

Predicting Variables in Youth Delinquency

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Abstract

Since the mid 1990's, juvenile delinquency has shown a declining trend globally. However, in more recent years this trend has been replaced by a more stagnating movement, even showing minor increasing in the overall level of delinquency, especially when looking at the Netherlands in particular. This research therefore aims to understand key factors in the prediction of juvenile delinquency, such as family dynamics, socioeconomic status, social influences, and environment, and looks into how these variables can potentially be used in an intervention, such as a monitor. The data in this research were collected using semi-structured interviews with participants working in the field of juvenile delinquency. Results showed that negative changes in both family dynamics (e.g., divorce or death of parent) as well as socioeconomic status (e.g., transitioning from high to low) could increase the likelihood of youths becoming delinquent. Furthermore, social influences were found to be of impact, with young adolescents being most prone to peer influences, as well as having a sense of insecurity and social anxiety. Youths interacting with peers who are already showing delinquent behaviour also increase the risk of them ending up on that same path. Finally, youths in urban areas were found to be more at risk of developing criminal behaviours, compared to juveniles in more rural areas, as a stronger sense of social control and cohesion was found in rural settings. Implications such as interpretation bias, as well as knowledge of participants were found to be points of improvement for future research.

Introduction

“Minnesota fourteen-year-old arrested in shooting death of twelve-year-old” (AP News, 2023), “group of juveniles rob and physically harass a cyclist on the F35 between Hengelo and Enschede, the Netherlands” (RTV Oost, 2023), “Rising youth crime concerns grip Sweden” (Kaludova, 2023). These are recent examples of how youth crime worries the current Western society today, also with criminal behaviour being the most prevalent in the teenage years of individuals (Bosick & Fomby, 2018). This does not only have an impact on the current society, but youths who show delinquent behaviour early on are also more at risk of persisting in this type of behaviour when they grow older, therefore also troubling society in later years (Cinini & Mkhize, 2023).

Criminal acts by youth, also known as juvenile delinquency, can be defined as unlawful behaviour committed by juveniles from the age of 12 up to and including the age of 24 (Nederlands Jeugdinstituut, n.d.). These unlawful behaviours can take place in various forms such as violent crimes, property crimes, vandalism and crimes against public order and authority, drug crimes, weapon crimes, traffic offenses, cybercrime, and other crimes, which can be found all over the world.

However, despite the various types of crimes that could be committed by youths, a global trend can be found in data that suggests a decline in juvenile delinquency rates. For example, research by the Department of Justice found that since 2010, youth crimes dropped by 74 percent in the United States in 2019 (Puzzanchera, Ryan, & La Vigne, 2022). According to criminologists, a decline in crime rates could be explained by facts such as more prominent police forces, an older population, better gun policies, and stronger economies (Blumstein & Wallman, 2006; Zimring, 2006). A similar trend can be found in other places, where nations such as England, Wales, Spain, Switzerland, and the Netherlands all have shown comparable

statistics for a drop in youth crimes since the mid 1990's (Griffiths & Norris, 2019; Fernández-Molina & Gutiérrez, 2018; Killias & Landfranconi, 2012).

However, when looking at the Netherlands in particular, even though crime rates in youths have been showing a downward trend, statistics have indicated a stagnating trend is showing from 2018 to the current day, with a growth in the numbers of violent crimes in underaged individuals in the Netherlands (Laan, Beerthuizen, & Boot, 2021). This research shows that between 2016 and 2019, the number of manslaughter convictions among youth doubled. In addition to this, property crimes with the use of violence rose by thirteen percent in 2019, as well as weapon incidents in 2020, which was eleven percent higher than the year prior, suggesting an increase in more violent crimes committed by youths.

Moreover, even though a decline in crime rates among youths has been detected over recent years, a clear explanation for this drop has not been found (Fernández-Molina & Gutiérrez, 2018). Understanding the decline in youth crime rates opens up a door for policymakers to develop effective interventions that include factors associated with a drop in crime rates among youths, as well as getting a better understanding of why certain youths commit crimes and others do not, therefore possibly reducing crime rates even further (Berghuis & De Waard, 2017).

Therefore, this research will seek to provide more insights into predicting variables in juvenile delinquency and seek better insight into what factors play a significant role in juvenile delinquency. This research in particular will focus on several identified factors that are thought to be most influential in juveniles, namely, family dynamics, socioeconomic status, social influences, and environment. Thus, by providing a theoretical framework of existing research concerning these variables, as well as using insights from relevant stakeholders such as governmental agencies, law enforcement, and juvenile institutions, by performing interviews, we would like to gain more knowledge about what factors are most

prominent when it comes to predicting juvenile delinquency in the Netherlands, especially in the Twente region, with regards to the underaged population.

Theoretical Framework

The following variables have been researched in prior research, however, there are still existing gaps currently, and with the help of this research these gaps could be further investigated, hence, building a stronger foundation. Furthermore, the outline that will be provided is not intended to provide a broad overview, but rather the variables that are thought to be most relevant in the development of juvenile delinquency in western, individualistic societies, particularly related to the region of Twente. In addition, these factors have been shown to be interrelated to each other to a certain extent, therefore, enhancing the possibility for a future monitor. Furthermore, although

Gender

In many cases, the role of gender can be seen as one of the more prominent contributing factors in whether an individual will show criminal behaviour (Daigle, Cullen, & Wright, 2007). When looking at the incarceration rates in juvenile detention centres in the Netherlands, there can also be seen a clear distinction between the male and female population, with the Custodial Institutions Agency (2022) showing that between 2014 and 2020, almost 97 percent of the inmates were boys.

These differences can be rather evident and are important to point out, however, also rather complex to account for. In addition, gender has been shown to be interconnected with several other important factors (e.g., social, and environmental factors) that contribute to the likelihood of juveniles behaving delinquent, and possibly play a more significant role when it comes to actually predicting delinquency (Daigle, Cullen, & Wright, 2007). Therefore,

because of the complex nature of the role of gender, and the scope of this research, the main focus will be laid upon other factors, however, still consider the role gender can play, where possible.

Family Dynamics

The household in which a child grows up can have a significant influence on whether a child will follow the right track later in life and has shown to be a causal effect of juvenile delinquency when a child grows up in a so-called broken home (Norland et al, 1979).

