



Impact of Family Background and Socioeconomic Status on Juvenile Delinquency: A Sociological Study

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Date of Submission: 14-02-2026

Date of Acceptance: 27-02-2026

Abstract: Juvenile delinquency has become a serious social problem, attracting the attention of sociologists worldwide. This issue has long-term negative consequences for society. Through this study, the multidimensional impact of juvenile delinquency concerning family structure, economic conditions, and parental education levels has been explored. For this purpose, 100 juvenile delinquents from Rewa city, India, were selected. The results of the study clearly indicate that the breakdown of the joint family system, excessive parental affection, poverty, parental occupation, and low levels of education are the major contributing factors to juvenile delinquency. This study will play an essential role in future planning and policymaking for juvenile delinquency prevention and will serve as a guide for researchers.

Keywords: Juvenile delinquency, family structure, poverty, family occupation, criminal behavior, education, affection

I. Introduction:

Juvenile delinquency is a complex social issue involving illegal acts by minors that violate laws and societal norms. It is influenced by factors such as family dynamics, peer pressure, and socio-economic conditions. A major cause is reduced parental involvement due to modern, busy lifestyles, which leads to poor communication and supervision, making children more susceptible to negative influences and delinquent behavior (Merdovic & Jovanović, 2024; Najamudin, 2024). Strong family relationships and effective communication are crucial in preventing delinquent behavior. Families that provide emotional support and set clear boundaries can significantly reduce delinquency rates (Najamudin, 2024). Adolescents are highly susceptible to peer influence, which can lead them to engage in criminal activities to fit in or gain acceptance (Siouti et al., 2024). Furthermore, economic instability and a lack of community resources can exacerbate juvenile delinquency, as

children may resort to alternative means to meet their needs (Raturi & Rastogi, 2022). One of the key contributors to this issue is the erosion of effective parental involvement. In many cases, the fast-paced and demanding nature of modern life limits the time and attention parents can devote to their children, resulting in weakened communication, reduced supervision, and a lack of emotional support. Such circumstances can leave young individuals vulnerable to negative external influences, increasing the likelihood of delinquent behavior.

Every society faces various social problems, and the growing rate of juvenile delinquency is one of them. Crime is a learned behavior that harms both the individual and society. Adolescence is a transitional phase between childhood and adulthood, filled with enthusiasm, passion, and curiosity. This stage requires maximum moral guidance (Singh, 2022), but due to the increasing pursuit of material comforts, parents are becoming so busy that they do not have time to communicate with their children (Singh, 2022). As a result, these delicate children come into contact with criminals and individuals with negative influences, violating social norms and legal regulations, ultimately turning towards crime (Singh & Chaturvedi, 2021).

Thus, juvenile delinquency refers to criminal activities committed by children and adolescents, which are considered socially and legally unacceptable. These actions go against established social values and norms, making juvenile delinquency a complex social issue that not only affects individuals but also disrupts the entire social fabric (Georges, 2009), destroying the future generations like a termite infestation. Today, juvenile delinquency is referred to by various names, including child delinquency, juvenile crime, and youth crime.

The family is the primary social unit for children, shaping their values, beliefs, and behaviors from birth (Kumar & Sangwan, 2024; Mwangangi,



2019). Within this environment, children learn social interactions, emotional exchanges, norms, and expectations (Kumar & Sangwan, 2024). Hence, the family is the most important primary unit of society. The relationship between family structure and child upbringing is deeply interconnected. The study of family structure and criminal behavior has been ongoing for over a century. In the early 20th century, social reformers Sophonisba Breckinridge and Edith Abbott pioneered this study with their book *The Delinquent Child and the Home*. Scholars believe that family structure has a significant and direct influence on criminal behavior (Hoffmann, 2023). Family dysfunction affects behavioral disorders in children, as families that lack moral values and have poor or conflict-ridden relationships tend to disregard social norms (Holdorovna & Temirpulatovich, 2023). A lack of communication and emotional bonding between parents and children impacts their lives (Oladipo, 2023). Thus, insecure parenting and family conflicts are responsible for juvenile delinquency (Bello, 2023).

