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The Impact of Family Education Deficiencies and Deviations on Juvenile Delinquency

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Abstract. In recent years, with the transformation of social structures and the diversification of family forms, juvenile delinquency in China has become increasingly severe, exhibiting trends of younger offenders, heightened violence, and group-related crimes. Studies have shown that the absence and deviation of family education—particularly incomplete family structures, extreme parenting styles, and lack of emotional support—are key factors driving adolescents toward criminal behavior. The family is not only the starting point of adolescent socialization but also a crucial setting for psychological development and behavioral regulation. This paper adopts a literature review approach to systematically analyze the mechanisms through which family structure deficiencies, extreme parenting, and weakened family functions influence juvenile delinquency. It reviews relevant domestic and international research findings and limitations and proposes recommendations such as improving family education legislation, strengthening home-school cooperation, and offering psychological interventions. This study reveals that compared with external punitive measures alone, building a stable, nurturing, and regulated family education environment is more effective in fundamentally reducing the risk of juvenile delinquency.

Keywords: Family education, juvenile delinquency, educational absence, parenting style

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a critical period for physical and psychological development, as well as the formation of core values. The family is the main socialization agent and is crucial in establishing behavioral norms, offering young people emotional support, and cultivating their understanding of the law. While inadequacies like structural instability and dysfunctional parenting greatly raise the probability of delinquent conduct, effective family education fosters healthy growth. Studies have shown that adverse family-rearing environments during childhood and adolescence have long-term negative impacts on psychological well-being in adulthood, reinforcing the crucial role of early family dynamics in shaping life outcomes [1]. In particular, parenting styles that are either overly authoritarian or excessively permissive may disrupt adolescents' identity formation and emotional regulation, thereby increasing the likelihood of deviant behavior [2].

Nontraditional family structures, such as mixed, single-parent, and grandparent-headed families, have been more common in China in recent years, which has presented two difficulties for the stability and effectiveness of family education. Particularly under polarized parenting styles, such as

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overindulgence or authoritarianism, adolescents are more likely to exhibit psychological disorders and behavioral problems. While the overall rate of juvenile crime has decreased, new trends like earlier onset, group criminal activity, and increased violence have surfaced, raising concerns about the lack of family education, according to the Supreme People's Court of China's White Paper on Juvenile Judicial Protection [3].

International scholars have offered various theoretical perspectives on the issue. Salvador Minuchin's structural family therapy emphasizes the importance of redefining family roles and boundaries, while Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory highlights the complex interplay among family, school, and community in adolescent development [3]. In China, scholar Sun Yunxiao advocates for the integration of family education and legal education, emphasizing value-based guidance [4]. Zhu Xiaoyu focuses on enhancing adolescents' legal literacy and stresses the importance of rule awareness within the family context [5]. Li Chunling underscores the irreplaceable role of the family in fostering adolescents' sense of social responsibility and legal identity [6].

Building upon these theoretical foundations and empirical insights, this paper presents a systematic review of how deficiencies and distortions in family education influence juvenile delinquency. It aims to provide both a theoretical framework and practical guidance for developing a scientific, multi-faceted, and sustainable juvenile crime prevention system.

2. Theoretical foundations

2.1. Social control theory

Social Control Theory, proposed by Travis Hirschi in 1969, posits a negative correlation between the strength of social relationships and an individual's likelihood of engaging in delinquent behavior. Hirschi identified four key elements—attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief—that form social bonds constraining individuals from deviant acts. When these bonds are weakened—especially in the context of familial environments lacking affection, communication, and trust—adolescents are more likely to deviate from social norms and engage in criminal behavior [7]. In this sense, the family, as the earliest source of social bonds, plays a crucial role in shaping youths' moral alignment. The absence or distortion of family education can directly undermine adolescents' internalization of social norms, diminishing their capacity for self-control and thereby increasing their risk of unlawful conduct.

2.2. Social learning theory

Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura, emphasizes that human behavior is learned through social interactions via observation, imitation, and reinforcement. Within the family context, parents serve as primary behavioral models for adolescents. Parental behaviors, emotional expressions, and strategies for handling conflict are all internalized by children through subtle imitation. If parents exhibit unlawful or violent behavior, or adopt neglectful, indifferent, or abusive parenting practices, adolescents are prone to emulate and internalize these maladaptive patterns [8]. Moreover, in the absence of effective family education, adolescents may turn to peer groups for behavioral cues. If these peer groups embody deviant norms, the likelihood of juvenile delinquency increases significantly.

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2.3. Family systems theory and ecological systems theory

Family Systems Theory views the family as an interconnected and interdependent system in which the behavior of each member affects and is affected by the entire system. When the family structure changes—due to factors such as divorce or domestic violence—patterns of interaction and communication among members are disrupted, which can adversely affect adolescents' psychological well-being and behavior.

