

THE EFFECTS OF INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL RISK FACTORS ON VIOLENT CRIMES OF JUVENILES

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The involvement of children in violent crimes as a perpetrator gets the attention of both researchers and society. The purpose of the study is to identify the risk factors that distinguish juveniles in terms of violent crime. The criminal behavior children were examined in two categories in this study. The first category is composed of non-violent crimes against individuals such as larceny, drug use, opposition to the law of meetings and demonstrations. The second category consists of crimes involving intensive violence against individuals such as armed robbery, felonious injury, murder, and sexual assault.

Method: Within the scope of the study 940 court files of the juveniles, which are adjudicated between 2015 and 2019 in the Istanbul Courthouse Jurisdiction, were selected randomly. Available information about children in the court file recorded retrospectively. Individual (gender, age at the date of crime, substance use, working in a job, self-harming behavior, run away from home and previous crime history) and social risk factors (duration of education, risky peer, parental education level, working parent, parental crime history, family type, number of siblings, sibling crime history, sibling substance abuse, domestic violence, sharing problems with the family, total monthly income of the family, domestic migration) was compiled using binary coding system. The factors affecting violent crime were determined by logistic regression analysis.

Findings: It was found that individual risk factors consist of being male gender, age at the date of crime, substance use, working in a job and run away from home. Whereas the context of social risk factors, it was found that the father's job, father's history of crime and not sharing personal troubles with the family predicted violent crimes. When the researchers put both groups into analysis at the same

time, they found that being male gender, age at the date of crime, working in a job, a runaway from home, domestic violence, sharing personal problems with the family have predicted violence.

Result: As a result, both individual and social risk factors have been found effective in dragging children to violent crimes.

Keywords: juvenile, delinquency, violent crimes, individual risk factors, social risk factors

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of juvenile delinquency has become an important input of social science research in recent years. Especially in the field of Forensic Sciences, delinquency and victimized children continue to be focused by the researchers. Researchers' emphasis on juvenile delinquency is related to the conflict between the values attributed to childhood. Criminal behavior and criminal justice system generally designed for the adults due to they can control their behavior and they are well aware of their actions. There are many differences between the criminal behaviors of adults and children. First, children's behavior happens impulsively and fail to understand the consequences. Second, while the factors that cause the criminal behavior of children are mostly environmental, it is related with personal factors in adults. In line with this thought, the Turkish Penal Code also divides children into age groups and emphasizes that there is no criminal responsibility for whom below 12 years old and for certain age groups (12 to 15) criminal responsibility should be investigated. Based on this point, the focus of Forensic Science research has been to determine the conditions that causes juvenile delinquency.

According to the Justice Statistics (2019) published regularly by the Ministry of Justice every year, the number of adjudicated children is 207.006 (see Table 1). Considering the gender and age groups, the rate of girls between the ages of 12-14 is 3.88% (n = 8.026) compared to all adjudicated children. The rate of boys in the same age group is 38.12% (n = 78.911). The rate of girls between the ages of 15-18 is 4.24% (n = 8.772), while the rate of boys in the same age group is 53.77% (n = 111.297). Considering all age groups, the rate of girls is 8.11% (n = 16.798), while the rate of all boys is 91.89% (n = 190.208). Based on these distributions alone, more than two hundred thousand children in our country are charged as defendants in courts every year.

Table 1. Number of Juvenile Delinquency

Age	Female	Ratio (%)	Male	Ratio (%)
12-14	8.026	3,88	78.911	38,12
15-18	8.772	4,24	111.297	53,77
Total	16.798	8,11	190.208	91,89

Justice Statistics, 2019

The type of crimes that committed by juveniles are given in Table 2. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Justice, most of the crime that committed by the children is crimes against property, like theft, shoplifting, and robbery, with a rate of 51%. Other offences are, 22% of crimes against liberty, like threat; 17% of crimes against physical integrity, like intentionally injury; 5% of crimes against public health, like using drugs; and 4% of crimes against sexual integrity, like sexual assault. The data shows that there is a similar ratio among the age groups for girls, however for the boys it is understood that 15-18 age group is committed more crime than the other age groups.

