

Psychology of Juvenile Delinquency in Albania: Psychosocial Factors that Influence the Involvement in Delinquent Behavior

Dipl. Psych. Ardita Prendi

University of Tirana, Faculty of Social Science

Abstract: Several theoretical models emphasize the relationship between social and psychological factors and delinquency. This relationship has been proposed by various hypothetical and theoretical approaches in the literature. Indeed, this relationship is a mainstay of most theories of delinquency, either explicitly or implicitly. This study examines the latter aspects of this presumed relationship using juvenile males in detention placement Institution of Juvenile of Kavaja (Albania). The purposes of the analysis: in order to find the causes of changing and the cause-effect relations, referred in the statistical analysis, it is needed to set which variables, whether psychological or social, are involved in how the individuals are influenced or included in delinquent behaviour. Results: The results of this study will blend together with conclusions and will be used as key points to the future orientations, so to whom this analysis serves, why is it important to consider, how and what changes might be done, if such are needed. Conclusions: Why it is important to consider, and what changes can be made, if such are needed. There is an urgent need to better understand delinquent behavior, which are closely based on social, psychological factors or on other coexistent variables, need which this study tries to cover.

Introduction

This article is an effort to draw a general picture of the situation regarding juvenile delinquency, while putting emphasis psychosocial factors that influence the involvement in delinquent behavior. In this context, it is necessary to clarify the age limit of individuals who are the actual object of the study. According to the text of the Criminal Policy "for individuals under the age of 18, Albanian legislation uses the term "juvenile", the term "child" is also used in a number of other dispositions of the Code. Under article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, "a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier." Albanian legislation states that one needs to be under the age of 18 to be a juvenile.

In the Albanian culture, child and juvenile are terms which often do not correspond to the specific age mentioned here above. Therefore, are generally considered and treated as children individuals of age 16 and under, and individuals of age 16 to 18 – 20 are considered juveniles. Involvement of juveniles and young people in criminal activities has turned into a distress for Albanians, especially in the last decade. Statistics from central and local institutions working in the field show that the concerns of the public are in general justified. The curve of child and juvenile crime is indeed constant, and remains almost unchanged.

Involvement of juveniles in criminal activity is associated with individual and external factors which create an environment for criminal behavior. Under these conditions, any study of the role of individual factors, like physical and psychological properties, should be analyzed in association with external factors such as family, social environment, community environment, quality education, and governance and law compliance experiences.

Juvenile crime has two components closely related: juveniles as offenders and juveniles as victims. The fact that juveniles are responsible for serious offences such as murder, theft, extortion, rape etc. should raise concerns to all the policy makers. Also is a fact that a numbers of criminal offences by juveniles are many times higher than of that thought by their peers.

1. Profile of juveniles in conflict with the law in Albania

Research on juvenile delinquency reveals that juveniles involved in criminal activities develop specific social characteristics with a psychological profile of their own.

a) Age and criminal behavior

Based on information gathered during visits in confinement and detention centers, the large majority of detained juveniles are 14 to 18 years old. Even if some have a history of antisocial behavior, most of them are confined and detained for the first time.

b) Level of education

Most convicted juveniles have a low education level. This should not serve as prejudice, even if it appears that the lower

the education is, the graver the criminal act tends to be. Referring to minors in all four sectors, it is estimated that 25% are recidivists and 75% found in a penitentiary institution for the first time. Regarding their educational level, we can say that a relatively small percentage, only 22% have completed 9 years education, while another 22% have not completed even primary education. 78% of minors within the institution attend 9 year compulsory primary education.

c) Economic situation

There is no doubt that this remains one of the main factor influencing one's personality and behavior and explaining how and why a juvenile gets in conflict with the law. Most of them have indeed important economic problems. They come from poor families, or have no chance for employment and ensuring their financial needs, or the person in charge of them simply cannot provide basic needs. All above cases reported so far had a strong economic component even if other factors were mainly dealt with.

d) Place of residence

When considering the place of residence of detained juveniles, it seems that most of them come either from rural areas, former industrial or new residential areas from the transition period. These are characterized by limited employment possibilities as well as a lack of resources such as land, and property. No economic activities mean a shortage of opportunities and sources to make a living. From the data collected is estimated that 40% of juveniles living in an area not their birthplace, in an area where their family has migrated, the rest 64% live in their birthplace.