Mwangangi (2019) acknowledges that multiple variables contribute to the likelihood of acting delinquent, however, also states that the dynamics of the family play one of the most crucial roles in this case.

For example, in a one-parent-home, a child is at higher risk of experiencing a lack of supervision from the caretaker(s), as well as growing up in a financially unstable household, therefore decreasing the amount of trust and assurance the child has in its life (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1997). Consequently, such youths are at higher risk of behaving in a criminal manner, as well as other antisocial behaviour such as dropping out of school, lower mental well-being, and engagement in sexual violence (Burt & Donnellan, 2008). Furthermore, Wells and Rankin (1991) found that the divorce of caretakers increases the chances of their offspring to act criminally with 10-15 percent. Research by Boccio and Beaver (2017) confirms this, however, also found that this effect is only temporary, and will weaken as time passes. Nevertheless, it could be said that instability in family structure, such as a divorce, negatively impacts the child and can increase the risk of acting criminally.

Furthermore, if the child does grow up in a family of two parents, attitudes of caretakers play a vital role in the development of the child and their personality. Mwangangi (2019) found that a house that promotes support, warmth, and understanding is associated

with a positive family environment, therefore, increasing the development of a healthy personality of the child. However, if the attitudes of parents are the opposite, with a lack of warmth and support, as well as refusal and antagonism, this may lead to a lack of development in personality, often associated with an increased risk of delinquent behaviour (Onyango, 2015, as cited in Mwangangi, 2019). Therefore, it is of high importance that family attitudes are pointed in the right directions by promoting a supportive and welcoming environment for their children.

Finally, the overall family cohesion has been shown to be related to the likelihood of a child being delinquent, as well as being a strong predicting variable in delinquency (Barr et al, 2012). In families with a strong social relationship between off-spring and caretaker, it has been found that children are less likely to show criminal behaviour, when being confronted with crimes themselves, compared to families with a low social cohesion (Barr et al, 2012). Other research confirms this and elaborates that youth are more likely to avoid ending up in situations where crime is committed when there is a sense of strong social cohesion with family through the social learning theory (Akers & Jennings, 2009). This theory explains that children can learn through their parents by imitation, observation, and reinforcements of their behaviours (Sharma & Gupta, 2023). In line with social learning, children learn how to deal with difficult situations and how to avoid ending up in these from their parents, when the social cohesion is high.

Crucial in understanding the influence of family dynamics on juvenile delinquency, however, is to recognise what is yet unknown. Kroese et al (2021) acknowledge the fact that much research has been put into the effects of a child being raised with only one parent, however, much less time and resources have been looking at the effects of the reason why a child only has one parent and how this can influence possible development of them committing a crime. Furthermore, the age of the child and the

influence of (negative) family dynamics have not been researched thoroughly, and should therefore be looked into more as well (Kroese et al, 2021). Therefore, it is of high importance to consider the overall family dynamics where a child grows up when trying to predict the likelihood of acting criminally.

Socioeconomic Status

Large amounts of research have been put into the influence on socioeconomic status (SES) and juvenile delinquency and found that youths with a low SES are associated with a higher chance of acting delinquent (Bonjar, 2017). Based on education, income, and the job someone holds, the SES is established, with growing up in poverty being significantly related to an increase in violent crimes committed by underaged individuals (Gunuboh, 2023). Other research confirms that poverty could cause stress upon caretakers and children, therefore weakening the social bond between the two, and increasing the risk of juvenile delinquency (Rekker et al, 2015).

This is in line with the general strain theory by Agnew (2006) which states people can experience negative emotions and show antisocial behaviour when faced with strain in their lives. For example, holding a lower SES can prevent youth from achieving their goals in life, therefore starting to act delinquent. In addition, the control theory by Hirschi suggests that delinquent youths have unsuccessfully developed social bonds with significant others, as well as a commitment to their education and the attitude that rules in society are there to be followed, therefore showing criminal behaviour (Wiatrowski & Swatko, 1979).

Furthermore, the research by Rekker et al (2015) looked into the influence of going through changes in SES and found that the same youths predominantly showed more delinquent behaviour when they were part of a low SES, compared to when they were part of a higher SES. Wamunyinyi (2016) findings verify this, however, states that juveniles moving

from a lower SES to a higher SES are more prone to an increase in antisocial behaviour, as well as alcohol and drug abuse. This could give rise to questions on what youths to focus on since youths who transit through changes in SES both seem to be prone to possible antisocial, delinquent behaviour. Furthermore, the mechanisms behind how SES can be linked to juvenile delinquency remain unclear today. Gunuboh (2023) found that the correlational link between SES and delinquency has been well-established, however, causal mechanisms that provide insight into how poverty can lead to an increased risk of becoming delinquent remain vague to this day. It could be said that potential mediating factors could be related to earlier mentioned variables such as family dynamics, however, this does require more exploration.

Social Influences

The type of peers a juvenile spends his or her time with plays an important role in the prediction of juvenile delinquency. In many studies, it is said that delinquency could mainly be attributed to the fact that individuals coming together with peers who have acted in a deviant manner (McCord, Widom, & Crowell, 2001, p. 80). Consequently, youths will be pressured into behaving according to the norms and values of their peers, therefore acting in an antisocial manner. Other research confirms this and even found peer pressure to be the biggest predictor of juvenile delinquency there is, as well as physical aggression, verbal aggression, and anger (Seema, Manju, & Manjeet, 2022).

Khan (2018) also stresses the fact that discrepancies among gender and age groups can be found when looking at the influence of peer pressure on juvenile delinquency. Hence, peer pressure was found to be of more significant influence on male youths at a younger age, compared to other groups (Khan, 2018; Leban & Gibson, 2020). However, Steinberg and Silverberg (1986) found that throughout the development of adolescents, youths shift away from the authoritative relationship with their caretakers, and behave more in line with their

peers, therefore also becoming more prone to peer pressure. In an interview with 1 Twente, board member Jeffrey Scholten of the municipality of Hengelo, the Netherlands, verifies this and states that parents only have a limited influence on their children, and as parents, you have little knowledge on the influence other peers can have on your children (Stichting Regionaal Media Centrum Twente, 2023). No research confirms this statement; however, studies do show that when parents have little knowledge about who their child socialises with, the more likely the child is to be less obedient towards their parents and behave antisocially because of peer influences (Wertz et al, 2016).

