

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AND HABIT PATTERNS*

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The present paper forms a part of the research project entitled "Delinquent Children" undertaken by the researcher recently. The study relates to 136 juvenile offenders whose ages range between 7 and 16 years and who were found to be inmates of remand homes at Dharwad and Hubli during a 20 month period from May 1979 to December 1980. As one of the background factors the researcher was prompted to find out the habit patterns of delinquent boys.

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The Problem

Do the delinquent boys possess any habits and pastimes which are normally considered as baneful — physically, mentally, morally and socially, to growing children? If so, what are they? What are the sources of the acquisition of such habits and pastimes? Is there any relationship between such habits and pastimes and delinquency? These are some of the searching questions that necessitate factual investigation about habits and pastimes with reference to juvenile delinquency. Some of these issues are considered in the present paper.

Research Procedure

The primary source of information was 136 delinquent boys who were detained in two remand homes. In this study, the principal instrument of data collection is a structured interview schedule with the help of which each of the subjects was interviewed within the premises of the remand home.

Regarding the structure of the schedule, it was first contemplated to use more of open-end questions in order to obtain responses from the subjects without the limitations of structured responses. But this experiment introduced for the pilot study did not give

the kind of results that were expected of it. On the other hand, answers were so varied and so unrelated to one another that the task of classifying the responses was extremely difficult. Hence, in the place of open-end questions, structured questions have been used in the schedule. The schedule is prepared in such a way as to cover every significant aspect of the research theme.

Findings and Discussion

There seems to be some relationship between what one can term as "recreational activities" and delinquency. In the early career of a delinquent, the various habits of smoking, drinking alcohol, and gambling may be pursued more as a form of personal enjoyment rather than as a form of defiance of parental authority, or for positive material gain. But gradually, the motive of material gain supplants what initially began as a mere recreational activity. Particularly, in gambling, one gradually accepts it as a means of gaining monetary ends. Thus, obtaining monetary gain becomes a common factor in specific forms of recreational activity. Where the motive of monetary gain becomes dominant in recreational activities, the distinction between recreation

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and deviance becomes somewhat blurred. Here, for purposes of analysis, a habit is defined as a settled tendency or practice. A pastime is treated as an equivalent to recreation, a sport or game. Recreation is viewed as a pastime, relaxation or amusement.

Though it could be argued that the habit patterns of the delinquent boys are not basically different from the habit patterns of adolescents in general, we cannot completely discount the fact that the delinquent boys are placed in such circumstances that the imbibing of certain habits becomes inevitable. One such habit which we find among the delinquent boys is the habit of smoking. The data reveal that nearly 70 (69.11) per cent of the delinquent boys smoke quite frequently, and another 24 (24.26) per cent smoke occasionally.

Smoking as a habit grows essentially in a group situation, in the sense that when a boy strays into the company of delinquent boys, he is more or less inclined to resort to smoking in order to be accepted as one of them. This particular habit, and in a similar way, other habits, which are approved by the members of a delinquent gang, are the means by which one can find one's own identity within a delinquent gang.

One thing which needs to be emphasized here is that the particular habit which we find in the case of a delinquent boy is largely the outcome of his interest in being accepted by his peers.

It is noticed that children, like adult smokers, resort to smoking excessively when they are extremely happy. They also smoke frequently when life becomes miserable. Boys commonly smoke beedies. They also smoke cigarettes as an item of luxury. Beedies, from the point of view of cost, are less expensive and available everywhere. It is also expressed by many delinquent boys in the present study that a smoke is really delightful and refreshing. During the period of detention in the remand home

some boys had become so impatient by force of habit that they never hesitated to ask the researcher for beedies during the course of interview. There are also cases where boys attempted to run away from the remand home when they could not resist the temptation of smoking.

Further, it might be observed that a habit does not occur singly, but occurs as a pattern. For instance, the habit of smoking is accompanied by the habit of drinking alcohol. Gambling is also often associated with drinking alcohol.

There seems to be some association between delinquent career and gambling where gambling serves as a kind of pastime. This, however, does not mean that every delinquent resorts to gambling as a pastime. Only about 39 (38.97) per cent of the sampled boys state that they are frequently engaged in gambling, while nearly 32 (32.35) per cent of the boys state that they are never in the habit of gambling. Gambling is a group activity, and unless one is frequently involved in peer-group association, such a kind of pastime can never become a habitual activity. Moreover, gambling is an unlawful activity and it is necessarily a concealed activity involving only those who are closely associated together. Such activities tend to strengthen the peer-group association.

Gambling can take many forms. As a group activity, playing cards seems to be quite popular among those who relish being in a group situation, and also by those who consider this form of gambling as a profitable one. Playing cards serves initially as a mere pastime. But gradually it acquires a new significance in so far as it becomes a source of monetary gain.

