

Family Influences on Delinquency

CHAPTER

10

David P. Farrington

► ► CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

1. To review and categorize family-related factors that influence juvenile delinquency.
2. To examine empirical evidence on the links between family factors and delinquency.

■ Introduction

When people are asked what they think are the main causes of crime, they often nominate poor parental child-rearing methods, and especially poor discipline or control of children (see Farrington, 2002). For example, in 1988, the British newspaper *Mail on Sunday* reported the results of a survey of a quota sample of over 1,000 adults who were asked what they thought were the main causes of violent crime. The most popular cause (nominated by 53 percent) was lack of parental discipline, followed by poverty (20 percent), television violence (19 percent), lack of school discipline (15 percent), broken homes (13 percent), and alcohol or drugs (13 percent).

Academic research confirms the importance of family factors as predictors of offending. Smith and Stern (1997, pp. 383–384) concluded in their review that:

We know that children who grow up in homes characterized by lack of warmth and support, whose parents lack behavior management skills, and whose lives are characterized by conflict or maltreatment will more likely be delinquent, whereas a supportive family can protect children even in a very hostile and damaging external environment. . . . Parental monitoring or supervision is the aspect of family management that is most consistently related to delinquency.

Lipsey and Derzon (1998) reviewed the predictors at age 6–11 years of serious or violent offending at age 15–25 years. The best explanatory predictors (i.e., predictors not measuring some aspect of the child's antisocial behavior) were antisocial parents, male gender, low socioeconomic status of the family, and psychological factors (daring, impulsiveness, poor concentration, etc.). Other moderately strong predictors were minority race, poor parent-child relations (poor supervision, discipline, low parental involvement, low parental warmth), other family characteristics (parent stress, family size, parental discord), antisocial peers, low intelligence, and

low school achievement. In contrast, abusive parents and broken homes were relatively weak predictors. It is clear that some family factors are at least as important in the prediction of offending as are gender and race.

Reviewing these kinds of results reveals the bewildering variety of family constructs that have been studied, and also the variety of methods used to classify them into categories. In this chapter, family factors are grouped into six categories: (a) criminal and antisocial parents and siblings; (b) large family size; (c) child-rearing methods (poor supervision, poor discipline, coldness and rejection, low parental involvement with the child); (d) abuse (physical or sexual) or neglect; (e) parental conflict and disrupted families; and (f) other parental features (young age, substance abuse, stress or depression, working mothers). These groupings are somewhat arbitrary and reflect the organization of topics of investigation within the field. For example, harsh discipline is usually studied along with poor supervision but, at the extreme, it could shade into physical abuse. Physical neglect is usually grouped with physical abuse, but of course it usually coincides with emotional neglect (cold and rejecting parents).

■ Crime Runs in Families

Criminal and antisocial parents tend to have delinquent and antisocial children, as shown in the classic longitudinal surveys by Joan McCord (1977) in Boston and Lee Robins (1979) in St. Louis. The most extensive research on the concentration of offending in families was carried out in the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development, which is a prospective longitudinal survey of 400 males from age 8 years to age 48 years (Farrington et al., 2006). Having a convicted father, mother, brother, or sister predicted a boy's own convictions, and all four relatives were independently important as predictors (Farrington et al., 1996). For example, 63 percent of boys with convicted fathers were themselves convicted, compared with 30 percent of the remainder. Same-sex relationships were stronger than opposite-sex relationships, and older siblings were stronger predictors than younger siblings. Only 6 percent of the families accounted for half of all the convictions of all family members.

Similar results were obtained in the Pittsburgh Youth Study, which is a prospective longitudinal survey of 1,500 males from age 7 years to age 30 years (Loeber et al., 2008). Arrests of fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, grandfathers, and grandmothers all predicted the boy's own delinquency (Farrington et al., 2001). The most important relative was the father; arrests of the father predicted the boy's delinquency independently of all other arrested relatives. Only 8 percent of families accounted for 43 percent of arrested family members.

In the Cambridge Study, having a convicted parent or a delinquent older sibling by the tenth birthday were consistently among the best predictors for age 8–10 years of the boy's later offending and antisocial behavior. Apart from behavioral measures such as troublesomeness and daring, they were the strongest predictors of juvenile convictions (Farrington, 1992). Having a convicted parent or a delinquent older sibling were also the best predictors, after poor parental supervision, of juvenile self-reported delinquency. Furthermore, the strength

of intergenerational transmission of offending was similar between the fathers and the study males and between the study males and their sons (Farrington, Coid, & Murray, 2009).

