

## Factors Affecting Juvenile Delinquency in Bahrain

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### Abstract

Kingdom of Bahrain is an island situated in the middle of the Gulf. The discovery of oil has led to the rapid modernization of the country and its prosperity. Such factors and others affected the lifestyle of the population and the traditional societal role with the transformation from the large extended families to a nuclear one. One of the many consequences of these changes was the increase in the prevalence of juvenile delinquency. In this study, there was a trial to study this phenomenon and find out the most risk factors that may help in its occurrence. The Parental Acceptance/Rejection Questionnaire, which has been translated into Arabic and was used previously with other Arab populations, was administered to a group of 30 jailed juvenile offenders and compared to a similar cohort and number of high school students with no record of delinquency. The variables, including areas related to the family conditions, were studied comparing the two groups (the delinquent vs. non-delinquent).

The results indicate that there are relationships between juvenile delinquency and the parental demographic characteristics. More delinquent subjects had illiterate fathers (47%) ( $p < 0.05$ ) and mothers (67%), ( $p < 0.001$ ) than the non-delinquent. Fifty percent ( $n = 15$ ) of the non-delinquents reported that their fathers were professional versus 21% of the delinquents ( $p < 0.05$ ). The familial relationships, conflicts, and practices were also related to the presence of delinquency. There was a less favorable interpersonal relationship between delinquents and their parents. With regards to family practices, the delinquents scored higher (1.932) than non-delinquents (1.69), indicating that the parents of delinquents were less involved in the lives of their children. Concerning emotional conflict, it was found that the delinquents scored higher ( $M = 2.18$ ) than non-delinquents ( $M = 1.68$ ); indicating more conflict was happening between their parents.

In conclusion, the risks of developing delinquency in juveniles were found to be very much related to the parental interpersonal relationships, their demographic characteristics and the socioeconomic status of the family.

**Keywords:** Delinquency; Family relation; Juvenile care center; Culture

### Introduction

Delinquency is a complex condition that has many interwoven causes. Thus, inadequate and misunderstood theories were given in explaining the reasons for its occurrence [1,2].

Einat and Herzog stated that there could be a cultural reason for the juvenile delinquency phenomenon [3]. However, it has been reported that children who are mistreated or rejected by either father or mother are at a substantial risk of being delinquent. Children, who have experienced abuse of all sorts such as physical and emotional are at greater risk of developing anti-social behaviors [4].

Most of the studies on delinquency have been done in Western countries; conversely little was done in Bahrain and other Arab Gulf states leaving the problem of delinquency poorly understood [1,2]. On the other hand studies reported that variables linked to delinquency are related to family conditions which include: family warmth, family relations, emotional conflict, and family practice [2,5,6]. It is reported that children are vulnerable to commit serious crimes if they belong to mothers with mental disorders as families remain to be the primary socialization agents for the development of moral values and ethical standards in children and youth [7,8].

The traditional family structure in Bahrain has been patriarchal and strict [6]. Modernization, however, has changed this structure. The status of women in Arab countries, in general, has remained with tradition, but the vast increase in wealth made many Bahraini males independent from their families. Although wealth can provide more economic opportunities, it also may create more conflicts within families [6,9,10].

Numerous studies have shown that delinquency tends to occur more frequently in young people who come from families with unhealthy relationship patterns [10-12]. Also, parents of problem youngsters differ from the parents of normal children in that the latter is more punitive and disciplinary [6,13]. Abnormal behavior of delinquent children is usually not discovered early by their parents. Hence, they are more liable to have an impact on the continuity of this negative behavior, giving more vague commands and being less efficient in controlling their children's behavior. Rekker et al. affirmed such findings, when they reported that delinquency is related to the socioeconomic status of the family [14]. While delinquent behavior predicts future heavy drinking behavior in adolescence [15], delinquent children do not perform well in their education and are more prone to commit crimes [16]. Hoge et al. in 1994 while testing the hypotheses for the prediction of occurrence of delinquency stated "there is a general support for a model implicating family, peer, and attitudinal variables in youthful criminal activity" [17]. While the absence of love and affection, family warmth and lack of strong family ties could lead to various delinquent and conduct disorders in children [10,18,19]. Moreover, single parenting which is not a common