Findings like these could reinforce the importance of including peer pressure as a significant predictor of juvenile delinquency even more. Important to point out, the consequences of falling for peer pressure can have long-term lasting effects that can lead to criminal behaviour in the adulthood of individuals as well (Apel, 2022). Therefore, it is important to identify individuals from early onset who are at risk for falling for a variable such as peer pressure.

Although peer pressure has been a well-researched variable in juvenile delinquency, there remain gaps in some areas. For example, just as in SES, the mechanisms behind peer pressure remain rather unclear, especially related to the influence this can have in the various developmental stages youths go through, as well as how peer pressure can influence the phases of delinquent involvement (Gifford-Smith, Dodge, Dishion, & McCord, 2005; McGloin & Thomas, 2019). It has been said that social influences may have different sorts of influences depending on the time of onset, as well as the type of involvement, however, this is still uncertain today. Furthermore, McGloin and Thomas (2019) stress the importance of the decision-making process youths go through when selecting individuals they want to befriend, and how this has been overlooked in previous research. Peer pressure being a significant factor and potentially deciding whether a juvenile will follow the right or wrong path in life

based on the people they hang out with, it should not be underestimated and therefore looked into more thoroughly.

Environment

In general, crime has been depicted often that it predominantly takes place in highly populated cities, with a high density of citizens (Kokoravec, Mesko, & Marshall, 2021). It is said that this idea can be explained by several factors. Namely, in more rural areas the perceived social cohesion and social bond of a community is said to be higher, compared to urban areas (Roche & Hough, 2018). This sense of community is positively correlated with better social interactions, a sharing of interests, and a sense of belonging to the community and having trust in the community, which could lower crime rates in a particular area (Meško, 2020).

On the other hand, urban areas are more associated with danger, and a lack of trust and sense of community (Harris, 2020; Pirnat & Meško, 2020). Furthermore, within urban areas, the overall level of crime and the perceived fear of crime tends to be higher compared to rural areas (Carrington et al, 2014). This can also be seen in the Netherlands, where the majority of juvenile delinquents are reported in the four most urban municipalities, also called the G4 (Amsterdam, Den Haag, Rotterdam, Utrecht), compared to the rest of the country (Kessels, 2023). Therefore, it has led policymakers to put their main focus on the more densely populated, urban areas, which has created a significant gap in current research, making it hard to compare the two areas with each other (Kaylen & Pridemore, 2013).

Even though statistics may suggest the urban area to be the main area of focus for juveniles to commit crimes, as well as policymakers to base their thoughts upon, the difference in crime rates between urban and rural areas is not as significant as originally thought (Kokoravec et al, 2021; Osgood & Chambers, 2003). For example, Weenink (2011)

found that youths from the Netherlands who lived in rural areas were only slightly less likely to act criminally, compared to their urban peers, which could suggest that the rural area has been an overlooked variable in criminological theories and policies today. Moreover, in the Netherlands, the decrease in juvenile crimes over recent years has been most notable in the urban cities, while in the rural area, it has been less obvious, with even a small increase being observed (Kessels, 2023).

However, the subject of the differences between urban and rural areas and their influence on juvenile delinquency has not been studied to such an extent that concrete conclusions can be made about these findings. This is also acknowledged by Kokoravec et al (2021), as they suggest more research needs to look at juvenile delinquency in rural areas, compared to urban areas. This can also help in creating a better understanding of the distribution of crime among juveniles in the west of the Netherlands (mainly looking at the G4) compared to more rural areas, such as the region of Twente, which has reported some of the lowest registered underaged offenders in the country (Kessels, Akkermans, & Derksen, 2023).

Research Questions

As mentioned earlier, the main aim of this research is to gain more knowledge and understanding of what factors contribute to the development of juvenile delinquency, especially related to the region of Twente, the Netherlands, and could therefore provide better insight into what can predict and prevent delinquency. Several factors have been identified during an extensive literature search, and either influence will be further investigated during an interviewing process with several stakeholders. Therefore, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. What are the effects of different family dynamics, including single-parent households, divorce, and parental attitudes, on the development of juvenile delinquency, and how do these effects vary based on the age a child is experiencing these dynamics?
2. How do changes in SES, in particular transitions from low to high SES (and vice versa), influence the likelihood of youths developing delinquent behaviours?
3. How do the processes of peer selection and susceptibility to social influence at different developmental stages contribute to attitudes and behaviours related to juvenile delinquency among youths?
4. What are the effects of growing up in a rural area on youths and delinquent behaviour, and how does this compare to the findings that have been observed in urban areas?

With family dynamics being of high importance in possibly predicting juvenile crime, it could be said that this variable is essential when constructing a theoretical framework. However, as stated earlier, several topics still lack insight, and should therefore be taken a closer look at. Therefore, this research question will help in creating a better understanding of how family dynamics play a role in the development of juvenile delinquency, especially related to under-researched matters.

Furthermore, a closer look will be taken into the role of SES, specifically related to how changes in SES may influence the development of juvenile delinquency. This will give a better understanding of how both a high(er) SES, as well as a low(er) SES, can contribute to the development and prediction of delinquent behaviour.

Moreover, the influence of peers is of significant impact on juveniles in the development of antisocial behaviour in youths. However, how youths are influenced by their peers at a certain stage in their lives is rather understudied, as well as the decision-making processes adolescents go through when befriending someone. Therefore, this research

question is used to investigate these gaps and seek more information on the influence of peer pressure.

Finally, urban areas have been the main point of focus when studying juvenile delinquency and implementing policies. However, the counterpart, rural areas, has not received the same amount of attention, while also showing to be of high importance. Therefore, the last research question will look into what the impact is of youths growing up in a more rural environment and how this contributes to the development of juvenile delinquency.

Methods

Design

In this research, a qualitative design has been chosen in which there was made use of semi-structured interviews with participants. These interviews were used to explore the expertise of participants on variables of juvenile delinquency and aimed to gain in-depth insights and experiences in a subjective manner. The use of semi-structured interviews has been identified as most applicable in this case, as it allowed the participants to be flexible in explaining their thoughts and opinions, as well as allowed the researcher to structure and guide the focus of the discussion to relevant topics.