In India, the rate of juvenile crime is higher than in other countries due to factors such as lack of education, poverty, unemployment, lack of parental supervision, parenting styles, family conflicts, high divorce rates, and broken families (Gupta et al., 2015; S. Verma, 2021). Two major factors in child-rearing that contribute to juvenile delinquency are harsh and inconsistent discipline combined with poor supervision (Farrington & Malvaso, 2023). When children experience harsh treatment from both society and family, their tendency towards criminal behavior increases (Lin et al., 2023).

Frederick Douglass' statement, "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men," highlights the significance of addressing the root

causes of juvenile delinquency. According to him, rehabilitating broken individuals is a difficult and complex task requiring substantial resources and effort. Therefore, children and adolescents should be nurtured in a way that prevents them from engaging in criminal activities, thereby increasing their likelihood of making a positive contribution to society (Choubey et al., 2023). Strengthening family functionality and promoting positive youth development can help prevent juvenile involvement in criminal activities (Shek et al., 2022).

Thus, juvenile delinquency is a serious and complex social issue that requires an in-depth analysis from psychological, sociological, and familial perspectives (Joshi et al., 2022). Without studying the family background and environment of juvenile delinquents, it is impossible to understand the root causes of crime.

Objectives of the Study:

- To understand the family structure of juveniles
- To investigate the economic and occupational status of juvenile offenders' families
- To assess the educational level of parents

II. Research Methodology:

For this study, juvenile offenders from Rewa city, India, were selected through a convenient sampling method. Data were collected from the Juvenile Observation Home, Rewa, and the Juvenile Justice Board, Rewa, which houses offenders from Satna, Shahdol, Sidhi, Singrauli, and Rewa. The study prioritized these juveniles for analysis. Additionally, juveniles appearing before the Child Welfare Committee and the Juvenile Board in Rewa were included in the study.

Sample Description:

Table - 1

No.	Study Area	Identified Juvenile Delinquents	Selected Juvenile Delinquents
1	Juvenile Observation Home, Rewa	100	85
2	Child Welfare Committee & Juvenile Board, Rewa	22	15
	Total	122	100

To maintain the study's focus, 100 out of 122 identified juvenile delinquents were selected through purposive sampling. Necessary permissions, both written and verbal, were obtained from the respective institutions and parents of the juveniles for interviews and discussions. Secondary sources,

including research papers, books, and websites, were used to supplement the study.

III. Findings and Analysis:

The classification and analysis of data obtained through interviews and parental discussions were crucial for this research. The



collected data were categorized, tabulated, and analyzed using pie charts, diagrams, and bar graphs to establish causal relationships. Through an in-depth examination, the study attempts to determine the connection between family background and delinquent tendencies.

Classification and Analysis of Data:

The classification and analysis of data has been a crucial component of the present research. Based on the interview schedules and discussions conducted with the parents, the collected information from the respondents was systematically categorized and organized into tabular form. This classification was intended to enhance clarity and facilitate a more effective analysis of the data. Subsequently, a detailed examination of the causes of juvenile delinquency was undertaken, with a specific focus on understanding the familial background and its influence on the development of delinquent tendencies. To ensure linguistic coherence and academic fluency throughout the paper, assistance and Translate from Open Ai ChatGPT was utilized. Additionally, Mendeley software was employed for reference management and citation organization.

The Role of Family in Juvenile Delinquency: A Foundational Influence

The family plays an indispensable role in the holistic development of a child. It is within the nurturing environment of the family that a child begins to shape their identity and character. Auguste Comte, the father of sociology, aptly described the family as the “immortal school of social life,” for it is the first institution where a child steps into the world and begins the lifelong journey of socialization. Here, the child learns not just to walk, talk, and sit, but also to internalize fundamental social and moral values.

Although the family is a universal institution, its structure and functioning vary significantly across cultures. Yet, regardless of cultural differences, the family's influence on a child's mental, emotional, and behavioral development is profound. A weak or dysfunctional family structure often becomes the vulnerable link through which a child may gravitate toward deviant or delinquent behavior. As (Edwin H. CRESSEY, 1978) observed, when the family fails in its foundational responsibilities, it opens the door for children to violate social and legal norms. Thus, the family remains the most crucial institution responsible for nurturing and guiding children toward positive social behavior.

The Impact of Family Status on Juvenile Delinquency-

Family status, including its economic, structural, and relational dimensions, plays a central role in determining the behavioral trajectory of children and adolescents. A wealth of research underscores how socioeconomic conditions, family structure, and parenting styles create an environment that either discourages or enables juvenile delinquency.

