
A STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF FAMILY ENVIRONMENT ON JUVENILES IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW: A CRIMINAL PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE

Dr. Sangita Hazarika, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Legal Studies,
Arunachal University of Studies, Namsai, Arunachal Pradesh. (India)

Mr. Subhajit Kanu, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Legal Studies,
Arunachal University of Studies, Namsai, Arunachal Pradesh. (India)

ABSTRACT

Family relationships provide an important context in which children develop patterns of conduct, emotional responses, values, and ways of dealing with conflict. The present study examines how the family setting is associated with delinquent behaviour among juveniles in conflict with the law, with particular attention to psychological processes. Factors considered include parental monitoring, family conflict, neglect, communication, discipline, emotional support, domestic violence, substance misuse, and socioeconomic circumstances. The study uses a mixed-method design, combining structured questionnaires, interviews, observation, and, where ethically appropriate, psychological assessment. Secondary material includes scholarly works, government publications, National Crime Records Bureau material, and relevant juvenile justice records subject to permission. The quantitative component examines respondents' perceptions through Likert-scale items, while qualitative information is intended to provide contextual understanding of their experiences. The findings reported in this paper show high agreement that psychological characteristics and family conditions are related to juvenile delinquent behaviour. Emotional instability received the strongest agreement among the psychological items, while positive family relationships received the strongest agreement among the family-environment items. The study also recognises that juvenile delinquency is multidimensional and cannot be explained by family circumstances alone. The findings support family-focused counselling, early identification of risk, constructive parental supervision, psychological support, rehabilitation and reintegration measures.

Keywords: juvenile delinquency; family environment; criminal psychology; parenting; family conflict; rehabilitation.

1. Introduction

Juvenile delinquency is both a social concern and a matter of juvenile justice. The behaviour of a young person is shaped through several interacting influences, including individual psychological characteristics, peers, school experiences, economic conditions and the wider community. Among these influences, the family occupies a distinctive position because it is normally the child's earliest and most continuous social environment. Through everyday interaction, children learn expectations concerning authority, responsibility, emotional expression, conflict resolution and acceptable conduct.

A constructive home environment can provide security, guidance and opportunities for healthy emotional development. In contrast, persistent conflict, neglect, inconsistent discipline, weak supervision, domestic violence, substance misuse and poor parent-child communication may create conditions associated with behavioural difficulties. From a criminal-psychology perspective, repeated exposure to adverse experiences may affect emotional regulation, decision-making, coping responses and the way a young person interprets social situations.

The family should not, however, be treated as the sole explanation for offending. Juvenile behaviour emerges from a combination of personal, relational and environmental influences. Accordingly, this study considers the family environment alongside psychological factors and recognises the contribution of peer, educational, socioeconomic and community contexts.

2. Statement of the Problem

Despite legal reforms and rehabilitation-oriented approaches, juvenile offending continues to require attention from the justice system and social institutions. Much of the discussion of juvenile delinquency has focused on legal, social or economic explanations, whereas the psychological pathways through which family experiences may be connected with delinquent conduct require further contextual examination. Understanding the relationship between family interaction and juvenile behaviour can assist in designing prevention, counselling and rehabilitation measures that respond to the young person's circumstances rather than relying only on punitive responses. The present study therefore examines family-related influences and psychological factors associated with delinquent behaviour among juveniles in conflict with the law.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. To identify psychological factors associated with delinquent behaviour among juveniles.
2. To examine the association between parenting style and juvenile offending.
3. To assess the influence of family conflict, parental neglect, and parental supervision on juvenile behaviour.
4. To propose preventive and rehabilitative measures in light of the study findings.

4. Research Questions

1. Which psychological factors are associated with delinquent behaviour among juveniles?
2. What relationship can be observed between parenting style and juvenile offending?
3. To what extent are family conflict and parental supervision associated with juvenile delinquency?
4. What family-based interventions may contribute to the prevention and rehabilitation of juvenile offending?

5. Significance of the Study

The study contributes to the criminal-psychology dimension of research on juvenile justice by examining family conditions together with psychological factors. Its findings may be useful to psychologists, social workers, educators, juvenile justice institutions, and policymakers when developing family-oriented prevention and rehabilitation strategies. The study also highlights the importance of strengthening family relationships, improving parental awareness and supervision, and providing appropriate psychological assistance to young people in conflict with the law.

6. Scope of the Study

The study focuses on juveniles in conflict with the law and examines the relationship between their family circumstances and delinquent behaviour from a criminal-psychology perspective. The principal areas considered are parenting practices, family relationships, parental

monitoring, communication, domestic violence, socioeconomic conditions and emotional support. The empirical component is limited to the selected institutions and participants included in the study, and the findings should therefore be interpreted within that geographical and sample context.