Participants

Based on knowledge of participants on the subject matter (e.g., field they were active in, their work with juveniles), participants were approached via the cooperate mail address of Kennispunt Twente, using a written recruitment text that was send to them in Dutch (see Appendix A). Based on their interest and availability, interviews were scheduled. A total of five individuals participated in the interviews that took place. Due to privacy reasons that

were ensured to participants, their name, age, employer, or any other demographic information will not be shared in this research. Rather, the interviewees will be referred to as participants 1 through 5. Participant 1 being a criminologist at an applied university, was interviewed on May 17th, 2024, in an online meeting which took approximately an hour. Participant 2 works directly with adolescences in the juvenile probation sector, and this interview took place on location on the 30th of May 2024, which was completed after roughly 45 minutes. Finally, participants 3, 4, and 5 were youth workers all working for the same organisation, who are also involved in a different project on the prevention of juvenile delinquency. These three participants were all interviewed at the same time in an online meeting on the 5th of June, this year during a group interview.

Materials

The semi-structured interview schedule that was developed for this research consisted of 16 questions, and the list of interview questions can be found in the appendix (see Appendix B). Regarding these questions, for example, existing literature has put a great emphasis on the role of urban areas and the influence of that on juvenile delinquency, but rather less focus has been put on the development of juvenile delinquency in rural areas (Kokoravec et al, 2021; Osgood & Chambers, 2003). Therefore, this interview included questions such as, “What are some of the most prominent characteristics of the environment a delinquent grows up in?” and, “How would you explain the sudden increase in the perceived number of violent crimes in the more rural areas, such as the region of Twente?”, to gain better insight in the role of the rural area on juvenile delinquency. The interview was designed to take approximately 45 minutes and included the use of prompts to gain greater information from the participants. Furthermore, a voice recorder was used during the interviews to ensure that interviews could later be transcribed.

The interview procedure started by informing participants about their ethical rights, together with the purpose and aim of the study and how their input will be used. This was done both verbally as well as written with an information sheet, which they could later agree or disagree on by signing an informed consent form, where once again they were informed of their ethical rights during the interview. During the interview, the researcher took a non-directive stance, which allowed participants to lead the conversation with the researcher guiding the discussion towards relevant topics. The interview questions (see Appendix B) were all covered during the conversations with participants. However, the sequence of these questions varied, as this was dependent on the relevant topic of the conversation at that time. This allowed for specific themes to be created throughout the interview related to the variables of family dynamics, socioeconomic status, social influences, environment, and other relevant information not related to any of the identified variables. Later on, interviews were analysed in ATLAS.ti, where the participants' answers were assigned to a certain category which can be found in the table in the appendix (see Appendix C).

Results

During the analysis of the interviews, the earlier described variables were used throughout the coding process, as well as the variable 'other', to ensure different variables that were mentioned throughout the interviews that did not fit into any of the formulated factors, were also taken into account. Hence, Table 1 serves the purpose of explaining all variables that were used during the analysis of the interviews with participants, together with numerous examples to ensure clarity of each factor (see Appendix C).

Family Dynamics

Throughout the interviews, participants recognised the importance of healthy family dynamics in the home, acknowledging the influence one-parent households can have on juveniles, with participants stating, “There is a lack of supervision. The parent needs to provide income and should therefore work... The child might need more attention and could thus not receive it, leading to a higher risk of delinquent behaviour” (1), as well, “I know from a few boys that a parent has been out of the picture, which has led to the child being able to do what it wants without being corrected. You see that that does contribute to juvenile delinquency” (5).

Moreover, sudden changes in family dynamics such as divorce or the death of a parent were recognised as being significantly related to predicting juvenile delinquency, “Yes, the child becomes so destabilised by the situation, which is also a period in which they start showing acting out behaviours” (2), and “It puts the world of a child completely upside down... The situation that once was stable is gone all of the sudden” (2). When asked about the influence of age in this case, it was said that the later a sudden change in family structure occurs, the lower the likelihood is a child will develop delinquent behaviours (2). As a result, this would suggest the importance of abrupt alterations in the home in the prediction of delinquent behaviour in youths, thus possibly making it a significant predictor for youths to start committing crimes.

Furthermore, multiple participants have raised awareness of attitudes parents hold and the influence they could have on youths. For example, it was mentioned that parents who do not value youths working, and their children going to school, will have a higher risk of their child ending up on the wrong path (2). This argument was strengthened by others, in which it was described that some parents encourage their children to not obey the laws and to ignore the norms and values of others (3 & 4). Instances like these would suggest that the certain

attitudes parents hold do influence the path a child would take in life. By parents not encouraging their children to go to school and to follow the rules, the risk of their child acting upon these norms and values will increase, making their child more likely to act delinquent. This, in addition to one-parent households and sudden changes in the family dynamics, such as divorce or the death of a parent, could put youths more at risk of becoming delinquent.

Socioeconomic Status

When looking at the variables of SES, all participants acknowledged the influence SES could have, pointing out the negative emotions it could bring, “Poverty does not help as well... It comes with a lot of stress” (1), or “When it is difficult for a household to financially structure their needs... it could make the child more sensitive to start acting more criminally” (2). Thus, based on these results it could be said that poverty comes with a lot of stress. Consequently, this could make youths more sensitive to making money differently, such as by doing unlawful behaviours.

Moreover, during the interviews, it was made clear by two of the interviewees that SES and family dynamics could be related in some instances. For example, in one-parent households, the parent is most often the only source of income within the house, therefore needing to work more often, and lowering the amount of supervision the parent has over their child (1 & 2). Consequently, the child could be corrected less for their antisocial behaviour, therefore increasing the risk of them developing delinquent behaviours.

In addition, interviewees pointed out the impact of going through changes in SES could have on the likelihood of youths becoming delinquent. It was believed that going through a transition from a high SES to a low SES could potentially lead to youths becoming more likely to act antisocially (2). This was explained by a matter of losing a form of stability you have in life, and by losing this financial stability, juveniles would be more likely to seek

alternative options to regain this sense of solidity by making money quickly and unlawfully.

On the other hand, however, participants pointed out that transitioning from a lower to a higher SES could be beneficial for youths, “You would say it gives you more freedom in life... more chances. If your parents were always used to having a harder time financially, and that changes all of a sudden, it would increase your possibilities to go to school and to go study, for example” (2). All in all, it could be said that adolescents need a form of financial stability in their lives. When this is present, it could increase their chances in life significantly, however, when this is not present or it falls away all of a sudden, it would make them more likely to want to recover this in an unlawful manner.

