

# The Impact of Parenting on Youth Criminality

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## Introduction

Should society wish to eradicate crime, we would have to begin by ensuring children have a positive upbringing (Boshier, 2011). Parents are the basis of a child’s knowledge and experiences; their input and guidance molds their child’s development and can ultimately determine how the child will behave for the entirety of its life (Boshier, 2011). This report will determine how parenting can increase the likelihood that a child will become involved in criminality and how to mitigate this phenomenon. For the purpose of this study, delinquent behaviours will be equated to criminal behaviours as this was reflected in the literature (Boshier, 2011; Dubas, Hovee, Gerris, Stams, Van Der Laan, & Van Der Put, 2012).

## Background

The research addressed the question: can parenting increase the likelihood of children perpetrating criminal activity? This research aims to conclude whether parenting can cause criminality and determine what behaviours can create this outcome. Recommendations could then be offered to avoid criminality from occurring and identify where future research should be conducted. The scope was limited to researching current data relating to parenting and its outcomes on children. This allowed for the identification of specific parenting behaviours that precipitated child delinquency.

## Methods

A qualitative design was selected for the research and secondary data was analyzed. This approach allowed for interpretations and theories to be developed from prevailing literature. To find these sources, a search of the Justice Institute of British Columbia’s (JIBC) online library database and Google Scholar was conducted for the literature review. The articles reviewed as a result of the search were compared against one another to determine common trends and themes related to approaches to parenting and child criminality.

## Results/Findings

The sources identified multiple aspects of parenting that could result in the child becoming more likely to engage in criminality. Poor parent-child relationships were shown to create delinquency (Dubas et al., 2012). Social control theory explains this as it states that persons with strong bonds to others are less likely to commit deviant acts as they seek approval from those they are bonded with (Dubas et al., 2012). On the other hand, attachment theory could be applied as it is characterized by the necessity for parental attachment in infancy, with emphasis placed upon parental responsiveness (Boshier, 2011). The relationships formed with caregivers at the start of life become the basis for all social relationships in the future. Poor parent-child relationships cause the child to develop poor social skills which could result in delinquency.

Next, parenting styles were identified to be a factor. Parenting styles are collection of behaviours and approaches a parent applies consistently, across all situations to care for and manage their child (Blokland, Dubas, Gerris, Hovee, Loeber, & Van Der Laan, 2008). The neglecting style, characterized by low responsiveness to the child’s needs and exerting low levels of control, was found to be associated with higher levels of delinquent children. Further, the authoritarian style (low responsiveness and high control) creates more delinquency compared to other styles, but not at a rate as great as neglecting parenting.

Finally, dimensions of parenting behaviours were analyzed and were of significance in increasing the likelihood of youth criminality. Control dimensions are parental behaviors that are used to restrict and limit the child; the demands placed on the child by the parent (Pinquart, 2017). The psychological control dimension (controlling the child through psychological techniques such as love withdrawal or using guilt) was associated with the high levels of juvenile delinquency (Pinquart, 2017).

## Discussion

The trends in the literature indicate that parenting styles and behaviours related to low responsiveness cause delinquency in children. This might explain why neglecting and authoritarian parenting produce higher rates of delinquency. However, the reason why authoritarian parenting causes fewer occurrences of delinquency than neglecting parenting might be explained by the control aspect of parenting styles.

It was identified in the literature that psychological parental control can cause delinquency. Therefore, children who are not subject to psychological control by authoritarian parents might constitute those who do not become delinquent; thus explaining the discrepancy in youth criminal outcomes of parenting styles characterized by low responsiveness. However, this shows that neither responsiveness nor control dimensions are sole explanations for how parenting can cause youth criminality.

Therefore, it might be the parent-child relationship that explains why neglecting and authoritarian parenting create delinquency. Perhaps it is psychological control or low responsiveness that disrupt the parent-child relationship and impedes its development. In either case, the child might perceive that they are not supported by the parent and experience fewer instances of affection and warmth (Blokland et al., 2008). It is important for the child to perceive these aspects as being present as they are key in developing a strong parent-child relationship (Blokland et al., 2008).

## Conclusions or Recommendations

Parents must take a great amount of care when selecting parenting techniques as the impact they have on their child’s future is profound (Boshier, 2011). A poor-quality childhood can lead to a myriad of problems in adulthood (Boshier, 2011). This report established that there is a link between the parenting style a child experiences and the likelihood they will become involved in criminality. Specifically, a neglecting or psychologically controlling approach to parenting results in greater occurrences of delinquent behaviours. These aspects point to the fact that the parent-child bond plays an important role in determining the likelihood of the child becoming delinquent. However, future studies should be conducted to determine the extent to which this is true.

## References

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