



Factors Influencing Juvenile Delinquency In Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh

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Abstract

Juvenile delinquency has emerged as a serious social concern in contemporary India, particularly in rapidly urbanising towns such as Itanagar. This article examines the major causes of juvenile delinquency by analysing the interplay of socio-economic, familial, and psychological factors that influence adolescent behaviour. Factors such as poverty, lack of parental supervision, family violence, substance abuse, negative peer influence, and the impact of media are identified as key contributors to juvenile crime. The study also highlights the vulnerability of adolescents during their transitional developmental phase, drawing upon psychological theories to explain identity crises and role confusion among juveniles. Furthermore, by focusing on both structural and individual-level factors, the article emphasises the need for a comprehensive and preventive approach involving family support, education, and social intervention. The study aims to contribute to a better understanding of juvenile delinquency and to encourage policy measures that prioritise rehabilitation and social integration over punishment.

Keywords: Juvenile Delinquency, Adolescence, Poverty, Parental Guidance, Peer Influence.

INTRODUCTION:

Whenever an incident of juvenile delinquency is reported, a fundamental question arises: why do such young individuals engage in criminal activities? What circumstances or pressures compel children and adolescents to take such extreme steps? Juvenile delinquency is not the result of a single cause; rather, it emerges from a complex interaction of social, economic, psychological, and familial factors. Numerous conditions can transform a normal adolescent into a delinquent.

Some of the most commonly associated causes of juvenile crime include lack of proper parental guidance, poverty, illiteracy, negative peer influence, drug and substance abuse, abusive parenting, single-parent households, family violence, child sexual abuse, and the negative influence of media. Among these factors, poverty plays a particularly significant role in a developing country like India, where economic hardship often pushes young minds toward delinquent behaviour as a means of survival or escape.

Adolescence is a crucial transitional phase in a child's life. During this period, an individual undergoes profound physical, emotional, and psychological changes. The personality and sense of self of an adolescent are shaped amidst rapid physiological development and intense social pressures. This phase makes juveniles especially vulnerable to both external influences and internal emotional conflicts, often resulting in mood swings, emotional instability, stress, and anxiety (Siegel, 2015). Psychologist Erik

Erikson explained this developmental stage through his theory of psychosocial development. According to him, juveniles between the ages of 16 and 18 experience a critical life crisis known as the conflict between *ego identity* and *role diffusion*. Role diffusion occurs when adolescents experience uncertainty about their personal identity and rely excessively on others for validation and direction. In contrast, ego identity develops when a young person achieves a clear understanding of self and their role within society. Failure to resolve this crisis successfully may lead juveniles to seek identity and belonging through delinquent peer groups or antisocial behaviour (Siegel, 2015).

Economic factors also share a close relationship with juvenile delinquency. Studies have shown that adolescents from economically deprived backgrounds are more likely to engage in criminal activities due to lack of financial resources and opportunities. Fleisher (1966) observed that poverty-driven juveniles often come into contact with illegal means of earning, such as drug trafficking or theft, as a way to support themselves or their families.

The role of parents is crucial in preventing juvenile delinquency. Proper moral, social, and emotional guidance from an early age is essential for healthy development. However, in the modern era of urbanisation and globalisation, many parents intentionally or unintentionally fail to devote adequate time and attention to their children. In the pursuit of better income and improved lifestyles, parental responsibilities are often compromised. While the intention may be to provide material comfort, neglecting emotional bonding and moral education can have severe consequences. Luxuries cannot substitute for values, discipline, and guidance. It is the fundamental responsibility of parents to instil ethical values and provide emotional support to their children, regardless of professional commitments.

