REVIEW

Social Factors Leading to Juvenile Delinquency

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Abstract. According to the White Paper on Crime 1994 published by the Ministry of Justice in Japan, the delinquent rate in Japan was highest when juveniles were approximately 14 to 16 years old, and declined as they grew older. The analysis of juvenile offenders in Japan showed that 70% of them had two living parents, with 90% of them from families which were financially stable or affluent. The breakdown of their parents attitudes showed, however, that 48.2% were classified as neglectful, followed by harshness at 30.3% and spoiling or overprotection at 17.3% in 1993 in Japan. In the following, social factors leading to juvenile delinquency were reviewed. Factors leading to juvenile delinquency were classified into social factors, school factors and home factors, and recent findings concerning those three factors were explained. A fairly clear outlook on the efforts required by society, schools and families to reduce juvenile delinquency was shown by revealing important factors leading juveniles to delinquency. (Keio J Med 45 (4): 287 - 295, December 1996)

Key words: juvenile delinquency, social factors, school, family discord, attachment

The population rate of juvenile delinquency in 1993 in Japan (the juvenile Penal Code offenders per 1,000 juvenile population aged 10 years or older and less than 20 years) was 9.3. The rate of juvenile offenders (the percentage of juvenile Penal Code offenders to the total Penal Code offenders, including adult and child offenders) was 49.0% in 1993 in Japan. The problem of juvenile delinquency is serious in the world.

In order to consider countermeasures to prevent juvenile delinquency, it is necessary to begin by revealing actual circumstances and various factors leading juveniles into misconduct.

By revealing these factors, concrete countermeasures to prevent juvenile delinquency will be clarified.

The results obtained from the research conducted on these factors thus far will be shown first. The factors which have been leading juveniles to delinquency can be generally divided into three factors: social, school, and home factors, all three of which are equally important.

Social Factors

Five social factors which appear to be relatively important in influencing juvenile delinquency are as follows.1

Influence of mass communication

Recent TV programs, films, magazines, and other mass media contain many violent scenes as well as many explicit sexual and criminal scenes. They often give rise to problems of their adversely influencing juveniles. The following findings have recently become generally known: After watching violent scenes in TV programs and films, children tend to directly imitate the violence, and all children tend to have a familiar association with violence. In particular, it was revealed that for children who, by nature, have the tendency for misconduct, watching these scenes increased the possibility for them to engage in misconduct.2-5 Moreover, it was found that by watching violent scenes for a prolonged time, children gradually obtained the tendency to become offensive with respect to their behaviour and manner.5 From the surveys conducted in Japan, a similar feature was revealed among the children who engaged in violence at school; many of them watched TV programs for about 4 hours

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On the other hand, the following findings were revealed by various studies in England and the US on the recent adverse influence of mass communication on juveniles. 1) After showing violent scenes on TV at high frequencies to boys aged 12-17 years living in the city of London, their violence significantly increased. In addition, their violence increased further when they felt a personal familiarity with those engaged in the violence (TV talents) and when that violence was justified in the programs. 7

2) In general, violent children are more likely to watch violent films. This causes a vicious circle, which leads their violence significantly increased. In addition, their violence increased further when they felt a personal familiarity with those engaged in the violence (TV talents) and when that violence was justified in the programs. 7

From these findings, it can be confirmed that the influence of mass communications on juvenile misconduct is strong.

Some of the possible mechanisms of the influence are described below. 1) Violent children and juvenile delinquents spend longer hours watching TV and they tend to prefer to watch violent programs.5 In addition, when they behave offensively, which stimulate them, they tend to become to prefer watching violent programs.13 Accordingly, it is conceivable that two factors — resorting to violent behaviour and watching violent programs — have mutual influences, and as a result, they become caught in a vicious circle, which in turn, further escalates both of these factors. 2) They imitate contents of TV programs directly. 3) It has already been found that by watching or listening to violent programs or violent scenes, they become stimulated, which increases their offensive impulse. There is an assertion, however, that watching violent programs causes a cathartic effect, which eases the viewers’/listeners’ tension.14 But the fact is opposite in most of the cases: violent programs give the viewers/listeners overwhelmingly stronger stimulation rather than a cathartic effect. 4) It is known that mass communications greatly influence the thought of people. Therefore, it is conceivable that by circulating violent or criminal scenes frequently, people’s feeling about violence or crimes becomes gradually paralyzed, which lead them to obtain a familiar feeling about these matters. This applies both to adults and children, but its influence on children is much stronger. Especially when children are in an environment in which violence or crime is familiar, the influence on them becomes much more stronger.

