

Juvenile Delinquency in China: Causes and Prevention

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Abstract: *Juvenile delinquency is one of the most complex social issues confronting both developing and developed nations in today's rapidly changing world. In China, adolescent criminality is likewise increasing at an alarming rate. In this study, we examined the status quo of juvenile delinquency in China, elucidated the reasons for adolescent crime from the perspectives of the individual, family, school, and society, and proposed preventive methods to provide insight into the reduction of juvenile delinquency in China.*

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JUVENILE delinquency has become a worldwide phenomenon that threatens social order and stability. Due to a surge in delinquency, a decrease in the average age of offenders, a proliferation of offense types, and the employment of sophisticated tactics, the issue of juvenile crime has raised significant public concern in China. As China has around 250 million school-aged children, the juvenile delinquency rate is approximately 6 per 10,000 and as high as 20.6 per 10,000 in major cities (Lu & Guo, 2014). Experts and academics have paid a great deal of attention to the escalation of adolescent criminality, which has prompted significant conversations and investigations. This study examines the current state and causes of juvenile delinquency and proposes solutions to this problem in an effort to contribute to the reduction of youth crime in China.

The Status Quo of Juvenile Delinquency in China

The incidence of juvenile delinquency in China has decreased for a number of years since 2010, but has risen again from 2020, according to statistics on juvenile offences released by relevant judiciaries. It is characterized by a wide range of crimes and sophisticated criminal methods. In addition, the average age of criminals is decreasing, and the majority of unlawful activities are committed by gangs.

The Lowered Age of Adolescent Offenders

Recent trends in juvenile criminality indicate that the average age of delinquent adolescents is falling. In 2013, Li, a girl from Chongqing Province, seized a baby and hurled it to the elevator floor when she was only 10 years old; and Cai, a 13-year-old boy, brutally murdered a 10-year-old girl in Dalian in 2019 (Sun, 2020). In all cases of juvenile delinquency, the proportion of juvenile offenders younger than 14 years old is increasing fast. The trend of younger adolescents committing juvenile offenses is increasing, resulting in irreparable consequences for the juveniles, their families, and the entire community.

The Use of Intelligent Technology in Juvenile Offenses

The Internet and information technology are widely used in adolescent delinquency as a result of the increased popularity of smart phones. Presently, youthful criminals are able to utilize intelligent technology in their crime planning; they can commit a crime and get away with it using intelligent means. Simultaneously, the universalization of online communication enhances the possibility that young people will meet other prodelinquent juveniles over the internet; the convenience and effectiveness of communication facilitate the formation of criminal gangs among adolescents who are socially deviant.

Adult-like Mentality in Juvenile Crime

In recent cases of adolescent violence, several perpetrators displayed adult-like composure and deliberation. They plotted well prior to committing crimes, remained composed after the occurrences, and had formidable counter detection abilities. After the murder, the 13-year-old Dalian boy did not panic or provide any hints. Instead, he watched the police investigating the case from his window as if nothing had happened, and he arrived at the location only after the girl's body was discovered. A 12-year-old child in Hunan stabbed his mother to death due to his hatred of her discipline. After his mother's passing, he used her cell phone to send a text message to his teacher requesting time off. They displayed a mentality comparable to that of adult criminals despite their adolescence, and the entire illegal operation was well planned. Their calculated maturity has surprised the entire community (Shi, 2014).

Causes of Juvenile Delinquency

External (Non-individual) Factors Related to Families, Schools, and Society

Hirschi (2004) claimed that every person is a potential criminal, whereas a person's relationship with society can cultivate their knowledge of ethical behavior and dissuade them from engaging in deviant and criminal activity that breaches societal norms. This implies that juvenile delinquency is the result of weakened or broken relationships with society. Consequently, family, school, and social issues cannot be separated from the investigation of the causes of adolescent misbehavior.