e) Anti-social behavior. It is a characteristic of juveniles in conflict with the law to model certain antisocial behaviors. They are known for not-tolerant discussions, limited communication skills and have problems controlling themselves in some situations.

f) Family and its environment are generally considered as having a major influence on the child and its personality which is determinant when becoming adult. A number of juveniles involved in criminal activities come from problematic families. Growing delinquency in young ages during the last decade is directly associated with the crisis that the Albanian family has suffered over the years of political transition. Dominant part of these juveniles and their families live in rural and suburban areas. From the personal data obtained by the process of interviewing, it is noted that most of the juveniles interviewed belong to families in relatively large numbers (parents and 3 or more children, grandparents, etc.). However there are cases when the minors do not live near their families, living with a parent and a stepparent, etc. A portion of the juveniles are convicted of theft or are in custody for committing this offense, but there are those who are convicted of various offenses, from murder, rape, drug trafficking and illegal possession of arms.

g) Minority and anti-social behavior

Another characteristic of juveniles in conflict with the law and their anti-social behavior is their ethnic origin. Among apprehended juveniles, many of them are of Roma or Egyptian origin. This suggests that ethnic origin and social exclusion of some minorities may play an important factor regarding criminal behavior since it is a further cause of stress, tension and problems.

2. Personality characteristics of delinquents

Psychological studies of delinquents have traditionally been concerned with how delinquents differ from no delinquents in intellectual structure, physiological constitution, and personality characteristics. They have been concerned with defining the particular personality traits which lead people to become delinquents. They have shown that many delinquents are emotionally disturbed, but equally important, that certain types of emotional disorder are negatively correlated with delinquency. Quay has decided that there are particular *types* of delinquents who differ from each other and have distinctive personality characteristics (Quay, 1965). To understand fully the psychological aspects of delinquency, then, it is necessary to examine each of these various types.

Types of delinquency

With some precision and a degree of practical utility, juvenile delinquents can be categorized into three general classes: the socialized delinquent, the neurotic delinquent, and the psychopathic delinquent. Each of these types exhibits certain traits that distinguish it from the other types and from no delinquents. Since the background and treatment of each variety of delinquent differs, an understanding of youthful crime should commence with an examination of these differences.

- *Socialized delinquency*

The socialized delinquent does not suffer from any particular psychological disorders, other than those which characterize the typical adolescent. His crimes are not motivated by deep-seated anxieties or unresolved conflicts, but rather by a simple desire to conform to the norms of his gang (Reiss, 1952; Hewitt & Jenkins, 1947). Typically, such a boy comes from a transitional urban area where a gang subculture has become entrenched. In his immediate social environment,

delinquency has evolved into an accepted, even honored, pattern of life, a legitimate way of achieving prestige in the juvenile community. Often, in early childhood the socialized delinquent joins a gang and imbibes the values and habits of a delinquent subculture.

One should not conceptualize the process of becoming a socialized delinquent, however, as just a matter of chance learning. Only certain children seem to be drawn toward a gang culture. Specifically, as many pieces of research have demonstrated, the socialized delinquent seems to be produced by a frustrating and inconsistent familial background. Compared with noncriminal children, the socialized delinquent has most often been raised in a family characterized by parental conflict, rejection, or neglect (Glueck & Glueck, 1950). In such a family, the child finds that his elemental needs for self-esteem, security, and emotional warmth are frustrated. Not unnaturally, he searches for alternative ways of fulfilling his basic needs, and, if he lives in a delinquent neighborhood, the gang offers him a very "live" option. Typically, too, the socialized delinquent has been reared in a home characterized by a lack of supervision and erratic discipline. In consequence, he has not internalized the usual middle-class standards that could immunize him from delinquent influences in his broader social environment.

Such a child adopts the ethic and customs of the gang as a means of assuring himself the sense of importance and security denied him in other ways. The gang can offer him acceptance and guidance. By adulthood, the socialized delinquent typically leaves his original home and neighborhood; he undertakes new responsibilities as a father, husband, and wage-earner. Thus, he escapes the influences that led him to delinquency and adopts new social roles that are inconsistent with membership in a juvenile gang.