Ecological Systems Theory, developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, emphasizes that individual development is shaped by multiple, nested environmental systems. Among these, the family represents the "microsystem"—the most immediate and enduring context for adolescent life. According to this theory, family structure (e.g., single-parent or blended families), functional roles (e.g., emotional support and behavioral regulation), and the performance of parental roles significantly influence the adolescent socialization process. When dysfunctions occur in the microsystem—such as a lack of emotional connection or behavioral guidance—adolescents' adaptability, moral reasoning, and self-regulation may be compromised, ultimately leading to behavioral deviations and potential delinquency [9].

3. Manifestations of deficiencies and distortions in family education

3.1. Structural deficiencies in the family

Family structure serves as a fundamental prerequisite for the effective functioning of family education. With ongoing social transformations, the number of nontraditional family types—such as single-parent, divorced, blended, and left-behind families—has been on the rise. These structural irregularities pose persistent risks to the physical and psychological development of adolescents. In single-parent or divorced families, adolescents often face a lack of emotional support and restricted opportunities for emotional expression, which can lead to negative emotional states such as loneliness, anxiety, and inferiority. These emotional disturbances, in turn, hinder personality development and weaken normative behavioral capacities. For instance, some adolescents may develop hostility toward one parent following a divorce or exhibit antisocial behaviors and social withdrawal as a result of emotional deprivation [10].

Structural deficiencies in families may also result in a lack of economic resources. In single-parent households, the primary caregiver typically bears the financial burden alone, often leading to economic hardship. Under such conditions, adolescents may be deprived of adequate support in areas such as education, daily life, and emotional well-being. Some may resort to theft, fraud, or other criminal behaviors as a means of fulfilling unmet material needs. Research has shown that family poverty is a significant social factor contributing to initial juvenile offenses, especially in urban-rural fringe areas and economically underdeveloped regions.

Furthermore, the absence of clear family role models can profoundly influence adolescent character formation and behavioral patterns. Studies have found that adolescents from single-parent, blended, or migrant worker families—especially those frequently exposed to family conflict—exhibit significantly higher rates of delinquency than their peers from intact, harmonious households [11]. These families often lack stable support systems, making adolescents more vulnerable to negative peer influences in the absence of strong emotional bonds. For example, boys raised in single-mother households may lack male role models, which can lead to confusion and conflict in gender role identity development. This may manifest as impulsive behavior, maladaptive imitation,

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or heightened rebelliousness. If such psychological tendencies are left unaddressed over time, they may evolve into unlawful behaviors that challenge social norms.

3.2. Deviant parenting styles

Parenting style is a critical factor in the socialization process of adolescents. Different approaches to parenting can foster distinct behavioral tendencies. Research indicates that excessively harsh, indifferent, neglectful, or even violent parenting practices often undermine adolescents' self-esteem and sense of belonging, increasing their hostility and aggression toward society [12].

Corporal punishment is one of the most destructive forms of deviant parenting. Adolescents who are chronically exposed to environments of physical or verbal abuse by parents are likely to develop an understanding of conflict resolution based on retaliatory violence. They tend to internalize such behavior as a “normative model” for problem-solving. Empirical studies have found a significant positive correlation between violent discipline and aggressive behavior in adolescents, making them more prone to impulsivity, revenge-seeking, and criminal tendencies [13].

On the opposite end of the spectrum lies a seemingly benign but equally detrimental form of deviant parenting: excessive indulgence. Some parents excessively cater to their children, taking over responsibilities and shielding them from any form of discipline. This “permissive” style of parenting neglects the development of self-control and responsibility in adolescents. As a result, these youths often display weak self-discipline and a poor sense of accountability. Once outside the protective boundaries of the home, they may struggle to cope with social pressures and are more likely to fall into delinquency due to inadequate moral judgment and poor adaptability.

3.3. Functional deficiencies in family education

The core functions of family education extend beyond material provision to include emotional support, value orientation, and behavioral regulation. However, in practice, many families fail to fulfill these functions effectively, leading to multiple deficits such as loose supervision, poor emotional communication, and the absence of positive role modeling.

Some parents, due to demanding work schedules or insufficient educational awareness, neglect daily interactions with their children and overlook emotional fluctuations and psychological changes. When adolescents grow up without timely emotional guidance and behavioral feedback, they often experience feelings of isolation and helplessness. This may lead to increased reliance on external environments such as the internet or peer groups. When these external influences are filled with negative information or deviant behavior models, they may act as catalysts for problematic adolescent behavior.

The failure of families to provide adequate moral guidance is also a prominent issue. In some households, parents themselves exhibit disordered value systems or contradictory behavior, making it difficult for them to serve as effective role models. For instance, if parents engage in illegal activities or adopt a tolerant attitude toward law-breaking behavior, it may unintentionally erode adolescents’ respect for rules and legal norms.

Moreover, the lack of structured behavioral training in family education impairs adolescents’ ability to make rational judgments and respond appropriately to real-life situations. This often results in impulsive decisions and risk-taking behaviors, potentially leading them toward the margins of illegality. Relevant studies indicate that a considerable proportion of juvenile offenders come from family backgrounds characterized by unstable guardianship and deficient behavioral guidance [1].