Defining and measuring juvenile delinquency remains a complex task. Delinquent behaviour may involve a single act, repeated minor offences, or a continuous pattern of criminal activity. The severity of such acts varies widely - from serious crimes such as murder and rape to minor offences like petty theft. It is also important to note that only a small proportion of juveniles who commit delinquent acts are actually apprehended, making accurate assessment difficult. In the Indian context, recent data highlights significant trends. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), educated juveniles were involved in more crimes than illiterate juveniles in 2017. The number of educated juvenile offenders increased from 4,244 in 2016 to 6,260 in 2017, while illiterate juvenile offenders decreased from 5,412 to 4,324 during the same period. Among the 19 metropolitan cities, Delhi recorded the highest percentage of juvenile crime, accounting for 35.2 per cent in 2017 (Bedi, 2019). These statistics challenge the conventional assumption that illiteracy alone is the primary cause of juvenile delinquency and indicate the influence of broader socio-economic and environmental factors.

In conclusion, juvenile delinquency is a multifaceted social problem rooted in economic deprivation, family dysfunction, psychological vulnerability, and societal neglect. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach involving parents, educational institutions, communities, and the state. Preventive measures, emotional support, moral education, and inclusive social policies are essential to guide juveniles away from delinquency and towards constructive participation in society.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the major causes of juvenile delinquency in Itanagar.
2. To analyse the role of socio-economic and familial factors in juvenile crime.
3. To suggest preventive measures to reduce juvenile delinquency.

Methodology of the study

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical approach based on secondary data. Data have been collected from books, academic journals, government reports, National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) publications, newspapers, and official websites. The analysis is qualitative in nature and focuses on identifying key factors influencing juvenile delinquency in the study area.

Major Causes of Juvenile Crime in the Study Area

Juvenile crime in the study area is influenced by a range of social, economic, familial, and psychological factors. Some of the most prominent causes include:

1. Poor socio-economic conditions and poverty
2. Lack of proper parental guidance and care
3. Negative peer influence
4. Broken families
5. Psychological problems
6. Drug use
7. Inappropriate parenting styles
8. Alcohol consumption among youth

Among these, poverty and adverse socio-economic conditions emerge as one of the most significant contributors to juvenile delinquency.

Poor Socio-Economic Conditions and Poverty

One of the primary causes of juvenile delinquency is poor socio-economic conditions, particularly poverty. A child requires a supportive socio-economic environment to develop moral values, emotional stability, and social responsibility. However, in the contemporary world marked by rapid economic growth, industrialisation, and technological advancement, socio-economic inequality has widened considerably. In a country like India, a sharp disparity exists between the rich and the poor. On one hand, children from privileged sections of society enjoy access to nutritious food, quality education, healthcare, and secure living conditions. On the other hand, a large number of children have never attended school and struggle to secure even one proper meal a day. The living conditions of children across different social strata vary widely, and monetary wealth has increasingly become the primary measure of social status in modern society.

Poverty often acts as a trap that pulls young individuals into delinquent behaviour. It exposes children to stress, insecurity, and social exclusion, making them vulnerable to criminal activities. Baratz and Grigsby define poverty as a severe lack of physical and mental well-being, closely associated with inadequate economic resources and consumption (Spicker, 2007). In such circumstances, juveniles may resort to illegal means to fulfil their basic needs or improve their financial condition. Money has become an indispensable requirement for survival, education, and access to healthcare. Consequently, the lives of millions of poor youths remain miserable due to the absence of financial stability and support systems. Lack of economic resources often pushes young people toward criminal activities such as drug peddling, theft, shoplifting, vehicle stealing, and even violent crimes. Reports of juvenile involvement in various forms of crime frequently appear in state, national, and international media, highlighting the growing seriousness of the problem.

Youth living in poverty experience continuous stress due to limited access to basic amenities such as education, employment opportunities, healthcare services, and financial assistance. Empirical evidence suggests that adolescents who grow up in impoverished conditions have a significantly higher likelihood of engaging in delinquent behaviour. According to data from the National Crime Records Bureau, 55.6 per cent of juvenile offenders belonged to families with an annual income of less than ₹25,000. On average, such families consist of more than four members surviving on a daily income of less than ₹70 (Chauhan, 2015). India's socio-economic reality further aggravates the problem. Nearly half of the country's 1.3 billion population lives in poverty, and children constitute around 40 per cent of the total population. A substantial proportion of these children either never attend school or drop out at an early stage. Additionally, nearly 20 million children are orphans or lack adequate family support, increasing their vulnerability to delinquency.