7. Review of Literature

Albert Bandura (1977): Bandura's Social Learning Theory provides a psychological explanation for the acquisition of behaviour through observation, imitation and reinforcement. Applied to juvenile behaviour, the theory suggests that children may learn aggressive or antisocial responses by observing people who have influence over them, including parents and other close role models. The family can thus serve either as a setting in which prosocial conduct is reinforced or one in which harmful behaviour is repeatedly modelled.

Travis Hirschi (1969): Hirschi's Social Control Theory places emphasis on the strength of social bonds. Attachment to parents, commitment to accepted values, involvement in conventional activities and belief in social rules can restrain deviant behaviour. From this perspective, weak family attachment and limited parental involvement may reduce informal social controls that otherwise discourage delinquency.

Michael Rutter and David Quinton (1984): Rutter and Quinton examined the consequences of parental psychiatric disorder for children and highlighted the importance of family instability and associated stressors. Their work is relevant to the present study because persistent family difficulties may create emotional and behavioural pressures that affect children's adjustment.

Shriya Vashisht (2019/2022): Research on children in conflict with law has examined the role of family environment, self-concept and personal values. The literature indicates that supportive family conditions can be associated with healthier self-perceptions and values, whereas unstable family circumstances may coincide with behavioural difficulties.

José Antonio Andrés-Pueyo et al. (2019): The systematic review of environmental and situational perspectives on juvenile delinquency emphasises that offending is affected by contextual conditions. Parental supervision and community-level influences are among the environmental dimensions relevant to understanding youth misbehaviour.

Dharm Chandra Pandey et al. (2026): The study of children in conflict with law reported

relationships between family environment and psychological behaviour. It drew attention to hostility, anxiety, emotional instability, and antisocial conduct in the context of difficult or neglectful family circumstances, while also emphasising family support and counselling.

Mesut Sari and Yasemin İmrek (2026): This work discusses risk factors and preventive approaches for juveniles in conflict with the law. It identifies the interaction of family dysfunction and psychological difficulties and points towards early, family-centred psychological intervention as an important preventive approach.

8. Research Gap

Existing scholarship addresses juvenile delinquency from legal, sociological, environmental and psychological perspectives, but comparatively less attention is given to the way family conditions operate through psychological mechanisms such as attachment, emotional regulation, cognitive responses and observational learning. The present study addresses this area by bringing family environment and criminal psychology together in the study of juveniles in conflict with the law.

9. Research Methodology

9.1 Research Design

A mixed-method approach was adopted. Quantitative information is used to examine patterns in respondents' perceptions of psychological and family-related factors, while qualitative methods provide additional context concerning the experiences of the participants.

9.2 Study Area

The empirical study was undertaken in selected Observation Homes, Child Care Institutions and Juvenile Justice Boards in Tinsukia District.

9.3 Population

The target population comprises juveniles in conflict with the law who are registered with Juvenile Justice Boards or accommodated in Observation Homes.

9.4 Sample Size

Approximately 50 juveniles were included, subject to accessibility and institutional approval.

9.5 Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was used to identify participants satisfying the study's inclusion criteria.

9.6 Sources and Methods of Data Collection

Primary information was collected through structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observation and, where appropriate and ethically approved, psychological assessment scales. Secondary material was drawn from books, peer-reviewed journals, government publications, National Crime Records Bureau reports, Juvenile Justice Board records where permission was available, and relevant research literature.

10. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Percentage
Age	7–10 years	5%
	11–14 years	35%
	15–18 years	60%
Gender	Male	85%
	Female	15%
	Other	0%
Family Type	Joint family	20%
	Nuclear family	60%
	Single-parent family	20%
Residence	Urban	30%
	Rural	25%
	Semi-urban	45%
Income level	Below ₹10,000	4%
	₹10,000–₹20,000	20%
	₹20,000–₹40,000	56%
	₹40,000 and above	20%

The respondent profile shows that 60% were aged 15–18 years, 35% were aged 11–14 years and 5% were aged 7–10 years. Males constituted 85% of the sample and females 15%, with no respondent recorded in the 'Other' category. Nuclear families represented 60% of the sample,

while joint and single-parent families each accounted for 20%. By residence, 45% lived in semi-urban areas, 30% in urban areas and 25% in rural areas. Regarding monthly household income, 56% fell in the ₹20,000–₹40,000 category, 20% in the ₹10,000–₹20,000 category, 20% above ₹40,000, and 4% below ₹10,000. These characteristics provide the socioeconomic context within which the subsequent responses should be read.