Interestingly, however, having a high SES does not always have to be associated with a lower likelihood of delinquent behaviour. For example, an interviewee pointed out how she had experience with a girl who grew up in a rather high SES, therefore not growing up in poverty. Yet, she was still drawn to the fact of making fast and quick money, functioning as a money mule (5). However, this being one example only, it is important to take into consideration its value. Nevertheless, the SES a child holds and grows up in could be seen as a key variable, as has been pointed out by participants during the interviews.

Social Influence

Social influence has been mentioned numerously throughout the interviews, in several different forms. For example, it was mentioned by all participants that the likelihood of youth acting delinquent increases when they socialise with people who are already participating in antisocial behaviours. For instance, “Criminal parents, criminal brothers, it has to do with who you are hanging out with. Even with family” (1). This would suggest that youths are more at risk when they are surrounded by people who are already part of a criminal world.

In addition, the people with who you socialise can contaminate you in such a way that you also start showing similar behaviours, even if these behaviours do not align with your values (1). Furthermore, the interviewee stated, “It is around twelve years old. Around then you see the influence of parents becoming less, and the influence of your social surroundings, like school and friends, that becomes more prominent” (1). According to the participant, this timeframe in life, the start of adolescence, is when youths are most vulnerable to being influenced by other peers.

Furthermore, one of the participants pointed out that with social influence, a feeling of belonging to a group can eventually lead to a sense of fear of losing that group. For example, “Those were boys that were very sensitive to the status of the others in that group” (2), and “They cannot sit still right now, because otherwise they will be blamed... They were just so scared that that group would turn against them, that they did what they did” (2). This would suggest that some youths can be influenced by people in such a way, that they will not be able to leave those people out of fear that they will lose them, and that they might act against them. Importantly, the participant did not mention a particular age with regard to this, however, it was known based on the context that the juveniles in question were around the ages of fourteen to twenty. To summarise, the people youths mix with can contaminate them in different ways; you can be influenced by family and friends who are already part of criminal activities, as well as trying to belong to a certain group of people that you will participate in certain actions for, out of fear of having those turn against you.

Environment

When talking about urban and rural areas, and their influence on youth crime, various things were mentioned by interviewees. For instance, participants made the interviewer aware of the fact that within more urbanised cities, there will be a bigger need for supply and

demand, therefore making it more likely to have criminal activity within places like these. For example, “If you are talking about drug problems, within the city the demand for drugs is a lot higher compared to rural areas, therefore, the chance is a lot higher that problems will arise there a lot quicker” (1). This would suggest that criminal activities, including youth crimes, would be more prominent in urban areas.

This could be explained by the fact of more social control within rural areas, which was pointed out numerous times by interviewees. According to participants, within the smaller towns and villages, there is more social cohesion and control, with people knowing each other within those towns better. This will make youths less likely to act delinquent, as they might be caught by others who know them within their town (2 & 3).

On the other hand, four of the participants mentioned during the interviews how youth can act more anonymously in bigger cities, making it easier for them to behave delinquent. For example, “In a city, or a larger town, you most often are a lot more anonymous, and you will learn a more diverse group of people” (3) and “Yes, in the city they are a lot more anonymous compared to in a town” (4). This would suggest that youth feel freer to act antisocial since they are under the impression that they can go unnoticed by others, related to the more cohesive social control that is present in more rural areas.

Interestingly, all participants raised the fact that they have not encountered or seen a difference in types of youth criminality being committed in urban areas, compared to rural areas. Participant 1, for example, mentioned that the kind of delinquency is the same everywhere and that it is just a matter of what is available to youth (1). This is reinforced by participant 3, who said during the interview that the problems they experience in the three municipalities that they oversee are the same overall and are mostly related to dealing drugs, illegal selling of vapes, and vandalism (3). Therefore, these results would suggest that

delinquency among youths is mostly the same across urban areas, compared to more rural areas.

Other

Finally, during the interviews, participants addressed multiple other contributing factors that were considered of high importance, according to them. For example, participants 1, 2, and 4 stressed the importance of how juveniles with a lower level of intelligence were associated with a higher likelihood of becoming delinquent. Interestingly, it was also mentioned that parents having an intellectual liability could increase the risk of youths acting criminally (1, 2, & 4). This suggests that not only the level of intelligence of adolescents themselves could be a predictive factor of delinquency, but also that of the caretakers of the same child.

Furthermore, all participants mentioned how the role of the personality of youths plays a significant role in whether they end up in the criminal world or not. For example, it was said that teens with a lack of self-control and who are overly confident are related to them being at higher risk (1). Remarkably, it was pointed out that youths who are seeking attention from others were also more prone to becoming delinquent, however, this was associated with a lack of confidence, rather than with overestimating themselves (3). These results would suggest that the personality of juveniles could influence them in multiple ways, and is therefore important to take into consideration.

In line with personality, participants pointed out how youths of certain ages are still figuring out their identity, and are therefore more prone to make the wrong choices when they are in this stage. For example, “A lot of juveniles are still figuring out who they are at that age, and to who they want to belong. If they are then surrounded by the wrong group of people, they are more at risk” (2). In this instance, participant two refers to youth around the

age of 12 to 14 years old. This is reinforced by participant 4, who also claims that when youths are in this discovery phase of who they are, they are more drawn to doing the opposite of what their caretakers tell them to do, “If they are not allowed to, for example, smoke cigarettes from their parents, and they see that their friends are doing it... Then they think it is cool, and they want to do it themselves” (4). Examples like these could stress the importance of intervening with youths as early as possible, so they do not start to associate their identity by doing unlawful practices.

Finally, these factors in combination with skipping class, having a materialistic mindset, and the use of drugs have been mentioned throughout the interviews (1 & 2), and could put youths more at risk of ending up on the wrong side and should therefore be taken into consideration when trying to prevent youths from becoming delinquent. In addition, multiple participants also pointed out what could potentially be helpful for youths in order to prevent them from becoming delinquent. For example, two participants made it clear that it is of high importance that juveniles feel heard by others (2 & 3), as well as one participant pointed out that youths need a place in which they feel they are seen, such as a hangout spot (4). Furthermore, a participant mentioned the difficulties which are experienced with the current privacy law in the Netherlands, and how it disables them from sharing knowledge between organisations that are involved in delinquent youths (2).