Table 2. Adjudicated Juveniles According to Crime Types

	Female		Male		Total
	12-14	15-18	12-14	15-18	
Crimes Against Property	2.718	2.505	39.259	44.062	88.544
Crimes Against Liberty	1.292	1.492	16.097	19.831	38.712
Crimes Against Physical Immunity	1.777	1.798	8.866	16.996	29.437
Crimes Against Public Health	305	536	1.774	6.641	9.256
Crimes Against Sexual Integrity	102	71	3.738	3.218	7.129
Total	6.194	6.402	69.734	90.748	173.078

According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, risk factors for juveniles who are 12-14 years were as such: being male, having poor family relationships, excessive or inadequate family discipline, neglect of the family, antisocial behavior in parents, single-parent family structure, violence and abuse in the family, low socio-economic status of the family, low school achievement, antisocial friends who involved in crime, drug use, high crime rates in the social environment. (Shader 2001: cited in Çoban, 2012). Similarly, Loeber (1990) proposed that the risk factors in juvenile delinquency are inadequate supervision, neglect of parents, insufficient discipline, negative attitudes of parents, aggressive behaviors of parents, parental crime record, marital problems, single-parent family, poor health of parents, and deviant circle of peers. In the study, it is stated that the most important risk factors are insufficient family control, the combination of various negative family conditions neglects of the family, criminal record and aggressiveness in the family, and risky friends (Loeber 1990: cited in Çoban, 2012).

As a result of the longitudinal study conducted with 1000 children in the 13-14 age group in the USA between 1988 and 1992, various risk factors are highlighted in five categories: family, school, living area, friends and the individual: i) in the family; The attachment problems between parents and children, the single-parent family structure and the control of parents over the child are not statistically as important as previous studies have shown; ii) at school; lack of commitment and low academic achievement correlate with criminal tendency while attachment to the school and high academic achievement correlate with not being involve in crime; iii) in the living area; Living in a region under poor conditions is indirectly related to the criminal tendency associated with negative socio-economic characteristics such as economic difficulties and lack of social support; iv) friends; being a gang member is closely related to crime; v) in the category of individual; approve of drug use are related to the probability of being offender (Case and Haines 2009: cited in Çoban, 2012).

In a study conducted by Erbay and Gülüm (2018), it was found that the risk factors of children prosecuted with criminal charges fall into two main groups. In the first group, there are factors that can be evaluated in the category of individual reasons such as running away from home, self-harm, drug use, dropping out of school. In the second group, it is more related to environmental reasons. Friends who are showing risky behavior, poor family sharing, domestic violence, an individual with a criminal history in the family, an individual with use of drugs in the family, the family's low economic income, and the movement of the family in the last 15 years with internal migration movements.

The reasons for juvenile delinquency are examined in different longitudes. Within the scope of this study, individual and social risk factors will be emphasized. These two factors will be discussed in the following sections.

Individual Risk Factors

Considering sociological and psychological deficiencies in society, there are important deviancy factors related to children. These deficiencies can be categorized biological (physical and mental) as well as social factors stemming from the child's family and environment (Yörükoğlu, 2001: cited in Bilir, 2009).

Even if personality traits and biological characteristics do not directly cause delinquency it provides the appropriate environment for committing a crime. Children with more negative personality traits are more prone to commit crimes. At least when negative personality traits find a suitable development environment, criminal behavior can occur more easily (Bilir, 2009).

Negative experiences of the child can cause emotional breakdown. Lack of family love, which plays a very important role in socialization for the child, the separation of parents, the presence of an individual who has committed a crime in his family, and inability to gain a place in the community create a negative emotional intensity in children. This feeling is reflected in the form of reaction. It can also lead to the development of a selfish, anti-social personality (Yavuzer, 2001).

Armstrong et al. (2005) proposed that individual risk factors consist of three dimensions. Under the psycho-social dimension, there are variables such as lack of self-confidence, low motivation, cognitive developmental delay, and social failure. In the behavioral dimension, there are variables such as getting pregnant at an early age, use of addictive substances, and dropping out of school. In the physical dimension, there are variables such as the presence of a chronic physical illness, being male, and nervous system diseases.

Social Risk Factors

Family functionality is one of the strongest predictors of the child's delinquency (Gorman et al., 2004: cited in Ergündüz, 2010). It is stated that in families with weak family ties and problems in family interactions, children will be alienated from their families. As a result, two different behavioral patterns will be observed in the child: running away from home/parent and avoiding home/parent (Angenent and Man, 1996: cited in Ergündüz, 2010).

