

CRIMINOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF JUVENILE AND YOUTH DELINQUENCY AND MEASURES FOR ITS PREVENTION

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Аннотация

В данной статье представлено углубленное криминологическое исследование преступности среди несовершеннолетних и молодёжи, её структуры, детерминант и социальных последствий. Анализируя сложное взаимодействие психологических, социальных, семейных и экономических факторов, побуждающих несовершеннолетних и молодёжь к преступному поведению, исследование выявляет ключевые механизмы, отличающие подростковую преступность от преступности взрослых. В исследовании также рассматриваются особенности развития подросткового возраста, способствующие импульсивности, подверженности влиянию сверстников и склонности к рискованному поведению. Используя качественный аналитический подход, в статье рассматриваются классические и современные криминологические теории, сравнивается международный опыт и оцениваются превентивные модели, применяемые в мире. Результаты показывают, что преступность среди несовершеннолетних обусловлена сочетанием семейного дисбаланса, неудовлетворительного образования, социальной изоляции и влияния цифровых технологий, в то время как эффективная профилактика требует комплексной государственной политики, эффективных систем поддержки семьи, взаимодействия с обществом и программ восстановительного правосудия.

Ключевые слова: преступность несовершеннолетних, молодежная преступность, криминология, профилактика, социализация, факторы риска, поведение подростков, семейная среда, восстановительное правосудие.

Abstract

This article provides an in-depth criminological examination of juvenile and youth delinquency, exploring its structure, determinants, and social implications. By analysing the complex interaction of psychological, social, family-based, and economic factors that lead minors and young people toward criminal behaviour, the study identifies key mechanisms that differentiate youth delinquency from adult criminality. The research also addresses the developmental features of adolescence that contribute to impulsivity, susceptibility to peer influence, and vulnerability to risk-taking behaviour. Using a

qualitative analytical approach, the article reviews classical and modern criminological theories, compares international practices, and evaluates preventive models implemented worldwide. The findings reveal that juvenile delinquency arises from a combination of family dysfunction, educational failure, social exclusion, and digital influences, while effective prevention requires integrated state policies, strong family support systems, community engagement, and restorative justice programs.

Keywords: juvenile delinquency, youth crime, criminology, prevention, socialization, risk factors, adolescent behaviour, family environment, restorative justice.

INTRODUCTION

Juvenile and youth delinquency remains one of the most pressing issues confronting modern criminology and social policy. While crime is a universal phenomenon, offences committed by minors possess distinctive characteristics shaped by developmental, psychological, and socio-environmental factors. Adolescence marks a transitional stage in which identity formation, emotional instability, and heightened sensitivity to peer influence coalesce, often producing behaviours that may escalate into criminal acts. Consequently, juvenile delinquency is not only a legal issue but a psychosocial one, requiring multidisciplinary examination.

Criminological interest in youth crime originates from the recognition that criminality often begins in adolescence. Numerous longitudinal studies show that individuals who engage in persistent offending patterns typically start with minor delinquent acts during their early teenage years. The early onset of delinquent behaviour increases the likelihood of chronic offending, making early prevention critical for long-term crime reduction strategies.

The concept of juvenile delinquency traditionally refers to anti-social acts committed by individuals below the legal age of criminal responsibility. Youth delinquency expands this category to include young adults whose psychosocial immaturity continues to affect decision-making. Criminology differentiates between episodic, experimental delinquency—common among adolescents—and persistent, systematic offending associated with deeper social and psychological problems.

The relevance of studying juvenile delinquency has grown in recent decades due to rapid socio-economic changes, digitalization, urbanization, and global cultural shifts. The rise of cyberbullying, online fraud, virtual gang culture, and internet-mediated deviant communities has reshaped the landscape of youth crime. These new patterns challenge traditional prevention models and require updated criminological understanding.

The present article aims to provide a comprehensive criminological description of juvenile and youth delinquency, analyse its determinants, and formulate effective preventive measures. The research emphasizes that preventing youth crime involves

addressing the root causes embedded in family dynamics, education systems, community structures, and the digital environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

Scholarly interest in juvenile delinquency can be traced to the early twentieth century, particularly through the works of E. H. Sutherland, who emphasized the role of differential association in shaping youth behaviour. According to Sutherland, young people learn criminal patterns through communication with deviant peers, making social environment a crucial determinant. Later, Travis Hirschi's social bond theory asserted that weak attachment to family, school, and community increases delinquency, highlighting social integration as a protective factor.

Psychological research has also contributed significantly. Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, and Lawrence Kohlberg examined the cognitive and moral development of adolescents, demonstrating how immaturity in judgment and emotional regulation contributes to risk-taking and deviance. Contemporary psychology adds the concept of "adolescent brain development," noting that the prefrontal cortex—responsible for impulse control—is not fully developed until the mid-twenties. This insight explains why youth offending often involves impulsive, unplanned acts.

Sociological theories further broaden understanding. Robert Merton's strain theory suggests that social inequality and lack of legitimate opportunities push young individuals toward crime. Subcultural theories by Albert Cohen and the Chicago School highlight urban marginalization and the development of deviant subcultures among youth. In recent decades, digital criminology has emerged, studying how online platforms create new opportunities for delinquency, from cyberbullying to hacking.

