

A PSYCHO-SOCIAL INVESTIGATION ON THE CAUSES OF JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

Aslı YAYAK

Bursa Technical University, Turkey

Burcu TURK

Haliç University, Turkey

Nurcan HAMZAOGLU

Yeni Yüzyıl University, Turkey

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Abstract

Crime is a phenomenon that has continued since the emergence of people. The concept of crime, which is defined as the action punished by the law, has been used with the concept of child in recent years. Juvenile delinquency is the crime of under-18s, suggesting the existence of a social problem. Therefore, in order to solve the problem, it is important to consider and evaluate the psycho-social factors that cause the problem. For this purpose, in this study, an investigation was made on the psycho-social causes of juvenile delinquency. The phenomenon of child dragged into crime, which is used to indicate that the child himself is a victim, has been widely used in our country's agenda since the beginning of 2000s. There are many individual, familial and environmental factors that lead children to crime in juvenile delinquency. Parameters such as child / adolescent substance / alcohol use status, age, intelligence gender, psychological status can be counted as individual (psychological) factors; and the reasons such as economic difficulties, family disintegration after divorce, some physical losses in the family, weak family ties, presence of individuals involved in crime among family members can be considered as familial factors that lead the child to crime. As to environmental factors causing crime; the peer group and friendship of the child, the child's relationship with the school, immigration, street life and / or working status, mass media (internet, tv, newspaper) can be included. As regards juvenile delinquency, it is clear that children are victims rather than perpetrators. In order to prevent children from being dragged into crime, first of all, the factors that cause this must be identified and eliminated.

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1. Introduction

Crime is a phenomenon that has continued since the existence of human beings. Crime in its simplest definition; It is the movement punished by the law (Elibol 1998).

The fact that the concepts of child and crime are mentioned together in recent years actually brings up the existence of a social problem. Juvenile delinquency has become one of the most important problems in many countries today (Işık 2006). Therefore, in order to solve the problem, it would be appropriate to consider and evaluate the psycho-social factors that caused the problem. When the juvenile delinquency is examined in terms of crime and guilt in general, it is revealed that this problem is not only a legal problem but also a social problem (Özkok 1996). Increasingly, juvenile delinquency is an indication of the existence of a social danger and that the issue cannot be solved solely on the legal level.

Although there are different definitions of crime, they are basically actions that are punished by law, or actions and behaviors that are explicitly defined by the legislator that it is harmful or dangerous to society. Juvenile delinquency is the crime of under-18s (Öcel 2002).

The most important criterion that separates juvenile delinquency from adult delinquency is the age limit determined by each country according to its own laws (Demirbaş 2001). According to the Turkish Penal Code, children under the age of 12 have no criminal responsibility in our country. On the other hand, children who commit crimes between the ages of 12-15 are examined whether they perceive the legal meaning and consequences of the act they have committed or whether they have the ability to direct their behavior. Children in the 15-18 age group, on the other hand, have a criminal liability, but a certain amount of penalty is reduced due to the small age.

The phenomenon of “child dragged into crime” used to indicate that the child himself is also a victim has been widely included in our country's agenda since the beginning of 2000s. The increasing number of children dragged into crime has been making the issue important (Ministry of Development 2013).

There are many psychological, social and economic factors that push children to crime in juvenile delinquency. Being a victim of violence, addictive habit, wrong friend relations, low family interest, cognitive deficiencies are just a few of these (Işık 2006).

Juvenile delinquency has long been dealt with from a developmental lifelong perspective in west (Loeber and LeBlanc 1990; LeBlanc and Loeber, 1998). According to this perspective, how a person's deviation behavior manifests in life is determined by the interaction of dynamic forces that affect the trajectory of the person in life. In general, the lifelong model can be considered within the ecological model of human development, which assumes that the development of individuals can be both changeable and sustained by the influence of different layers in their lives (individual, family, school, peer group, living environment) (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

The term described with juvenile delinquency in Western literature meaning “the habitual committing of criminal acts or offenses of underage” is used as guiltiness of children in Turkey (Polat, 2002). Juvenile delinquency is an important issue. Because juvenile offenders tend to have a longer criminal career than those who were involved in violence for the first time at a later age (Loeber and Farrington 2000).

There are many individual, familial and environmental reasons affecting juvenile delinquency. The reasons such as changing value judgments, the chaos caused by moral rules, rapid and irregular urbanization and industrialization, migrations, economic crises, the presence of parents who use alcohol / substance in the family, poverty, fragmentation of the family,

the number of children, and the conflict between family members are the reasons that lead the child to crime.

