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The Influence of Family Factors on Juvenile Delinquency

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Abstract: Juvenile delinquency is a quite serious social issue, and family is one of the important factors which can affect juvenile delinquency. This study mainly explored how can family factors influence crimes that are committed by teenagers, and the content will mainly be divided into five parts. Firstly, the effect of the social-economic status of a family will be illustrated. It shows that delinquent behaviors are more likely to show in teenagers with poor socioeconomic positions. Also, the geographical location that teenagers live is able to affect the probability of juvenile delinquency. In addition, youngsters living in non-intact families are more likely to show criminal behavior than others living in intact and traditional families. The factors of the parents themselves are also considered in this study. In terms of parental self-control, parents who have a low ability in controlling their emotions (showing more irritable emotions) are more likely to lead a passion for a crime for their children. In addition, parental imprisonment is likely to cause psychological stress for the child and affects boys' theft rates. In terms of parenting styles, children who grow up under laissez-faire parenting, lack of supervision, and love from their parents are more probable to become criminals later.

Keywords: family, teenager, crime, juvenile delinquency

1. Introduction

The healthy growth of juveniles is always one of the most essential parts of social development since younger generations are the ones responding to the social challenges and changes and holding the responsibility of leading and promoting social progress. A higher juvenile delinquency rate means that there are more teenagers embarking on the wrong path of committing crimes and losing their chance of having systematically academic education access, and therefore, fewer talents contributing to various fields in society. In this case, bringing down the juvenile delinquency rate plays an extremely important role in building a harmonious and prosperous society, and it is necessary to find the influencing factors of those crimes. Family is definitely one of the most critical factors influencing the juvenile delinquency rate, and exploring how family factors influence juvenile delinquency would help in understanding the mechanism by which family influences juvenile delinquency. Also, it has an enlightening meaning in intervening with families, for the purpose of reducing juvenile delinquency. In this paper, we will analyze how the family has

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an impact on juvenile delinquency from five perspectives, including family socioeconomic status, family structure, parental self-control, parental imprisonment, and parenting styles.

2. The Influencing Factors

2.1. Juvenile Delinquency

Juvenile Delinquency refers to regular engagement in criminal activity by minors who are under the legal age of majority, that is, those who are under the age of 18 [1]. In the USA, young people have the largest risk of entering prison in the world, and the largest proportion (20%) of the crime committed by them is simple assault (including unlawful intentional infliction) [2]. Since 2018, it has been noted a modest increase in juvenile offenders among China's top prosecutors. In 2019, 61,295 teenagers were reviewed for prosecution in China [3].

2.2. Socioeconomic Status of Family

Socioeconomic status is the social class of a person or a group. It takes into account the income of a family, the kind of job that parents do, the degree of education, and the well-being of the family as a whole. [1,4,5]. The strain theory by Merton (1940) states that engagement in delinquent behaviors among the youth may be motivated by poverty. When the youngsters do not have legitimate methods to meet their needs such as having sufficient food or drink for survival, they may achieve their goal by committing a crime. In addition, According to rational choice theory (the 18th century), a young person may decide to engage in criminal behavior if they believe they will gain more from it than they will lose. Future prospects and living quality are two examples of this [6]. It has been widely believed that people with higher socioeconomic status have more options to choose where they live, while people with lower socioeconomic status can only live in areas with the worse condition. The social disorganization theory claimed that the probability of juvenile delinquency can be affected by the geographical location where people live [7]. The theory states the basic function of the neighborhood in affecting criminal behavior. The fact that people with the poor socioeconomic position are more likely to have children involved in criminal activity is also stressed. This is because the unsuitable living conditions in these areas frequently result in significant rates of migration into and out of these areas. Since there are so many people in these countries who are from various ethnic and cultural origins, creating an unofficial social structure is quite challenging there [8]. Most often, economically depressed places welcomed many immigrants, resulting in a diverse population of people of many racial and ethnic backgrounds. As a result, the traditional institution in charge of social controls became weak and unable to oversee the behavior of the young people in that area. Hence, young people are more likely to commit crimes. To support their families, some of the youth participate in these activities.

In general, a large number of studies suggested that youths that came from homes with poor socioeconomic positions seem to be more prone to show delinquent behaviors, frequently sending those youngsters into juvenile facilities. In Loeber's study, delinquencies are classified into three categories [4]. After doing a longitudinal study of 256 students from Pittsburgh primary schools, the study claimed that teenagers from families with low socioeconomic positions had twice risk to commit some minor delinquencies (involving non-violent crimes or stealing something that has a value of less than $5). Besides, they were three times more likely to conduct serious delinquencies (such as burglary, forcible robbery, and vehicle theft) than they were to commit moderate ones (involving acts of simple assault and gang fighting), although they were only slightly more likely to do so. Youths with poor socioeconomic have a tenfold increased probability of committing serious delinquency in high-risk areas. Additionally, they had a five and a half times higher likelihood of acting in a moderate manner and a four times higher likelihood of committing a minor offense. To

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sum up, socioeconomic status significantly influences the probability of teenagers committing a crime [5].

2.3. Family Structures

In general, compared with living in an intact and traditional family, living in any other type of family leads to a higher rate of juvenile delinquency. When the case is simply about an incomplete family or a complete family, kids raised in an incomplete family tend to show a higher possibility of juvenile misconduct [9].

When focusing on a complete family, there are further differences between cohabiting family and a parental family. Children who live with two biological parents are revealed to have a lower crime rate [10]. In addition, researchers have found that children would show an unusually high rate of antisocial behaviors if they live with one biological parent, with another non-biological parent present.

