
Single-parent Families And The Impact On Juvenile Delinquency

There were nearly 48,000 juveniles in which were incarcerated on any given day in the United States in 2019. In today's society, delinquency is almost glorified between adolescents and is seen as being socially acceptable. These young people do not think about how it will affect them later in life, therefore it is essential that the number of juvenile crimes and delinquents gets cut down. Children who are being raised by a single parent are more likely to participate in criminal activity than children who are being raised by both parents. Juvenile delinquency is ultimately a product of a strained relationship between the parent and child. It is also more prevalent in children who grow up without a father figure. Though it may be difficult, there are ways to prevent delinquency among these adolescents.

One factor that potentially plays the most significant role in juvenile delinquency is the lack of a relationship between the parent and the child. When there is not a well-established relationship within a family, it tends to be easier for the children to participate in juvenile activities such as smoking, drinking, trespassing, stealing, and even in gang related activities. Many times, single parent families are struggling to provide a good lifestyle for themselves and their children. The adult may be holding more than one job which makes it difficult to spend the necessary amount of time with their child that is needed in order to create a strong bond. It also makes it more difficult for the parent to closely and directly supervise the adolescent in everything they do. It has been seen within many adolescents that when a parent is not closely involved in the child's life, they tend to act out more in order to the attention they so badly crave from their parent or guardian, whether it be good or bad.

The lack of inductive parenting is one of many reasons that adolescents engage in delinquent activities. Inductive parenting is a particular parenting style in which clear limits are established and the importance of why behaving in a way that is socially acceptable is discussed and reiterated. A group of scholars at Iowa State University conducted a study on how certain parenting behaviors or styles effects a child's self-efficacy. When the study was concluded, the authors stated in their results, "Parents' use of inductive parenting techniques and avoidance of harsh parenting behaviors, in turn, contributed to adolescents' self-efficacy" (Whitbeck, L. B., Simons, R. L., Conger, R. D., & Wickrama, K. A. S. (1997, December)). It is crucial for a child to have a high sense of self-efficacy because it leads to having better control over one's motivation and behaviors in many different environments, which will lead to very little or no acts of delinquency at all.

In low socioeconomic single parent families, there is usually not a father figure in the adolescent's life. When the father is not present in a child's relationship, it conclusively leads to not only hurting the child in an emotional way, but also in a social and psychological means. "...youth may act out in response to the emotional disruption engendered by high levels of familial conflict that can precede and succeed a union dissolution" (Markowitz, A. J., & Ryan, R. M. (2016)). Many children who never have the experience of a father who is present and active in their life often struggle socially in certain ways due to socialization theory. This negatively effects the child through behavior modeling especially within young males. Behavior modeling is exactly what it sounds that it would be – modeling the desired and socially acceptable way of

behavior. An absent father is showing the child, especially a male, that it is okay to leave a family and to let them struggle without him. The absence of a father could also cause psychological trauma to the adolescent. Once again, many single parent families struggle economically which could lead to not having food on the table, not having resources needed for school and other activities, and even potentially being homeless. Each of these factors could cause a child psychological trauma which then leads to the child participating in delinquent behavior.

However, while there is a significant number of fathers who simply just walk away from parenting, there are many who may be incarcerated and cannot see their child. Looking back at socialization and behavior modeling, having a father in prison can cause an increase in the likelihood of the adolescent to act in criminal ways. It also makes it simpler for the adolescent to do so because of a decrease in parental supervision. Another negative factor of having an incarcerated father is complete separation. If the child is unable to see their parent due to incarceration, it may make it easier for the child to completely cut all ties with that parent. Therefore, no longer having an additional family member to turn to when they need someone, which could then result in the child acting out and committing criminal behavior (Porter, L. C., & King, R. D. (2015)).

There are also many children who grow up without a mother or maternal figure in their life but do have a father or paternal figure. Though there are not many studies on single father families, the journal article, "Family Structure, Family Processes, and Adolescent Delinquency," states, "we might anticipate that adolescent delinquency will be higher in single-mother than in single-father families. On the other hand, Hoffman and Johnson's (1998) findings of higher levels of alcohol and drug use among adolescents in single-father families would lead us to expect higher levels of delinquency in this family form" (Demuth, S., & Brown, S. (n.d.)). This statement shows that it is unclear whether or not a child would be more successful in a single mother home or single father home. However, in both, it is still very likely that the child will participate in some form of delinquency.

While juvenile delinquency is so prevalent within children in single parent homes, there are many programs and other ways that will help to prevent or slow down the delinquency. One program is the Models for Change Program. In the textbook "Juvenile Delinquency in a Diverse Society," the author describes how the Models for Change Program works. "... Models for Change Program has been underway as a method of bringing juvenile justice advocates, government officials, lawyers, educators, families, and community leaders from across the United States together to address the issue of juvenile delinquency and reform of justice system" (Bates, K. A., & Swan, R. S. (2018)). The program has also been expanded in order to help get tips and information about preventing juvenile delinquency across the states. They are partnered with a Resource Center and other agencies including OJJDP and SAMHSA. One of the things the Model for Change Programs has recently adopted is a screening process to go about when they are intaking new juveniles. The screening is used to determine if a juvenile has a mental health disorder in order to give them special attention if it is needed. There is also an assessment that determines how much of a violent risk a juvenile entering the program is; this assessment is called the Structured Assessment of Violent Risk in Youth. Another program that can help to prevent juveniles from participating in criminal behavior is evidence-based programs. Evidence-based programs have been shown to be the most effective within adolescents according to social science research (Bates, K. A., & Swan, R. S. (2018)).

Another way to prevent juvenile delinquency is recreation. Recreation can help prevent delinquency in several areas such as attachment, commitment, involvement, and positive beliefs. By participating in sports or other recreational activities, adolescents who may not have a stable home life or who live in a single parent home will have the opportunity to create and grow a bond with their coaches or leader. It also gives them the opportunity to befriend other kids their age who may be better influences on them. These bonds can positively affect the troubled adolescent and reduce delinquent behavior by having people in their life that they trust to confide in. Recreation also requires personal commitment. In the journal article, "How Recreation Professionals Can Design Programs that Really Work," the authors state the following about recreation and commitment, "if persons invest a significant amount of time and effort in the acquisition of a reputation based on virtue, they will consider the costs of delinquent behavior and the consequences of such actions and be less likely to engage in activities that might jeopardize their reputation" (Munson, W. W., & Estes, C. A. (2002)). Another way recreation can help to prevent or reduce delinquency is simply by involvement. If an adolescent is involved in any kind of recreational activity whether it be sports, camping, etc., they will be too busy with the activity to engage in criminal behaviors.

Adolescents who grow up in a single parent home, whether it be a single mother home or single father home, are more likely to engage in delinquent behaviors. Between the reduced supervision, lack of parent-child relationship, and even low socioeconomic status, the emotional and psychological trauma may just be too much for the adolescent to handle. These factors ultimately cause social problems within the teen to a point that they do not know how to act in a way that is socially acceptable. Though there are many troubled teens across the states, there are also many prevention programs and activities to help these children turn their life around.

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