There are six possible explanations (which are not mutually exclusive) for why offending tends to be concentrated in certain families and transmitted from one generation to the next (Farrington et al., 2001). First, there may be intergenerational continuities in exposure to multiple risk factors. For example, each successive generation may be entrapped in poverty, have disrupted family lives, single and teenage parenting, and may be living in the most deprived neighborhoods. Parents who use physical punishment may produce children who use similar punitive methods when they grow up, as indeed Eron et al. (1991) found in New York State. One of the main conclusions of the Cambridge Study is that a constellation of family background features (including poverty, large family size, parental disharmony, poor child-rearing, and parental criminality) leads to a constellation of antisocial features when children grow up, among which criminality is one element (West & Farrington, 1977). According to this explanation, the intergenerational transmission of offending is part of a larger cycle of deprivation and antisocial behavior.

A second explanation focuses on assortative mating; female offenders tend to cohabit with or get married to male offenders. Children with two criminal parents are disproportionately antisocial (West & Farrington, 1977). There are two main classes of reasons why similar people tend to get married, cohabit, or become sexual partners (Rowe & Farrington, 1997). The first is called “social homogamy.” Convicted people tend to choose each other as mates because of physical and social proximity; they meet each other in the same schools, neighborhoods, clubs, pubs, and so on. The second process is called “phenotypic assortment.” People examine each other’s personality and behavior and choose partners who are similar to themselves. In the Dunedin study in New Zealand, which is a follow-up of over 1,000 children from age 3 years to age 32 years, Krueger et al. (1998) found that sexual partners tended to be similar in their self-reported antisocial behavior.

The third explanation focuses on direct and mutual influences of family members on each other. For example, perhaps younger male siblings tend to imitate the antisocial behavior of older male siblings, or perhaps older siblings encourage younger ones to be antisocial. There is considerable sibling resemblance in delinquency (Lauritsen, 1993). In the Cambridge Study, co-offending by brothers was surprisingly common; about 20 percent of boys who had brothers close to them in age were convicted for a crime committed with their brother (Reiss & Farrington, 1991, p. 386). However, intergenerational mutual influences on offending seem less plausible, since co-offending by parents with their children was very uncommon in the Cambridge Study. There was no evidence that parents directly encouraged their children to commit crimes or taught them criminal techniques; on the contrary, a criminal father usually disapproved of his son’s offending (West & Farrington, 1977).

A fourth explanation suggests that the effect of a criminal parent on a child’s offending is mediated by environmental mechanisms. In the Pittsburgh Youth Study, it was suggested that arrested fathers tended to have delinquent sons because they tended to impregnate young women, to live in bad neighborhoods, and to use child-rearing methods that did not develop

a strong conscience in their children (Farrington et al., 2001). In the Cambridge Study, West and Farrington (1977) suggested that poor parental supervision was one link in the chain between criminal fathers and delinquent sons, and Smith and Farrington (2004) showed that authoritarian parenting and parental conflict were mediating variables between parental antisocial behavior and child conduct problems. In the Glueck study in Boston, Sampson and Laub (1993) found that maternal and paternal deviance (criminality or alcoholism) did not predict a boy's delinquency after controlling for family factors such as poor supervision, harsh or erratic discipline, parental rejection, low attachment, and large family size.

A fifth explanation suggests that the effect of a criminal parent on a child's offending is mediated by genetic mechanisms. In agreement with this, twin studies show that identical twins are more concordant in their offending than are fraternal twins (Raine, 1993). However, an objection to these kinds of twin studies is that the greater behavioral similarity of the identical twins could reflect their greater environmental similarity. Also in agreement with genetic mechanisms, adoption studies show that the offending of adopted children is significantly related to the offending of their biological parents (Brennan, Mednick, & Mednick, 1993). However, an objection to adoption studies is that some children may have had contact with their biological parents, so again it is difficult to dismiss an environmental explanation of this finding. In a more convincing design comparing the concordance of identical twins reared together and identical twins reared apart, Grove et al. (1990) found that heritability was 41 percent for childhood conduct disorder and 28 percent for adult antisocial personality disorder. This design shows that the intergenerational transmission of offending is partly attributable to genetic factors. An important question is how the genetic potential (genotype) interacts with the environment to produce the offending behavior (phenotype).

A sixth explanation suggests that criminal parents tend to have delinquent children because of official (police and court) bias against known criminal families who also tend to be known to official agencies because of other social problems. At all levels of self-reported delinquency in the Cambridge Study, boys with convicted fathers were more likely to be convicted themselves than were boys with unconvicted fathers (West & Farrington, 1977). However, this was not the only explanation for the link between criminal fathers and delinquent sons, because boys with criminal fathers had higher self-reported delinquency scores and higher teacher and peer ratings of bad behavior. It is not clear which of these six explanations is the most important.