The data reveal that seventy eight boys constituting nearly 57(57.35) per cent of the sampled boys state that they play cards. These boys play cards in their own groups as well as outside the group. Most of the

boys confess that they know more than one game of cards. Some of them always carry a pack of cards with them as the necessity for its use may arise any time.

Regarding the places of gambling, usually the hang-outs differ with the nature of gambling. The boys find gardens and fields in the outskirts of the towns, cities, the space below the over-bridge, as well as crumbled and deteriorated houses inside the city or town as suitable places for playing cards. It is also found that habitual gamblers generally have the profit motive and play for monetary gain. The loser is usually forced to gamble in the expectation of getting back the money that is lost. This is how the gambling continues though places of gambling are raided from time to time.

As a pastime, gambling, especially playing cards, keeps the delinquent boys busy during such times when they are not actually engaged in delinquent activities. And for those who are consistently engaged in gambling activities, it provides an expectation of monetary gain. Even in the absence of actual monetary gain, gambling provides the much desired thrill and excitement.

Gambling can take a more individualized form in the "Matka"* form of gambling. Here also the pecuniary considerations may prevail in resorting to this form of gambling. The element of thrill and expectation is more intense in this form of gambling than in other forms. Forty-one boys, constituting nearly 30 (30.14) per cent of the sampled boys, state that they play Matka.

One way of looking at some of the habits of the boys is to consider them as a way of the delinquent's expression of resentment of institutional authority. Very often such activities are concealed, and they may become more open when the delinquent is inclined to show open opposition to any kind of restrictions placed on his behaviour.

In fact, over fifty (55.88) per cent of the boys state that their parents never object even when they know that they are actively associated with their peers.

It is significant that a fairly low percentage of the sampled boys are addicted to alcohol. Only 22 boys, constituting about 16 (16.17) per cent of the sampled boys, state that they drink alcohol frequently. Drinking alcohol can be rather expensive and, even in the case of country liquor, the expenditure can be quite high which the boys cannot afford on a sustained basis. However, on the basis of availability of funds, the boys would buy liquor from licensed shops, or even take to illicit liquor which is relatively cheaper. Also, occasional use of alcohol may be observed when the 'earnings' from unlawful activities are fairly high. In fact, nearly 35 (35.29) per cent of the boys state that they do drink alcohol occasionally. Nearly 50 (48.52) per cent of the boys state that they never take alcoholic drinks. In spite of the fact that drinking alcohol is also a group activity, it has not developed into a confirmed habit in the case of a large number of youthful offenders covered by the study.

One of the ways in which the adolescents may be drawn to the habit of drinking alcohol is when they serve as carriers of illicit liquor. In such cases the impetus to cultivate the habit of drinking alcohol may largely be derived through association with adult offenders who are the prime movers in illicit liquor trade. Moreover it is noticed in the present study that drinking among boys is a group phenomenon and hence boys usually drink in a group. Moreover it is the group that induces boys to drink. Regarding the use of intoxicants boys expressed that it provides recreation, excitement and relaxation from monotony. Some senior delinquent boys stated that the use of alcohol

* Matka, a number game, is a popular form of gambling.

makes them bold and courageous and raises their stamina in crime and gambling. According to these boys, it enhances their capacity for betting in gambling — a quality that is highly appreciated by the delinquents in general.

Delinquent boys not only take alcoholic drinks but also smoke ganja and consume opium and charas which provide intoxication. Boys who normally associate with adult criminals are initiated into such habits. It is noticed in the present study that 14 boys consume opium and charas and 18 boys smoke ganja.

Visiting movies is another common practice found among the delinquent boys. Data reveal that nearly 73 (72.78) per cent of the sampled boys have much craving for seeing motion pictures. It is a pastime which provides thrill and enjoyment to teen age boys. It is also noticed that some boys have tried to conduct their gang activities on the lines observed on the screen. Thus the movie visits partially provide guidelines to delinquent activities.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis reveals that delinquent boys also develop habits and pastimes such as smoking, gambling, drinking alcohol etc., that tell upon their health, character and psychology. The habits that the boys develop are almost a group phenomenon. Boys acquire these habits in the group and they can enjoy them to the fullest extent only in the company of other individuals — juveniles as well as adults. In the case of delinquent boys these activities such as smoking, gambling, drinking alcohol etc., are recreational too. That means the delinquent boys resort to these activities for recreation. And when he finds that delinquent activities are also recreational, he indulges in it and soon accepts it as a career.

Hence, it has almost come to mean that activities that are delinquent in nature are accompanied by bad habits and pastimes. This fact requires the attention of all those persons who deal with delinquent children — institutionally or otherwise.

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