Family-Related Factors

Numerous researchers have published their findings on the impact of family on juvenile misbehavior over the course of several decades. Most of them examined the relationship between family function and adolescent criminality from the perspective of family interactions (Zou, Zhang, & Wang, 2005). According to the prevailing viewpoint, it is not the dissolution of the family itself that causes juvenile delinquency, but rather the rifts between family members that undermine family functioning and instigate juvenile criminality. Palmer and Hollin (1998) found that the problematic behaviors of children from single-parent or remarried families are mostly linked to their conflicting surroundings, and that if these adolescents move from a conflict-ridden milieu to a harmonious one, their problematic acts decrease. Bank and Burraston (2001) discovered through interviews, surveys, and observations that the majority of juvenile offenders came from in-harmonious families filled with parent-child, inter-parent, and inter-sibling conflicts. The proportion of juvenile criminals with loveless parents and strained relationships with their parents is significantly greater than the proportion of juvenile offenders with divorced parents. A tense family environment tends to erode family cohesion, which is adverse to the efforts of parents to educate their children and solve difficulties. In this work, we attempt to separate family factors into two categories: the family environment

and the family structure, and we examine the impact of family factors on juvenile delinquency in these two dimensions.

The Effect of Family Environment on Juvenile Delinquency

The family environment contains both a physical and a soft component. The soft home environment includes characteristics such as intimacy, affection, cultural atmosphere, recreation, and conflict; the physical home environment is represented by parents' age, level of education, occupation, and socioeconomic status. Li and Zhou (2004) found that the majority of home conflicts occur prior to parents' divorce or in families with short-tempered parents with low levels of education; in both cases, family life is characterized by quarrels, accusations, and denunciations, and children are plagued and tormented by fear and anxiety throughout the day. Children are likely to develop traits such as introversion, aggression, and animosity throughout life. In order to escape the sad familial environment, kids may choose to run away and wind up living on the streets. As a result, people may be forced to commit illegal crimes in order to survive. In addition to family problems, parental moral apathy has a negative impact on children's behavioral development. Parents who are arbitrary, greedy, cruel, and crafty are more likely to create children who are selfish, narrow-minded, and aimless. The influence of parental behavior on children's personalities increases with age.

According to Chen's empirical research from 2004, 35% of delinquent teenagers in a city in Heilongjiang Province lived in households where their parents constantly argued, while 65% of teenagers who were sentenced in Wuhan lived in families where there was no love. Nearly 60% of the 186 surveyed juvenile delinquents in Jilin Province had parents who had no idea how to raise their children, and some of these parents even encouraged their kids to steal, gamble, and consume alcohol before the legal drinking age. In Shandong Province, 9% of juvenile offenders from one-child families had divorced parents, but 46.8% of them claimed that they had long lived in the shadow of arguing parents. As a result, conflicts between parents or a parent's corrupt lifestyle are strongly and favorably connected with the emergence of deviant behavior in children.

The Impact of Family Structure on Juvenile Delinquency

Contemporary Chinese family structures are less influenced by conventional marriage ethics and morals, and individuals are more likely to accept core families, which are independent and relatively small, as opposed to the old large family model. The single-parent family, migrant worker family, stepfamily, separated family, and DINK family are examples of so-called "alternative families" that are also allowed. This change denotes the declining stability of China's family system and the consequent rise in family issues that are either directly or indirectly linked to juvenile delinquency (Jiang, He, & Zou, 2006).

The Single-Parent Family and Juvenile Delinquency

Even though parents may have been ready for a divorce in a broken marriage, because children are more psychologically vulnerable and lack sufficient self-control, it is more like a “sudden calamity” to them. Children suffer more severely from divorce than parents do. Children who experience parental estrangement from either one or both parents develop a sense of inadequacy that can make them irritated and even violent (Wang, 2021). Another effect of divorce is that parents who feel bad for their kids may become very critical of themselves and try to make up for it by overindulging in worldly possessions. Because of this, they end up indulging their kids, who may turn to stealing or robbery if their family’s financial needs cannot be met. On the other hand, some divorcing parents pin their future hopes on their kids. They become excessively severe with their children and place unreasonable demands on them. The kids may flee home and commit delinquent behavior in an effort to escape the crushing responsibility.