Individual Factors

In the literature, many personal characteristics and individual factors leading to the child's being dragged into crime are mentioned. There are studies that the variables such as substance / alcohol use, age, intelligence, gender, psychological status of the child / teen may be related to criminal behavior.

When the gender variable in juvenile delinquency is considered, it is known that boys are driven to more crime than girls (Farrington and Loeber, 2000). This can be explained by the fact that the traditions and customs of society expect different values from men and women. Women are expected to be more polite, calm, naive, warm, helpful, while men are expected to be more independent, more entrepreneurial, success-oriented, dominant and aggressive. This situation may cause boys to show more risk taking behaviors and be prone to crime (Kaner 2002).

When evaluated in terms of age factor, it is known that criminal behavior starts most intensely before puberty and during puberty and reaches peak after end of puberty and then decreases (Ögel 2014). Adolescents who acted more commanded in puberty, begins to make decisions alone. Therefore, they take risks more easily than adults (Irwin 2003). Substance use which is one of the most risky behaviors can lead to criminal behavior, either through self-harm to the child/adolescent or by damaging the environment. It can be said that children under the influence of drugs can commit crimes more easily (Boranlıoğlu 2015). The child/adolescent, who is in search of an identity, can choose to isolate himself from society during this period. If this process reaches the point of alienation of the child/adolescent from his/her own body, social and emotional environment, destructive reactions may

occur in the individual. The most severe consequence of these behaviors is regarded as the criminal behavior (Özkok 1996).

Psychiatric disorders, especially major depressive disorders and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, are common in adolescents and children who are dragged into crime (Rothman, McNaughtan, Johnson 2012). Some types of personality disorders also reveal criminal behavior. Antisocials that are not socialized, devoid of empathy, irresponsible, impulsive and lacking in feelings such as guilt are highly prone to committing crimes (Sokullu 2002). It is known that some abnormal behaviors in childhood form the basis for future crime-related behaviors. Behavior disorder is a condition that is accompanied by problematic behaviors such as non-compliance with social rules and fighting, lying, torturing animals (Ögel 2014).

It is observed that people who have antisocial behaviors such as deliberate harm to animals, other people and the environment which are started to be seen in childhood, who cannot adapt to the society and who are known as “psychopaths” are involved in 24% more crimes than the others (Yavuzer 2010). According to the study report of the National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice (NCMHJJ) in 2006, 70.4% of children/adolescents included in the judicial system had at least one mental disorder; 46.5% had disruptive behavior disorders, 46% had substance abuse disorder, 34.4% had anxiety disorders in 34.4% and 18.3% had mood disorders (Schufelt and Coccozza, 2006).

Again, it is seen in the studies that children diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder show aggressive and antisocial behaviors. Major depressive disorder is seen as a risk factor for both antisocial behavior and behavior disorder for both boys and girls (Ögel 2014).

High impulsivity and low intelligence level come to the fore in juvenile delinquency (Kalb and Williams 2003). Children with low levels of intelligence are more likely to be impulsive and deceived by other people as well as behavioral problems, and are more likely to commit crime. Low

cognitive skills and behavioral problems in childhood clearly show the link between academic failure and crime (Wasserman et al. 2003).

A relationship between substance use and juvenile delinquency has been proven by different studies. In a study dealing with juvenile delinquency, it was found that substance abuse was the most important predictor of criminal behavior (Simoes et al. 2008). As a result of substance abuse, it is seen that involvement in crime weakens individuals' ties with society and therefore substance use continues (Ford 2005). In another study conducted in the UK, it was concluded that the most important risk factor in the involvement of children between the ages of 12-17 was the use of drugs in the past year. Children / adolescents who use drugs are 5 times more likely to show criminal behavior than those who do not (Ögel 2014). Supplying the money required to reach the addictive substance also makes it necessary to intervene in a criminal behavior - gasp, theft, prostitution, murder - from time to time (Altuner et al. 2009).

In another study, the most common psychiatric diagnoses as a result of semi-structured assessment and self-report scales with 72 guilty adolescents were conduct disorder and substance abuse. Following these, post-traumatic stress disorder and depression occurs (Vermeiren et al. 2000).

Familial Factors

Some familial characteristics can be mentioned in the child's orientation to crime. Economic difficulties, the danger of family break-up after divorce, some physical losses in the family, domestic violence, multi-populated family structure, inadequate family control, weak family ties, the presence of individuals involved in crime among family members lead children to crime (Hablemitoğu 2011).

