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**Biological, Psychological, and
Sociological Effects on Juvenile Delinquency**

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ABSTRACT

There are a variety of factors contributing to the delinquency of juveniles. This study examined the biological, sociological, and psychological effects that may cause juvenile delinquency. This study included 60 juveniles who were incarcerated in the Calcasieu Parish Juvenile Detention Center in Louisiana from January 1, 2007 to December 31, 2008. Factors believed to be contributing to juvenile delinquency include absentee fathers, absentee mothers, domestic abuse and/or violence in the home, alcohol and/or drug use in the family, a parent who has been incarcerated, as well as siblings who have been incarcerated, the child's mental health history, and poverty. Results indicated a significant correlation between the number of risk factors and the number of violent crimes committed by the incarcerated juvenile. There was also a significant correlation between parental and sibling criminal history and the number of felonies committed by the incarcerated juvenile.

INTRODUCTION

Bad day, bad decision, broken home, empty wallet, bored. What goes through your head when you think about juvenile delinquency? Some children are labeled as “bad kids” because of their actions. In several studies, it has been proved that biological, sociological, and psychological aspects of the child’s life can contribute to the likelihood of the child becoming delinquent. This being said, it would seem that scientists could pin point the exact cause of delinquency and eliminate it. It is credible to test and research several possible causes and combination of those causes to determine which is most likely to contribute to delinquent behavior. It can be hypothesized that sociological aspects (home life, associations, involvement) of the child’s life will have a greater impact on delinquency than biological and psychological. In summation one can predict that the greater the number of risk factors playing in a juvenile’s life, the greater the number of felonies he/she will be potentially convicted of.

The criminal justice system emerged in the eighteenth century. During this time period, it was believed that a person’s biological makeup would determine whether he would become deviant. Cesare Lombroso believed in a born criminal. Lombroso created a physiological picture of what he believed a criminal looks like. Lombroso alleged that criminals were similar to primitive people. Characteristics of these people included a large forehead, large ears, highly pigmented skin, well-developed frontal sinuses, and frizzy hair (Lombroso, 1886). Another researcher during this time was Richard Dugdale. Dugdale believed that criminal behavior could be inherited genetically. He used Alfred Binet’s intelligent test to compare criminals and non-criminals. More criminals fell into a category Dugdale called feebleminded, than non-criminals (Dugdale, 1887). William Sheldon also believed that deviance could be explained through biology. Sheldon used a system known as somatotyping. Somatotyping is a way of categorizing

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body types, which he believed were more deviant than others. Sheldon found that most delinquents during the eighteenth century were of the mesomorph body type. This body type is distinguished by being muscular and large boned, with an aggressive and extraverted personality (Sheldon, 1949). Johannes Lange conducted twin studies on the subject. Lange proved that if one twin engaged in delinquent behavior there was high correlation that the other twin would as well (Lange, 1919). The works of these men proved that biology has an influence on delinquency, but has yet to be proven as the sole cause.

Researchers also took a psychological approach to explaining delinquency. William Healy examined juveniles in a psychiatric institution. Healy found that several of the juveniles had experienced emotional trauma. Healy compared these results to those of the delinquent juvenile's siblings, in which emotional trauma was not profound. Having this proof, Healy concluded that emotional trauma has an effect on the child that may cause him/her to become delinquent (Healy, 1915). Yochelson and Samenow studied the criminal personality. These men believed that criminals are born with personalities that seek excitement, have a high opinion of self, and are selfish, manipulative and amoral. These aspects of the personality affect the ability to make decisions (Yochelson & Samenow, 1976). Albert Bandura proposed the learning theory. Bandura believed that criminal behavior as well as normal behavior was learned. Juveniles learn behaviors by watching others; behaviors that are rewarded are imitated (Bandura, 1973). For instance, little John's brother makes fast money by pick pocketing and has never been caught. Little John may learn by watching his brothers that pick pocketing is an easy way to get money. If John's brother had been arrested for pick pocketing, John would have learned that pick pocketing is not a moral way to make money.

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Several sociological theories are in play when determining the cause of juvenile delinquency. Albert K. Cohen gave his ideas about juvenile subcultures. Cohen noted that most delinquent behavior is found among lower class males. Cohen saw that many lower class homes were female dominated. The father of the children were either unknown, in jail, deceased, or uninvolved. Thus, male children feel they must fulfill the male role in the home. When the male is unable to fill the position he seeks refuge among other adolescent males in similar situations. The teens develop a new set of goals and values to replace the unobtainable goals (Cohen, 1955). This idea was used by Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin. These men found that just as there was a legitimate opportunity structure to achieve goals, there is also an illegitimate opportunity structure (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960).