The Stepfamily and Juvenile Delinquency

Children of remarried couples tend to be sensitive to stepparents and find it difficult to quickly establish a compatible parent-child bond with them, which lowers their level of satisfaction with the new family. Children of stepfamilies might occasionally experience abuse and abandonment at the hands of their stepparents, developing distant, violent personalities and mental health issues. There are worse situations where parents disregard their own children’s desires for parental company and see them as a barrier to remarriage. These children are more prone to engaging in illegal behavior as adults because they lack parental direction and are uninformed of moral and social conventions (Qu & Zou, 2009).

Families with Implicit Handicaps and Juvenile Delinquency

Juvenile delinquents can also result from seemingly stable households with underlying issues like extramarital affairs and illegal cohabitation. Children’s psychological well-being suffers greatly when one parent leaves the house, and this causes them to become resentful of their parents. They may grow to have antisocial personalities and pro-delinquent views over time.

Internet-Related Factors

Undoubtedly, the internet has two sides. While it greatly improves the effectiveness of human endeavors, it has numerous detrimental repercussions on contemporary society. Internet access has now become one of the key variables affecting the physical and mental development of teenagers, since internet browsing is currently the No. 1 leisure activity for Chinese youngsters. The internet is flooded with information on violence

and pornography because internet regulation has lagged significantly behind its development. Young people are prone to developing a socially abnormal mindset if they are exposed to such damaging material over an extended period of time.

Online Pornography and Juvenile Delinquency

The internet is currently flooded with all types of sexual content. According to pertinent data, pornography is mentioned in relation to around 47% of non-academic information on the internet. The majority of the approximately one million pornographic computer files on the internet are novels, video clips, and graphics; 85% of convicted juvenile offenders in China have been tempted by obscene information; 48.28% of them have been exposed to pornographic websites; and 43.39% have received pornographic and violent emails or e-cards (Liu, 2012).

Adolescence is a high-risk stage of life in which teens experience fast physiological growth, giving rise to mature sexual organs and evident secondary sexual indicators. At the same time, they also develop a sexual awareness of and interest in the opposite sex. Youths in China receive minimal sex education in school, and open discussion of sex is not proper. Teenagers are therefore vulnerable to the harmful effects of various types of pornographic information because they lack appropriate instruction on sexual issues. After being exposed to online pornography, some young people are more likely to develop pathological impulses that lead them to engage in illegal or criminal behaviors such as prostitution, whoring, and rape.

Cyber Violence Games and Juvenile Delinquency

The internet may offer individuals interactive activities and entertainment that let them fully immerse themselves in them, in addition to traditional mass media like news, film and television, and other entertainment programs. The growth of online gaming has been aided by advances in information technology and the internet. Among these industries, the cyber violent games sector is the most successful due to its ability to draw in young people. The most exciting aspect of online violent games is that they allow players to simulate actions and experience improbable outcomes through realistic scenarios. Teenagers' intense curiosity in the outside world is satisfied by this function. The cost of violence in the game is low. When using violence, players do not need to expend a lot of mental or physical effort or bear any responsibility. In addition, players do not feel bad about using violence, even when it is directed at innocent people. Teenagers who play cyber violence games are reinforced in their understanding of violence and have their morals misguided, leading them to believe that using violence to solve problems is appropriate. As a result, when they run across conflicts in real life, they turn to violence as a first resort, which leads to many instances of starting fights and causing difficulties (Mei, 2005).

Addiction to Cyber Games and Juvenile Delinquency

According to research, once young people become addicted to online games, they tend to spend the majority of their time and money on them. Due to their extensive workload as students, they will inevitably violate school policies in order to do this. Obsessed with online games, kids don't think twice about engaging in risky conduct like skipping class, staying up late, and spending a lot of time at cybercafés and other locations where they can access cyber games (Liu, 2017). Liu, Hu, and Guo (2014) found that teens hooked on online games tend to go to great lengths to raise money in order to buy props or expensive equipment required in the game. They made this discovery through interviews with cybercafe management and parents of internet-dependent children. If it doesn't work, stealing and robbery are the fallback options. For instance, Shi, a 17-year-old addicted to internet games, received a one-year prison term for robbing a store using a knife. Sun, a 14-year-old who was addicted to online games, began by borrowing money from his parents, family, and friends before moving on to stealing money with his online pals. Because he was under 16, the public security agency instructed him before releasing him.

School-Related Factors

Outdated Educational Methods and Juvenile Delinquency

Some schools continue to apply the traditional, antiquated educational approaches that have been around for a while but are no longer in line with the needs of modern teenagers, despite the ongoing development of innovative pedagogical ideas. These antiquated teaching techniques are frequently regimented and dictatorial in nature, disregarding student diversity and interactions with teachers. Due to these conditions, students have strained relationships with their professors, experience emotional suppression, and, over time, develop abnormal personalities (Mo & Ye, 2006).

School Punishment and Juvenile Delinquency

Teachers in China are frequently too focused on their students' exam results and will go to any lengths to encourage them to raise their grades. They might turn to physical punishment if verbal reprimand is ineffective. Students who observe physical punishment in the classroom may come to believe that violence is the answer to all of their issues; potential targets for their violence may include teachers, parents, and other students. Some professors prefer to verbally or physically criticize low-achieving students in addition to using corporal punishment to motivate them to improve. These discriminated-against students may seek out outside delinquent teenagers for psychological assistance because these "soft violence" practices can undermine students' self-esteem and cause them to forsake themselves.

Individual Factors

Psychological aberrations in people also have a role in juvenile delinquency, in addition to variables relating to families, schools, and the internet. Adolescent criminal behavior is caused by the interplay of various causative elements.

Inferiority Complex and Compensation

The founder of Individual Psychology, Adler (1959), talked about how “inferiority complex” and “compensation” relate to crime and offer theoretical justification for insights into criminal psychology. An inferiority complex is a sensation that you are not as important or as good as other people. A person who feels inferior frequently has a low opinion of themselves and a bad attitude toward themselves. People with physiological flaws, such as deficiencies in body organs, weakness, clumsiness, slowed growth, and deformities, are frequently prone to inferiority complexes, according to Adler (1959). According to Adler’s thesis, “compensation” refers to the process of replacing one activity with another to offset psychological distress when an individual is disappointed by their inability to complete a task owing to a flaw in themselves. Numerous instances of juvenile delinquency demonstrate that almost all young people involved in gang activity have flaws in one or more areas that affect their survival and development, such as a dysfunctional or loveless family, academic failure and the subsequent stigma from teachers and peers, or a poor upbringing. These inadequacies lead to a chronic inferiority complex that has never been adequately healed. Personality disorders are the outcome of long-term mental suffering and turn young people against their peers and society. In an attempt to make up for their inferiority, they decide to join an adult criminal gang or form a group with other kids who have had a similar experience. They then engage in crimes that violate other people’s rights and upend societal order.

Adler’s concept of inferiority complex and compensation was validated by Ma and Xu’s (2011) study of a gang crime involving 67 male juvenile offenders in eastern Hebei Province. Most of the members of this criminal gang were low-achieving kids who were shunned by instructors and alienated by peers due to family divisions at home, which prevented them from having regular parent-child interactions. As a result, they resorted to the gang, which was made up of kids who were also experiencing emotional voids, scholastic disappointments, and family calamities, for emotional fulfillment. They are faithfully and firmly committed to the gang where they have a sense of self-worth and belonging, which helps to offset their sense of inferiority brought on by the lack of care. The results of Ma and Xu’s study also reveal that the 67 juvenile offenders had only 8.2 years of schooling on average, with 36 of them having dropped out of junior high school. Their inferiority complexes are exacerbated by the fact that, after dropping out of school, they were unable to support themselves without the required educational background and job skills.