Increase of criminal opportunities and desire for wealth

Since the end of World War II, cars, bicycles, motorcycles, etc. have been rapidly increasing in number and as a result, nowadays, they are widely seen and more easily accessible, which has been increasing criminal opportunities. The appearance of many supermarkets has also increased shoplifting opportunities due to the insufficient number of store clerks. In addition, the amount of goods has become abundant, which has increased the desire for people to obtain them.

Regional influence

It is known that misconduct and crime have been occurring frequently in particular regions, such as slums and new residential areas. Moreover, neighbouring cities and towns and the number of streets are also factors which affect their frequency. These regions have shown similar tendencies in terms of frequency of juvenile delinquency for quite a long time. In addition, more crimes by adults, mental disorders such as alcoholism, one parent households, households with many children, and poor living conditions have been in existence in these regions. More misconduct or delinquency has been occurring around buildings where broad, semi-public space, not visible to others is located. On the other hand, the buildings where less misconduct has been occurring have the following common features. They have clear boundaries on the outside of their buildings, which make their residents believe that they must be responsible for supervising their buildings. They have structures which enable their residents to immediately recognize the people outside of their buildings. They have their own doormen.

Influence of delinquent groups

Juveniles showed the tendency to be easily led into misconduct when they couldn’t do well at schools or were outcast from their peers. These students then form delinquent groups, and attempt to gain recognition of their existence in a different manner by misconduct. Moreover, in recent years many juveniles have the urge for misconduct, and this even applies to the general high school students. According to a survey conducted in Japan, 58.1% of the respondents said they wanted to experience driving in a car or a motor-cycle at the highest speed possible. Therefore, we can say that quite a few juveniles have the potential for misconduct. The following are the known relationships between delinquent groups and secondary juvenile delinquents. 1) Most of the misconduct have been conducted in groups,
2) Juveniles whose parents have criminal histories or whose friends engage in misconduct tend to be easily driven to misconduct. 3) Juveniles who live in regions or go to schools where there is a high frequency of misconduct showed the tendency to be easily driven to misconduct. 4) Juveniles who have juvenile delinquents as friends tend to have a higher probability to engage in misconduct. 5) Probability for a certain juvenile to engage in misconduct depends on the frequency of misconduct initiated by his/her friends. 6) When a juvenile has friends or acquaintances who have engaged in misconduct, these misconduct of these people have a significant correlation with future misconduct by this juvenile. As we can see from these findings juveniles tend to have greater possibility to have contact with delinquent groups when they are unable to adapt appropriately at home or school. And when they come into contact with delinquent groups more frequently, the possibility for them to be driven into misconduct gradually becomes higher.

Labeling

Arresting, putting on trial, and consigning of juvenile delinquents are conducted for educational purposes for the juvenile in question and for other juveniles. But sometimes, these measures result in labeling them as juvenile delinquents, which leads to the public’s prejudice against them and deteriorates their self-images. And in the worst case, they are driven into second offenses. Therefore, thoughtful treatment is essential when handling these matters. Labeling a person as a criminal or a juvenile delinquent leads the public to judge him/her as he/she was labeled, which gives him/her serious handicaps for obtaining jobs and hinders his/her marriages. If by chance, a second offense was conducted, the probability of an arrest would be higher than that of others because they were already known to the police. Moreover, when they are not accepted by other people due to their deteriorated images, they tend to easily return to the juvenile groups which they felt a sense of belonging to.

The adverse influence of labeling has been most frequently seen for their first offense. That is, juvenile delinquents who have experienced being put on trial and consigned in facilities have a stronger tendency to misconduct after they get free, compared with delinquents who had similarly misconducted and avoided trial. However, there was less adverse influence on second offenders.

School Factors

Juveniles spend quite a long time at schools. It is compulsory for them to attend school for 9 years. During these years, they spend about a half of each day, subtracting sleeping hours, involved in school-related activities. Therefore, schools have an enormous influence on the growth of juveniles. As for rapidly increasing juvenile misconduct at schools in recent years, various factors, especially those at schools appear to influence them greatly. The reason why the various school factors which influence the misconduct of juveniles have gained the public’s attention is due to the fact that the frequency of the misconduct markedly differs from school to school. Power et al conducted an investigation of 20 junior high schools in the same region of London and found that there was a marked difference in the frequency of juvenile delinquency among the schools. The frequency ranged from merely 1% a year to 19% a year, depending on the school. This difference did not depend on regional differences and almost similar tendencies were found to be unchanged in the same surveys repeatedly conducted over 6 years. (That is, even among the schools in the same region, marked differences were found.) In a later study, Gath et al also obtained similar results from a survey conducted at elementary schools and junior high schools in a neighboring area of London. In addition, differences were also found in terms of laziness of juveniles (Gath et al or problematic behaviour in classes. Accordingly, it became necessary to reveal the reason why there were such differences in the frequency of misconduct among the schools in the same region. One explanation for this is that those juveniles who had been problematic at elementary schools did not enter each junior high schools at an equal dispersion, rather many of them may have entered only a select number of schools. This may be an important factor, but another fact was found; regardless of whether they had been problematic or not at elementary schools, they had the potential to improve or worsen after entering junior high school. According to these findings, the influence of junior high school on students can be summarized as described below.

