

Juvenile Delinquency Predictors and Preventions

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Abstract

This exploratory study examines juveniles who have been incarcerated and risk factors of their home environment. The data-collected is aimed at identifying predictors of delinquent behavior as well as effective preventions for delinquency. The sample population was juvenile records and ACE questionnaires.

### Juvenile Delinquency Predictors and Preventions

Juvenile delinquency is becoming a focal point in our society. From 1960 to 2017, the number of juvenile delinquency cases has doubled, reaching approximately 818,900. Of those cases, 52% involved youth under the age of sixteen (Hockenberry & Puzzanhera, 2019).

Children grow into adults and when deviant patterns have gone unchanged, they turn into the offenders who occupy our jails and prisons. Preventing early childhood delinquency will reduce the rates of incarceration for juveniles and adults. Reduced rates of incarceration can lead to a decrease in criminal activity, a decrease in unemployment, a decrease in drug and alcohol use, and a better functioning society as a whole.

Voisin, Harty, Elsaesser, & Takahashi (2017) analyzed parental monitoring and parental warmth on African American juveniles in low-income communities (p. 226). The study tested two criminological theories: social control theory and social learning theory. With social control theory, parents and caregivers who have better knowledge and supervision of their children give them less unsupervised time alone. This lowers the risk of behavioral health problems. The social learning theory says that children and youth adopt positive behaviors from watching their parents and guardians display them. The theory suggests that parental warmth results in children and youth picking up and mimicking those positive habits (p. 226).

The sample population for this study was 368 self-identified African Americans ages 13-24. Forty-six percent were male and 54% were female. They were recruited from low-income communities where African Americans prominently resided. Participants were given a questionnaire to fill out right then in a quiet setting. The questionnaire took about forty-five minutes and participants were compensated ten dollars for their participation (Voisin et al., 2017, p. 227). Over 75% of the individuals sampled qualified for free or reduced lunch. Of the

participants, 31% lived at home with both parents, 55% with mother only, and 2.5% with the father only. Over half of the participants were raised in a single-parent household (p. 230).

The findings of the research showed that parental monitoring and parental warmth were positive influences in juvenile growth and decreasing delinquency. They both matter in different ways depending on the youth's problems. Parental monitoring correlated with lower amounts of substance abuse, delinquency, unsafe sex, and higher school engagement. Higher parental warmth correlated with better youth mental health but it also had higher rates of alcohol, cigarette, and marijuana use. Parental warmth also contributed to less dating violence and a decrease in mental health problems such as depression (Voisin et al., 2017, p. 223).

Williams & Smalls (2015) explored parenting practices and their impact on juvenile recidivism. This study used the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ), a reliable method of measuring parental style. It consists of five subscales that correspond with the characteristics of parenting and reflects the risk for conduct problems (p. 4).

The questionnaire had thirty-two questions that measured four different parenting styles: parental monitoring, positive parenting techniques, permissive supervision, and inconsistent discipline. An example question being, "Do you help your child with their homework?" The parents participating represented first-time offenders and repeat offenders from ages twelve to seventeen. Ninety-one parents completed the survey, 71% of them being mothers and 46% being single parents. Out of these parents, 64% of their children were at the detention facility for their second, third, or fourth offense (Williams & Smalls, 2015, p. 6).

The results of the survey were disappointing. Most parents carried a high score in poor parental monitoring, permissive supervision, and inconsistent disciplinary practices. Most also carried a low score in parental involvement and positive parenting admitting that they are rarely

involved in their children’s activities. In positive parenting techniques, most parents indicated that they rarely ever reward their child, praise them for doing a good, or show them affection (Williams & Smalls, 2015, p. 9).

Parents are a strong indicator of delinquency. Tapia, Alarid, & Clare (2018) explored parenting styles, juvenile delinquency, and gender relationships. The theory used in this research was social bonding theory which suggests that delinquency is more likely when bonds between society and individuals are weakened, this includes parental attachment (p. 24).

A sample of 6,366 youth was taken from the 1997 National Longitudinal Study. The youth were ages 12-16, living in the United States and resided in a home with both a mother and a father figure (Tapia, Alarid, & Clare, 2018, p. 25). Delinquency was measured through a self-report questionnaire completed by youths. Parenting styles were measured in two youth self-reports. The first one asked youth to rate each parent separately regarding the parent’s level of support of the youth. Responses were measured on a three-point scale: very supportive, somewhat supportive, and not supportive. The second measure asked youths whether each parent is permissive or strict (p. 26).