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4. Intervention path and suggestions

4.1. Improving legal and institutional safeguards for family education

The "Family Education Promotion Law of the People's Republic of China" provides a legal foundation for the development of family education; however, issues such as weak enforcement and unclear responsibilities remain in practice [14]. The law should be refined to clarify the responsibilities of guardians and the minimum standards for parenting approaches. A mechanism for holding parents accountable for neglectful parenting, violent discipline, and other harmful behaviors should be established, while increasing the judicial application rate of the law. Additionally, family education training should be integrated into the lifelong education system, with ongoing parent training programs established in communities, universities, and enterprises. Special attention should be given to single-parent, impoverished, and migrant families, enhancing their parenting skills and child-rearing knowledge, thereby promoting a shift from experience-based to scientifically-informed family education practices.

4.2. Establishing a family-school-society coordination mechanism

Preventing juvenile delinquency requires breaking down the barriers between families, schools, and communities to create a collaborative intervention system. First, a dynamic assessment mechanism for family education status should be established within the school system. Through regular interviews with class teachers, psychological assessments, and behavioral observations, potential family risk factors can be identified. Once problems are detected, timely communication with the family should occur, followed by the initiation of educational consultation or psychological counseling. Second, a family service network should be established at the community level. By leveraging the community's comprehensive governance platform and integrating resources from women's federations, civil affairs, education, and judicial departments, family education guidance stations can be set up. By developing family profiles and offering case-specific interventions for families at risk of education-related problems, these stations should focus on important demographics like blended families, children left behind, and single-parent, low-income households, guaranteeing "early detection, early intervention, and early support."

4.3. Strengthening psychological support for adolescents from special family backgrounds

Adolescents from special family backgrounds are more likely to experience emotional deprivation and behavioral deviations. To address this, psychological health service centers should be established in primary and secondary schools, staffed with professional counselors and social workers to provide regular emotional support and behavioral correction for students showing significant emotional or behavioral issues. Particular attention should be given to adolescents from families affected by the loss of a single child, blended families, or poverty. Long-term tracking and support should be provided to enhance their social adaptability and psychological resilience. Additionally, community-based youth psychological assistance platforms should be developed. Through hotlines, online consultations, and offline group counseling, university students majoring in psychology should be encouraged to volunteer, promoting a "community mental health service into families" initiative that focuses on early warning and systemic intervention of family function issues. Furthermore, in the medical system, a "family psychological health assessment mechanism" should be introduced, incorporating family function evaluations and parent-child relationship

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measurements into children's health checkups and medical records, helping to identify and intervene early.

4.4. Promoting social participation in family education support

Active participation from social forces is a crucial element in building a comprehensive family education support system. First, social organizations with backgrounds in psychology and education should be supported in establishing “Family Education Guidance Centers” to provide multifaceted services such as parent-child communication counseling, puberty education, and behavioral correction. These centers can help fill gaps in government-provided public services through case consultations, group interventions, and family therapy. Second, social volunteer services should be expanded to community families. Volunteers, including university students, retired teachers, and enthusiastic parents, should form “family education volunteer service teams” to provide tutoring, companionship, and guidance for children from special family backgrounds, strengthening adolescents' sense of belonging and social identity. At the same time, family education should be organically integrated into community governance. “Parent-child interaction spaces” and “family growth classrooms” should be established in residential communities and street centers, making family education a part of community cultural development. This will guide residents to actively participate in their children's education and growth, fostering a societal atmosphere that values and supports family education.

5. Conclusion

This study provides a systematic review centered on the topic of "The Impact of Deficient and Deviant Family Education on Juvenile Delinquency." By analyzing social control theory, social learning theory, family systems theory, and ecological systems theory, the foundational role of family education in the behavioral development of adolescents is clarified. The research indicates that family structural deficiencies, extreme parenting styles, and weakened family functions are significant factors contributing to deviant behaviors and even criminal activities among youth. Literature analysis reveals that a lack of emotional support from parents, violent or indifferent disciplinary methods, and dysfunctional family relationships markedly increase the risk of adolescents deviating from social norms. Furthermore, this paper proposes four intervention strategies: First, it suggests improving the legal framework for family education to enhance awareness of responsibility and educational support. Second, it advocates for the establishment of a collaborative mechanism among families, schools, and society to facilitate early identification and intervention. Third, it emphasizes the need to enhance psychological support services for children from special family backgrounds. Lastly, it encourages social organizations to participate in family education guidance and community-based care services. This paper aims to provide a theoretical foundation and practical pathways for relevant policy formulation, educational practice, and future research, thereby promoting the development of a systematic and diversified mechanism for preventing juvenile delinquency.

However, there exist some limitations in this study. First, it relies on existing Chinese core journals and a selection of foreign-language literature, without fully incorporating the latest international research developments—such as recent trends in family intervention strategies and judicial collaboration mechanisms in Western countries. Future research should expand the range of database sources to enhance academic perspectives and comparative depth. Second, the systematic integration of theories needs to be strengthened. Although classical theories such as social control

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theory and social learning theory have been reviewed, the interactive mechanisms between these theories in the context of family education and juvenile delinquency have not been deeply and constructively integrated.

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