Large family size among economically weaker sections poses additional challenges in ensuring a decent standard of living and proper upbringing of children. Although India is the second most populous country in the world, the more critical concern lies in the size of its poor population. Overpopulation, unemployment, and poverty collectively contribute to rising juvenile delinquency. Recognising this issue, initiatives such as the Assam government's policy restricting government employment for individuals with more than two children born after January 1, 2021, aim to address population growth and its socio-economic consequences (Bakshi, 2019).

2. Lack of Proper Parental Guidance and Care

Every child is unique, and it is the foremost responsibility of parents to provide proper guidance, care, and emotional support. A child's behaviour and personality are deeply influenced by the family environment in which they are raised. It is evident that many problems faced by young individuals are closely linked to the nature of parental supervision and family structure. Learning begins at the cradle and continues throughout life, and values such as ethics, discipline, and morality are primarily inculcated through parental upbringing. However, many children do not receive adequate parental guidance due to several reasons. One such situation arises when parents are divorced, resulting in children being raised by a single parent or, in some cases, without effective parental supervision. Similarly, children who lose their parents at a very young age often lack guidance regarding right and wrong, as there is no one to provide moral direction or instil good values during their formative years.

Scholars have identified various parental factors that negatively influence a child's behaviour. Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber identified four key paradigms—neglect, deviant behaviour, disruption, and conflict - which explain how parental behaviour can contribute to juvenile delinquency (Shoemaker, 1984). In addition, excessive parental control combined with adolescents' natural desire for independence may lead to conflict and rebellion, thereby increasing the likelihood of delinquent behaviour (Poduthase, 2012). In some cases, parents themselves are uncertain about the nature and extent of guidance they should provide to their children. Lack of awareness about effective parenting practices often results in inconsistent discipline and weak emotional bonding. Furthermore, many parents fail to recognise the importance of the involvement of both parents in child-rearing and place the primary responsibility solely on the mother (Cooper, 1950).

Parental failure is also evident when parents are unable to fulfil their fundamental roles due to emotional, social, or economic pressures. Working parents, particularly working mothers, may unintentionally fail to devote sufficient time to their children, leading to communication gaps and emotional distance (Jones, 1922). Such gaps often leave children feeling neglected, increasing their vulnerability to negative external influences. It is important to note that instilling moral values through verbal instruction alone is insufficient. Parents must also act as role models by demonstrating ethical behaviour in their daily lives. Children

closely observe parental actions, speech, and attitudes, which significantly shape their own behaviour. While parental involvement in a child's life is essential, it must be balanced with respect for the child's autonomy to maintain a healthy and trusting relationship.

Contemporary society presents additional challenges, as parents are increasingly occupied with professional commitments, leaving limited time for meaningful interaction with their children. As a result, many children are deprived of the attention and emotional support they require during their formative years. According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (SPCC), children raised in a healthy household environment under the guidance of supportive parents are more likely to develop into well-adjusted and successful adults (Debatewise.org).

Loving a child should not be confined to fulfilling material needs alone; rather, it involves nurturing honesty, discipline, and moral values. Empirical evidence further reinforces this argument. A study conducted by the Department of Women and Child Development in collaboration with UNICEF on the root causes of juvenile crime examined 2,500 boys housed in observation homes in Bangalore over a period of eight years. The findings revealed that nearly 94 per cent of the juveniles were not under proper parental care (Kulkarni, 2016), highlighting the critical role of parental guidance in preventing juvenile delinquency.