- *Neurotic delinquency*

The *neurotic delinquent* suffers from deep anxiety, intense insecurity, and, often, pervasive guilt. For such a boy, criminal behavior is a way of expressing an unresolved conflict and offers a release from anxiety. His behavior stems from deeply imbedded psychological causes rather than from a simple acceptance of a gang culture as a means of winning prestige. Unlike the socialized delinquent, the neurotic child often commits his crimes alone and usually commits only a single type of crime. His behavior exhibits a compulsive quality that is often absent in socialized delinquents. The juvenile arsonist, sexual offender, or narcotics addict usually comes from the ranks of neurotic delinquents. The motives behind the neurotic's crimes are varied and difficult to comprehend. The arsonist, for example, may set fires because of exhibitionistic desires; the neurotic burglar may commit his offenses because the act of burglary offers him sexual release (Abrahamsen, 1960).

Although their specific characteristics and backgrounds differ markedly, neurotic delinquents generally emerge from a more middle-class, conventional environment than do socialized delinquents. Their family's exhibit severe emotional strain and their parents are usually neurotic or psychotic. Some studies have described the neurotic delinquent as possessing a "relatively weak ego" and as tending to isolate himself from other people, particularly other children (Hewitt & Jenkins 1947). Because their reformation depends upon a profound reorientation in character, neurotic delinquents more often continue their criminal behavior into adulthood than do the typical gang delinquents.

- *Psychopathic delinquency*

The *psychopathic delinquent* is relatively rare but, from societies point of view, perhaps the most dangerous of young criminals. The psychopath's distinguishing traits are (1) his inability to form a lasting emotional relationship with other human beings and (2) his almost total lack of guilt, remorse, or inhibition. Unlike the neurotic delinquent, the psychopath does not suffer from internal conflict or anxiety. Unlike the socialized delinquent, the psychopath does not find emotional satisfaction in gang membership. The psychopathic delinquent commits a wide gamut of crimes and has a remarkably high rate of recidivism. Almost all investigations of psychopaths' environments indicate that they have been raised in homes characterized by extreme parental brutality, neglect, discord, and intensely severe discipline. Many have come from foster homes or orphanages. They have seldom, if ever, experienced a warm, loving relationship with other human beings, and they seem to lack the capacity for affection. Quite often, the psychopath suffers from a neurological disorder, perhaps of a type that decreases his ability to inhibit impulses (Mccord & Mccord, 1964).

3. Psychosocial features among minors who commit delinquent behavior (criminal)

Number of minors is variable due to the dynamic process, short sentences, and frequent releases and new entries into custody. Referring to minors in all four sectors, it is estimated that 25% are recidivists and 75% found in a penitentiary institution for the first time. Regarding their educational level, we can say that a relatively small percentage, only 22% have completed 9 years education, while another 22% have not completed even primary education. 78% of minors within the institution attend 9 year compulsory primary education. Fledgling period which corresponds to a large part of it with

adolescence as well (but the latter may continue longer), is a delicate stage in the life of a person, full of anxiety, putting to the test subject in its interpersonal and social relations and can generate dynamic actions, in many cases can be even delinquent. Such behavior to the adolescent age group may also be merely transitory youth episodes and are not repeated after the person matures. However stigmatization as "criminal, thief, murderer, vagabond, vagrant etc", is often detrimental and leaves consequences in the person's life. One way to avoid such labeling is the understanding of the causes that promote delinquent behavior. In a large part of cases the minors who commit delinquent behavior have emotional problems and come from problematic families. So often it is noted that minors who commit deviant behavior prefer to leave and abandon their families, after considering it an obstructive environment, disturbing and not positive. The studies concluded that this group of teenagers with deviant behavior is dominated by the lack of well-education, shown in the form of a deep disinterest to the child from their parents, or the lack of paternal authority and an attitude too "soft", letting the child to decide on everything, or an inadequate education, very tough and strict, not to say in some cases tending toward violence. According of psychological characteristics and conditions of isolation in which these minors suffer the sentence given by the courts or are awaiting trial process, it is easier to understand their ways of communication in these specific circumstances. There are several reasons identified for the dysfunction of a constructive communication between minors at this institution.

