

## Communication Deviance and Inconsistent Control in Family: A Study on Male Juvenile Offenders

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**Objective:** The purpose of the present research was to determine the role of perceived communication deviance and inconsistent control (Parental) in the family of male Juvenile offenders (age 12 yrs-18 yrs) through its comparison with their non-offender counterparts.

**Methods:** Sample of the present research consisted of 200 adolescents divided into two groups of offenders and non-offenders from low socioeconomic status. General Scale of Family Assessment Measure-Version III (FAM-III) was administered in order to measure the level of Communication, whereas Dyadic Relationship Scale was used to measure Control among the family members of male offenders and non offenders. Student's t-test was calculated in order to determine the difference in the level of Communication, and Control among family members of both groups.

**Results:** The results showed significant differences on the variables of Communication and Control among the family members of offenders and their non-offender counterparts.

**Conclusion:** The problem of relationship between family and the adolescent children should be taken into consideration while designing effective programs for the prevention of delinquency.

*Iranian Journal of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences(IJPBS), Volume 1, Number 2, Autumn and Einter 2007 : 28-32.*

**Keywords:** Juvenile Offenders • Communication Deviance • Control

### Introduction

Patterson describes family management factors as having the best ability to predict future and current delinquency, followed by child problem behavior, and school performance(1). Social control theory of delinquency assumes that the bond of affection and emotional connection one feels toward other persons or groups and the extent to which one cares about their opinions and feelings is a major deterrent to crime. The stronger this bond, the more likely the person is to take it into account when he contemplates a criminal act(2). Families are one of the strongest socializing forces in life. They teach children to control unacceptable behavior, to delay gratification, and to respect the rights of others. Conversely, families can teach children aggressive, antisocial, and violent behavior(3). One of the most important

influences upon the adolescent is the emotional climate of the family (4). Some families evidence a prevailing mood of gaiety, joy, optimism and happiness. Other families reflect a climate of fear, depression, cynicism and hostility. The happier the parents and the more positive the home climate, the more beneficial the effect on growing children. The best adjusted children are those who grow up in happy homes where adolescents and parents spend pleasurable time together (5). Hirschi found that delinquency was inversely related to the bonds of attachment within the juvenile's family (6).

In the realm of family functioning there is a theory known as the coercion theory, which suggests that family environment influences an adolescent's interpersonal style, which in turn influences peer group selection. They further state that peers with a more coercive interpersonal style tend to become involved with each other, and this relationship is assumed to increase the likelihood of being involved in delinquent behavior. Thus understanding the nature of relationships within the family, to include family adaptability, cohesion, and satisfaction,

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provides more information for understanding youth (7). The cohesiveness of the family successfully predicted the frequency of delinquent acts for non-traditional families(8). Research indicates that various exposures to violence are important sources of early adolescent role exits, which means that not only can a juvenile witness violence within the family but on the outside as well. If violence encompasses all emotionally environmental aspects of the juvenile's life, he or she is more likely to engage in delinquent activities(9).

One key to harmonious parent-youth relationship is communication (10). Clark and Shields (11) state that the importance of positive communication for optimal family functioning has major implications for delinquent behavior. According to Hirschi (2), it is not the simple fact of communication with parents, but the focus of this communication that is crucial in affecting the likelihood that a child will recall his parents, when and if, a situation of potential delinquency arises. Poor parent-adolescent communication has been linked to more delinquency (12) and greater deviance (13), whereas higher levels of monitoring have been associated with lower levels of adolescent deviance (14).

Parents in all societies grapple with how to raise their children in a way that prepares them for the complexities of life (15) and equips them to one day become parents themselves. In order to accomplish this daunting task, parents rely on their own socialization into parenting, their intuitive sense of right and wrong, and their overall cultural beliefs(16). Family behaviors, particularly parental monitoring and disciplining, seem to influence association with deviant peers throughout the adolescent period (7). Among social circumstances which have a hand in determining the future of the individual it is enough for our present purpose to recognize that family is central (3).

Methods of control or processes and forms of discipline can play a part in the development of delinquent child. Previous research found that coercive parenting and lack of parental monitoring contributes not

only directly to boys' antisocial behaviors, but also indirectly as seen in the contribution to their increased opportunity to associate with deviant peers, which is predictive of higher levels of delinquent acts (17). Numerous risk factors have been identified as indicators or predictors of juvenile delinquency and those factors represent dysfunction at several levels, specifically within the structure of the offender's family. Some of these factors include conflict within the family, a lack of adequate supervision and/or rules, a distinct lack of parent-child attachment, instability, poor home life quality, parental expectations, out-of-home placements and inconsistent discipline (18).

In addressing the issue of disciplinary practices Glueck and Glueck (19) report extreme permissiveness or inconsistency by the mother and permissiveness by the father influences the development of traits characteristics delinquents. Intuitively, it seems that the use of various disciplinary techniques will influence attachment between parents and children. McCord et al. (20) provides evidence that consistent love-oriented behavior by both parents is less conducive to delinquency than inconsistent discipline. On other hand Rutter and Giller (21) found that family variables associated with juvenile delinquency included parental criminality, cruelty, passive or neglectful parenting, erratic or harsh discipline, marital conflict, and poor parental supervision. These same variables have been associated with non adjudicated disturbances of conduct.

The aim of this study was to determine if juvenile offenders would perceive higher communication deviance and/or inconsistent control in family than their non-offender counterparts.