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phenomenon in Bahrain is associated with greater psychological tensions among the child [11,12]. Loneliness experienced by the single parent and his/her inability to provide loving environment can lead to serious maladjustments in the personality development of the children. Parents who themselves had experienced disturbed family conditions dominated by fighting and mixed with hate and aggression that leads to family break-ups would show less physical and verbal warmth towards their children [12,18]. Weak interpersonal relationships among family members could be dramatic leading to an increase in conduct disorder [11,19,20]. The migration of families from rural to urban areas has led to weakened parental authority that may lead to less direct and effective supervision of their children. Rejected children are also prone to become resentful or angry from their parents, as well as fearful of more and more rejection and abandonment, thereby causing their emotional withdrawal and detachment from parents. Family practices such as lack of parental supervision, lack of crisis resolution strategies, and "smother love" shown toward the child, have also been found to be associated with delinquency [19,21,22]. It is reported that instability within the family and pressure from companions has increased influence on juvenile delinquency of girls [23].

Several familial factors that may affect the delinquency behavior in adolescents include:

**Family warmth** - It has been shown that lack of parental warmth and affection and tensions in the family that happens before, during, or after family break-ups, can have a lasting effect on the psychological well-being of children [18,24,25]. Research has shown that children, who lack physical and verbal affection from family members such as cuddling, praising, or playing with the child, may become vulnerable to serious conduct disorder or even associated with substance abuse [26].

**Family disputes** - fighting and marital conflicts not only lead to marital disintegration, but also to parents' loss of affection and emotional avoidance of their children [19,20]. It is found that the delinquent acts are more prevalent in families having conflict. Such families do not usually show love and warmth towards their children. Specifically, tense family situations are associated with a lack of parent-child love and care, less expressed approval of the child's behavior, less play time with children, less enjoyment, comforting, consoling, cuddling and praising. The respect shown by parents could be an influential component protecting children from developing delinquency [27]. It is shown that warm family relationships and positive parental practices are highly associated with the overall psychological health of children. Moreover, warm and positive relationships between the parents and their children can help the later adjusting to their environment [28].

**Family Relations** - This has several aspects which include: (a) interactions among members of the family, especially between parents and their children; (b) parental practices; (c) marital aggression, expressed in verbal and physical abuse; (d) parental discipline [10-12].

A study reported that child abuse can have a serious effect on his/her adolescent years [29]. According to Gover, the relationship between child abuse and the frequency of violent offending was mediated by social risk factors [30]. Hostile treatment and yelling at and threatening the child is also related to delinquency. Harsh discipline in Bahraini families, including the use of severe corporal punishment, could be related to delinquency. The parents of delinquents did not typically use verbal explanations, reasoning and withdrawal of privileges. Rejection by the preferred parent or threat of rejection can lead to delinquency. In many cases, the child is neglected by either the father or the mother. It would not be easy for the child to consider his father as a role model

if he was rejected by him. Mothers additionally, may impose stringent restrictions on a child's behavior and then leave him in the hands of a neglectful father who fails to follow through.

Apparently, either extreme of parent behavior, controlling or rejection and neglect, may be associated with delinquency. The parents of delinquents may be more restrictive, demanding of conformity, and less affectionate. Thus, it may be related to parental over control, as well as to neglect and rejection [9,10].

### Family Practices

There are four characteristics of families that are related to delinquency [19,22,25].

1. No rules related to parental expectations of the adolescent and what he/ she should or should not do.
2. Poor parental supervision, so that parents are not entirely aware of what the teenager is doing or experiencing.
3. A weak contingency system for rewards for good behavior or punishment for bad behavior. Such action leads to too many punishments for bad behavior and no reward for good behavior.
4. Poor crisis resolution strategies so that problems remain unresolved, creating a state of prolonged tension between the adolescent and his parents.

**Emotional conflict** - A study showed that children's insecurity about family and community is considered important if we have to improve the child's well-being and the inception of delinquent behavior [31].

This study was done with the main purpose of finding out the differences between delinquents and non-delinquents as far as family issues are concerned.

### Method

This is a case-control study where two groups of adolescent males were studied; one included thirty boys selected randomly from 266 delinquents in a juvenile care center of Bahrain and the other contained thirty boys selected randomly from two high schools which are geographically distant from each other. The second group acts as a control for the research.

A data sheet constituting of three sections was used. One part was dealing with the subject himself. Another section was for the father's status and the third to collect information about his mother's status. The sheet also contained for the collection of demographic data which included age, level of education of the subject, the occupational and educational levels of each parent, the father's number of wives, and in the case of the delinquent, the reasons he is confined at the juvenile center.

