* 22: 640-664
<http://jar.sagepub.com.ezproxy.lib.calpoly.edu:2048/cgi/reprint/22/6/640>
- Cao, Liquin; Cao, Jian; Zhao, Jihong. (2004). *Family, welfare and delinquency*. *Journal of Criminal Justice*. Volume 32. Issue 6. Pages 565-576.
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/>
- Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice. *Intro to Juvenile Justice and Myths and Facts about Youth and Crime*. (2008). <http://www.cjcj.org/jjic/intro.php>
- Crawford, Lizabeth A., Novak, Katherine B. (2008). *Parent Child Relations and Peer Associations as Mediators of the Family Structure Substance Use Relationship*. *Journal of Family Issues*. Pg. 155-184.
<http://jfi.sagepub.com.ezproxy.lib.calpoly.edu:2048/cgi/reprint/29/2/155>
- Jencks, Christopher. (March 21, 1990). *The Real Welfare Problem*. The American Prospect, Inc.
http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=the_real_welfare_problem

- Jensen, Gary F. (2003). *Social Control Theories in Encyclopedia of Criminology*.
Richard A. Wright (Editor). Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers.
<http://sitemason.vanderbilt.edu/files/l/l3Bguk/soccon.pdf>
- Leighninger, L., & Popple, Phillip R. (1996). *Social Work, Social Welfare, and American Society* (3rd. Ed.). Allyn and Bacon: Needham Heights, MA.
<http://www.skidmore.edu/academics/english/courses/en205d/student7/bib.html>
- Mack, Kristin Y. (2007). *Reassessing the family-delinquency association: Do family type, family processes, and economic factors make a difference?* Science Direct Journal of Criminal Justice, Vol. 35, Issue 1.
<http://www.sciencedirect.com.ezproxy.lib.calpoly.edu:2048/scince>
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (2007). *Juvenile Population Characteristics*. <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/ojstatbb/population/faqs.asp>
- Ritzer, George. 2008. *Sociological Theory*. Seventh edition. McGraw-Hill. New York, NY. Pgs. 347-386.
- Robbins, Dale. (1990). *What do they Mean by Traditional Values?*
<http://www.victorious.org/tradvalu.htm>
- Senna, Siegel (1994) *Juvenile Delinquency: Theory, Practice, and Law*. West Publishers.
<http://homepage.mac.com/brenn/Child%20Savers.html>
- Snyder, Howard N., and Sickmund, Melissa. 2006. *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Sokol-Katz, J., & Dunham, R. (1997). *Family structure versus parental attachment in controlling adolescent deviant behavior: A social*. *Adolescence*, 32(125), 199.

Retrieved from

<http://web.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.lib.calpoly.edu:2048/ehost/detail>

Sturt, Gary. (2008). *Theories of Crime*.

<http://homepage.ntlworld.com/gary.sturt/crime/theocrim.htm#farrington>

Wells, Edward L. & Rankin, Joseph H. (February, 1991). *Families and Delinquency: A Meta-Analysis of the Impact of Broken Homes*. *Social Problems*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 71-93. Published by University of California Press.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/800639>

Wilkinson, Karen. (1974). *The Broken Family and Juvenile Delinquency: Scientific Explanation or Ideology?* *Social Problems*, Vol. 21, No. 5.

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici>