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The Dynamics of Delinquent Peers and Delinquent **Behavior: Theory Evaluation**

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Abstract— This article seeks understanding peer association and the causes of delinquent behaviors, the relationships of peer behaviors, and the delinquency itself. The data from the National Youth Survey are used to estimate a cross-legged panel model that corrects the measurement error in indicators of delinquent peers and delinquent behavior. An emphasis of this research paper falls on Wilson's arguments about reducing juvenile delinquency through deterrence philosophy, and Matsueda and Anderson's theory of delinquency on peer influence that impact delinquency. Authors of these theories made attempts to explain not only the peer influence and their delinquent acts, but also how the delinquent peers cause delinquency. Results show that the origin of delinquency is still unknown, because peers may influence delinquency, but it is not clear where this learning process began. Peer influence and delinquency may be interrelated. Further studies are needed to understand the learning process of delinquency.

Keywords—Delinquency, Juveniles, Crime, Theory, Peer influence, Learning.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

One of the most fundamental issues in criminal justice is juvenile delinquency. Many researchers struggle to understand what and how the phenomenon occurs. There are two main groups of researchers about juvenile delinquency. One of them is peer influence, and the other one is delinquent behaviors rooted in family and social environment. Many authors think that peers provide the primary social context for adolescents, and peer influence is consistently one of the strongest determinants of delinquent behavior (Akers & Cullen, 2000; Pratt et al., 2010). According to Meldrum et al. (2013), youth observe and mimic the behavior in an effort to align their behavior with that of the peer group, and for others, the effect of delinquent peers operates through peer pressure. Less selfcontrol may be one of the main elements of peer influence in delinquency. Analyzing, a General Theory of Crime, by Gottfredson and Hirschi as founder of this theory, Meldrum et al. (2013) in a study with 5,400 families who were identified based on births at hospital in 10 cities, using also data analysis of juvenile self-report surveys, found that selfcontrol was a significant, negative predictor of susceptibility. Meldrum et al. (2013), in this study, found that adolescents with higher levels of self-control are less likely to be susceptible to peer influence. In a study about the family impact on juvenile delinquency, using a sample of male juvenile offenders in the U.S., from ages 13-17, Simmons et al. (2017), found that youth in the harsh-father group engaged in more offending behaviors and used more substances than youth in the absent-father group. Family control seems to have played a crucial role based on this study. It is important to understand main factors that influence delinquency; such factors may vary from individual level to group level, to include social factors.

II. **METHODS**

This article studied the delinquency issue by testing various hypotheses through analyses of the National Youth Survey. This is policy analysis study, through evaluation of three main theories of delinquency by Matsueda and Anderson's dynamics of delinquency theory of 1998, and Wilson's peer influence of delinquency. Authors tested the hypothesis that measures of delinquent behaviors contaminated due to the respondents' information about their behaviors to that of their friends, the friendship to those who share their delinquency and the respondents reporting hearsay or rumors that are correlated with their delinquent status. Furthermore, the authors used the substantive model that determined the cross-legged effects of delinquent peers on delinquency and vice versa. Thus,



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the data from the National Youth Survey are used to estimate a cross-legged panel model that corrects the measurement error in indicators of delinquent peers and delinquent behavior. This article takes into consideration various theories, such as a theory of social disorganization and cultural transmission which argue that delinquency rates in inner-city neighborhoods remain high over time, and because of the disorganized communities have weak institutional controls that lead to unsupervised adolescent groups.

Furthermore, this article also was focused on group process theories that argue that delinquent peers can have direct effects on delinquent behavior by providing induced motives, pressured, and value-added collective acts. An analysis of Matsueda and Anderson's (1998) arguments which were focused on explaining this phenomenon by elaborating the symbolic interactionist theories, such as differential social control which argue that delinquent peers can have direct and indirect effects on delinquent behavior, were analyzed. For, Matsueda and Anderson regardless of intervening causal mechanisms, each of these theories points a total effect of delinquent peers on delinquency, therefore, if an effect is not found, the theories should be radically altered or wholly rejected.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK III.

The Findings that Support the Theory of Delinquency

This article led to three major conclusions, one is that Gottfredson and Hirschi's (Matsueda & Anderson, 1998), study may have an ambiguous interpretation. This ambiguousness is part of self-reported delinquency because the error correlations are due to similar wording of delinquent peer and self-reported measures. Thus, according to Matsueda and Anderson (1998), the hypothesis offered by Gottferdson and Hirschi require a different design, because co-participation, imputing one's own qualities to friends, or imputing friendship to people like oneself and whether the behavior was committed in isolation or with the specific peer is unclear. Analyzing the claim that "birds of a feather flock together," the authors found that delinquent behavior exerts a large effect on delinquent peer association. According to Matsueda and Anderson (1998), the effect of delinquency on delinquent peers is larger than the effect of delinquent peers on delinquency. The third conclusion, according to Matsueda and Anderson is that delinquent peer associations exert a nontrivial effect on delinquent behavior.

Furthermore, the results of substantive model and crosslagged panel model suggest that delinquent peers and delinquency are reciprocally related in a dynamic process, which is consistent with interactional theory, which explicitly specifies reciprocal effects (Matsueda & Anderson, 1998). It seems that the findings do not support the learning theories because the results suggest that delinquent peer associations and delinquent behavior are reciprocally related. However, the findings support more the control theories because the authors concluded that the effect of delinquency on peer association is larger than that of peer associations on delinquency. Matsueda and Anderson (1998), found that hypothesis that is based on learning and groups process theories which argue that association with delinquent peers is causally related to delinquent behavior is false.

IV. **EVALUATION**

Strengths and Weaknesses

There are some strengths, however, there are weaknesses of this study as well. This study takes into consideration the Glueceks' research of delinquency where according to this research (Matsueda & Anderson, p.270), about 98 % of 500 delinquents had delinquent friends while only 8 % of 500 nondeliquents had delinquent friends. Furthermore, later researchers found almost the same results where "delinquent acts occur largely in groups of two or more peers" (Matsueda & Anderson, p.270). Another good point Matsueda and Anderson brought was that they did to certain degree considered the combination of the causality (delinquent peers increase the likelihood of delinquency) with the social selection (delinquency increase the likelihood of associating with delinquent peers), and learning theories that should be reciprocally related in a dynamic process (Matsueda & Anderson, 1998). To add more to this process, Matsueda and Anderson (p.278), think that this dynamic process does not occur in a vacuum, but rather is structured by a larger social organization. At this point, Matsueda and Anderson concluded that the various theories of delinquency can explain delinquent behaviors and peer influences, however, the authors avoided being straightforward to view the peer influence and delinquency as part of social disorganization factor. The authors did not answer the question, where and how this dynamic process begins and which are the factors that lead to such a dynamic process? Of course, there is a lack of empirical evidence to relate reciprocal effects that result



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in changes in delinquency proceeded changes in delinquent peers and vice versa. The self-report questioned derived from the *National Youth Survey* to some respondents perhaps were not clearly understood, while some respondents identified their behaviors to their peers while the fact consists that the behaviors may not have resulted in the same.

The Study Contribution to Understanding the Dynamics of Delinquency

In this study, Matsueda and Anderson brought some important points by analyzing the dynamic reciprocal relationship between delinquent peer association and delinquent behavior. This study was viewed from a variety of crime theories, and this study shed important light on delinquency and its influence on peer association. Matsueda and Anderson (1998), found that gender exerts significant positive direct effects on delinquency. However, according to Schmalleger (2006), most gangs (83 %) report having female members. This shows delinquency and peer association do not exclude the male and female population. On the other hand, Matsueda and Anderson to some degree emphasized the social control theory in explaining the delinquency and peer influence on delinquency. In this aspect according to Corin (2010), people with greater bonds to society exhibit less criminal behavior than those who have fewer or less developed bonds with society. This study found that the effect of delinquency on delinquent peers is larger than the effect of delinquent peers on delinquency. Curt and Anne Bartol do not think that the effect of delinquency on delinquent peers is larger. According to Curt and Anne Bartol (2008), numerous investigations have found that peer influence is a strong predictor of adolescent substance use and delinquent behavior. In this aspect Sutherland (Brown at al. p.278) thought that criminal behavior is learned primarily in interaction with significant others such as family and friends. On the other hand, according to Brown at al. (2010), persons may engage in criminal conduct, for whatever reasons, and then seek out particular associations to match their criminal values and activities: this consist of a "birds of feather" interpretation.

The Public Policy Implications

Trying to explain the dynamic process and consist of the effect of delinquency on peer associations as larger, therefore the delinquency may contribute to peer associations. The problem with this ideology is that it is too broad and does not include the social characteristics as the cause of delinquency. Even though Matsueda and Anderson emphasized the delinquency effect as larger than peer associations, Brown at al. (2010), elaborated that " the deviance of one's friends is among the strongest and most consistent predictors of delinquent and criminal behavior identified to date" (p.281). On the other hand, since peer influence is ignored to some degree by this study, however, one would wonder what are the main factors to cause delinquency? The way the study argues, there may be some policy implications, because if this study is taken very seriously instead of being taken with reserves, then the policymakers would exclude the peer influence on establishing and applying anti-delinquent rules as well as delinquency prevention strategies. This study also mentioned that delinquent peers and delinquency are reciprocally related in a dynamic process which consists of interactional theory, then why there is a greater effect of delinquency on delinquent peers? If delinquent peers and delinquency are reciprocally related, then what are the motivations that lead to such reciprocity?

Social Control

To address and explain social control theories such as the social disorganization and collective efficacy theory, first it is important to fully understand them. According to Frank Schmalleger (2007, p.217), social disorganization depicts a social change, social conflict, and lack of social consensus as for the root causes of crime and deviance. Social control is implemented in various ways, and this is done with the involvement of the community (informal social control) and the government and law enforcement agencies (formal social control). According to Corin (2010, p.4,), informal social control is done through the actions of residents. One of the good examples of the informal social control is the increase of awareness through the meetings, educative and artistic programs, etc. A good example of informal social control is the meeting of teachers and parents about the students in high school, the help of parents and school staff to prevent school dropouts. When the informal social control is applied, the teachers and parents will cooperate and be proactive in keeping the students in school and preventing high rate dropout. Parents, in this case, will make sure to drop their children to school, while school staff makes sure to keep them inside the school system until all classes have ended. With this parents will make sure to pick their children up and send them home safely. This is the only way to prevent these students from going out in the streets and committing



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crimes. With a serious involvement of not only teachers and parents but also all levels of the community, the school dropout will be reduced greatly.

There are many ways to prevent crime through informal social control practices. Robert Sampson and Byron Groves (Brown at al., p.264), through their classical work relied upon data from the British Crime Survey, found that communities characterized by sparse friendship networks, unsupervised teenage peer groups, and low organizational participation had disproportionately high rates of crime and delinquency. This shows the importance of community involvement in crime prevention programs and the increase of awareness. Another example of promoting informal social control is considered the youth employment programs that would attract young individuals to participate in community services while this program would keep them away from the streets. When the juveniles are offered part-time jobs, they most likely will work and avoid illegal activities because they would be busy working. By this form of informal social control practice, juveniles will be kept under control, and the chances for their improvements will be promising. Community businesses will gather all juveniles to hold meetings and train them for future careers. Thus the young individuals most likely will succeed in their school as well as be ready for future endeavors.

It is important to understand those negative elements in society can be greatly reduced by the involvement of the community in solving social problems and especially those problems that are a roadmap for future crimes. According to Wilson and Kelling (Schmalleger, 2007), crime can occur anywhere once the communal barriers-the sense of mutual regard and the obligations of civility-are lowered by actions that seem to signal that " no one cares". Thus, the informal social control is very important that without it to a certain stage the crime prevention is almost impossible. The best way to promote informal social control is through the involvement, responsibility, and accountability of the community in finding ways to prevent and solve social problems. Ultimately crime derives from society, by this the society is responsible for finding ways (through employment, training, and education) to solve and prevent crime. Only when all levels of the society are involved and design ideas to invest in opportunities for the youth, then the informal social control is fully functional and will

Part I – Summary of Wilson's Conclusions

Some of the main arguments or Wilson's conclusions are as follow:

- States in which the probability of going to prison for robbery is low are also states that have higher rates of robbery
- As sanction becomes more likely, crime becomes less common
- For most people in most circumstances, the moral quality of their actions, and the internalized inhibitions against misconduct arising out of that moral code are probably the major deterrents of crime.
- Most experiments in deterrence have involved changes in police behavior rather than changes in the behavior of judges and prosecutors.
- Difficulties in administering the law weakened its deterrent power, with the result that most offenders and would-be offenders did not experience any significantly higher risk of apprehension and punishment.
- The experience under the Rockefeller law does not disprove the claim that deterrence work, however, the way it was administered, could not have deterred behavior because it made no change in the certainty of punishment and reduced its swiftness.
- The legal minimum drinking age law changes had contributed to an increase in fatal motor vehicle accidents.
- The evidence from all experiences is that changes in the probability of being punished can lead to changes in behavior, though this may not happen when new laws exist on paper and not in practice.
- Deterrence and job-creation are two sides of the same strategy; the former increases the costs of crime; the latter enhances the benefits of alternatives to criminal behavior.
- Both crime and unemployment are the results of some common underlying cause.
- There is very little or no evidence that unemployment causes crime
- In the past, the crime rate was lower than today

Wilson's Evidence and Arguments



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Wilson elaborated Isaac Ehrlich's research where he found that the higher the probability of imprisonment for those convicted for robbery, the lower the robbery rate. Wilson analyzed the police patrol units in Kansas City in the level of the routine preventive patrol. He argues that if the police make more aggressive efforts, the greater are the chances to make a difference in reducing the crime rate. For instance, Wilson mentioned that Kansas City police with their routine work does not make any significant changes in crime rate while officers riding New York subway cars and San Diego police stopping and interrogating persons in the streets resulted in some changes. Another argument Wilson gave about the Great Britain police and the breathalyzer when they routinely began to use a breathalyzer to catch inebriated motorists. A study of Laurence Ross provided Wilson with a good argument that the Road Safety Act caused a reduction in casualties" by as much as two thirds during weekend evenings" (1983).

Another point made by Wilson is that police even though the attempt to make changes and change their behaviors, the prosecutors and judges fail to do so. Wilson elaborates those efforts of Minneapolis officers in handling spouse assaults result that if one or both parties to such an assault were handled by the officer informally, the parties would be better off than if the assaulter was arrested. However, police often preferred not to make arrests, because it took time and effort and often led to no prosecution when the victim refused to press charges.

The Rockefeller law, as it was administered, could not have deterred behavior because it made no changes in the certainty of punishment. Based on the group research about the Rockefeller law, the research suggested that reducing severity in favor of certainty might create the only real possibility for testing the deterrent effect of changes in sentences (Wilson, 1983).

Wilson talking about the minimum legal drinking age, mentioned the study between 1970 and 1973, in 24 states where they lowered their legal drinking ages. In this study, Allan Williams from the Insurance Institute found that changes in drinking laws had contributed to an increase in fatal motor vehicle accidents. William and his colleagues in their study in nine states found that when young individuals could not legally buy alcoholic beverages, fewer fatal auto accidents occurred.

In this argument that the probability of being punished can lead to changes in behavior, Wilson argues that when the prospective gains from heroin trafficking or obtaining illegal abortions are very large, these gains can nullify the effect of modest changes in the costs of these actions. According to Wilson, when the system makes the behavior much more costly, as it did with the 317 juveniles in Chicago, one observed a reduction in crime.

Wilson also argues that deterrence and job creation are not different anticrime strategies because job creation enhances the benefits of alternatives to criminal behavior. Wilson brought a good point in portraying a young man in need of financial support, so this man may want to find a job, however finding a job would not be easy. Furthermore, if he gets hired, then it would take a month until he receives a paycheck. However, "the young man may be wrong about all this, but if he is ignorant of true risks of crime, he is probably just as ignorant of the true benefits of alternatives to crime" concluded Wilson (1983). Thus, based on Wilson theory, the society must walk a narrow line and apply penalties that are costly and sufficiently great to offset, at the margin, the benefits of the illegal act, but not so great to generate in the criminal-justice system resistance to their prompt imposition (Wilson, 1983).