The measuring instrument used for delinquency information was the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ) which is based on a socialization theory that identifies various family conditions that can affect the children behaviorally, emotionally, and psychologically and classifies parents on a continuum between acceptance and rejection [32]. Accepting parents tend to be warm and loving towards their children. Rejecting parents turn towards abuse, emotional distance, and hostility. The PARQ was constructed to be usable cross-culturally. A survey done cross-culturally showed that most of the family conditions were the principal manifestations of the acceptance-rejection process. Three considerations were involved in developing it. For the PARQ validity, the following were ensured:

- The scales have universal applicability
- The terms within each of the scales should have universal applicability
- The phraseology of the items is aimed at universal comprehension with a standard American English

The PARQ had two versions, an Adult, and a Child form. The forms differ only in whether the items refer to the past or the present relationships with a parent. The adult subject's response concerning his past relation when he was a child; or adolescents responds to his current relationships with a parent. Since the juvenile subjects were not living with their parents at the time of the study, they were administered the past-tense Adult form. The control subjects, all of whom were living with parents, were administered the Child form. Upon experimentation with the Adult form it was discovered that there were no significant age or sex differences found in the adult responses to the instrument. Likewise, no significant age or sex differences were found in the children's answers to the instrument. To test the reliability of the PARQ, Cronbach's coefficient alpha was used. High alpha indicated that all items in the scale are sampling the same content. Thus, the PARQ showed strong psychometric properties.

In this study, the subject can refer either to his father or mother or any other principal caretaker. They are instructed to ask themselves if any item is true or false about the ways their mothers treat(ed) them. If the statement is true, they are asked if the is/was "almost always true" or "sometimes true". If the declarations are basically untrue, then they are asked if the statement is/was "rarely true" or "almost never true."

Permission for implementing the study among the control group was granted from the Bahrain Ministry of Education and copies of the instrument as well as the purpose of the study were clarified and presented in the Arabic language to them. A random sample of subjects was selected, using a simple random procedure, from two secondary schools; one from the capital Manama and the other from the large city of Muharraq. Students were assured of the confidentiality of the study and the collected information.

Additional information that might help in the study was obtained from the school authorities and social workers. None of the students had records of delinquency, nor did their families. Most of the students belonged to the lower and middle social class, which was representative of the school population.

For the delinquent adolescents, permission to enter the juvenile care center was granted by the relevant authorities. Thirty juveniles were randomly selected from the population. All the subjects were Bahraini males who had been convicted for one or more offenses. The purpose of the study was thoroughly explained to them by the social worker who was always present during the process of study conduction and were assured about the confidentiality of the gathered information. Since the majority of the delinquents were illiterate, the questionnaire was administered orally and individually which helped to gain the children's confidence.

### Ethical consideration

Approval for conducting the study was obtained from various related bodies. Verbal consent was taken from the participants and their parents who were ensured that all possible measures were taken to maintain the confidentiality of the collected information and the participants' identity will be obscured.

## Results

### Demographic characteristics

The family status was treated in terms of the marital status and the demographic characteristics of the parents. Table 1 shows the main characteristic differences between the two groups. The mean age of the delinquents was 17 and for the non-delinquents 18. There was a difference in the size of their families; the delinquents had more siblings than non-delinquent. Also, the fathers of twenty (70%) delinquents had more than one wife in comparison to only two (7%) of the delinquents. More delinquent subjects (n=26) than non-delinquents (n=14) came from the rural areas. The parents of two delinquent children were separated, and three were divorced, but none of the parents in the non-delinquent families were divorced or separated. There was a significant difference in the level of the father's occupation (chi-square of 6.04633,  $p < .05$ ). Fifty percent (n=15) of the non-delinquents reported that their fathers were professional versus 21% of the delinquents.

Almost half of the fathers of the delinquent subjects (n=14 or 47%) were illiterate in comparison to only three fathers (10%) of the non-delinquent. This finding was statistically significant (chi-square of 11.94705,  $p < 0.05$ ). The same finding was found in relation to the mother's level of education. Mothers of the delinquent subjects were

Area	Delinquent	%	Non-delinquent	%
	Frequency		Frequency	
Area				
Urban	4	13	15	52
Rural	26	87	14	48
Father marital status				
Married currently to subject's mother	10	33	26	87
Married to more one wife	20	67	2	6.7
Deceased	0	0	2	6.7
Father Education				
High School	2	6.7	3	10
less than high school	2	6.7	4	13
Can read & write	10	33	13	43
Illiterate	14	47	3	10
Father's Occupation				
Professional	6	21	15	52
Non-professional	23	79	14	48
Father's Employment				
Employed	17	57	26	90
Unemployed	13	43	3	10
Mother's marital status				
-Married	20	67	28	93
-Separated	2	6.7	0	0
-Widowed	4	13	2	6.7
-Divorced	3	10	0	0
-Deceased	1	3.3	0	0
Mother's Education				
-High school	2	6.7	1	3.3
-Less than high school	2	6.7	3	10
-Can read & write	2	6.7	14	47
-Reads Quran only	4	13	7	23
-Illiterate	20	67	5	17

Table 1: Some of the demographic characteristics of the two groups.

mostly illiterate (67%), in comparison to 47% of the mothers of the non-delinquent (chi-square 19.35152 (p<0.001)).