■ Large Family Size

Large family size (a large number of children in the family) is a relatively strong and highly replicable predictor of delinquency (Ellis, 1988; Fischer, 1984). It was similarly important in the Cambridge and Pittsburgh studies, even though families were on average smaller in Pittsburgh in the 1990s than in London in the 1960s (Farrington & Loeber, 1999). In the Cambridge Study, if a boy had four or more siblings by his tenth birthday, this doubled his risk of being convicted as a juvenile (West & Farrington, 1973). Large family size predicted self-reported delinquency as well as convictions (Farrington, 1992). It was the most important

independent predictor of convictions up to age 32 years in a logistic regression analysis; 58 percent of boys from large families were convicted up to this age (Farrington, 1993).

There are many possible reasons why a large number of siblings might increase the risk of a child's delinquency. Generally, as the number of children in a family increases, the amount of parental attention that can be given to each child decreases. Also, as the number of children increases, the household tends to become more overcrowded, possibly leading to increases in frustration, irritation, and conflict. In the Cambridge Study, large family size did not predict delinquency for boys living in the least crowded conditions, with two or more rooms than there were children (West & Farrington, 1973). This suggests that household overcrowding might be an important intervening factor between large family size and delinquency.

Brownfield and Sorenson (1994) reviewed several possible explanations for the link between large families and delinquency, including those focusing on features of the parents (e.g., criminal parents, teenage parents), those focusing on parenting (e.g., poor supervision, disrupted families), and those focusing on economic deprivation or family stress. Another interesting theory suggested that the key factor was birth order: large families include more later-born children who tend to be more delinquent. Based on an analysis of self-reported delinquency in a Seattle survey, they concluded that the most plausible intervening causal mechanism was exposure to delinquent siblings. Consistent with social learning theory, large families contained more antisocial models.

■ Child-Rearing Methods

Many different types of child-rearing methods predict a child's delinquency. The most important dimensions of child-rearing are supervision or monitoring of children, discipline or parental reinforcement, warmth or coldness of emotional relationships, and parental involvement with children. Unlike family size, these constructs are difficult to measure, and there is some evidence that results differ according to methods of measurement. In their extensive review of parenting methods in relation to childhood antisocial behavior, Rothbaum and Weisz (1994) concluded that the strength of associations between parent and child measures was greater when parenting was measured by observation or interview than when it was measured using questionnaires.

Parental supervision refers to the degree of monitoring by parents of the child's activities, and their degree of watchfulness or vigilance. Of all these child-rearing methods, poor parental supervision is usually the strongest and most replicable predictor of offending (Farrington & Loeber, 1999; Smith & Stern, 1997). It typically predicts a doubled risk of delinquency. Many studies show that parents who do not know where their children are when they are out, and parents who let their children roam the streets unsupervised from an early age, tend to have delinquent children. For example, in the classic Cambridge-Somerville study in Boston, Joan McCord (1979) found that poor parental supervision in childhood was the best predictor of both violent and property crimes up to age 45 years.

Parental discipline refers to how parents react to a child's behavior. It is clear that harsh or punitive discipline (involving physical punishment) predicts a child's delinquency, as the

review by Haapasalo and Pokela (1999) showed. In a follow-up study of nearly 700 Nottingham (UK) children, John and Elizabeth Newson (1989) found that physical punishment at ages 7 and 11 years predicted later convictions; 40 percent of offenders had been smacked or beaten at age 11 years, compared with 14 percent of non-offenders. In the Seattle Social Development Project, which is a follow-up of over 800 children from age 10 years to age 30 years, poor family management (poor supervision, inconsistent rules, harsh discipline) in adolescence predicted violence in young adulthood (Herrenkohl et al., 2000). In the Columbia County (NY) follow-up of over 850 children from age 8 years to age 48 years, Eron et al. (1991) reported that parental punishment at age 8 years predicted not only arrests for violence up to age 30 years, but also the severity of the man's punishment of his child at age 30 years and his history of spouse assault.

Family factors may have different effects on African American and Caucasian children in the United States. It is clear that African American children are more likely to be physically punished, and that physical punishment is more related to antisocial behavior for Caucasian children than for African American children (cf. Deater-Deckard et al., 1996; Kelley et al., 1992). In the Pittsburgh Youth Study, 21 percent of Caucasian boys who were physically punished (slapped or spanked) by their mothers were violent, compared with 8 percent of those not physically punished. In contrast, 32 percent of African American boys who were physically punished were violent, compared with 28 percent of those not physically punished (Farrington, Loeber, & Stouthamer-Loeber, 2003). It was suggested that physical punishment may have a different meaning in African American families. Specifically, in these families it may indicate warmth and concern for the child, whereas in Caucasian families it tends to be associated with a cold and rejecting parental attitude.