The socio-cultural background of the family determines the socio-cultural level of the society. Family which is the role model for the child plays a major role in the socialization of the child. The child develops his personality through patterning, identification, reinforcement, and learning in this socialization process (Cole and Chipaca 2014). Family factors such as socio-economic status, structure (whether fragmented or not), criminal history of the family, presence of substance use in the family, witnessing / exposure to domestic violence, or psychological disorder in family members are factors that lead the child to crime. At this point, social learning theory can be mentioned. When a person's learning and social experiences match his or her values and expectations, it determines his or her behavior. This is known as the social learning approach. Its major representatives are Albert Bandura, Walter Mischel and Richard Walters (Jacoby 2004). It basically argues that children model their behavior with positive or negative feedback from the opposite party. This opposite party is often the person they have the closest relationship with, primarily their parents. If children witness an angry behavior, for example, if one adult is slapped or punched in the other during a discussion and rewarded in return, they may resort to violence during a similar discussion. As a result, children specialize in aggression techniques and are more confident that their behavior will bring tangible rewards. Indirectly social learning, children who grow up in homes where violence is a lifestyle may believe that such behavior is acceptable and rewarding. Even if the parents tell them not to be violent and punish them, the children still model the violent behavior of the parents they observe. Therefore, what parents do is more important than what they say (Meena 2016).

Fragmented families interrupt the child's socialization process, leading to incomplete and erroneous socialization. This incomplete socialization leads the child to criminal behavior (Uluğtekin 1991). Definition of fragmented family; refers to the fact that one or more members of the family, one or

both parents cannot be found due to death, divorce, abandonment and separation (Çelikten 2017). In a study conducted by Glueck with 500 dragged into crime and 500 normal children, the proportion of those who grew up in fragmented families was 60.6% in those who had been dragged into crime and 34.2% in the innocent group. The rate of those who were raised with foster parents, foster families or relatives was 46% in the guilty group and 12% in the innocent group. This shows that growing up in a broken family is a factor leading to crime (Uluğtekin 1991).

Family is the first step of socialization for the child and it is the smallest building block of the society where love and respect are learned. It has been found that children who grow up in families with appropriate breeding methods and healthy positive relationships are less likely to make friends with peer groups with tendency towards aggression, and children who grow up in families with negative relationships tend to have more relationship with peer groups with aggression and criminal behaviors (Henry et al. 2001).

It has been found that children who experience childhood abuse in the family are more prone to crime than others (Oral 1993). Major childhood abuse types are physical, sexual, emotional abuse, incest and neglect (Soysal and Çakalır 1999; Geyran and Uygur 1995). In a study conducted with 1981 children in Istanbul, Ankara and Antalya prisons between 2011-2012, 11.8% of the children reported that they were physically abused (Ögel et al. 2011). Again in 2004, a study comparing the characteristics of children who had been dragged into crime and children living in correctional facilities and those who had not been dragged into crime with an active education life has reached an important finding regarding abuse. It was observed that the rate of those who declared sexual abuse by one of their family members against their consent was 7.5 times higher in the group of children dragged into crime (Ögel 2014). In a study conducted with 235 children between the ages of 15 and 18 staying at the

Bayrampaşa H Type Closed Prison, it was observed that children scored significantly higher on physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect sub-dimensions (Ovacık 2008).

Disciplinary understanding of parents is another variable in children's tendency to crime. Especially in children who have grown up in families with harsh attitudes, resorting to physical punishments and not showing enough affection for the child, signs of aggression, anger and feelings of anger can be observed. Since the child cannot reflect these feelings directly to his family, he endures them in silence. These feelings of anger and resentment are reflected to the environment by overflowing. A method of expression of this child's internal conflict is the criminal behavior (Taner 1985). In a study with prisoners, Farrington (1991) reveals that the frequent use of physical punishment by parents or the practice of very strict discipline increases the inclination to crime.

Environmental Factors

The 'social environment' in which children live in crime plays a triggering role. The social environment of children dragged into crime contains 'criminogenic' elements (Yıldız 2009). The environments in which crime-related behaviors are learned the most are the groups we have close relationships with. This learning process includes methods on how to commit a crime, motivations related to crime and the ways to make sense of the behavior (Ögel 2014).

The peer group and circle of friends are the first environmental factors driving the child to crime. The child gains some behaviors and habits within the peer group. Especially in adolescence, friendship relations reach the highest point by passing in front of the family. The more important it is for children / adolescents to be accepted and approved by friends, the more rejection and exclusion are so degrading (Uluğtekin 1991). In this sense, the

impact of the group of friends on the child is great. Even if the child's behavior is incorrect, the child may show compliance with the group in order not to be excluded. It is known that especially children with low family control and interest have closer relationships with peer groups in order to compensate for this deficiency (Sutherland 1947). Studies have shown that there is a strong positive relationship between the guilt behavior level of the child and being involved in a criminal peer group (Warr 1993).