Frustration and Aggression

According to Miller (1941), the nature of individual frustration is the suppression of the desire for pleasure and the inability to get rid of the feelings brought on by unpleasant stimuli. When the human drive to seek pleasure is restricted from releasing energy due to frustration, pressure will result. When blocked energy is directed outward, it causes intentional harm to other people; when directed inward, it leads to self-torture, self-destruction, or even suicide. According to a field investigation of female murderers housed in Jiangxi Province's Women's Prison, the main motivator behind their crimes was an intense sense of frustration brought on by their poor socioeconomic and occupational standing, inadequate educational preparation, and emotional setbacks like divorce (Jiang, 2007). Teenagers are more susceptible to setbacks and challenges than adults are. They face significant challenges from things like academic success, jobs, romantic relationships, and interpersonal interactions. Adolescents are more inclined than adults to externalize psychological failures and disagreements into aggressive actions throughout the challenging teenage years. The Shangqiu City Juvenile Court's statistics showed that between 1999 and 2001, the court tried a total of 14 defendants who were then enrolled in school. Six examples featured arguments or acts of retaliation between students; another six were motivated by hatred; one involved the defendant's younger brother; and two were about standing up for friends. Therefore, frustration has a very harmful effect on juveniles, both directly and indirectly (Chen, 2021).

How to Prevent Juvenile Delinquency

Home-Related Measures

Set Up Parent Schools

A supportive family structure and a peaceful home environment are crucial for a child's healthy physical and mental development, and a quality home education can make up for some shortcomings in school education. Despite the widely acknowledged value of home education, most parents really lack systematic knowledge of family education due to their own educational background or line of work. They require the expertise and support of professionals and academics in the fields of education, psychology, sociology, etc. In order to provide classes on resolving domestic disputes, emotional control, scientific parenting, and problem child correction, communities must develop parent schools. Parents who attend parent schools can share parenting advice and knowledge with one another as well as receive new information about home schooling from teachers (Zhang, 2021).

Establish Family Support and Welfare Systems

As per Mwangangi's study, youngsters are frequently pushed to the brink of crime by their family's failure to pay for basic requirements like food and clothing. Because of this, the majority of young criminals are from the most impoverished slums in major

cities. Although several nations have implemented pertinent welfare policies to guarantee the poor's fundamental standard of living, China has, in comparison, not given the family support tax system and home welfare system adequate attention. Without social help, poor parents must focus all of their efforts on generating income to maintain their family, neglecting their responsibility to look for and educate their children. Parents can only devote the time necessary to their children's physical and mental health and to creating a peaceful home environment when they are not burdened by financial obligations. This will stop children from committing crimes.

To Provide Legal Support through Social Workers

Individuals' ignorance of the law prevents them from receiving legal education at home. To lower the risk of juvenile delinquency, social workers with training in law might give families lectures or quick videos focused on legal problems that kids could overlook. In order to prevent emotional harm to juvenile offenders from family members, they should also offer legal services to families who already have juvenile offenders and mandate interventions in their rehabilitation based on the principles of equality, respect, and acceptance. Plans for the follow-up education of youth with a history of delinquency can be developed based on social workers' scientific assessments (Yao, 2021).

School-Related Measures

Educate Teachers on Professional Standards and to Regulate their Educational Behavior

Teachers serve as crucial role models for students and have a lasting impact on their development. The best way to keep students on the correct track is with a group of excellent professors. Lack of oversight and control by the educational system considerably increases the likelihood of students' criminality. Students who do not have positive school experiences are more likely to take drastic measures, such as dropping out and truancy, to avoid receiving a regular education (Ghosh, 2021). Schools should implement a more thorough teacher assessment system to control their instructional behavior in addition to evaluating teachers based only on the academic success of their students. Teachers who utilize severe sanctions for corporal punishment on students should be fired from the school. Additionally, the school administration must understand that developing students' moral character and outlook on life is just as important as their academic progress rate (or test scores), and that teachers should be especially patient with students who exhibit poor behavior and learning difficulties (Gao & Pang, 2003).