First, student behaviour can be classified into the following three categories: (a) Problematic behaviour at schools such as violent behaviour, and disturbing lessons. (b) Scholastic achievement. (c) Attendance percentage.

Factors which greatly influenced each of the above categories are given as follows: (a) Most of the problematic behaviour at schools were caused by an inadequate administration system. (b) As for scholastic achievement, students who entered schools with a good administration system tended to achieve higher scholastic results, and students who were doing well before they entered junior high school tended to maintain the similar level of achievement at junior high school. On the other hand, student scholastic achievement tended to worsen when there were a large number of students not doing well in the same class. That is, students in the same class mutually influenced each other. (c) The percentage of
The teacher's enthusiasm for education and expectations for students

Generally, human beings are sensitive to how others evaluate ourselves. When we are highly appraised, we seek to be worthy of such, and when the appraisal is the opposite, that is, low, we tend not to make any effort. In particular, juveniles markedly showed this tendency. When teachers expressed their expectations for students to achieve good grades, it encouraged the students to study. And when teachers instilled that they trusted the students and afforded them the responsibility for their own achievement, students attempted to live up to these expectations. When teachers expressed their expectations for students to achieve good grades, it encouraged the students to study. And when teachers instilled that they trusted the students and afforded them the responsibility for their own achievement, students attempted to live up to these expectations.65-67 Enthusiasm for education is expressed by the following: Beginning and ending lessons punctually: Assigning appropriate homework diligently and holding substantial lessons by elaborating the education curriculum: Placing value on lessons and making an effort not to decrease the hours of lessons (not canceling lessons for holidays:70 Emphasizing the pursuit of learning.52,68 Conducting students to actively participate in lessons: Displaying the work of students attaining high achievement on the walls, etc. On the other hand, giving a formal prize at the end of the year did not greatly influence the class as a whole, which caused problematic behaviour to occur more easily. (c) Too frequent reproach to a student’s problematic behaviour tended to help increase such behaviour further. The reason for this was thought that teacher’s reproach interrupted the flow of the lessons, which distracted students’ attentiveness and deteriorated the entire atmosphere in the classes.5,71-73

How to praise and punish

(a) Regarding the guidelines for rewards and punishment, there are two cases; in one case, the judgement of the incident lies with each teacher’s discretion, and in another case, judgement is based on discussion among teachers. When comparing the schools employing these two cases, the former (the schools where judgement was left to the discretion of the teacher) showed more adverse tendencies in both student scholastic achievement and delinquent behaviour. Incidentally, more adverse tendencies were found for student behaviour at schools where corporal punishment had been inflicted, but not particularly adverse tendencies were found at schools where students were forced to stand as punishment or assigned additional work.46,53,63,71,74 (b) Student behaviour improved by using praise rather than punishment, although correcting student behaviour by means of punishment was sometimes necessary. As for the ways of praising, the following were found to be effective: Determine positive aspects of the students and praise them during lessons: Praise students in groups: Display the work of students attaining high achievement on the walls, etc. On the other hand, giving a formal prize at the end of the year did not greatly influence the class as a whole, it may be because not many students could be qualified for the prize.

Reliance on teachers

At schools where many students often consulted with their teachers (not professional counselors) when they had personal problems, both percentage of attendance and scholastic achievement were good.

Students’ responsibilities and participation in activities

(a) When schools in a block of London were investigated to determine the percentage of students of each
school who had a responsibility role (captains, homework checkers, and so on), there was quite a difference among the schools; from 7% to 50%. There was a positive relationship between the ratio and student scholastic achievement and behaviour at school; the higher the ratio was, the better the scholastic achievement and behavior were. (b) As reference to whether or not students had experienced roles in activities such as at cultural festivals or some assemblies in schools, both scholastic achievement and daily behaviour were found to be better at schools with a greater ratio of students who had such experiences. (c) Concerning the maintenance of each student's learning materials both the percentage of class attendance and behaviour were found to be maintained well at schools where students had been entrusted with this maintenance.