The relationship between the child and the school as environmental factors is one of the other determinants. It is a known fact that there is a positive relationship between low academic achievement and the risk of committing a crime (Katsiyannis et al. 2008). Failure in the school as a way of socialization causes the school to lose its effect on the child and deficient socialization (Uluğtekin 1991).

Polk and Halferty (1972) found a negative relationship between juvenile delinquency and school loyalty. It was observed that the children who were dragged into crime had negative attitudes, found the school boring and had low grades. In relation to school and environmental factors, the peer group is also an important factor in dragging the child / mother into crime. With adolescence, the effect of the family on the child decreases, while the influence of peer groups increases. Even if the child is brought up in a good family environment and has problematic friends, he/she is likely to develop risky behavior (Phillipi and Deproto 2010). According to the findings in the literature, crime behavior tends to be a small group behavior rather than a single one (Polat 2004).

Migration is also an important environmental risk factor in juvenile delinquency. Every year, there are intensive migrations from rural areas to cities and especially from the Middle East to our country. As urbanization increases, city populations become crowded and social control decreases. However, individuals who are not able to adapt to the culture of the city and are excluded by the society can also turn into crime with the difficulty of

living conditions in this new place. In a study conducted by Akduman et al. (2007), it was found that 94.7% of the children dragged into crime were children coming to Ankara by migration. In another study conducted in our country, it was found that the most important factors determining the crime rate were income level, unemployment, immigration rate, education level, population density, birth rate and urbanization (Cömertler & Kar 2007; Erkan & Erdoğan, 2006). Also in the thesis studies on juvenile delinquency and immigration in Turkey, it was found that the families (32-68%) of the children in conflict with the law migrated from rural to urban areas (Küçüker 2001; Akalın 1999; Ataseven 2006).

Street living and/or working is another environmental risk factor for juvenile delinquency. Children who are guilty of crime or who are in conflict with the law may be exposed to crime either because they live or work on the streets. However, some of the children living/working on the streets may use drugs or volatile substances due to abuse, violence, neglect and apathy in the family. The fact that children using drugs are dragged into prostitution and child pornography leads to a separate victimization and crime. Another factor that drives children living/working on the streets to crime is street gangs. They are usually groups of children over the age of 15 and organized on the street. These street gangs can sometimes be used by larger crime groups and dragged into crime (Güngör 2008).

Mass media can also be considered among the environmental factors driving the child into crime in today's world. In addition to printed media such as magazines, newspapers and books, as well as video-audio mass media such as radio, television and cinema; the telephones and tablets in the hands of even 2-year-old children are being used to transmit information to people. Especially through the internet, which children and young people use as a means of leisure time, users may be exposed to some unpleasant stimuli. Violent and aggressive games, pornographic materials, crime-promoting publications can adversely affect children and young people, making them

more aggressive and angry. In the studies conducted, the indirect effect of mass media on juvenile delinquency is mentioned (Sevük 1998).

Result

In recent years, the fact that the concepts of child and crime are mentioned together brings up the existence of a social problem. It is a known fact that children determine the future of the countries where they live. Therefore, minimizing juvenile delinquency rates is very important for the future of societies. However, it is not enough to look at this issue only from a legal point of view, and the social-psychological factors that push the child to crime should also be addressed. In order to prevent children from being dragged into crime, it is necessary to first determine the factors causing this. The child should be considered as a whole within the family and social environment in which he / she lives. When it comes to juvenile delinquency, it is clear that children are victims rather than perpetrators.

Individual (observation of antisocial behaviors at an early age, limitation in cognitive skills, hyperactivity), familial(poverty, abuse, domestic violence, divorce, mental state of parents), peer related factors(presence of peers with deviant behavior, exposure to peer-denial, meeting with crime-oriented children and adolescents), school and community-based factors (lack of commitment to school, low academic achievement, poor neighborhood relations, easy access to weapons) draw the attention in the orientation of children and youth to crime. At this point; it is possible to reduce juvenile delinquency by strengthening economic and social policies, increasing the level of education of families, facilitating access to social, cultural and sporting activities of children living in disadvantaged regions, preventing migration by reducing poverty and unemployment, and making more strict follow-up and evaluation of children in schools.

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Contact Information

E-mail: asliyayak@yahoo.com

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