Table 2. Psychological Factors Associated with Juvenile Delinquent Behaviour

Sl. No.	Statement	Mean	SD
1	Difficulty in regulating emotions is associated with greater likelihood of delinquent behaviour.	4.32	0.77
2	Anger and frustration may increase the possibility of juvenile offending.	4.14	0.69
3	Difficulty in coping with stress may be related to involvement in delinquent activities.	4.16	0.77
4	Insufficient emotional support may adversely affect juvenile behaviour.	3.90	0.67
5	Loneliness or social isolation may contribute to delinquent behaviour.	4.04	0.73
6	Psychological difficulties may increase vulnerability to negative peer influence.	4.32	0.71
7	Difficulty managing negative emotions may raise the risk of	4.14	0.77

	offending.		
8	Emotional instability may be associated with rule- or law-breaking behaviour.	4.42	0.67

The combined mean for the eight psychological items is 4.18, with an overall standard deviation of 0.72. The highest item mean is 4.42 for the statement concerning emotional instability and rule- or law-breaking. The lowest mean is 3.90 for the item concerning lack of emotional support. Every item records a mean above 3.00, indicating general agreement among respondents with the psychological associations examined.

Table 3. Family Environment and Juvenile Criminal Behaviour

Sl. No.	Statement	Mean	SD
1	Frequent conflict between family members may adversely affect juvenile behaviour.	4.20	0.81
2	Insufficient parental attention may increase the likelihood of delinquent behaviour.	4.16	0.79
3	Poor parent-child communication may contribute to behavioural problems.	4.18	0.80
4	Limited emotional support within the family may increase vulnerability to criminal activities.	4.14	0.81
5	Excessively strict parenting may encourage rebellious behaviour.	4.06	0.79

6	A broken or unstable family setting may increase the risk of juvenile delinquency.	4.22	0.82
7	Family financial difficulties may increase the risk of juvenile involvement in criminal activities.	4.08	0.80
8	Positive family relationships may reduce the likelihood of juvenile criminal behaviour.	4.32	0.74

The family-environment scale has an overall mean of 4.17 and a standard deviation of 0.79. The greatest agreement is recorded for the statement that positive family relationships can reduce juvenile criminal behaviour (mean 4.32). The lowest mean, 4.06, concerns excessive parental strictness and rebellious behaviour. Overall, the responses indicate that participants perceive family conditions as meaningfully connected with juvenile behaviour.

10.1 Reliability of the Questionnaire

Measure	Value
Cronbach's Alpha	0.882
Number of items	16

The 16-item questionnaire produced a Cronbach's alpha of 0.882. This value indicates good internal consistency for the set of items used to examine psychological factors and family-environment factors associated with juvenile delinquent behaviour.

11. Findings

1. The psychological-factor items produced an overall mean of 4.18 (SD 0.72), showing a high level of agreement among respondents regarding the association between psychological characteristics and delinquent behaviour.

2. Emotional instability, difficulty with emotional regulation and inadequate emotional support were identified by respondents as relevant psychological conditions associated with juvenile behaviour.
3. The family-environment scale recorded an overall mean of 4.17 (SD 0.79), indicating that respondents viewed family circumstances as an important influence on juvenile behaviour.
4. Conflict within the household, inadequate parental attention, weak communication, insufficient emotional support, excessive strictness, family instability and financial difficulties were perceived as family-related factors associated with delinquent behaviour.
5. Positive family relationships were perceived as a potentially protective influence against juvenile criminal behaviour.
6. Juvenile delinquency should not be attributed to family circumstances in isolation. Psychological characteristics interact with peer relationships, socioeconomic conditions, educational experiences and community influences.

12. Conclusion

The study indicates that the family environment is an important context for understanding the psychological and behavioural experiences of juveniles in conflict with the law. Parenting, monitoring, discipline, communication and emotional support can shape the conditions in which young people develop self-control, empathy, coping skills and social adjustment. Conversely, persistent conflict, neglect, violence, inconsistent or excessively severe discipline, substance misuse and emotional deprivation may be associated with psychological distress and problematic behaviour.

The results do not establish that family dysfunction alone causes juvenile delinquency. Rather, they point to an interaction between family circumstances and other influences, including individual psychological characteristics, peer pressure, socioeconomic conditions, education and the wider social environment. A response to juvenile offending should therefore address both the young person and the context in which the behaviour developed. Early identification of family-related risk, constructive parental supervision, family counselling, psychological services, educational support and rehabilitation may contribute to improved adjustment and social reintegration.

13. Suggestions

1. Juvenile justice responses should incorporate family-centred and psychologically informed interventions alongside legal measures.
2. Psychologists, social workers, educators, juvenile justice personnel and policymakers should coordinate efforts to strengthen family support and parental awareness.
3. Parents and caregivers should be encouraged to use constructive supervision, consistent guidance and open communication rather than excessively harsh discipline.
4. Early assessment of family dysfunction and psychological difficulties may allow counselling and support to be offered before behavioural problems become persistent.
5. Family counselling and emotional-support programmes should be integrated, where appropriate, into rehabilitation and reintegration plans.
6. Strengthening stable and nurturing family relationships may support emotional resilience, responsible decision-making and positive social adjustment.

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