### Family conditions

The PARQ examined four areas related to the family condition; family warmth, family relations, family practices, and emotional conflicts. The choices on each item of the PARQ were weighted as follows: always, sometimes, rarely and never. For areas related to family warmth, the scale considered a higher score for more warmth. But in factors related to family relationships, the higher score meant worse family relationships. Also, for variables related to family practices, a higher score would represent negative family practice. The same was applied to the questions that were related to emotional conflicts, and a higher score would mean more emotional conflict.

The t-test findings (Table 2) suggested that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of the delinquents and non-delinquents in family warmth. And there was no significant difference between the delinquents and non-delinquents with regards to family relationships. The mean score of the delinquents (2.13) was higher than the mean score of the non-delinquents (1.72) in family relations, indicating a less favorable interpersonal relationship between delinquents and their parents. With regards to family practices, the delinquents scored higher (1.932) than non-delinquents (1.69), indicating that the parents of delinquents were less involved in the lives of their children.

About emotional conflict, it was found that the delinquents scored higher (M=2.18) than non-delinquents (M=1.68); indicating more conflict.

### Discussion

Bahrain is a rapidly modernizing Gulf state whose prosperity from oil revenues has been accompanied with many challenges to the traditional family values that might have led to various stresses to the family members, especially adolescents. It is assumed that juvenile delinquency may have been one of the outcomes of such stress [32]. The Kingdom still maintains frequent social connections among members of extended families which provide emotional support to the family members. However, it seems to have diminished considerably over time. However, the country offers attractive settings to investigate certain conditions associated with the delinquency problem.

This study compared the family conditions of some incarcerated juvenile male offenders with a similar age group of secondary school students who had no history records of arrest. The PARQ which measures differences on four family variables; family warmth, family relations, family practices and emotional conflicts was used. The study suggested a significant difference between both the delinquent and the non-delinquent groups on all but the family warmth. Similar findings were reported in other studies [4,20]. The quality of communications, discipline, and aspects of care related to the parent-child relationship

were found to be superior in the non-delinquent families compared to the delinquent group. A finding that has been supported by other investigators [19,20]. It seems that rapid modernization has markedly influenced the family relationships, practices and the traditional paternalistic approach of the extended family structure in the country [19,20]. Our findings on family practices showed that families of non-delinquents have adapted more successfully to cultural changes than the other group.

The lesser degree of emotional conflict with their parents reported by the non-delinquents appears to be a natural accompaniment to the superior quality of relations and practices they portray in their families. Along with the prosperity and improved economic and social opportunities, the stresses associated with rapid changes in patterns of work and family life could have harmful consequences on inter-familial relationships. Under such conditions, conflicts between parents and their children could inevitably become more intense. Hence, rejection, emotional hurt, cut-offs, alienation and anti-social conduct are the likely outcomes. The families of the non-delinquents seem more congenial in this regard, probably as consequences of their more successful adaptation, already noted, to changing economic and socio-cultural conditions. The higher degree of parental conflict reported by the delinquents is consistent with other published studies [4,20,23].

### Conclusion and Recommendations

It is concluded that family conditions can determine importantly whether or not a young male is at risk of having delinquent behavior and ultimately being convicted as a juvenile offender. However, the study's findings cannot be generalized to other countries because of the limited sample size, and the familial factors are limited to Bahrain that is considered a developing country and may not be compared to the industrialized countries.

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Variable	Delinquent			Non-delinquent			t-test
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	
Family warmth	30	3.15	0.41	30	3.35	0.48	1.77
Family relations	30	2.13	0.45	30	1.72	0.52	-3.19**
Family practices	30	1.93	0.46	30	1.69	0.36	-2.28*
Emotional conflict	30	2.18	0.55	30	1.55	0.41	-4.17***
	*p<0.05			**p<0.01			***p<0.001

Table 2: Test of hypotheses about family conditions.

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