Erratic or inconsistent discipline also predicts delinquency (West & Farrington 1973). This can involve either erratic discipline by one parent, sometimes turning a blind eye to bad behavior and sometimes punishing it severely, or inconsistency between two parents, with one parent being tolerant or indulgent and the other being harshly punitive. It is not clear whether unusually lax discipline predicts delinquency. Just as inappropriate methods of responding to bad behavior predict delinquency, low parental reinforcement (not praising) of good behavior is also a predictor (Farrington & Loeber, 1999).

Cold, rejecting parents tend to have delinquent children, as Joan McCord (1979) found almost 30 years ago in the Cambridge-Somerville study in Boston. More recently, she concluded that parental warmth could act as a protective factor against the effects of physical punishment (McCord, 1997). Whereas 51 percent of boys with cold, physically punishing mothers were convicted in her study, only 21 percent of boys with warm, physically punishing mothers were convicted, similar to the 23 percent of boys with warm non-punitive mothers who were convicted. The father's warmth was also a protective factor against the father's physical punishment.

Low parental involvement in the child's activities predicts delinquency, as the Newsons found in their Nottingham survey (Lewis, Newson, & Newson, 1982). In the Cambridge Study, having a father who never joined in the boy's leisure activities doubled his risk of conviction (West & Farrington, 1973), and this was the most important predictor of persis-

tence in offending after age 21 years, as opposed to desistance (Farrington & Hawkins, 1991). Similarly, poor parent-child communication predicted delinquency in the Pittsburgh Youth Study (Farrington & Loeber, 1999), and low family cohesiveness was the most important predictor of violence in the Chicago Youth Development Study follow-up of over 350 boys (Gorman-Smith et al., 1996).

In psychology, there has been a great emphasis on parenting styles rather than parenting practices. Diana Baumrind (1966) originally distinguished three broad styles: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. In brief, authoritarian parents are controlling, punitive, demanding and rather cold; authoritative parents set firm rules but are also warm and supportive and allow the child some autonomy; and permissive parents are rather lax, non-punitive, and warm. Authoritative and permissive parents have good communication with their children, negotiating, explaining, and being sensitive to the child's needs. While parenting styles are influential in psychology, largely due to the work of Laurence Steinberg and his colleagues (1992; see also Darling & Steinberg, 1993), they have rarely been investigated in criminological research. However, in the Cambridge Study it was found that having authoritarian parents was the second most important predictor (after hyperactivity/poor concentration) of convictions for violence (Farrington, 1994). Also, having authoritarian parents was the most important childhood risk factor that discriminated between violent offenders and frequently convicted non-violent offenders (Farrington, 1991).

Most explanations of the link between child-rearing methods and delinquency focus on social learning or attachment theories. Social learning theory suggests that children's behavior depends on parental rewards and punishments and on the models of behavior that parents represent (cf. Patterson, 1995). Children will tend to become delinquent if parents do not respond consistently and contingently to their antisocial behavior and if parents behave in an antisocial manner. Attachment theory was inspired by the work of John Bowlby (discussed later) and suggests that children who are not emotionally attached to warm, loving, and law-abiding parents will tend to become delinquent (cf. Carlson & Sroufe, 1995). The sociological equivalent of attachment theory is social bonding theory, which suggests that delinquency depends on the strength or weakness of a child's bond to society (cf. Catalano et al., 2005).

Another possibility is that the link between child-rearing methods and delinquency merely reflects the genetic transmission of offending, as David Rowe (1994) argued. This idea was tested in the Cambridge Study. The specific hypothesis was that child-rearing factors (supervision, discipline, and warmth/coldness) would not predict offending after controlling for parental criminality. This was confirmed in a structural equation modeling analysis but not in a regression analysis (Rowe & Farrington, 1997). Thus, genetic factors could explain only part of the link between child-rearing factors and delinquency.

■ Child Abuse and Neglect

Children who are physically abused or neglected tend to become offenders later in life (Malinosky-Rummell & Hansen, 1993). The most famous study of this was carried out by Cathy Widom (1989) in Indianapolis. She used court records to identify over 900 children

who had been abused or neglected before age 11 years and compared them with a control group matched on age, race, gender, elementary school class, and place of residence. A 20-year follow-up showed that the children who were abused or neglected were more likely to be arrested as juveniles and as adults than were the controls, and they were more likely to be arrested for juvenile violence (Maxfield & Widom, 1996). Child abuse predicted later violence after controlling for other predictors such as gender, ethnicity, and age, and predictability was greater for females than for males (Widom & White, 1997). Child sexual abuse, and child physical abuse and neglect, predicted adult arrests for sex crimes (Widom & Ames, 1994).

