

Parent-adolescent relationship and juvenile delinquency in Kerala, India: A qualitative study

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Adolescence is a transitional period from childhood to adulthood and relationship between adolescents and their parents are vital. Lack of intimacy, lack of parental involvement, lack of guidance, lack of parental attachment, blaming, and anger can lead to delinquent behavior among adolescents. In India, in 2010 alone, there were 34,527 cases of reported adolescent delinquency. There was a substantial difference in the number of crimes committed by boys (95%) and girls (5%) of the total crimes committed by adolescents.

The purpose of this study was to explore and compare, from the adolescent's perspective, the parent-adolescent relationship among adolescents who have engaged in delinquent behavior and those who have not. Participants were adolescent boys in the state of Kerala, India, who discussed the environment they experienced in their home: their relationship with their father and mother; and the control, guidance, and pressure from their parents.

Framed by social control theory and general strain theory, the study used a constructivist paradigm to explore the lived experiences of 21 adolescent boys between the ages of 14 to 17: 12 boys who were nondelinquent and 9 who were delinquent. Each participated in an in-depth interview for 30 minutes to 1 hour and one of two focus groups which lasted for 45 minutes.

The results indicated that parental attitudes and behaviors likely contributed, directly and indirectly, to adolescent behavior. The adolescents with delinquent behavior were living in a family where parental fights were common, where the father was alcoholic and/or abusive, and where the adolescents experienced severe parental punishment from their childhood. The interviews revealed the lack of parenting skills among the parents of adolescents with delinquent behavior. Adolescents without delinquent behavior experienced higher parental involvement, parental guidance, and attachment. These adolescents were living in a happier family environment with fewer family fights and greater communication.

It is clear that delinquent and nondelinquent behavior adolescents experienced their family life quite differently, and that their respective home and family environments directly influenced behavior patterns. Implications of the research findings for social work practice, policy, and research are presented, as well as the study's strengths and limitations.