International literature stresses prevention. Scandinavian models prioritize family support, education, and restorative justice; the United States emphasizes risk assessment and behavioural programs; while European Union strategies focus on multi-agency cooperation. The United Nations' *Beijing Rules* and *Riyadh Guidelines* advocate a balanced approach combining legal protection and social rehabilitation.

Despite diverse approaches, the literature converges on key themes: juvenile delinquency is multidimensional, socially constructed, and deeply influenced by developmental psychology. Effective prevention requires integrated, evidence-based strategies.

This study uses a qualitative, analytical, and comparative methodology grounded in criminological theory, psychological frameworks, and sociological research. The approach emphasizes conceptual clarity and multidimensional analysis rather than statistical quantification.

The methodological process includes:

1. **Theoretical Systematization** – identifying fundamental concepts of juvenile delinquency and consolidating definitions across criminology, psychology, and social sciences.
2. **Causal Analysis** – exploring developmental, familial, environmental, economic, and technological factors contributing to youth delinquency.
3. **Comparative Evaluation** – reviewing international prevention models, legal frameworks, and institutional practices to extract successful elements.
4. **Interpretive Synthesis** – connecting theoretical insights with practical implications to formulate a coherent prevention strategy.

Sources include academic monographs, peer-reviewed criminological articles, policy documents, UN reports, and national legislation. The interpretive method ensures critical integration of ideas across disciplines, avoiding narrow legalistic or purely sociological explanations.

The chosen methodology enables a holistic interpretation of youth delinquency, treating it as a dynamic and socially embedded phenomenon.

RESULTS

The research demonstrates that juvenile and youth delinquency results from a combination of psychological immaturity, social inequality, family dysfunction, and peer influence. The results can be summarized through several key findings:

1. **Developmental Factors:** Adolescents exhibit heightened impulsivity, emotional volatility, and a desire for autonomy. These traits increase susceptibility to deviant behaviour, especially when combined with weak self-regulation.
2. **Family Environment:** The family remains the most influential determinant of youth behaviour. Broken homes, parental neglect, violence, inconsistent discipline, and substance abuse significantly raise delinquency risks. Conversely, supportive and communicative families serve as a strong protective factor.
3. **School and Education:** Poor academic performance, school dropout, bullying, and weak attachment to teachers correlate strongly with youth crime. Schools often serve as either preventive institutions or breeding grounds for delinquent peer networks.
4. **Peer Influence:** Association with delinquent peers is the strongest predictor of juvenile criminal behaviour. Peer groups provide identity, validation, and social status, encouraging rule-breaking norms.
5. **Digitalization:** The internet creates new forms of delinquency (cyberbullying, online fraud, digital piracy) and facilitates recruitment into deviant communities. Virtual anonymity lowers social inhibition and increases aggression.

6. **Economic and Social Marginalization:** Poverty, unemployment, urban overcrowding, and inequality create environments where youth seek alternative means of achieving social status or financial resources.

These findings suggest that juvenile delinquency is not a result of a single factor but emerges from interconnected systems. Criminological prevention must therefore address individual, family, institutional, and societal levels.

DISCUSSION

The discussion highlights the broad theoretical and practical implications of the results. Juvenile delinquency must be understood as a developmental phenomenon influenced by unstable identity, cognitive immaturity, and social vulnerability. Unlike adult crime—driven by stable motives and rational calculation—youth crime is often impulsive, situational, and reactive.

The discussion emphasizes that prevention efforts must begin early, targeting families, schools, and communities. Parenting programs, school counselling, mentorship, and structured recreational activities demonstrate strong preventive effects in multiple countries. Family-based interventions such as Functional Family Therapy (FFT) and Multisystemic Therapy (MST) have shown significant success in reducing reoffending.

Furthermore, the discussion acknowledges that punitive measures alone are ineffective for minors. Excessive criminalization can reinforce deviant identity and increase recidivism. Restorative justice—based on reconciliation, accountability, and community repair—has proven more effective for youth, helping them reintegrate into society without stigma.

Digital prevention strategies must also adapt to modern realities by promoting digital literacy, online safety education, and monitoring harmful online communities.

Criminological theory and practical experience show that youth delinquency is preventable through systemic, multidisciplinary approaches rooted in empathy, evidence, and long-term policy commitment.

CONCLUSION

The article concludes that juvenile and youth delinquency is a multifactorial social phenomenon requiring comprehensive analysis and integrated preventive interventions. Its causes lie in the combined effects of psychological development, family environment, peer influence, education quality, economic conditions, and digital exposure.

Effective prevention requires strengthening families, supporting schools, enhancing community structures, and implementing restorative justice models. International experience demonstrates that punitive responses alone fail to prevent youth crime; rather, meaningful reduction occurs through early intervention, social inclusion, and rehabilitative strategies.

Understanding youth crime through a criminological lens allows policymakers to design prevention programs that address root causes instead of superficial symptoms. A society committed to protecting its youth must invest in social support, education, and moral development to reduce future offending and promote healthier communities.

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