Similar results have been obtained in other studies. In the Cambridge-Somerville study in Boston, Joan McCord (1983) found that about half of the abused or neglected boys were convicted for serious crimes, became alcoholics or mentally ill, or died before age 35 years. In the Rochester Youth Development Study follow-up of over 1,000 children, Smith and Thornberry (1995) showed that recorded child maltreatment under age 12 years (physical, sexual, or emotional abuse or neglect) predicted later self-reported and official delinquency. Furthermore, these results held up after controlling for gender, race, socioeconomic status, and family structure. Similarly, child abuse and neglect predicted later violence in the “Young Lawbreakers as Adults” project in Stockholm, Sweden (Lang, Klinteberg, & Alm, 2002).

Possible environmental causal mechanisms linking childhood victimization and later violence were reviewed by Cathy Widom (1994). First, childhood victimization may have immediate but long-lasting consequences (e.g., shaking may cause brain injury). Second, childhood victimization may cause bodily changes (e.g., desensitization to pain) that encourage later violence. Third, child abuse may lead to impulsive or dissociative coping styles that, in turn, lead to poor problem-solving skills or poor school performance. Fourth, victimization may cause changes in self-esteem or in social information-processing patterns that encourage later violence. Fifth, child abuse may lead to changed family environments (e.g., being placed in foster care) that have deleterious effects. Sixth, juvenile justice practices may label victims, isolate them from prosocial peers, and encourage them to associate with delinquent peers.

Numerous theories have been put forward to explain the link between child abuse and later offending. Timothy Brezina (1998) described three of the main ones. Social learning theory suggests that children learn to adopt the abusive behavior patterns of their parents through imitation, modeling, and reinforcement. Attachment or social bonding theory proposes that child maltreatment results in low attachment to parents and hence to low self-control. Strain theory posits that negative treatment by others generates negative emotions such as anger and frustration, which in turn lead to a desire for revenge and increased aggression. Based on the Youth in Transition study, Brezina found limited support for all three theories.

Symons et al. (1995) tested a fourth theory, namely that the link between child abuse and offending was one aspect of the intergenerational transmission of antisocial behavior from parents to children. Their findings in Iowa were most concordant with this theory. DiLalla and Gottesman (1991) more specifically suggested that the link reflected the genetic transmission of violent behavior. It is clear that the importance of genetic factors needs to be estimated in future studies of the effects of child abuse.

■ Parental Conflict and Disrupted Families

John Bowlby (1951) popularized the theory that broken homes cause delinquency. He argued that mother love in infancy and childhood was just as important for mental health as were vitamins and proteins for physical health. He thought that it was essential that a child should experience a warm, loving, and continuous relationship with a mother figure. If a child suffered a prolonged period of maternal deprivation during the first 5 years of life, this would have irreversible negative effects, including becoming a cold “affectionless character” and a delinquent.

Most studies of broken homes have focused on the loss of the father rather than the mother, because the loss of a father is much more common. In general, it is found that children who are separated from a biological parent are more likely to offend than children from intact families. For example, in the Newcastle (UK) Thousand Family birth cohort study, Kolvin et al. (1988b) discovered that boys who experienced divorce or separation in their first 5 years of life had a doubled risk of conviction up to age 32 years (53 percent as opposed to 28 percent). In the Dunedin study in New Zealand, Henry et al. (1996) found that boys from single-parent families were particularly likely to be convicted.

Joan McCord (1982) in Boston carried out an innovative study of the relationship between homes broken by loss of the biological father and later serious offending by boys. She found that the prevalence of offending was high for boys from broken homes without affectionate mothers (62 percent) and for those from unbroken homes characterized by parental conflict (52 percent), irrespective of whether they had affectionate mothers. The prevalence of offending was low for those from unbroken homes without conflict (26 percent) and—importantly—equally low for boys from broken homes with affectionate mothers (22 percent). These results suggest that it might not be the broken home that is criminogenic but the parental conflict that often causes it. They also suggest that a loving mother might in some sense be able to compensate for the loss of a father.

The importance of the cause of the broken home was also shown in the UK National Survey of Health and Development by Michael Wadsworth (1979), in which over 5,000 children were followed up from birth. Illegitimate children were excluded from this survey, so all the children began life with two married parents. Boys from homes broken by divorce or separation had an increased likelihood of being convicted or officially cautioned up to age 21 years (27 percent) in comparison with those from homes broken by death of the mother (19 percent), death of the father (14 percent), or from unbroken homes (14 percent). Homes broken while the boy was between birth and age 4 years especially predicted delinquency, while homes broken while the boy was between ages 11 years and 15 years were not particularly criminogenic. Remarriage (which happened more often after divorce or separation than after death) was also associated with an increased risk of delinquency, suggesting an undesirable effect of step-parents. This undesirable effect was confirmed in research in Montreal by Pagani et al. (1998). The meta-analysis by Wells and Rankin (1991) also shows that broken homes are more strongly related to delinquency when they are caused by parental separation or divorce rather than by death.