Changes in socio-cultural level of education among minors. Incompatibility with each other because of differences ineducational level and consequently the level of understanding.

Impacts of *family environment* where they are grown. Communication patterns that have been in the past in the family and peer groups who attended in many cases have been different for these minors. Another factor that affects an unsuccessful communication between minors is *sub cultural background*. Often children who do not fit in with the ways of communicating to each other and that are likely to have a potential chance for conflict among minors coming from different areas of Albania. Of course in many cases minors overpass this difficulty and find common ground among them despite the subcultures they come from, however occasionally there is a tendency toward conflict because of this background.

Personal characteristics: There are those juveniles who want to prove themselves superior, to have an impact on the sector, they are more impetuous, aggressive, are unable to manage frustration, anger. Everyone wants to be in the spotlight, to be the "leader", to be heard, in some cases and this leads to disputes, fights or grudge-bearing, which build barriers to effective communication between them.

Situational stress accumulated from being locked up, family situations (death of a parent, while the minor is in an institution), the unstable psycho-emotional and in some cases it takes a little to interrupt the verbal and nonverbal communication between them convenient.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

- The majority of juveniles who have committed deviant behavior and that are in conflict with the law have an unhealthy self-esteem. Therefore work must be done to increase the sense of self-worth which would help improve communication between them, would lead to containment and the escalation of conflicts. People in general and teenagers with a healthy self esteem are less likely to have prejudices toward others. Also, people who have a healthy sense of self-worth are less likely to react harshly to others. By having a positive view of yourself, minors will be better able to cope constructively with the problems they face, especially in conditions of isolation, but also after they serve the sentence and become free.
- Efficient involvement of educational staff, the police and other social agents who cooperate with the institution feeding to minors the sense of equality. Feeling equal stops the building of the hierarchy among juveniles within the same group, improves communication among them and serves as a value that will serve to minors even after serving the sentence.
- Create more possibilities to be involved with artistic and sports activities. Painting, but also the learning of musical instruments, the promotion of literary creations by juveniles, and involvement in sports activities will help juveniles canalized accumulated frustrations and stress in conditions of isolation and be more constructive in relationships with others.
- Creating a sense of trust and cooperation to counter feelings of suspicion and competition that often created in the conditions of isolation. This requires that all actors operating in this institution to work in coherence and to be cooperative.

References

- Abrahamsen, David, 1960. *The Psychology of Crime*. New York: Columbia Univ. Press.
- Caplan, Nathan S. 1965. Intellectual Functioning. Pages 100–138 in Herbert C. Quay (editor), *Juvenile Delinquency: Research and Theory*. Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand.
- Cohen, Albert K., 1955. *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang*. Glencoe, Ill. Free Press.
- Dinitz, Simon; Reckless, Walter C.; and Kay, Barbara, 1958. A Self Gradient Among Potential Delinquents. *Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology, and Police Science* 49:230–233.
- Glueck, Sheldon (editor), 1959. *The Problem of Delinquency*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Glueck, Sheldon; and Glueck, Eleanor, 1959. *Predicting Delinquency and Crime*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press.
- Haxhiymeri, Edlira. Unicef. Sida 2007. Juvenile Delinquency in Albania. Tirana. Pages 7.34-36
- Hewitt, Lester E. and Jenkins, Richard L., 1947. *Fundamental Patterns of Maladjustment: The Dynamics of Their Origin*. Springfield, Ill. : Thomas.
- Mccord William and Mccord Joan, 1964. *The Psychopath: An Essay on the Criminal Mind*. Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand.
- Quay, Herbert C., 1965. Personality and Delinquency. Pages 139–169 in Herbert C. Quay (editor), *Juvenile Delinquency: Research and Theory*. Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand.
- Reiss, Albert J. Jr., 1952. Social Correlates of psychological Types of Delinquency. *American Sociological Review* 17:710–718.
- Personality Characteristics of Criminals. *American Journal of Sociology* :476–484.
- Sutherland, Edwin H.; and Cressey, Donald R. (1924), 1960. *Principles of Criminology*. 6th ed.