School is an important factor affecting whether children can adapt to society or alienate from it. Because the circle of friends is formed in the school and thus a new phase of the socialization process begins. For this reason, when the school cannot fulfill the functions it should perform, it can lead to crime-prone personality development rather than preventing crime. However, some studies reveal that this situation is related to the low education level of the country in general rather than the education level of the child. For this reason, it is necessary to evaluate the educational status of juveniles together with the characteristics of the social environment (Ergündüz, 2010). The research revealed that schools sometimes become a place of criminal activities and students bring guns and knives to the school (Omaji, 1992: cited in Bilir, 2009). Some researchers argue that children will turn to less crime after leaving school because they get rid of a negative environment, while others are of the opinion that children who drop out of school will turn to more crime because they have cut ties with an important socialization institution (Seydlitz and Jenkins, 1998: cited in Ergündüz, 2010).

According to Agnew and Brezina (2012), children and adolescents learn both socially accepted behaviors and criminal behavior through association or exposure in the same way. Close social groups such as family or friend groups have a tremendous influence on the learning process of children and adolescents. It would not be surprising for children and adolescents to spend a large part of their time with these social groups in terms of learning both socially approved behaviors and criminal behavior. At this point, it is the characteristics of social groups that are important. If criminal behavior is accepted as a positive feature in these groups and

there are people who exhibit this behavior, it will be faster and easier for children and adolescents to acquire these behaviors. On the other hand, reinforcement of criminal behavior is an important parameter in the internalization of that behavior. The peer group, which is one of the places where the search for identity continues, is an environment where specific norms and values, especially loyalty, gain importance. Peer groups can put pressure on children to exhibit criminal behaviors like stealing and using drugs (Angenent & Man, 1996: cited in Ergündüz, 2010).

In studies on juvenile and adolescent delinquency, it has been observed that the family income is generally low (Türkeri 1995: cited in Ergündüz, 2010). Although the low economic level is not the only reason leading to crime, it creates a suitable environment for crime (Hancı, 1999: cited in Ergündüz, 2010). On the other hand, work life at young ages is one of the factors that hinder the socialization process. Because the child is faced with dropping out of school in order to go to work. If children are employed in jobs where it is prohibited to work, it may be easier for them to be involved in crime due to the adverse environmental conditions they are in (Dönmezer, 1994: cited in Bilir, 2009).

2. METHODS

2.1 Sample

Within the scope of the study, 940 adjudicated children selected randomly in İstanbul Courthouse between 2015-2019. The total number of juveniles were 4200 in the same time period. The number of files accessed is 420, and a total of 940 children were adjudicated in these files.

2.2 Data Collection

Information on children in the file includes individual (gender, age at criminal history, substance use, employment, self-harming behavior, running away from home and previous criminal history) and social risk factors (risky peer, parental education level, parents working at work, parental crime history, family type, the number of siblings, sibling crime history, sibling substance abuse, domestic violence, sharing troubles with the family, total monthly income of the family, internal migration). All acquired data coded in a binary system.

2.3 Data Analysis

The individual and social risk factors that cause delinquency were examined in a two-model structure with logistic regression analysis. While only individual factors are included in the first model, in the second model both individual and social risk factors are included.

3. FINDINGS

It was understood that 96.1% (n = 903) of 940 children were male and 3.9% (n = 37) were female (see Table 3). The average age of males is 16.4, while the average age of females is 15.1. According to the distribution of crime types, crimes against property are in the first place with 48.4% (n = 455). The remaining crimes are crimes against public health with 24.9% (n = 234), crimes against sexual immunity with 9.7% (n = 92); There are crimes against physical immunity with 7.3% (n = 69) and crimes against liberty with 3.9% (n = 37), respectively.

