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The Impacts of Parenting on Youth Criminality

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As the quality of an individual's childhood can be a determining factor in whether or not they become involved in perpetrating crime, it is important for society to understand how to give children the best possible upbringing. To do so, parenting must be examined to determine which actions might result in youth criminality (referred to here also as delinquency).

The manner by which parenting can result in criminality was researched through the examination of secondary data in a qualitative study. This study worked to answer whether parenting style can increase the likelihood of the child perpetrating criminal activity and, secondarily, what aspects of parenting result in delinquency.

The study initially found that delinquent behaviours can be linked to parenting styles and poor parent-child relationships. Parenting styles are categorized by either low or high levels of responsiveness and control. Low responsiveness implies that the parent does not respond promptly or adequately to the needs of the child. Conversely, control refers to what the parent does to ensure the child adheres to the demands and rules they set out. Here, the parenting styles found to cause the most occurrences of delinquency among children were neglecting parenting and, to a lesser degree, authoritarian parenting (Boshier, 2011). The neglecting parenting style is characterized by low responsiveness and low control whereas authoritarian parents exert high control and low responsiveness.

Next, poor parent-child relationships were found to be extremely detrimental to children. The strength of the bond is dependent upon the child's perceptions; the child needs to perceive positive feelings from the parent such as shared support, affection and nurturance as well as response to the child's needs. Children who do not have quality relationships with their parents can develop behavioural issues such as "the inability to show affection or concern for others, as well as aggressive tendencies" (Hoeve, Stams, Van Der Put, Dubas, Van Der Laan, & Gerris, 2012, p. 772). They might have trouble managing emotion, possess low self-confidence, aggression, hostility, depression, anxiety and are more likely to suffer from mental disorders (Mallers, Charles, Neupert, & Almeida, 2010).

Additionally, another trend evident in the literature was the damaging effects of psychological control. Specifically, it was linked to delinquency and negative behaviours such as aggression, defiance and impulsivity. Psychological control is defined by the use of psychological techniques in an attempt to control a child's behaviour. This might include manipulation such as withdrawal of love and instilling guilt (Hoeve, Dubas, Eichelsheim, Van Der Laan, Smeenk, & Gerris, 2009).

Ultimately, the best explanation for why parenting can lead to delinquency came from examining the impacts the responsiveness and control dimensions have on the parent-child relationship. Parental responsiveness was found to be necessary to build a relationship. This might imply that if the parent does not adequately respond to the child's needs, the child cannot develop the positive feelings necessary for creating a quality relationship. Similarly, psychological control can impede the relationship as it might keep the child from perceiving mutual trust and support. Again, this would interfere with the development of positive emotions necessary to create and maintain a relationship.

Structured Abstract

Introduction: As parents are the basis of a child's future behaviour and experiences, it is necessary to understand which approaches may result in delinquent (criminal) children. This study worked to answer the research question: can parenting style increase the likelihood of the child perpetrating criminal activity? Additionally, it went on to address the secondary question: what aspects of parenting result in delinquency?

Methods: The research was conducted using a qualitative approach. This approach to research was well suited for this study as it allows for the interpretation of existing data and the formation of multiple hypotheses to find meaning in social problems. Too, the integration of secondary data was selected alongside qualitative methods as recurring themes in parenting and its outcomes could be identified in previous works. This approach then allowed for these themes to be analyzed and validated through the various perspectives and opinions in past works. Data was collected through comprehensive searches of the Justice Institute of British Columbia's (JIBC) online library database and a basic online search using Google Scholar.

Results: Trends in the literature indicated that the parent-child relationship and parenting style are linked to juvenile delinquency. Specifically, poor relationships, neglectful parenting and, to a lesser degree, authoritarian parenting result in greater occurrences of criminality. The link between parenting style and parent-child relationships was drawn through the theory that certain dimensions of parenting styles can interrupt or impede the formation or development of the parent-child relationship. Specifically, psychological control can spur rebellion in children and produce negative behaviours such as aggression, defiance and impulsivity (Hoeve et al., 2009). This, along with the likelihood of distrust and ineffective communication between parents and child, would make forming a quality relationship extremely difficult.

Likewise, low responsiveness might cause the child to perceive that their parent is not warm or affectionate and does not support or care about their needs and desires. Too, the parent does not invest the time and attention required to allow there to be opportunity to bond with the child (Boshier, 2011). This theory is further backed by attachment theory which relays that responsiveness in infancy is essential for quality relationships to be formed.

Discussion: The parent-child relationship is important in avoiding juvenile criminality or delinquency. Poor relationships can result in lower self-confidence and difficulty in coping with emotion (Trzesniewski, Donnellan, Moffitt, Robins, Poulton, & Caspi, 2006). Higher rates of aggression, hostility, depression, and anxiety as well as mental disorders have been associated with children who have poor-quality relationships with their parents. Too, these children might have lower emotional intelligence (Sharma, Prakash, Sengar, Chaudhury, & Singh, 2015). These traits leave the child more vulnerable to becoming involved in criminality and many have been noted to be prevalent among offenders. This is an important consideration when exploring how future crime can be prevented.

Practical Applications: Parents and professionals working with children and families can apply this research to ensure they place adequate focus upon developing quality parent-child relationships. Actions necessary to develop and maintain relationships were highlighted in this work.

Publications/Presentations/Reports

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