There is no doubt that parental conflict and interparental violence predict antisocial behavior by a child (cf. Buehler et al., 1997; Kolbo et al., 1996). In the Christchurch (New Zealand) Health and Development Study follow-up of over 1,300 children, Fergusson and Horwood (1998) found that children who witnessed violence between their parents were more likely to commit both violent and property offenses according to their self-reports. The importance of witnessing father-initiated violence held up after controlling for other risk factors such as parental criminality, parental substance abuse, parental physical punishment, a young mother, and low family income. Parental conflict also predicted delinquency in both the Cambridge and Pittsburgh studies (Farrington & Loeber, 1999).

Much research suggests that frequent changes of parent figures predict offending by children. For example, in a longitudinal survey of a birth cohort of over 500 Copenhagen males, Mednick et al. (1990) found that divorce followed by changes in parent figures predicted the highest rate of offending by children (65 percent), compared with divorce followed by stability (42 percent) and no divorce (28 percent). In the Dunedin study in New Zealand, Henry et al. (1993) reported that both parental conflict and many changes of the child's primary caretaker predicted the child's antisocial behavior up to age 11 years. However, in the Christchurch study in New Zealand, Fergusson et al. (1992) showed that parental transitions in the absence of parental conflict did not predict an increased risk of the child offending. Also, in the Oregon Youth Study follow-up of over 200 boys, Capaldi and Patterson (1991) concluded that antisocial mothers caused parental transitions, which in turn caused child antisocial behavior. In the Woodlawn longitudinal study of over 1,200 children in Chicago, the diversity and fluidity of children's living arrangements were remarkable (cf. Hunter & Ensminger, 1992; Kellam et al., 1977).

Explanations of the relationship between disrupted families and delinquency fall into three major classes. Trauma theories suggest that the loss of a parent has a damaging effect on a child, most commonly because of the effect on attachment to the parent. Life course theories focus on separation as a sequence of stressful experiences and on the effects of multiple stressors such as parental conflict, parental loss, reduced economic circumstances, changes in parent figures, and poor child-rearing methods. Selection theories argue that disrupted families produce delinquent children because of pre-existing differences from other families in risk factors such as parental conflict, criminal or antisocial parents, low family income, or poor child-rearing methods.

Hypotheses derived from the three theories were tested in the Cambridge Study (Juby & Farrington, 2001). While boys from broken homes (permanently disrupted families) were more delinquent than boys from intact homes, they were not more delinquent than boys from intact high-conflict families. It is interesting to note that this result was replicated in Switzerland (Haas et al., 2004). Overall, the most important factor was the post-disruption trajectory. Boys who remained with their mother after the separation had the same delinquency rate as boys from intact low-conflict families. Boys who remained with their father, with relatives, or with others (e.g., foster parents) had high delinquency rates. It was concluded that the results favored life course theories rather than trauma or selection theories.

■ Other Parental Features

Numerous other parental features predict delinquency and antisocial behavior of children. For example, early child-bearing or teenage pregnancy is a risk factor. Morash and Rucker (1989) analyzed results from four surveys in the United States and England (including the Cambridge Study) and found that teenage mothers were associated with low-income families, welfare support, and absent biological fathers; that they used poor child-rearing methods; and that their children were characterized by low school attainment and delinquency. However, the presence of the biological father mitigated many of these adverse factors and generally seemed to have a protective effect. Similarly, a large-scale study in Washington State showed that children of teenage or unmarried mothers had a significantly increased risk of offending (Conseur et al., 1997). Boys born to unmarried mothers aged 17 years or less had an 11-fold increased risk of chronic offending compared to boys born to married mothers aged 20 years or more.

In the Cambridge and Pittsburgh studies, the age of the mother at her first birth was only a moderate predictor of the boy's later delinquency (Farrington & Loeber, 1999). In the Cambridge Study, for example, 27 percent of sons of teenage mothers were convicted as juveniles, compared with 18 percent of the remainder. More detailed analyses in this study showed that teenage mothers who went on to have large numbers of children were especially likely to have convicted children (Nagin et al., 1997). It was concluded that the results were concordant with a diminished resources theory: the offspring of adolescent mothers were more crime prone because they lacked not only economic resources but also personal resources such as attention and supervision. Of course, it must be remembered that the age of the mother is highly correlated with the age of the father; having a young father may be just as important as having a young mother. Also, since juvenile delinquency predicts causing an early pregnancy (Smith et al., 2000), the link between teenage parents and child delinquency may be one aspect of the link between criminal parents and delinquent children.