Provide Students with a Psychological Counseling Service

Impulsive adolescents are prone to acting aggressively due to negative attitudes brought on by feelings of inferiority and frustration. The likelihood of them committing criminal activities rises as angry feelings mount. It is imperative to universalize school psychological therapy so that kids can receive support from a reputable source anytime they encounter emotional disturbance. Additionally, including psychological health education in the curriculum might benefit students by enhancing their psychological knowledge and self-acceptance in order to support teenagers' healthy personality development (Deng, 2012). According to pertinent research, those who have experienced domestic violence, physical or mental abuse, or long-term neglect are less likely to seek out psychiatric counseling services. In order to prevent catastrophes, schools should routinely conduct interviews or home visits with children to better understand their family backgrounds. They should also give particular attention to students who have experienced psychological trauma (van Duin et al., 2019).

Offer Extra Help to Academically Disadvantaged Students

In their analysis, Mishra and Biswal (2018) found that the majority of juvenile offenders considered quitting school as early as the compulsory education stage. They lose interest in learning and school as a result of their academic shortcomings. They spend the entire day doing nothing and wind up becoming friends with other juvenile offenders. According to a national study on juvenile delinquency in China, of the more than 2,000 juvenile offenders detained, 74.2% were inactive before committing the crime, failing to graduate from junior secondary schools or even primary schools. They didn't try to hide their dislike of studying when they were being interviewed (Zhou, 2008). Some dropouts stop going to school because they can't keep up with the curriculum; others are dismissed from schools because of their troublesome behavior, which is not only irresponsible toward the students they've expelled but also against the law. To maintain all children of school age in schools, schools should increase their understanding that every child is educable and offer low-achieving students additional tutoring to assist them improve their academic performance.

Community-Related Measures

To Strengthen the Regulation of the Internet

Although there are many different types of material available on the internet, some of them are harmful to young people's physical and mental health. To lessen the negative effects of unwholesome information on adolescents, the government should implement effective measures to regulate online information communication and modernize the network environment. To stop minors from developing criminal attitudes, it is important to perform extremely thorough inspections of websites that offer cybergames and to limit their exposure to online portrayals of illegal and criminal activity. Internet addic-

tion can impair academic performance, cause vision loss, and cause a drop in physical fitness. Therefore, the government must create a grading system for online gaming software and set time limits for youth playing online games in order to confine their attention to the virtual world and focus their energy on real-world activities (Liu, 2014).

To Provide Shelters to Adolescents in Predicaments

The government should provide juveniles who are truant (including but not limited to homeless children) with shelters where they have access to food and other necessities of life, as well as support their prompt return to school. Communities should provide young aimless idlers with the fundamental advice they require in terms of education, work, lifestyle, and social contact, based on their actual circumstances, so that they can integrate into the community and discover the direction for their future lives (Yang, 2015).

To Give Full Play to the Corrective Role of Juvenile Delinquency Punishment

The recommendations for youth criminal punishment should call for individualizing sentences and minimizing jail time. Most adolescents are physically and mentally fragile as they make the transition between childhood and maturity. Their incarceration has probably not resulted in education or reform but rather an extreme attitude, an inferiority complex, and a lifelong burden of criminal records, all of which enhance the likelihood of recidivism. Therefore, the juvenile court should examine criminal punishment's function in social reform and correction more when imposing sentences on young offenders (Teng, 2005).

Conclusion

Adolescents have greater demands during the challenging teenage years in regards to academic success, peer acceptance, interpersonal connections with parents and teachers, etc. Individuals' emotional instability, parental neglect, irrational teaching strategies, and the negative effects of the internet can all be factors in the prevalence of adolescent delinquency. To effectively prevent and protect young people from engaging in illegal activities, a teen-friendly atmosphere must be created via the combined efforts of the family, school, and community. Children who have a history of delinquency should be embraced without prejudice and encouraged to reintegrate into society and the classroom.

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