Discussion

Family Dynamics & Socioeconomic Status

This research aimed to seek more insights into variables that could help in the prediction of whether certain youths will show delinquent behaviour. By conducting semi-structured interviews, several things could be said. Firstly, the family structure in which a child grows up is one of the elements that could explain how family dynamics influence the

development of juvenile delinquency. Being raised with one parent has been associated with a lack of supervision, as well as a lower likelihood of being corrected on bad behaviour.

Moreover, children going through sudden changes in the family structure, such as divorce or the passing of a parent, drastically influence the child and make them more likely to end up on the wrong path. These sudden changes do not only play a role in family dynamics, but also in SES, where going from a higher SES to a lower SES could increase the chances of youth becoming delinquent since they would lose their financial stability. Vice versa, however, it would only increase the chances juveniles have in life, therefore making them more likely to engage in prosocial behaviour, according to participants. Furthermore, a lower SES has been associated with negative emotions such as stress, making youth more prone to start acting out. Interestingly, participants also pointed out the possible relationship between SES and family dynamics, with adolescents in troubling family dynamics having less supervision since the parent(s) need to provide an income by working, therefore leaving the child with less supervision and more possibilities to act criminally.

These findings are supported by McLanahan and Sandefur (1997), in which it is made clear that a reduced amount of supervision due to only one parent raising the offspring could increase the likelihood of the child behaving criminally. Moreover, even though divorce and juvenile delinquency have not been well researched yet, Wells and Rankin (1991) found that children experiencing divorce will make them more likely to become delinquent by fifteen percent. Age appears to play an important factor in this case however, since the later divorce takes place in a youth's development, the lower the likelihood of them showing criminal behaviour. This is also confirmed by Boccio and Beaver (2017), who claim that changes in family structure, such as divorce, do influence the likelihood of youths becoming delinquent, however, the impact that this has changes over time and is dependent on the age of the child,

with youth being more likely to engage in criminal behaviour when divorce is experienced at a younger age, compared to when they are at the end of their adolescents.

Furthermore, Rekker et al (2015) said that juveniles who transitioned to a lower SES over time had an increased risk of delinquency. On the other hand, however, this research has pointed out that changing to a higher SES would only result in more beneficial chances for youth, making them less likely to start acting delinquent. Unlike findings by Wamunyinyi (2016), in which it was claimed that youths transitioning from a lower to a higher SES were more at risk for delinquency related to alcohol and drug abuse, the overall idea that could be formed by the findings is that a higher SES comes with more financial security, therefore, more stability in life. This is confirmed by several other research, in which a significant relationship was found between growing up with a higher SES and a lower likelihood of developing delinquent behaviours, and it could therefore be said that holding a higher SES would be associated with more positive outcomes for youth at risk for delinquency.

Social Influences & Urban versus Rural

In addition to this, the social influence that youth are confronted with can significantly influence them as well, in certain ways. According to participants, adolescents can be contaminated by others in negative ways, both family and friends, therefore starting to act in ways that are in line with the values of others, which might not be in line with their morals. This is in line with earlier findings of McCord et al (2001), in which it was said that youths who come together with delinquent youths are at a higher risk of developing antisocial behaviours themselves, due to a pressured feeling of behaving under others' norms and values.

Interestingly, it was pointed out that youths are most at risk of being negatively influenced by their peers around the start of adolescence. Steinberg and Monahan (2007)

confirm this and argue that in the early stages of adolescence, and a little before that, youths are the least likely to resist peer influences. In this article, it also becomes clear that after the age of fourteen, juveniles are more able to stand up for themselves, and therefore less likely to be influenced by their social circles. This would suggest that youths are more at risk in their early adolescence, around the age of twelve, to develop delinquent behaviours due to social influences.

Moreover, it was noticed during the interviews that various youths can also act in ways out of fear that delinquent groups will turn against them, making them behave in ways that they might not even want themselves. This topic has not been researched thoroughly, however, Bica (2022) found that individuals with high social anxiety tend to follow the norm of groups more often, even if the behaviour shown by the group is considered antisocial. This could be explained by evolutionary manners, where highly socially anxious individuals see themselves as lower ranked in society, and therefore need to confirm with the norms and values of a certain group to remain part of that group (Bica, 2022). Nevertheless, it is unclear in this case whether the participant in our research dealt with highly socially anxious youths, it could be an important factor which could also be related to earlier mentioned variables such as low self-confidence.

These social aspects also appeared to play an important role with regard to the urbanisation of certain towns, where youths were found to be more criminally active in urban areas compared to rural areas. Literature confirms this and states that rural areas deal with a stronger sense of social bond and community compared to urban areas, as well as more social control and cohesion by others (Roche & Hough, 2018). This could also be related to what has been said by participants earlier since this was mentioned numerous times during the interviews. The social disorganisation theory of Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay confirms this, and explains the development of delinquency by characteristics of neighbourhoods such

as high unemployment rates, as well as fluctuating and diverse populations (Shaw & McKay, 1943). Features like these are often seen in more urban areas, and are associated with a lack of social cohesion and social control, which contributes to the increased likelihood of youths acting criminally (Wickert, 2023).

Differences in types of crimes being committed by youth, when comparing the environment they live in, were not found in this research. However, other research suggests that differences can be found, such as when looking at property and violent crimes. For example, urban areas reported higher victims rates of violent crimes, with 24.5 out of 1000, compared to 11.1 per 1000 victims in rural areas (USA Facts, 2023). Furthermore, this same source also reported that almost one in five of rape or sexual assaults were reported to take place in urban areas, compared to only two percent of these same crimes being committed in rural areas. However, rural areas reported higher levels of alcohol consumption, as well as joy riding (Kokoravec et al, 2021). Nevertheless, as stated earlier, these differences in types of crimes being committed were not found in this research, and a clear explanation for possible differences in environmental areas has not yet been found. Therefore, for future research it is advised that more resources are used in helping to explain how differences in urban and rural settings can be clarified, if differences are reported in the first place.