Several researchers have investigated factors that might mediate the link between young mothers and child delinquency. In the Dunedin study in New Zealand, Jaffee et al. (2001) concluded that the link between teenage mothers and violent children was mediated by maternal characteristics (e.g., intelligence, criminality) and family factors (e.g., harsh discipline, family size, disrupted families). In the Rochester Youth Development Study, Pogarsky et al. (2003) found that the most important mediating factor was the number of parental transitions (frequent changes in caregivers). It is interesting to note that the link between young mothers and child delinquency was stronger for white and Hispanic families than for African American families. Pogarsky and his colleagues suggested that early child-bearing was less harmful when it was more common.

Substance use of parents predicts delinquency of children, as found in the Pittsburgh Youth Study (Loeber et al., 1998a). Smoking by the mother during pregnancy is a particularly important risk factor. The Northern Finland Birth Cohort study of over 5,600 males showed that maternal smoking during pregnancy doubled the risk of violent or persistent offending by their sons after controlling for other biopsychosocial risk factors (Rasanen et al., 1999).

When maternal smoking was combined with a teenage mother, a single-parent family, and an unwanted pregnancy, risks of offending increased 10-fold. Comparable results were obtained in a Copenhagen birth cohort study of over 4,100 males by Brennan et al. (1999).

In the Pittsburgh Youth Study, parental stress and parental depression were only moderate predictors of the boy's delinquency (Loeber et al., 1998a). Conger et al. (1995) carried out an interesting study of parental stress (caused by negative life events) and delinquency, based on two surveys in Iowa and Oregon. They concluded that parental stress produced parental depression, which in turn caused poor discipline, which in turn caused childhood antisocial behavior.

In the days when working mothers were statistically uncommon, it was often argued that they caused delinquency, presumably because it was expected that they would supervise their children less well than would non-working mothers. However, in the Cambridge Study, having a working mother was associated with a relatively low risk of delinquency, possibly because full-time working mothers tended to have higher incomes and smaller families (West & Farrington, 1973).

■ Key Methodological Issues

It is difficult to determine what are the precise causal mechanisms linking family factors—such as parental criminality, young mothers, family size, parental supervision, child abuse, or disrupted families—to the delinquency of children. This is because these factors tend to be related not only to each other but also to other risk factors for delinquency such as low family income, poor housing, impulsiveness, low intelligence, and low school attainment. Just as it is hard to know what are the key underlying family constructs, it is equally hard to know what are the key underlying constructs in other domains of life. It is important to investigate which family factors predict delinquency independently of other family factors, independently of genetic and biological factors, and independently of other factors (e.g., individual, peer, neighborhood, and socioeconomic). In the Oregon Youth Study, Bank and Burraston (2001) found that child maltreatment predicted arrests for violent crimes after controlling for unskilled discipline, academic performance, and deviant peers.

Another important question focuses on the interactions between family and other factors in the prediction of delinquency. There are many examples of interactions between family and biological factors. For example, Raine et al. (1997, p. 5) found that maternal rejection interacted with birth complications in predicting violence in a large birth cohort of Copenhagen males. The prevalence of violence was only high when both maternal rejection and birth complications were present. Family factors are likely to have different effects on children of different ages (Frick et al., 1999). Similarly, family and other risk factors may have different effects on offending in different neighborhoods (Wikström & Loeber, 2000).

It might be expected that family factors would have different effects on boys and girls, since there are well-documented gender differences in child-rearing experiences. In particular, boys are more likely to receive physical punishment from parents (cf. Lytton & Romney, 1991; Smith & Brooks-Gunn, 1997). However, in their extensive review of gender differences

in antisocial behavior, Moffitt et al. (2001) concluded that boys were more antisocial essentially because they were exposed to more risk factors or a higher level of risk. Family risk factors did not seem to have different effects on antisocial behavior for boys and girls. It might also be expected that family factors would have different effects at different ages, and in the Rochester Youth Development Study, Thornberry et al. (2001) found that maltreatment during adolescence was more strongly related to delinquency than maltreatment during childhood.

While family influences are usually investigated as risk factors for delinquency, it is important also to investigate their effects as protective factors. In the Pittsburgh Youth Study, good supervision (compared with average levels) predicted non-delinquency, just as poor supervision (compared with average levels) predicted delinquency (Stouthamer-Loeber et al., 1993). In the Newcastle Thousand Family Study, Kolvin et al. (1988a) studied high-risk boys (from deprived backgrounds) who nevertheless did not become offenders. The most important protective factors included good maternal care and good maternal health for children under age 5 years and good parental supervision at ages 11 years and 15 years.