Their research showed that with parenting styles the rates were:

<b>Parenting Style</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Authoritative	64.5%
Authoritarian	48.1%
Permissive	54.4%
Neglectful	42%

The researchers found that neglectful parents had children with the highest delinquency rates. However, this was true only for fathers. “Neglect by the father includes exposing their children to criminogenic factors and situations, which may be captured in these data” (Tapia, Alarid, & Clare, 2018, p. 32). The same was found for permissive parenting styles, where

permissive mothers had no effect on delinquency for youths, but fathers' permissive parenting style had a positive, significant effect on their children's delinquency (p. 32).

Conversely, for authoritarian parents, mothers had the same effect on delinquency as fathers (a slightly weaker effect, in fact). These findings suggest that youths respond similarly to a stern or disciplinarian parent, regardless of the parent's gender" (Tapia, Alarid, & Clare, 2018, p. 32). Contrary to researchers' predictions, parental attachment had no effect on delinquency for either parent gender (p. 31).

Lucero, Barrett, & Jensen (2015) examined children's demographic characteristics and parenting stress related to juvenile delinquency. The researchers collected data from "the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study which is a national panel study that follows a group of new parents and their children. The data was collected from the day of birth, when they were one, three, five, and nine years old". For this study the researchers only used the information obtained from the parents and their children at the age of nine years old. They used parent and child self-report data of 2,824 participants (p. 167).

Findings from an ANOVA test showed that African American children reported higher levels of delinquency compared to Caucasian, Latino, and other bi-racial children (Lucero, Barrett, & Jensen, 2015, p. 168). Researchers also found that children with both parents born in the United States had higher delinquency rates than ones with a parent (or both) who were foreign-born (p. 168). Children who lived in households without both biological parents, families who were at poverty level or below, and households with parents who are stressed and overwhelmed with their roles and tasks as parents were at an increased risk of early childhood delinquency. Conversely, school belonging was negatively related to early childhood delinquency (p. 169).

Juvenile delinquency is a problem that all countries face and the need for successful prevention programs is increasing (Radic, 2016, p. 120). In European countries, prevention programs focus on males between the ages of 14-17 and the programs specialize in preventing alcohol and drug abuse, and school-related violence. Their preventative programs not only involve the juvenile but also their parents. Many programs also require the involvement of others like police officers, social workers, schoolteachers, and persons from the judicial system (p. 125).

In the Netherlands, there most popular prevention program is the HALT program. Police offer this alternative option to first-time juvenile offenders who have committed a minor offense such as theft, vandalism, graffiti, arson, and truancy. The alternative options for the program include damage compensation and/or community service. The main goal for HALT is to prevent and reduce juvenile crime and once the juvenile has completed the program, the charges against them are dismissed (Radic, 2016, p. 125).

England and Wales use the Triage program for delinquency prevention. To be eligible for the program the juvenile must admit guilt for the crime(s) and not have a previous criminal record. In this program, the focus is restorative justice and the juvenile is required to write a letter to the victim apologizing, participate in mediation with the victim, and make amends with his victim or the community. There are many benefits to the Triage program including, “early identification and assessment of the risk of reoffending and needs of juvenile quick interventions for juvenile and the parents; victims input into interventions through a restorative justice approach; prevention of reoffending” (Radic, 2016, p. 126). The main goal of the Triage program is to prevent juveniles who have committed a minor criminal offense from obtaining a criminal

record. If the juvenile completes the program successfully then the criminal charges will not become part of their record (p. 126).

Typically, juveniles will experience more than one risk factor throughout their childhood. Some examples being the degree of parental supervision, the lack of emotional bonds between parent and child, and substance abuse or criminality of parents (Radic, 2016, p. 118). Therefore, it is important that prevention programs focus on more than one factor, and focus on children who are at a greater risk of offending or reoffending (p. 123). Ideally, preventative programs would be implemented early enough in a child's life before criminal behavior or delinquency has begun (p. 124).

Parents are the biggest influence on juveniles and should be included in prevention programs. Because parents are the most important element in reducing risk factors, community-based programs that emphasize family interactions are the most successful programs. Having successful prevention programs positively affects not only the juvenile, but society as a whole. With success comes a rise in education, an increase in income, an increase in labor participation, and the improvement of physical and mental health in general (Radic, 2016, p. 123).