Teachers' system

(a) Regarding annual education schedules at schools had been entirely prepared by each teacher without any restraint from other teachers, or prepared through among teachers or under direction of senior teachers, the frequency of misconduct and absence were high at schools where such preparation had been entrusted to the decision of each teacher. (b) Concerning evaluation systems for each teacher's responsibilities, better results were obtained at schools where these systems existed. As for the frequency of evaluations conducted by senior teachers, for example, checks on homework assigned to the students by each teacher, there was quite a difference ranging from 10% to 100%, depending on the school. But there was a positive relationship between students' scholastic achievement and checks conducted by senior teachers; the more frequent the checks, the better the scholastic achievements were. (c) The decision procedure within schools was found to be another factor greatly influencing students. Most of the schools in London have decision making systems comprising senior teachers within the schools in addition to meetings by all the teachers of the school. As regards whether the major decisions at the schools had been made at senior teachers' meetings or at the general teachers' meetings (comprising all the teachers), the ratio of the schools where such decisions had been made at senior teachers' meetings at his/her school ranged from 33% to 100%, depending on the school. The general behaviour of students were better at schools where such decisions had been made not at the general teachers' meetings but at the senior teachers' meetings. Meanwhile, at schools where each teacher thinks his/her opinions have been taken into consideration to some extent when making such decisions, the general behaviour of students were found to be good. That is, when senior staff made these decisions after well-considering the input from teachers, it showed the tendency to bring about the best results.

Each teacher's educational skill

The evaluation of a teacher's educational skill is not simple because it represents the integration of various factors. One of the factors is the general atmosphere of the school. At schools where teachers have been responsible for undertaking education interdependently as one body, their educational skills improve naturally. That is, it can be said that a teacher's educational skill is determined by not only his/her individual ability but also by the situation of the schools. As regards the ratio of the time spent by teachers for communicating with all the students of the class, which is an important factor of educational skill, inexperienced teachers spent less time for communicating with all the students at all the schools, and spent less time with only a part of the students. But at inferior schools, even experienced teachers had spent a small amount of time for communicating with the all students, which had been causing problematic behaviour of many students in the class. Accordingly, it became clear that, in addition to each teacher's personal effort, a cooperative relationship among the teachers within the schools was an important factor for improvement of a teacher's educational skills.

Student scholastic achievements

When students have poor grades (when students are slow learners), they tend to lose confidence in their study and become bored and spiritless or defiant. Therefore, a teacher's efforts are necessary to help them understand their lessons well and to improve their scholastic achievements.

Size and cleanliness of schools

Neither the size of the schools (the number of students in one school), the size of one class, nor the number of students for to each teacher was found to be related to percentage of attendance, problematic behaviour, and scholastic achievements (Rutter and Madge). Regarding the school buildings, the age of the buildings had no influence on students, however, there was a tendency that maintaining clean schools favorably influenced the students.

Home Factors

Five home factors which thus far have been found to be closely related to juvenile misconduct will be explained.

Criminal history, social problems, and abnormal personalities of parents
One of the indexes which are most related to juvenile misconduct is whether or not parents have a criminal history. This has been proven in the research conducted by Jonsson\textsuperscript{75} in Switzerland and West and Farrington\textsuperscript{76,77} in England. West and others conducted a prospective study of the general public, and found that 39\% of the juveniles whose fathers had a criminal history had a history of misconduct, and on the other hand, as for the juveniles whose fathers didn’t have a criminal history, only 16\% of them had a history of misconduct. Formerly McCord\textit{et al}\textsuperscript{78} reported that the ratio of the risk for juveniles to misconduct became maximum when their fathers had criminal histories, cold-hearted personalities, and had been neglecting them. From these findings, there was a strong correlation between parental crime and child misconduct. In particular, when the parents were habitual criminals and they had committed crimes while they were raising their children, these children tended to be easily driven into misconduct\textsuperscript{29,79}. Moreover, when parents had continual social problems (alcoholism, frequent unemployment or absence from work, and dependence on social security systems), their children also showed the same tendency.\textsuperscript{77,80} As for the reason why there is a positive correlation between parental crime and child misconduct, it is thought that the children incorporate the antisocial attitude of the parent and obtain a predisposition to the misconduct when parents are habitual criminals and expose their antisocial attitude to their children every day. On the other hand, heredity could be one of the reasons for this, but it is only true in the case of habitual misconduct which leads to adult crimes and not in the case of general juvenile misconduct, most of which is transient.\textsuperscript{79,81–87}