Another argument given by Wilson is that both crime and unemployment are a product of some common underlying cause. Wilson mentioned Brenner's study on crime and unemployment, stating that "the murder rate went up with an increase in per capita income and inflation as well as with a rise of joblessness." However, Wilson, in his study, wonders if the murder rate went up with income increase then why the joblessness also contributes to increasing of the murder rate. Thus, Wilson concludes that there is very little or no evidence that shows a relationship between economic factors and crime. Furthermore, Wilson stated that the evidence linking income and crime is inconclusive, because there are many methodological problems confront the researcher such as some people commit crimes because they are poor, while others may be poor because they have turned to crime but are not very good at it, while some others turn to both crime and poor life because of the common underlying factors. Orsagh and Witte (Wilson, 1983) on their research on crime concluded that the research using aggregated data provides only weak support for the simple proposition that unemployment causes crime and does not provide convincing tests of the relationship between low income and crime. Another strong argument given by Wilson is the study of Philip Cook. Cook in his research followed 325 men who had been released from Massachusetts prisons in 1959 and found that



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parolees who were able to find a satisfactory job were less likely than other parolees to have their parole revoked because they committed a new crime during an eighteenmonth follow-up period. Another argument about the crime rate and unemployment was tested through the Texas project called TARP (Transitional Aid Research Project). Nine thousand ex-convicts who received financial aid and employment counseling had about the same arrest rate after their release as the group that received no aid or counseling.

Wilson argued that a free society lacks the capacity to alter the root cause of crime since they are almost sure to be found in the character-forming processes that go on in the family. The researchers from Sheldon and Glueck in Boston during the 30 and 40s, and continuing with the work of Robins, William and Joan McCord, as well as David Farrington in England, suggest that the family effects criminality especially the criminality of serious offenders. On the other hand, Wilson elaborates that during the nineteenth century, there were shared values of people, reinforced by operation of religious, educational and communal organizations concerned with character formation, which produced a citizenry less criminal than today without diminishing to any significant degree the political liberties. During those years the crime rate was low, however, according to Wilson, when efforts designed to protect the family, by institutionalizing familial virtues in society at large weakened then the moral consensus on which they were based decayed. This led to an increase in crime rate, loss of moral values in society, and weakened the criminal justice system in general. Explaining the low crime rate during the nineteenth century, Wilson did not forget to mention the criminal justice components such as police and courts. In this observation according to Wilson the criminal justice system was probably no swifter or more certain in its operation than the system today, the police were primitively organized and slow to respond, plea bargaining was then as now, rife in the criminal courts, and protection against the vicissitudes of the labor market was nonexistent. Another argument why the crime rate is too high now comparing to the back in the 30s is that the social processes back then may have had a greater effect on crime rates. Wilson (1983) concludes that back then, unlike now, they were working in concert with social sentiments: society condemned those who the police arrested, the judge convicted, or the labor market ignored, shame magnified the effect of punishment.

Part II - Evaluation

Do you Agree or Disagree with Wilson's Main Argument?

Even though Wilson brought some very good points about the social processes and criminal justice system and its components weakened by the caseload of crimes being processed, still he ignored the fact that alternatives other than punishments are required to save the money and space in correctional centers. At one point, Wilson is right when he stated " nearly 4,000 cases come up on that day; each received, on the average, a three-minute hearing from one of seventy overworked judges" (1983). Most of the deterrence actions have involved the police behaviors but rarely ever the changes in the behavior of judges and prosecutions, and critically thinking Wilson is correct about this. Many new laws are approved, and with these laws, the behaviors of police are changed (more police are patrolling) however behaviors of prosecutors and judges do not chance, and there is a weak link between the deterrence and its effects. According to Schmalleger (2006, p.126), one reason American criminal justice seems so ineffectual at preventing crime and reducing recidivism may be that the punishments that contemporary criminal law provides are rarely applied to the majority of offenders. It would not be enough a three-minute robbery case hearing. There are many theories about crime, and some of them may support Wilson's "thought" about crime, while others oppose it. According to Corin (2010, p.2), theories of crime must be tested through careful observation of the real world. Apparently, Wilson embraced Emile Durkheim's theory of crime, where he stated that "crime delineates the boundaries of acceptable behaviors and solidifies society in support of those boundaries" (Brown at al. p.31). According to Wilson, the crime rates are growing in recent years, however, Frank Schmalleger (2006, p.20) does not think so, but concludes that crime rates have declined substantially in recent years. Apparently, " Americans are feeling as safe today as at any time in last 40 years, and only 36 % of them say that they would be afraid of walking alone at night close to their homes, the lowest since 1965" (Schmalleger, p.20).