It is important to investigate sequential effects of risk factors on offending. Several researchers have concluded that socio-economic factors have an effect on offending through their effects on family factors (cf. Bor et al., 1997; Dodge et al., 1994; Fergusson et al., 2004; Larzelere & Patterson, 1990; Stern & Smith, 1995). In the Pittsburgh Youth Study, it was proposed that socioeconomic and neighborhood factors (e.g., poor housing) influenced family factors (e.g., poor supervision), which in turn influenced child factors (e.g., lack of guilt), which in turn influenced offending (Loeber et al., 1998a, p. 10). There may also be sequential effects of some family factors on others, for example, if young mothers tend to use poor child-rearing methods (see Conger et al., 1995). There may also be effects of family factors on other risk factors, for example, if antisocial parents tend to have low incomes and choose to live in poor neighborhoods.

Just as parental child-rearing methods influence characteristics of children, so child characteristics may influence parenting, as Hugh Lytton (1990) suggested. For example, an antisocial child may provoke more punishment from a parent than a well-behaved child. In the New York State longitudinal study, Cohen and Brook (1995) found that there were reciprocal influences between parental punishment and child behavior disorder. Similarly, several researchers have concluded that there are reciprocal relationships between parental supervision and delinquency (cf. Jang & Smith, 1997; Paternoster, 1988).

It is also important to investigate the cumulative effects of family risk factors (and indeed of all risk factors) on delinquency. Forehand et al. (1998) showed how the probability of conduct disorder and delinquency increased with the number of family risk factors. A logical implication of the clustering of risk factors is that boys with multiple risk factors should be studied. In the Pittsburgh Youth Study, Loeber et al. (1998b) investigated how multiple risk factors were related to multiple types of child problems (including delinquency, substance use, hyperactivity, and depression). Relationships were general rather than specific. Many types of risk factors predicted many types of problems, and the number of risk factors predicted the number of problems, rather than specific risk factors predicting specific problems.

These results are in agreement with the hypothesis that delinquency is one element of a larger syndrome of antisocial behavior, and hence that predictors of one type of offending (e.g., violence) are similar to predictors of another (e.g., theft). Nevertheless, it is still useful to search for specific relationships between types of family factors and types of antisocial behavior.

■ Conclusion

It is clear that many family factors predict offending, but less clear what are the key underlying family dimensions that should be measured. The strongest predictor is usually criminal or antisocial parents. Other quite strong and replicable predictors are large family size, poor parental supervision, parental conflict, and disrupted families. In contrast, child abuse and young mothers are relatively weak predictors.

Many theories have been proposed to explain these results. The most popular are selection, social learning, and attachment theories. Selection theories argue that relationships between large family size, poor parental supervision, disrupted families (etc.), and delinquency are driven by the fact that antisocial people tend to have large families, poor parental supervision, and disrupted families (etc.), as well as antisocial children. An extreme version of this theory suggests that all results reflect the genetic transmission of antisocial behavior from parents to children. Social learning theories argue that children fail to learn law-abiding behavior if their parents provide antisocial models and/or fail to react to their transgressions in an appropriate, consistent, and contingent fashion. Attachment theories argue that low attachment to parents (created, for example, by cold, rejecting parents or by separation from a parent) produces cold, callous children who tend to commit delinquent acts. These and other theories, and competing hypotheses about intervening mechanisms, need to be tested more effectively.

In order to advance knowledge about causal effects of family factors on offending, new prospective longitudinal studies are needed. Such studies should aim to estimate genetic influences and should measure a wide range of risk factors (individual, family, peer, school, neighborhood, etc.). They should aim to establish independent, interactive, sequential, and reciprocal effects of family factors on offending. They should study protective factors as well as risk factors, and should investigate family effects on later criminal careers (e.g., on desistance) as well as on the onset of offending. Systematic observation as well as interviews and questionnaires should be used to measure family factors. Ideally, intervention experiments targeting family factors should be included in longitudinal studies in order to establish causal effects more securely. A new generation of longitudinal studies should go beyond demonstrating that family factors predict offending and should seek to determine the key causal mechanisms that are involved. This should help greatly in designing family-based prevention programs to reduce crime.

■ Discussion Questions

1. This chapter groups family factors that influence juvenile delinquency into six categories. For each category, what are identified as the strongest predictors of delinquency? What are the weakest predictors?

2. In considering the family factors that influence delinquency, what finding(s) presented in this chapter are the most surprising to you? Why?
3. To the extent that this can be determined, what are the causal mechanisms linking family factors to delinquency?
4. To what extent might family factors serve as protective factors against juvenile delinquency? What are the most important protective factors?
5. How might family factors interact with environmental (e.g., socioeconomic and neighborhood) factors to influence delinquency?
6. If you had to choose one theory that explained how family factors influence delinquency, which one would you select? Why this one? In what ways does your selected theory fall short of fully capturing or explaining the influence of family factors on delinquency?

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