Negative Peer Group

The family is regarded as the primary agent influencing a child's mental, emotional, and physical development. After the family, peer groups emerge as one of the most influential socialising agents in a child's life. Peer groups and social networks can function both as protective and risk factors, depending largely on the nature and values of the group to which an individual belongs (Hope, 2016). Adolescents frequently acquire information, attitudes, and behavioural patterns from their peers, often more readily than from adults.

It is widely acknowledged that the adolescent brain is still in the process of development, particularly in areas related to judgment, impulse control, and risk assessment. Consequently, adolescents are more susceptible to external influences and are vulnerable to engaging in risky behaviour. As children grow older, they increasingly seek acceptance and belonging within peer groups, such as sports teams, cultural groups, or informal social circles. With time, the dynamics of human interaction change, and peer influence becomes more prominent. In this context, Charles Shaw observed that "delinquency is a product of community forces," highlighting the role of social environment in shaping delinquent behaviour (Mamoria, 1965).

Adolescence is often considered one of the most formative phases of life, as experiences during this period significantly shape an individual's personality and future behaviour. Negative peer influence is a major contributor to juvenile delinquency. When a child associates with peers who exhibit delinquent tendencies, the likelihood of adopting similar behaviours increases. Peer pressure within such groups may encourage individuals to engage in activities such as smoking, alcohol consumption, drug use, early sexual activity, truancy, and other deviant behaviours.

Such influences often lead to adverse outcomes, including emotional distress, depression, behavioural problems, and poor decision-making. The desire for social acceptance and fear of rejection frequently compel adolescents to conform to group norms, even when those norms are harmful. This notion is aptly reflected in the biblical proverb: "Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm" (Proverbs 13:20). Thus, the peer environment plays a crucial role in either reinforcing positive behaviour or increasing the risk of juvenile delinquency.

4. Broken Homes, Parental Separation, Polygamy, and Lack of Family Ties

The family is widely regarded as the primary institution influencing a child's overall personality, attitudes, and behavioural patterns. Children are deeply shaped by parental values and interactions, making the family the first and most important agent of socialisation. Socialisation refers to the process through which socially accepted norms, values, and behaviours are transmitted from one generation to another, enabling individuals to function effectively within society.

In contemporary society, however, the traditional stability of the family structure has been increasingly challenged. The institution of marriage, once considered sacred, is now often subjected to instability, experimentation, and dissolution. Divorce and marital separation have given rise to what is commonly referred to as "children of divorce." While divorce has long been prevalent in Western societies, it has gradually become more common in India as well. Additionally, practices such as polygamy and weakening family bonds have further contributed to family disintegration. These changes have had profound negative consequences on the emotional and psychological well-being of children.

The separation of parents frequently disrupts a child's emotional security and sense of belonging. Children from broken homes often face adjustment difficulties, including social discomfort, behavioural issues, depression, and learning problems. Financial instability is another major consequence of parental separation, which can further aggravate stress and insecurity within the household. In many cases, children experience psychological distress as they struggle to cope with changes in family dynamics and reduced parental attention.

The long-term effects of parental divorce, separation, and polygamy can be particularly harmful, as they alter a child's perception of relationships, trust, and social norms. Children raised in such environments may develop feelings of abandonment, resentment, or confusion, increasing their vulnerability to antisocial behaviour. Furthermore, single parents—often compelled to work long hours to support their families—may unintentionally fail to provide adequate supervision and emotional support. This lack of parental involvement can create communication gaps between parents and children. Family structures can broadly be categorised into nuclear families and single-parent families. Single-parent families have become increasingly common in modern society, either due to marital separation or the death of one parent. Regardless of the cause, it is the child who is most affected by family disruption. Children raised in single-parent households are often more exposed to external influences and may be drawn toward delinquent environments due to loneliness, lack of supervision, and emotional neglect.