1. Socioeconomic Status: Economic conditions are one of the most decisive factors in shaping youth behavior. Children from low-income families are at a disproportionately higher risk of engaging in delinquent activities. The lack of access to adequate education, healthcare, and recreational opportunities often pushes them toward crime as a means of survival or expression. According to (Sun & Wang, 2023), low socioeconomic status is a strong predictor of juvenile delinquency. Furthermore, economic hardships such as poverty and parental unemployment create stress and instability within the household, often compelling youth to deviate from lawful behavior (Md. Zahidul Islam et al., 2024).

2. Family Structure: The structure and cohesiveness of the family unit also significantly impact a child's propensity for delinquency. Research shows that children raised in non-intact families such as those undergoing divorce, separation, or single-parenting are more susceptible to behavioral problems and criminal activities.(Mansourabadi et al., 2014) and (Zakaria et al., 2022) both highlight a strong correlation between broken families and youth delinquency. Furthermore, environments plagued by domestic violence, substance abuse, or parental neglect further escalate the risk, fostering emotional trauma and antisocial tendencies in children (Mwangangi, 2019).

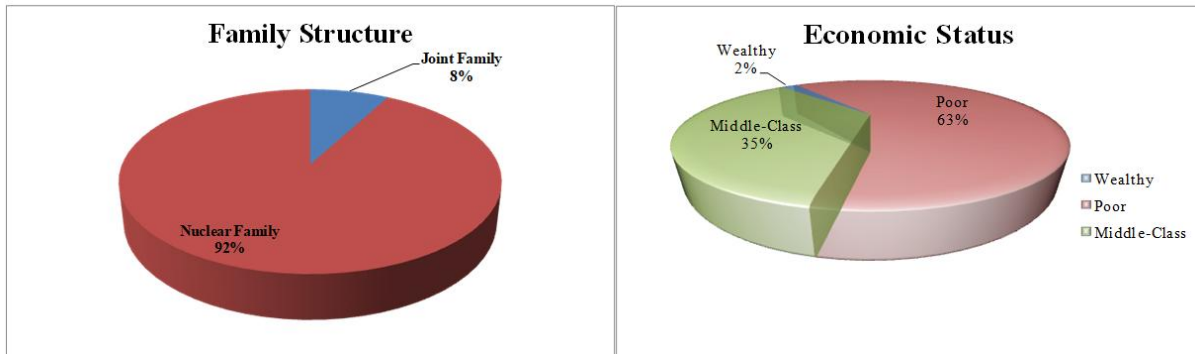
3. Parenting Styles: The manner in which children are parented is another critical factor. Permissive or laissez-faire parenting marked by a lack of supervision, emotional neglect, and absence of clear boundaries has been linked to higher rates of juvenile offenses (Sun & Wang, 2023). On the contrary, consistent parental involvement, emotional support, and structured discipline act as powerful protective factors against delinquency. Islam et al. (2024) argue that the absence of adequate supervision and communication is among the leading contributors to delinquent behavior in minors.

Beyond the Family: A Complex Social Web



While the family undeniably forms the bedrock of a child's social development, some scholars urge a broader view. (Zakaria et al., 2022) emphasize that juvenile delinquency cannot be attributed solely to family-related factors. Instead, a complex web of influences including peer

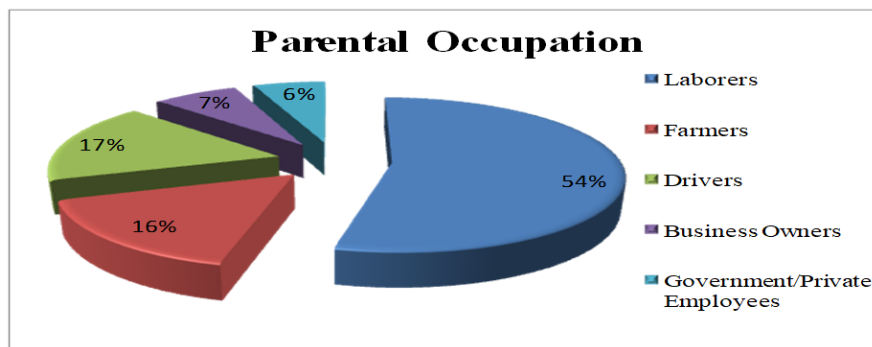
relationships, school environment, neighborhood conditions, and community resources must also be considered. These external influences often interact with familial dynamics, making the roots of delinquency multifaceted and layered.