When focusing on an incomplete family, which is also called a single-parent family, there are further differences between a family with a single mother and a single father. Divorce itself is reviewed to have an influence in shaping teenagers' behaviors in the aspect of antisocial behaviors. A large number of literature explores the consequences of the missing biological father role and then finds that the missing of the biological father is strongly associated with lower scores on cognitive tests, lower graduation rates in high school, higher rates of improper behaviors, and therefore higher delinquency rates [11]. However, surprisingly, experts have confirmed that children from single-father families even show a more severe condition than children from single-mother families [12].

2.4. Parental Self-Control

Research has found that parental self-control affects juvenile crime rates [13]. Self-control refers to the ability to control one's emotions. People with low self-control tend to be more impulsive, which is more likely to lead to crime. Meldrum et al. conducted a questionnaire survey on juvenile parents processed by a juvenile justice evaluation agency in the southeast United States and concluded that the worse the self-control ability of the parents, the more serious the juvenile delinquency, which means the more irritable the parents are [13]. Parents with low self-control may not adopt proper parenting practices and are more likely to abuse their children, so their children are more likely to commit crimes. In addition, the study found that parents of juvenile offenders showed more anger. This is because they will spend a lot of time and money to solve their children's problems, which greatly affects their normal life [13]. More anger will lead to the parents' bad attitude towards the child, which may again cause the child's rebellious mentality and lead to crime. Therefore, a bad cycle is formed. In addition, children have strong learning abilities. If parents can't control their emotions well, children can't learn how to control their emotions. Therefore, it is likely that the child also has low self-control and impulsivity, which leads to crimes of passion. In conclusion, juvenile delinquency can indeed be influenced by parents' self-control and anger.

2.5. Parental Imprisonment

Juvenile delinquency is influenced by parental imprisonment. Parental imprisonment will cause psychological harm to teenagers, which will lead to crime. The Pittsburgh Youth Study found that boys' theft rates were driven by parental incarceration, but marijuana use, depression and poor school performance had no effect on boys' incarceration rates [14]. Boys whose parents are incarcerated show higher rates of theft. This may be due to three factors. First of all, the psychological trauma caused to the children during the arrest of their parents. This is because arrests

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are often sudden and accompanied by violence [14]. In addition, the trial process will also bring psychological pressure to the criminal's family, including the child; because the child does not know how many years his or her father or mother will be jailed. Therefore, the process of parents' arrest, conviction, and trial can cause great psychological damage to children. Secondly, in addition to affecting juveniles in the process from their parents' arrest to trial, juveniles can also be psychologically affected by the stigma of parental incarceration. For example, an experiment in Virginia showed that teachers had a bias against students whose mothers were incarcerated [14]. The label of parental incarceration may affect a lot of the activities that teenagers do later in life, such as studying and getting a job. Finally, absences caused by parental incarceration can also have an impact on adolescents and their new caregivers. This is because the child needs to adjust to a new environment and a new caregiver. It is possible that the parenting style of the new caregiver may not be appropriate for the child, which can cause psychological stress for the child. Therefore, the incarceration of parents causes psychological damage to the youth and thus increases the crime rate.

2.6. Parenting Styles

A series of research has confirmed that children who are exposed to a higher level of warmth, care, affection, and love from their family are much less likely to be delinquents; in contrast, children who lack those supervision and love from their parents do not only have higher possibility of having a health problem but also are more likely to commit crimes [15]. There are mainly three types of parenting styles, which are authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire [16]. The authoritarian refers to those extremely harsh parents, who believe that it's best for their children to grow up entirely according to parents' ideas and instructions. Democratic parents refer to those parents who educate children based on reasonable standards, like getting good grades in school or playing fewer video games; but what’s different is that they are also flexible to children's demands. Laissez-faire parents refer to those who put few limits on their children and let them do what they want, which also means that they rarely put attention to their children.

The democratic parenting style is shown to be positive in educating children, along with the provision of their needs, ranging from material needs to emotional support. On the contrary, some studies [17] have revealed that children who grow up under laissez-faire parenting are more probable to be juvenile delinquents since they didn't get enough supervision from their parents, failing to get a positive response when they express their opinions or raise confusion [18]. Lastly, it's worth noting that the authoritarian style is controversial. Some reports state that the authoritarian style in literature has a negative effect on teenagers' behaviors, while others have found that it actually yields more positive effects on Asian and Indian children [19].

3. Conclusion and Implication

The present study finds that family factors can indeed influence juvenile delinquency, including family socioeconomic status, parental self-control, parental imprisonment, parenting style, and family structure. In order to reduce juvenile delinquency, it can be solved from both family and social aspects. First of all, from the perspective of the family, parents should pay more attention to teenagers and give them a perfect childhood. Then, parents should also pay attention to what they say and do at home. This is because children will imitate their parents' behavior. In order to prevent children from learning bad behavior, parents should always pay attention to their own language and behavior. In addition, parents are particularly important to children's education. As the first teacher of children, parents should set up correct values for children and prevent them from going on the road of breaking the law. Secondly, from the social perspective, the community and the court can

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strengthen the punishment for juvenile delinquency, for example, increasing the prison term. In addition, the community can try to expose inner-city youth to more education, which can increase their job opportunities and reduce crime. This study summarizes several family factors that influence juvenile delinquency but do not take into account some other factors. For example, families of different countries and races have different views on children's education.

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