Brooks, Edelen, and Tucker (2017) examined predictors of running away, including both parent and youth ratings of family functioning, and focusing on risk factors that would predict the risks of youth running away (p. 249). All adolescents and their parents were referred to a parent-child mediation program for at-risk youth in Los Angeles, California. Surveys covered several domains including family functioning, perceived academic functioning, and participation in problem behaviors such as substance use, delinquency, and running away. There were 111 parents and youth who completed the surveys at baseline, six, and twelve weeks (p. 250).



The study showed similarities between both parent and youth ratings of family conflict and communication at the baseline. Youth reported greater dissatisfaction with communication, but there were no significant differences in how parents and their youth-rated family cohesion and conflict (Brooks et al., 2017, p. 252). Family functioning composite scores were lower for these parents and their youth, which was significantly associated with runaway status during the follow-up periods. Youth who ran away at the baseline were 11 times more likely to run away again during the follow-up stages (p. 253). Demographic and school-related variables showed no significant effect on running away (p. 252).

Mowen & Boman (2018) used data from the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI) to examine whether family conflict and peer delinquency affect crime and substance use in youth who are going through the reentry process. The SVORI is designed to assess whether enhanced reentry programs such as anger management, life skill classes, substance abuse treatment, and reentry planning resulted in better reentry outcomes (p. 279). The research included four waves of panel data from 337 male youth under the age of 18, in four different states (Mowen & Boman, 2018, p. 278).

The first wave was collected about thirty-one days before the youth was set to be released from the facility, the second was collected about three months after release, the third was collected nine months after release and the fourth was collected at fifteen months after release (Mowen & Boman, 2018, p. 279). At each wave, the youth were asked a variety of questions about substance use, criminal offending, family dynamics, peer relationships, housing and educational outcomes, and their mental health since the previous wave (p. 279).

For the post-release youth, family conflict and delinquent peer influence were both significantly associated with increased levels of offending. “Results appear to suggest that family

conflict is largely responsible for driving delinquent peer contact” (p. 284). “Family conflict works as a coercive force that drives individuals into other forms of coercion (e.g., future conflict and deviant peer relationships) which then relate to even greater levels of offending and substance use. In short, our findings demonstrate that family conflict is the most important theoretical developmental cause and effect for adolescents undergoing reentry” (p. 285).

Conversely, “increases in family support decreased family conflict across time.” (Mowen & Bowen, 2018, p. 284). Only 20% of the model programs included in the study were classified as being effective (p. 276). There is an “apparent, but unrealized need for practitioners to form effective interventions with the goal of interrupting family conflict for returning adolescents (p. 286).

Regarding gender and juvenile delinquency, compared to males, females are more likely to be detained for status offenses such as truancy, running away, and underage drinking (Barrett, et al., 2015, p. 427). This study used a large sample archival data from a state juvenile justice agency. They examined the behavioral and demographic predictors of repeat offending for a sample of approximately 34,414 females who had been referred for criminal offenses (Barrett, et al., 2015, p. 427). The control group was a group of 34,414 female youth without a history of delinquency and matched on birth year and race. Data from eight different groups of female juvenile offenders were drawn from the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice Management Information System. The sample included female juvenile offenders born between 1981 and 1988 each of whom had been referred to the SCDJJ on at least one occasion (p. 428). These sets of data were merged with the data from SC State budget and Control Boards Office of Research and Statistics. That data was collected from the Department of Social Services, the Department of Mental Health, and the Department of Education.

Results about recidivism showed that offenders who had a history of drug use were almost twice as likely to have a second offense as those not having any drug history. Compared to offenders who committed serious crimes, offenders who committed less severe offenses were 30% more likely to have a second offense. This was due to family criminal history, and a younger age at first offense (Barrett, et al., 2015, p. 427).

The delinquent group was compared to the non-delinquents group on four demographic variables: free lunch eligibility, CPS services, foster care, and disorder of aggression. More than 50% were eligible for free lunch in both groups, 62.9% being from the delinquent group. Females involved in CPS were 3.2 times more likely to engage in delinquency. There were six times more females from the delinquent group placed in foster care, and females placed in foster care were twice as likely to be involved in delinquency. The strongest predictor of delinquency was mental health diagnosis related to a disorder of aggression. Female juveniles clinically diagnosed as aggressive were 11 times more likely to be delinquent (Barrett, et al., 2015, p. 431).