Wilson, to some degree, supports the rational choice that people weight the costs and benefits of criminal behavior, and deterrence theory. In this aspect, both theories are part of the utilitarian approach that tends to explain the decision-making process as part of a final result of such a decision. On the other hand, like Beccaria with his school of classical thought about crime and punishment, Wilson as well often blame prosecution and judges for being reluctant toward crime deterrence. At one point, Beccaria argued (Brown at



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al., p.142) that in criminal cases, judges cannot have the authority to interpret laws, and the reason, again is that they are not legislators. Wilson, on the other hand, thinks that courts do not treat and execute laws as they are described in the paper. If a crime is a matter of rational choice then one thinks of crime occurring in disorganized societies and low crime rate in organized societies. According to Schmalleger (2007) in one study, for example, Laura Moriarty and James Williams found that the routine activities approach explained 28 % of property crimes committed to socially disorganized (high-crime) areas of a small Virginia City and explained only 11 % of offenses committed in low-crime areas. Wilson mentions the certainty of punishment as a key element in deterrence. However, Corin (2010), thinks that different components of deterrence affect people differently based on how people assess risk. Wilson focuses on support of deterrence theory, however, ignores the fact that deterrence can partially be effective. According to Brown at al. (2010), a recent study comparing the effects of prison to probation (severity of punishment), conducted by Cassia Spohn and David Holleran, found that recidivism was both more frequent and occurred more quickly for all three types of offenders (drug, drug-involved and nondrug) if they were sentenced to prison rather than probation. Furthermore, if deterrence theory can be effective, "increased deterrent effects for robbery, for example, could lead to increases in other offenses" (Brown at al., 2010). If there are increases in other offenses due to deterrence, then apparently Wilson is wrong about deterrence theory, because this theory becomes coin with two faces, because deterrence may be effective for one crime but contribute to increasing of another one.

Talking about the deterrence and job-creation, Wilson makes another mistake mentioning that unemployment rate is not related to crime. Many researchers, through their empirical evidence, relate unemployment with crime increase. However, according to Winter (2008, p.98), if unemployment rate reduces the income of individuals who would otherwise consume more of these goods in better times, it may appear that crime and unemployment are inversely related. Furthermore, with declining incomes in economic downturns, there may be fewer purchases of goods that are attractive for criminals to steal (Winter, 2008). On the other side, the blocked opportunities, deteriorate areas, poor living conditions, are some of the contributing factors in the increase in crime. Statistics are showing that the crime rate in deteriorated areas higher than

in stable economic areas. From the white-collar crime context, the cities with strong financial benefits are more prone to high crime rate as well, especially fraud and cybercrime.

Finally, Wilson is correct, stating that those larger social processes may have had a greater deterrent effect on crime rates than today because then, they work in concert with social sentiments. However, the statistics are showing that the crime rate in recent year has declined. In this aspect John Braithwaite focuses on the role of shaming in deterrence crime. Braithwaite (Brown at al., p.170), shaming may consist of a wide range of social reactions to undesired behavior ranging from a frown, a turning of a back, a slight shaking of the head, direct verbal confrontation, indirect confrontation by gossip or officially pronounced by a judge from the bench. According to Brown at al. (2010) research has been revealing with a relative consistency that informal sanction threats deter more than the formal.

V. LIMITATION

Juvenile delinquency may come to light based on so many factors. Delinquency is a complex and ongoing issue in criminal justice. Juvenile delinquency is influenced by delinquent peers. However, theories lack explaining where the learning process of delinquency begins. More research is needed to answer the main questions on whether peer influence is a stronger indicator to contribute to delinquent behaviors.

VI. CONCLUSION

Juvenile delinquency is a very complex social issue. Even though many theories are analyzed, still further research is needed in this context. There is not any general formula to estimate or calculate the causes of all delinquent behaviors. What is known is that peer influence should not be ignored, in explaining juvenile delinquency; however, today more juveniles are being abused than are abusing.

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