Thus, relating back to the main research question, it could be said that negative changes in both family dynamics, e.g., divorce or death of a caretaker, as well as SES could increase the risk of youth becoming delinquent. This in combination with an individual having a lower self-confidence, therefore being more prone to social influences, could only make them more likely to start acting in a criminal manner at a young age. Finally, even though the types of crimes being committed seem to be rather alike across different areas, this research has pointed out that youths living in a more urban area could be potentially higher at risk for developing delinquent behaviours. However, as this research, as well as other research

has pointed out, the predicting variables behind juvenile delinquency are of a complex manner, and there does not seem to be one simplistic answer to what could prevent youths to start acting criminally.

Limitations

Although the findings of this research have shed new light on several variables concerning juvenile delinquency, it is important to take into account the limitations of its scope. Firstly, in the sample of this study, one of the participants worked in the field of juvenile delinquency as a criminologist, therefore basing their answers purely on theoretical knowledge, rather than practical experiences that were gathered in the real world. This could be seen as a limitation since the interviews aimed to gain in-depth insights and experiences from participants in a subjective manner. By providing real-world examples from own experiences, a better understanding of the subject matter could be reached, rather than obtaining information from a more theoretical perspective. This is supported by McGrath, Palgrem, and Liljedahl (2018), who state that interviewing people with practical knowledge and experience in a field can provide more nuanced and well-grounded information, especially in qualitative research. Their knowledge can give better insight into more implicit challenges, as well as certain decision-making processes that come with that (Döringer, 2020). This does not suggest, however, that interviewing participants with only theoretical knowledge gives insufficient information and results, but their knowledge may lack certain valuable information, as stated earlier, and can therefore result in a lack of information, especially with a smaller sample size. It is therefore advised for future research to set up more criteria that participants need to meet and to adequately obtain individuals that align with these criteria in order to gather the best possible data for their research. This would enhance the data that is collected with real-world examples, as well as allow the interviewer to adapt

their questions throughout the interviews as they might come across unexpected insights from the interviewee's experiences (Hollenbach, 2024).

Additionally, a certain bias by the researcher regarding the interpretation of data could have resulted in the gathered information during the interviews pointing in a certain direction. This not only goes for the interview itself but possibly also for analysing the data afterward. This research, for example, focused on four particular variables regarding juvenile delinquency, however, this does not mean that these are the sole predictors of delinquency among youths in general. There could be, and have been identified multiple other variables that play a significant role in the prediction of youth criminality, such as a lower intelligence level of both youth and their caretakers, school absenteeism, personality traits of youths such as extraverted and overly confident, as well as feelings of shame that come with poverty, for example (Hirschi & Hindelang, 2002; Rocque et al, 2016; Sumithra & Komalavalli, 2022). Even though the interviewer left room for additional information during the interviews, it could be advised for future research to take a more open stand when interviewing participants to obtain as much valuable information as possible. Lampropoulou and Myers (2013) confirm this and claim that, during qualitative research especially, it is more beneficial to have a so-called "situated interaction", rather than an interaction that is influenced by pre-existing knowledge of the interviewer. Nevertheless, the interviewer needs to be aware of current literature and information on the subject matter out there, but also consider not to let this knowledge lead their way, and to follow a more open approach during the interviews, as well as take an unbiased approach during the analysis of the data. This could, for example, be done by letting other researchers examine the interviews, as this will allow for a broader view of the results. Furthermore, by using more general questions and applying these in a more participant-centred approach, this would allow for more insights that would initially not have been thought of.

Interestingly, in most cases, it would be considered a limitation as well if the sample size is rather small, which could be argued in the case of this research. However, it became clear that in the field of qualitative research, this sample size can also be considered sufficient. This is supported by Boddy (2016), who reports findings that conclude a sample size of only one can already give valuable insights into the world of qualitative studies. Other research claims that around ten participants in qualitative research would be considered sufficient, but that this could also vary (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

However, Hennink and Kaiser (2022) also looked into saturation, and make a distinction between theoretical and data saturation. Theoretical saturation refers to the point that additional, new data does not give any other insights than the data that has already been gathered. On the other hand, data saturation refers to the fact that the collected data does not lead to any new themes, or categories that were already established (Henk & Kaiser, 2022). With the complex nature of juvenile delinquency, it could be predicted that a set of different insights could have possibly been gathered when conducting more interviews, thus not confirming to theoretical saturation. Though, with the current information that was gathered, it could be said that a level of data saturation has been reached, to a certain extent, as similar answers were found across interviews. This could suggest that this research has gotten a more in-depth look into the specific variables, however, a clear theoretical framework of these variables might be lacking, and some remain possibly untouched.

Thus, even though the sample size is often seen as a limitation, it is also important to acknowledge findings, especially in qualitative studies, and not let them be taken out of their value because of possible issues with the validity of these results. Nevertheless, it has to be mentioned that finding causal relationships in qualitative research can most often not be found. Moreover, it is important for future research to clearly establish theoretical saturation

by diving deeper into underlying mechanisms that could play a crucial role in the understanding of delinquency.

Finally, it could be argued how high the level of representativeness is, with regards to the participants. Their insights were based on either a theoretical background, or their own way of thinking, which could bring a certain bias with it concerning the importance of certain factors, according to them. This is also acknowledged by Powell (2021), who raised the importance of using insights from different participants, both experts as well as actual juveniles. Moreover, in order to build a stronger sense of representativeness of participants, Musa and Raise (2023) interviewed former male delinquents to seek for what influenced them. This advice could also be used for future research, as it could give more insight into what youths themselves actually experience and find most influential, regarding variables that play a role in the development of delinquency.

The obtained results and findings of this research can possibly also be used in real-world practices today. With light being shed on numerous factors that can potentially contribute to the development of delinquency among youths, it is important to use this information in order to prevent this from happening. For example, it has been found that the influences from both the household, as well as those from friends play a significant role in the development of criminal behaviour. Youths value these personal relationships significantly, and it should therefore be of high concern to promote healthy relationships with others, in order for them to stay on the right path. Görden et al (2015) recognises this and also found that youths themselves see family and friends as the most influential with regards to preventing delinquency. By educating both caretakers as well juveniles on how to foster these relationships, youths will potentially develop better social skills that will enable them to use these relationships when they feel vulnerable, as well as to stay out of trouble in the first

place. Görden et al also points out the importance of SES, and highlights that in order to prevent delinquency, interventions should start from an early age.