A previous diagnosis of mental health problems is the strongest predictor of delinquency for female juveniles (Barrett, et al., 2015, p. 432). Females not only experience higher levels of mental health problems than male peers, but they are also less likely to receive treatment and more likely to abandon treatment (p. 431). Females are more emotional than males and experiencing trauma or mental health problems can cause acting out or mental breakdowns especially if they are not receiving treatment. The American Bar association and National Bar Association have concluded that there is a critical lack of prevention diversion, and treatment alternatives for girls in the juvenile justice system (p. 428). This research shows that female juvenile delinquency can be caused by an unhealthy home environment, socioeconomic status, mental health problems and that prevention for delinquency begins at home.

Calleja, Dadah, Fisher, & Fernandez (2016) examined the effectiveness of specialized reentry services compared to the basic reentry services. Specialized services consisted of a standardized assessment of substance abuse and functional ability, and individualized case management to address the juvenile's specific treatment needs (p. 1). The study had a total of 273 male juvenile offenders between the ages of 13-18 who were incarcerated in the same locked treatment facility. The experimental group was 117 offenders who consented and participated in the Second Chance Act Project (SCR) and the Wayne County Second Chance Act Reentry Program (WC) (p. 5). The control group was 156 offenders who consented and received the usual reentry services.

Researchers collected the data at three different intervals: upon admission to treatment, at program release, and two years after release from treatment. Recidivism data was collected through a search of the regional and statewide juvenile and criminal justice databases for up to 2 years after their release (Calleja et al., 2016, p. 6).

The results of the study showed 24% of the control group recidivated compared to 16% of the experimental group. The odds of recidivism were over two times greater for offenders who received the usual reentry services versus youth who received the specialized reentry services (Calleja et al., 2016, p. 7). With more than 1.3 million juveniles cycling through the court system every year, the results of the experiment demonstrated that specialized reentry services help reduce recidivism rates in juvenile offenders (p. 2).

The Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) is a self-report questionnaire used to identify childhood experiences of abuse and neglect. The questionnaire is a 10-point scale and the higher the score, the more trauma the child has experienced. "Continued exposure to violence and other adversity increases the risk that these patterns will continue in adulthood potentially affecting

their own future and their children's future" (p. 21). Indicators of childhood trauma include signs of behavioral and mental health challenges throughout adolescence. Some signs include acting-out behaviors, problems at school, hanging out with the wrong crowds, and engaging in delinquent activities such as substance use and engaging in high-risk sexual behaviors (*"Preventing Adverse Childhood"*, 2019, p. 21).

If a child is showing signs of trauma, treatment can be beneficial in addressing the social, emotional, and behavioral consequences that result from traumatic exposure. Individualized, trauma-informed interventions can "strengthen children's resilience and break the cycle of adversity" (p. 21). Assessments can be used with parents to identify risks in the family environment; risks such as parent drug and alcohol use, stress, the use of harmful punishment, and domestic violence in the home. Using family-centered approaches for substance abuse can address the substance misuse by parents while also addressing the needs of their children with trauma exposure (*"Preventing Adverse Childhood"*, 2019, p. 21).

Parents who struggle with substance abuse can have difficulty regulating stress, processing emotions, and caring for their children in the proper way that is essential for a child to have a healthy social and emotional development. There are many evidence-based treatments for substance abuse and preventative services such as mental health services, parenting education, and children's services that can be utilized such as therapeutic interventions, individual and family counseling, (*"Preventing Adverse Childhood"*, 2019, p. 21).

Children are a product of their environment. Numerous factors out of their control are what lead them either away from or towards delinquency. Based on previous research, this study will examine early predictors of delinquent behavior as well as effective preventions for delinquency.

## **Method**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to identify early predictors of juvenile delinquency and what can be done to prevent delinquency.

### **Participants & Sampling procedures**

The participants in this study were a convenience sample of agency records and ACEs scores from juveniles entering a detention center from June 2018 – December 2019.

### **Research Design**

This study was an explanatory and descriptive study identifying reasons why juveniles engage in delinquency, and what can be done to reduce the likelihood of offending by youth. This research used a mixed-methods approach to collect data.

### **Instrumentation**

The instrumentation used to collect the data was juvenile ACE questionnaires.

### **Date Collection**

The data was collected from juvenile records and ACE questionnaires provided by the juveniles entering a detention center.

### **Ethical Considerations**

See attached IRB application.