It was found that a positive relationship existed between mothers’ extremely abnormal personalities and child misconduct. Moreover, abnormal personalities of fathers also caused child misconduct, however they were less influential than those of mothers.\textsuperscript{77}

\textbf{Family discord}

The following family discord tended to lead their children to misconduct.\textsuperscript{88–90} Frequent disputes or hostility between parents extending over a long period of time: Separation or divorce of the parents due to the discord: Parental attitude of refusal or frequent yelling and punishment to the children: Numerous trivial quarrels between parents in front of their children McCord and others\textsuperscript{78} found that those families which experienced frequent quarrels between parents and neglect of children particularly had many juvenile delinquents. Similar findings were reported by Glueck\textit{et al}\textsuperscript{25} and West\textit{et al}.\textsuperscript{77} Power\textit{et al}\textsuperscript{41} reported that the most important factor which indicated whether or not a juvenile delinquent would appear in court again was the home factor. It had been previously reported that children from disruptive or divorced families were adversely affected by such events.

For example, Bowlby\textsuperscript{92} insisted that children who had experienced separation from their mothers over a long period of time were likely to attain characteristics which influenced them into misconduct. Additional researches were conducted afterwards, and it became clear that relatively many juvenile delinquents had experienced family disruption or separation from parents.\textsuperscript{93–96} More detailed research conducted later revealed, however, that the nature of their separation experience was important. Children, whose families were disrupted due to their parental separation or divorce, in particular, showed the tendency to be easily driven to misconduct, but the misconduct by the children whose families were disrupted by the death of one parent did not occur frequently.\textsuperscript{77–79} According to the findings of West and Farrington,\textsuperscript{77} the ratios of the children who had experienced misconduct were 18\% for those who grew up in undisrupted families, 21\% for those who grew up in families which experienced the death of one parent, and 38\% for those in families with parental divorce or separation. The dispersion of these figures were especially obvious for the habitual criminals. (In the families which experienced divorce or separation, the ratio of the children engaged in habitual misconduct was 19\% but in the families which experienced the death of the parent, the ratio was merely 1\%). Separation from parents for more than one month because of hospitalization due to sickness did not increase child misconduct unless the separation occurred repeatedly. On the other hand, when the cause of the separation was family discord, it tended to increase the misconduct.\textsuperscript{77,100} In addition, illegitimate children showed higher probability to become habitual criminals. The same tendency was shown even if the illegitimate children had been living with their biological parents.

\textbf{Weak relationship with parents}

Children who grew up in the families which lacked a close and warm parental relation showed the tendency to be easily driven to misconduct. For example, juvenile delinquents had little experience of enjoying leisure time with their families.\textsuperscript{76,101} In addition, juvenile delinquents didn’t have close communication with their parents.\textsuperscript{84} These juveniles tended to be or do as follows: They had difficulty adapting to other children: They often separated themselves from their family and remained in their rooms: They often did not stay at home, but chose to go out:\textsuperscript{102} They tried not to spend time with their families. Many of their parents showed the following tendencies: They lacked parental love for their children:\textsuperscript{77,78,100} Parental role had less meaning for them and they didn’t become attached to their children.
Insufficient parental discipline or control

When children grew up in the families where discipline was wrongly administered and too severe or insufficiently controlled, they were apt to be easily driven to misconduct.25,78,103,104 As the indexes of insufficient control, Patterson gave the following 4 items. 1) Lack of rules within the families (There were no rules for each person’s roles for meals, etc). 2) Lack of control over children’s behaviour (Parents didn’t know what their children were doing or how they were feeling, etc). 3) Lack of effective response to happenings (Parents were unable to praise children’s good behaviour or admonish their antisocial behaviour consistently). 4) Incapable of dealing with crisis in the families or family troubles (Therefore, they couldn’t settle problems, which increased tension and caused frequent conflict).

Many siblings

Children who were brought up in the families which had quite a number of brothers and sisters showed the tendency to be easily driven into misconduct.77,105 This tendency was particularly marked in poor families (There was a similar tendency in middle-class families as well to a lesser extent).43,77,96 However, its causes remain unclear. In any case, it is admitted that unfavorable conditions develop easily in the families which have many brothers and sisters. These include being forced into overcrowded living conditions,77,106 living in poor housing, children often being left alone, instability of father’s job, financially poor, etc.

Further research and efforts toward their practical applications107–109 to prevent juvenile delinquency are required.

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