Furthermore, these findings could also be used in the building of a monitor that looks into at-risk individuals. By using the results of this research, adolescents that meet certain criteria, and therefore, fall into the category of being at risk of becoming delinquent, could be detected. This would ensure that they are not falling prone to the criminal world in the first place, and that follow-up interventions would help them stay on the right path by promoting, for example, the relationships they have and how this could help them. Setting up a monitor like this can be challenging, however. As stated earlier, one participant pointed out the difficulties that could be faced with privacy laws in the Netherlands, and the sharing of information between organisations regarding delinquent juveniles. This could also be a difficult task for a possible monitor, especially when it comes to sharing certain type of information. However, due to the scope of this research, the difficulties that could be faced when trying to build a monitor are for future research.

Therefore, even though many contributing factors could explain why youths become delinquent or not, which are difficult to oversee, this research still emphasised the importance of certain variables that should be taken into account. With previous research already having established a well-grounded foundation, these findings once again stressed the importance of certain variables, as well as opening up new doors to research for future insights into how delinquency among youths can be prevented.

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Appendix A – Recruitment Text

Beste **insert name**,

Mijn naam is Julian Schepers en in samenwerking met Kennispunt Twente en de Universiteit van Twente doe ik onderzoek naar voorspellers omtrent jeugdcriminaliteit in Twente voor mijn afstudeeronderzoek.

Dit onderzoek is onderdeel van een groter onderzoek van Kennispunt Twente, in opdracht van Platform Integrale Veiligheidszorg (IVZ). Platform IVZ heeft de behoefte om problematiek rondom risicojongeren en jeugdcriminaliteit in Twente beter te volgen, monitoren, begrijpen en uiteindelijk te verminderen. Daarom doet Kennispunt Twente onderzoek naar de wensen, behoeften en mogelijkheden voor een monitor op het gebied van jeugdcriminaliteit. Hierbij wordt ook gekeken naar welke onderdelen er in een monitor zouden kunnen. Daarom is een onderdeel van het onderzoek het in beeld brengen van voorspellers voor jeugdcriminaliteit.

Met mijn afstudeeronderzoek wil een theoretisch kader ontwikkelen dat kan bijdragen aan de eerder benoemde monitor op het gebied van jeugdcriminaliteit.

Voor dit onderzoek zou ik interviews willen houden met verschillende stakeholders die mij meer zouden kunnen vertellen over welke verschillende factoren een rol spelen in de ontwikkeling van jeugdcriminaliteit, en hoe deze factoren een rol kunnen spelen in het voorkomen hiervan.

Dat is ook de reden dat ik contact met u opneem, aangezien mijn oog viel op uw mogelijke kennis en werk in dit veld, wat erg van toepassing is in dit onderzoek. In het interview zal ik u wat vragen stellen over uw ervaringen met jongeren, wat voor factoren volgens u van belang zijn in het identificeren van jeugdcriminaliteit en hoe specifieke factoren volgens u een eventuele rol kunnen spelen.

Daarom vroeg ik mij af of u eventueel geïnteresseerd zou zijn om een interview in te plannen waarin ik u een aantal vragen stel over dit onderwerp? Het interview zal ongeveer 45 minuten tot een uur duren, en zou zowel op locatie als online plaats kunnen vinden.

Mocht u nog vragen hebben, kan u mij altijd bereiken via mijn email:

j*****@kennispunttwente.nl of via mijn telefoonnummer: +316 8*****4

Alvast bedankt voor uw tijd, en hopelijk spreek ik u snel.

Met vriendelijke groet,

Julian Schepers

Appendix B – Interview Questions

1. According to your thoughts, what is believed to be/are the biggest predicting variable of juvenile delinquency?
2. In what way can the SES influence the family dynamics in a household, therefore also influencing juvenile delinquency?
3. How do you think changes in SES (e.g., going from high(er) SES to lower SES, and vice versa) can contribute to the development of juvenile delinquency?
4. What mechanism(s) do you believe play a significant role in the link between SES and delinquent behaviour?
5. Can you discuss how different family structures, single-parent households and divorce, can impact the development of juvenile delinquency?
6. How can parental attitudes and behaviours in the family setting contribute to the likelihood of a child acting delinquent, and are there specific stages in the development of the child in which these are more prominent?
7. How do you think an early onset (before age 8) of a child being raised in a one-parent home can influence their development of juvenile delinquency?
8. What do you think the influence is of peer pressure on juvenile delinquency?
9. How do you think the mechanisms through which peer influence operates differ across various developmental stages of adolescence?
10. What role do you think the selection of certain peers has on the development of delinquent behaviours in youths?
11. What are the characteristics of youths to more actively select and bond with antisocial peers, and take up the social norms of these peers?
12. What do you think the influence is of the place someone grows up in on juvenile delinquency?

13. What are some of the most prominent characteristics of the environment a delinquent lives in?
14. How would you explain the sudden increase in the perceived number of violent crimes in the more rural areas, such as the region of Twente?
15. Besides the named variables, family dynamics, peer pressure, socioeconomic status, and urban vs. rural, are there other variables that you find of significant importance in juvenile delinquency?
16. What would be needed to prevent youth crime in the region of Twente?

Appendix C - Table 1

Description and Examples for Each Variable

Variable	Description	Example
Family Dynamics	The influence of family structure and parental attitudes within the family on the development of youths.	“We often see that after a divorce, or when children have never met one of their biological parents, that that contributes to delinquent behaviour” (Participant 2)
Socioeconomic Status (SES)	The influence of occupation and income in household, as well as education on the development of youths.	“When children are being raised in a lower SES from a young age, that negatively influences them” (Participant 2)

Social Influence	The influence of the social circles youths are mixing with in their lives, such as friends and family.	“When you are not confident, and you are hanging out with the wrong group of people, that could mean you are more prone to head in the wrong direction” (Participant 3)
Urban vs. Rural	The influence of being raised and living in an urban setting, compared to a rural setting on the development of youths.	“I believe youth crime is the same in most settings, it just depends on what sort of opportunities adolescences have” (Participant 1)
Other	Any other contribution factors that could influence the development of youths and their likelihood to engage in delinquency.	“...Could be related to a matter of insecurity, and having troubles finding out what their identity exactly is” (Participant 4)

Appendix D

Artificial Intelligence Statement

During the preparation of this work, the author used Perplexity.ai in order to obtain scientific articles and information on questions that were asked by the author. After using this tool/service, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the work.