The chart indicates that 92% of juvenile delinquents belong to nuclear families, whereas only 8% come from joint families. This suggests that the breakdown of the joint family system and the rise of nuclear families contribute to juvenile delinquency. The findings show that 63% of juvenile delinquents

come from poor families, whereas only 2% belong to wealthy households.

The study indicates that children from laborer families are at the highest risk of becoming juvenile delinquents due to parental absence and lack of supervision.



IV. Result:

1. Family Structure and Juvenile Delinquency

Findings: 92% of juvenile delinquents belong to nuclear families, while only 8% come from joint families.

The breakdown of the joint family system has contributed to a lack of supervision and social control, leading to delinquent behavior.

Social Disorganization Theory (Shaw & McKay, 1942) states that weakened social structures, such as disorganized families, contribute to crime. The decline of the joint family system reduces collective supervision, leaving children vulnerable to negative influences. The absence of strong family bonds makes juveniles more prone to deviant peer influences.

2. Parental Presence and Supervision

Findings: 81% of juvenile delinquents have both parents alive, yet they engage in criminal activities.

Only 1% of delinquents have lost both parents, while 10% live with only their mother and 8% with only their father.

Lack of parental involvement and supervision, rather than just parental absence, plays a key role in delinquency.

Differential Association Theory (Sutherland, 1939) suggests that criminal behavior is learned through interactions with others. Lack of parental guidance increases association with delinquent peer groups, leading to criminal behavior. Juveniles imitate



criminal behavior when they lack positive role models at home.

Implication: Parents must actively engage with their children's upbringing and monitor their social circles to prevent delinquency.

3. Economic Status and Delinquency

Findings: 63% of juvenile delinquents come from poor families, while 35% belong to middle-class families, and only 2% come from wealthy backgrounds. Poverty and financial struggles force juveniles to seek alternative means for survival, often leading to crime. Strain Theory (Merton, 1938) Merton's Strain Theory argues that individuals turn to crime when they cannot achieve societal goals through legitimate means. Poverty prevents access to education, job opportunities, and social mobility, leading to frustration and criminal behavior. Juveniles engage in theft, drug dealing, and violence to compensate for their economic struggles.

Implication: Providing economic support and opportunities for underprivileged families can reduce juvenile delinquency.

4. Parental Occupation and Delinquency

Findings: 54% of juvenile delinquents come from families where parents work as laborers, indicating a lack of parental supervision. Other occupational backgrounds: Drivers (17%), Farmers (16%), Business Owners (7%), Government/Private Employees (6%) Parents working in low-income or labor-intensive jobs struggle to supervise and discipline their children, increasing delinquency risk.

Social Disorganization Theory: Parental absence due to labor-intensive jobs weakens social control, increasing the likelihood of delinquency.

Strain Theory: Juveniles may turn to crime as an alternative means of achieving economic success, especially in families with unstable incomes.

Implication: Policies promoting job security, work-life balance, and parental involvement programs can help reduce crime rates.

5. Parental Education and Delinquency

Findings: 60% of juvenile delinquents have illiterate parents, while 20% have parents educated only up to the primary level. Only 1% of parents are postgraduates, and their children are less likely to engage in criminal activities. The study confirms that low parental education is a key risk factor in juvenile delinquency.

Illiterate parents may lack awareness of child supervision, discipline, and positive socialization.

Uneducated parents fail to provide academic motivation, leading juveniles to drop out of school and engage in crime. Children of educated parents are less likely to be delinquent due to better guidance and opportunities.

Implication: Improving adult literacy programs and parental education can significantly impact juvenile crime reduction.

V. Conclusion:

The study highlights that juvenile delinquency is not solely an individual issue but a structural problem influenced by family dynamics, economic conditions, and education.

Social Disorganization Theory explains how broken family structures and weak supervision contribute to crime.

Strain Theory highlights how poverty and lack of opportunities push juveniles into crime. Differential Association Theory shows that crime is learned through social interactions, especially in the absence of parental guidance.

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