In the absence of strong family bonds, children often turn to peers for emotional support and social acceptance. While peer relationships can be positive, reliance on peers in the absence of family guidance may increase exposure to delinquent influences. In contrast, families characterised by warmth, affection, and open communication significantly reduce the risk of delinquent behaviour among children and adolescents. Empirical evidence from the Netherlands indicates that adolescents aged 14 to 21 who maintained positive relationships with their mothers were considerably less likely to engage in delinquent behaviour compared to those with negative parental relationships (Ponzetti, 2003). Further evidence is provided by a sample study conducted by the Empowerment of Children and Human Rights Organisation (ECHO), a juvenile justice centre in Bangalore. The study identified broken homes, lack of parental affection and security, weak family ties, and parental divorce or separation as major factors contributing to juvenile delinquency (Kulkarni, 2016).

In sum, family disintegration in the form of broken homes, parental separation, polygamy, and weakened family ties plays a critical role in increasing children's vulnerability to delinquent behaviour. Strengthening

family relationships and providing emotional security are therefore essential components in preventing juvenile delinquency.

Alcohol, Drugs, and Crime

The consumption of alcohol and drugs among adolescents has emerged as a major social problem in contemporary society. A growing number of juveniles are exposed to substance use at an early age, often without understanding its harmful physical, psychological, and social consequences. Alcohol and drug abuse are closely associated with criminal activities such as vandalism, theft, assault, and other violent offences, indicating a strong relationship between substance abuse and juvenile delinquency.

Children raised in supportive and affectionate family environments are less likely to engage in alcohol- and drug-related crimes. In contrast, poor family conditions, lack of supervision, and association with delinquent peer groups significantly increase the risk of substance abuse among juveniles. Substance abuse not only harms the individual child but also negatively affects society at large. Since youth constitute the backbone of the nation, widespread addiction among adolescents poses a serious threat to social stability and future development.

Empirical studies support the link between substance abuse and crime. Research indicates that youths addicted to drugs are more likely to commit criminal acts than non-users (Vito, 2017). Substance abuse also increases the likelihood of involvement in serious crimes such as rape and murder. A study conducted by the Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights revealed that 100 per cent of children in conflict with the law were drug users, while 95.5 per cent of children residing in child care institutions were also found to be addicted to drugs (Sharma, 2016).

The easy availability of alcohol further worsens the problem, enabling juveniles to access intoxicants with little restriction. Once addicted, many juveniles resort to illegal means to satisfy their substance dependency. The issue is particularly alarming in Arunachal Pradesh, which has reportedly emerged as one of the regions involved in illegal opium cultivation, especially in districts such as Changlang, Longding, and Tirap. Consequently, a significant number of drug-related offences involving juveniles have been reported across various districts (Mama, 2017).

Thus, the growing nexus between alcohol, drugs, and juvenile crime calls for urgent preventive measures, including stricter enforcement, rehabilitation programmes, parental supervision, and community-based awareness initiatives.

Conclusion and Suggestions:

Juvenile delinquency requires a preventive and rehabilitative approach rather than a purely punitive one. Strengthening family support through parental awareness programmes is essential to ensure proper guidance and emotional bonding. Poverty alleviation and access to quality education can reduce children's vulnerability to crime. Schools should incorporate value education, counselling, and life-skills training to identify and support at-risk juveniles. Strict enforcement of laws against underage substance use, along with rehabilitation and de-addiction programmes, is necessary. Community-based youth engagement activities and accessible mental health services can further help in diverting juveniles from delinquent behaviour.

Juvenile delinquency is a multifaceted social problem rooted in poverty, family disintegration, negative peer influence, and substance abuse. The study reveals that juveniles often engage in crime due to adverse social and economic circumstances rather than criminal intent. Punitive measures alone are

insufficient to address the issue. A comprehensive approach involving family, education, community participation, and rehabilitative justice is essential. Addressing the root causes of juvenile delinquency will not only reduce juvenile crime but also contribute to building a safer and more responsible society.

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