## Materials and Methods

### Subjects

In present research two samples of participants were recruited from big industrial city of Karachi, Pakistan. The sample consisted of 200 adolescents divided into two groups of 100 offenders (experimental group) and 100 their non-offender counterparts

(Control group) from low socio-economic status. The first sample consisted of male adolescents (offenders) who were all charged by the court in delinquent act. The offender group was enrolled in the Youthful Offender Industrial School Karachi. The second sample consisted of adolescents (non-offenders) from several urban secondary schools located in different lower class areas of Karachi. The ages of the participants in both samples ranged from 12 years to 18 years ( $15.84 \pm 1.86$ ).

### Data collection

The entire sample was drawn from low socioeconomic class. First sample of subjects were selected from Youthful Offender Industrial School Karachi. Participation was voluntary. A letter of consent describing the research project and inviting participation was provided to the administrator of Youthful Offender Industrial School, along with the questionnaires. Before the administration of psychological tests the researcher established rapport with the adolescents individually and they were interviewed and the examiner filled in questionnaire of personal information. Two subscales of Family Assessment Measure-III (22) (Urdu translation) were administered in order to measure level of perceived communication deviance and inconsistent control (parental) among the family members of offenders. Second sample (non-offenders) was drawn from various schools located in different urban areas of Karachi (Pakistan). Similar procedure of rapport development and administration was followed as in the case of first sample.

### Statistics

Statistical method used for analysis of data in the present research was Mean comparison t-test. It may be noted that high scores on the variables of communication and control indicate high level of communication deviance and inconsistent control in family respectively.

### Results

Analysis of the results revealed that there is a significant difference on the variables of Communication Deviance ( $t=3.401$ ,  $df=198$ ,

$P<0.05$ ), and Inconsistent Parental Control ( $t=2.011$ ,  $df=198$ ,  $P<0.05$ ), among the family members of Juvenile male offenders and non offenders (tables 1 and 2).

**Table 1:** Comparison of the difference in the level of Communication among family members of Offenders and Non-Offenders

Groups	N	Mean	SD	df	Sig (2-tailed)	t	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Offenders	100	6.51	2.18	198	0.001	3.40	Lower	Upper
Non Offenders	100	5.48	2.10				0.43279	1.62721

**Table 2:** Comparison of the difference in the level of Control among family members of Offenders and Non-Offenders

Groups	N	Mean	SD	df	Sig (2-tailed)	t	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Offenders	100	7.18	2.31	198	0.046	2.01	Lower	Upper
Non Offenders	100	6.56	2.03				0.01189	1.22811

### Discussion

There is a significant difference on the variable of Communication Deviance and Inconsistent Parental Control among the family members of Juvenile male offenders and non offenders.

These results were consistent with the hypothesis formulated and previous studies and theories. As mentioned in previous section that poor parent-adolescent communication has been linked to more delinquency (12) and general deviance (13). Communication may serve to improve the parent adolescent relationship, thus increasing the internalization of parental values and decreasing deviance, whereas monitoring may serve to decrease deviance directly through parental control of adolescent's activity (23).

One of the most frequent complaints of delinquents that we came across while interviewing them was that 'their parents do not listen to their ideas, accept their opinions as relevant or try to understand their feelings and points of view'. Adolescents want parents who will talk with them, not at them, in a sympathetic manner. Quality time and communication are vital aspects in the family and without these; the child is likely to turn to other sources for comfort and attention. The

child could turn to sex, drugs or other gang activities for comfort as a result of peer's pressure if there is no strong parental support. Basically, adolescents want sympathetic understanding, an attentive ear and parents who indicate by their attitudes that they feel they have something worthwhile to say and therefore are willing to communicate with them. Research indicates that the respect parent's show for adolescent's opinions contributes greatly to climate and happiness of home.

Parents and adolescents face a conflict of values. Sometimes the conflict is between parental and adolescent's values, but just as often the parents are experiencing value conflict within themselves just as the adolescents are. The adults are aware of value changes around them that sometimes conflict with the traditional values with which they have grown up. They have lost some of the idealism of their own youth; usually they have become more cynical and realistic and less certain about many things.

Adults may react with dogmatism and authoritarianism to convince both their adolescents and themselves that they are right. In families of delinquents individual members function separately and autonomously with little family interdependence. They further reported that in such families one common characteristic is parental inconsistency towards rules and the behavior of the children. Inconsistency may take various forms: 1) certain behaviors are permitted at one time but not at another, 2) what the child is told to do is inconsistent with what the child sees other family members doing, and 3) one parent may enforce a rule while the other parent allows for the breaking of the rule. It is important that parents must not adopt a rigid pattern to impose value and norms which they expect their children to follow. Rigid controlling parents appear cruel in their interaction with their children. They generally have a large number of rules and regulations that they enforce in a cold rigid manner. Instead of having children who are compliant and non-delinquent, rigid controlling parents may have children who develop manipulative behaviors that passively express their

aggression. Ultimately, the child may explode into highly delinquent (24). Studies have shown that what parents expect from their children also affects the likelihood of future delinquency. Typically parents who set high but reasonable standards of conduct have children who are less likely to commit crimes (25,26). Parents must teach and encourage their children to behave within a certain set of clear and realistic expectations. Immariageon (27) says it best when he states that justice can be better served and young people steered on the right path by involving families in juvenile crime cases. If anything would play a large part in delinquency it would be a family. Understanding how the family and how the juvenile within the family works get to the core of delinquency.

In conclusion analysis of the present research indicates that the family occupies an important place among other groups that socially influence adolescents. Therefore the problem of relationship between family and the adolescent children should be taken into consideration while designing effective programs for the prevention of delinquency. Indeed the very absence of intact families makes gang membership more appealing (28).

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