Table 3. Gender, Age and Crime Types

Gender	n	%	Mean age (years)
Male	903	96,1	16,4
Female	37	3,9	15,1
Crime Types			
Crimes Against Property	455	48,4	
Crimes Against Public Health	234	24,9	
Crimes Against Sexual Integrity	92	9,7	
Crimes Against Physical Immunity	69	7,3	
Crimes Against Liberty	37	3,9	

According to the results of the logistic regression analysis (see Table 4) which is performed to determine the individual and social risk factors that are effective in violent crimes, the model produced was to be found significant ($\chi^2 = 84,764$, $p = .000$). Among the individual risk factors age and drug addiction; in the category of social risk factors, the presence of criminal history of the parents, the existence of a non-traditional family type (such as divorce and single parent), and not sharing their troubles with the family observed significant predictive effect. It is understood that variables can explain 23% of the variance of delinquency ($R^2 = .23$). It is estimated that the probability of children being involved in violent crime will increase approximately 1.6 times as the age increases by one unit. In the presence of drug addiction, it is estimated that the probability of occurrence of a violent crime will increase by 0.4 times. If the parents have a criminal history, the probability of delinquency is approximately 0.4 times; being a member of a non-traditional family type will increase delinquency approximately 0.4 times, and not sharing problems with the family will increase delinquency approximately 0.4 times.

Table 4. Individual and Social Risk Factors Prediction on Delinquency

Variables	B	SE	Wald	p	Exp(B)
<u>Individual Risk Factors</u>					
Age	.451	.083	29,616	.000	1,57
Drug Addiction	-.983	.315	9,756	.002	.374
<u>Social Risk Factors</u>					
Parental Crime History	-.987	.363	7,391	.007	.373
Family Type	-1,015	.318	10,205	.001	.362
Sharing Problem with Family	-.931	.270	11,834	.001	.395
Nagelkerke's R^2			.23		
χ^2 (df)			84,764 (19)*		

* $p < .001$

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The concept of age in juvenile delinquency is generally measured by the risks exposed at early ages (Hawkins et al., 1998; Lipsey & Derzon, 1998). Herrenkohl et al. (2000) report that a 10-year-old child who is exposed to six or more risk factors is 10 times more likely to commit violent crimes up to the age of 18 than a 10-year-old child exposed to only one risk factor. Similarly, the findings obtained from the study in question shed light on the conclusion that children who commit crime at lower ages are more likely to be involved in violent acts as they get older. On the other hand, Loeber (1990) advocated the view that behavioral problems that children show developmentally will evolve into aggression-based disorders as they get older, which is also effective in being dragged into crime.

Another factor that is effective in individual risk factors is that children are addicted to substances. The findings show the possibility of addicted juveniles is high being delinquent. According to Petraitis, Flay, and Miller (1995), the underlying reasons for drug use by children and adolescents are multifaceted. It is claimed that children and adolescents used to smoke and drink before using drugs and then switch to cannabis as an experiential drug. The researchers reported the effective factors on drug use as follows: the structure of social norms and laws, access to drugs, severe economic crises, social disorder, certain psychological features, anti-social behavior, family history of alcohol, drugs, and antisocial behavior, domestic violence, poor family management, low family commitment, academic failure, absence from school, and social models in drug use.

Findings obtained in the context of social risk factors are generally related to family relations. Parents' crime stories, single-parent families, and lack of effective family sharing mechanisms affect children being delinquent. According to Farrington (2010), the effect of families is enormous in the delinquency of children. Parental inability to discipline children, economic difficulties, divorce, and similar reasons, single parenthood, and family crime history were emphasized as negative family dynamics. Uluğtekin (1976: cited in Ergündüz, 2010) revealed that parents who cannot cope with their economic, social, and emotional problems in their daily life direct their aggression towards their children. This situation raises the issue of domestic violence and abuse. In the family, arguments among parents, being disrespectful to each other, avoiding behavior of the father, presence of individual having a criminal record in the family, exhibiting inappropriate behaviors around the child, and parents' inconsistent behavior towards the child can lead the child to criminal behavior (Edwards, Schulz, and Long, 1995: cited in Bilir, 2009). Smith and Stern (1997) argue that not supportive families, parents do not have the ability to manage the family, and the presence of domestic violence drives children to violent crimes. According to Wong (2010), children of parents with negligent behavior are driven into crime more. Especially the negligent characteristics of fathers cause boys to be dragged into violent crimes. Again, the lack of communication within the family, the parents' attitudes about their children's friends, and inconsistency in the decisions cause the children to be negatively affected.

As a result, it can be said that both individual characteristics and social factors are effective on juvenile delinquency. It is considered that if children are prevented from accessing drugs and if effective parenting skills are provided to families, the number of delinquents can be reduced.

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