Children in foster home settings have also been significantly studied. In a study of African American male children in foster care, the researchers concluded that children who have been subjected to neglect and child abuse are more likely to become delinquent than the general population who were not abused or neglected (Ryan, Testa, & Zhai, 2008). The researchers found that juveniles that did not have an interest in education were uninvolved in extracurricular activities, and did not have pleasant relationships with authority figures (teacher, parent, principal) had an increased risk of becoming delinquent (Ryan et al., 2008).

METHOD

Participants

Participants in this study included 60 Juveniles incarcerated at the Calcasieu Parish Juvenile Detention Center in Louisiana from January 1, 2007 to December 31, 2008.

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Design

This study was an archival study of 60 case files of juveniles incarcerated at the Calcasieu Parish Juvenile Detention Center in Louisiana from January 1, 2007 at December 31, 2008. The two primary variables in this correlation study included Risk Score and number of felony convictions. Potential risk factors that were hypothesized to be probable causes of delinquency were reviewed. These factors included absentee parent(s), a parent or sibling with a criminal record, domestic abuse or violence, alcohol and drug use in and out of the home, the child's mental health history, association with other delinquents, and poverty. Results were analyzed using a Pearson r .

Instrument

The first author designed an instrument specifically for this study. The instrument measures risk factors that are potential causes of delinquency. Examples of risk aspects on the instrument include: "The juvenile has at least one parent who has been incarcerated at least once in his/her life" and "The juvenile has a sibling who has been incarcerated at least once in his/her life." The instrument also measures the number of felonies the juvenile has been adjudicated for (see Appendix).

Procedure

Sixty case files of juveniles who have been incarcerated at the Calcasieu Parish Police Jury Office of Juvenile Justice Services Detention Center were randomly selected. Using the prepared instrument each file was evaluated for risk factors. Risk factors were recorded (records do not include a name or any demographic variables). Each file received a numerical score that is the number of risk factors; this number was used to assess the correlation between the Risk Score

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and the number felonies the juveniles has been convicted of in his or her life. Once the information was gathered, results were analyzed using a Pearson r .

RESULTS

Risk Factors and Delinquency

In an attempt to see if there was any correlation between the number of risk factors in a juvenile's life and the number of felonies the juvenile has been convicted of, the researchers performed a Pearson r , with an alpha level of .05 set prior to performing any test. The research used an instrument to assess 60 case files. The mean number of felonies was 4.35 ($SD=1.89$), and the mean number of risk factors was 4.48 ($SD=3.89$). The Pearson r indicated a p -value of .575 and a Pearson Correlation of $-.074$. Based on these results, there is no significant evidence that supports the claim that the number of risk factors in a juvenile's life has any relationship with the number of felonies a juvenile commits.

Despite the fact that the number of risk factors was not statistically correlated with the number of felonies a juvenile committed, the researchers found two interesting relationships among the data. First, when these risk factors were present, the felonies tended to be violent crimes, such as robbery and battery. The Pearson r indicated a p -value of .02 and a Pearson Correlation r of .83. In addition, the parent and sibling criminal history was related to the number of felonies committed, $r(59df) = .79, p = .02$.

DISCUSSION

Results indicated a significant correlation between the number of risk factors and the number of violent crimes committed by the incarcerated juvenile. There was also a significant correlation between parental and sibling criminal history and the number of felonies committed

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by the incarcerated juvenile. The number of risk factors, however, was not significantly correlated with the number of felonies committed by the incarcerated juvenile.

Some of the limitations of this study include the limited sample size and single sampling frame, namely one parish in Louisiana. However, one could readily argue that the factors in this study may readily generalize to other locales.

This study is one more that illustrates the connection between risk factors for juveniles pertaining to their propensity to engage in criminal behavior, especially violent crimes.

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APPENDIX

	YES	NO
1.The juvenile has an absent mother		
2. The juvenile has an absent father		
3. The juvenile has at least one parent who has been incarcerated at least once in his/her life.		
4. The juvenile has a sibling who has been incarcerated at least once in his/her life.		
5. The juvenile has been a victim of domestic abuse or has witnessed domestic abuse		
6. The juvenile abuses drugs and/or alcohol		
7. The juvenile associates with delinquent juveniles		
8. The juvenile has been molested		
9.The juvenile has a mental disorder		
10. The juvenile a learning disability		
11. The juvenile lives in poverty		

Each “yes” counts 1 point. Combine the total number of questions answered “yes” for the score.

Score_____

Number of Felonies_____