### **Bias**

The bias in this research is juvenile information we are unable to obtain.

### **Limitations**

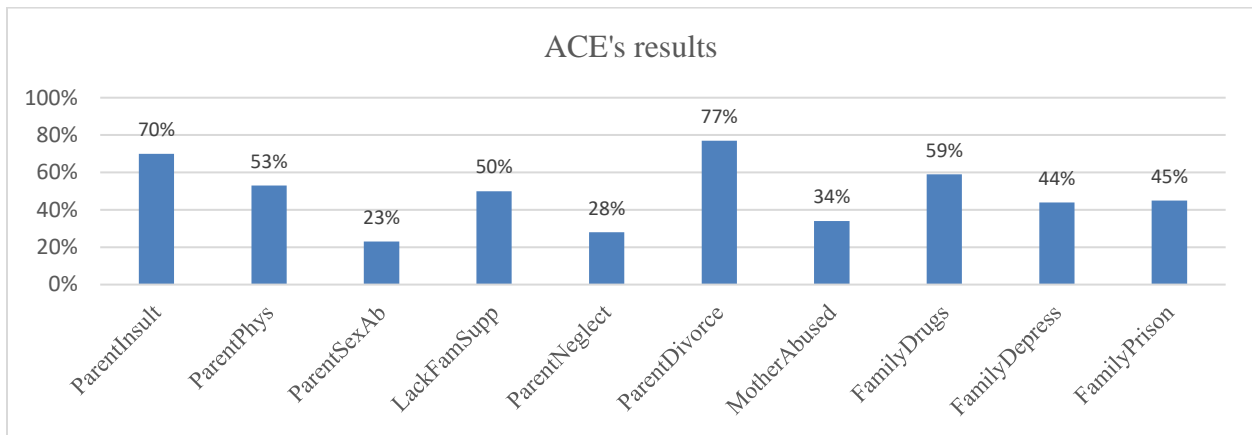
The limitation of this study is the population sample is limited to one small jurisdiction.

## Results

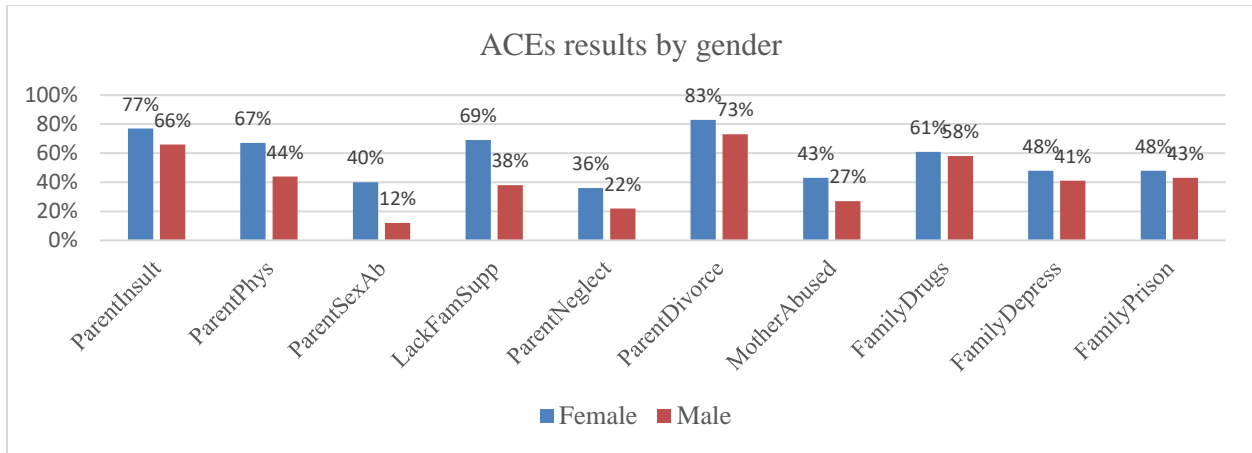
### Sample

Data for this research was gathered from 159 juvenile records and ACE questionnaires for youth who entered a juvenile detention center between July 2018 and December 2019. The information provided from their juvenile records were their gender, booking date, and charge(s).

### Survey Findings



Analyzing the ACE questions separately, three of the questions stood out with alarming rates: 77% of the juveniles had parents who were divorced, which can lead to less supervision and inconsistent parenting techniques; 70% of the juveniles had a parent or adult in the home who verbally and/or mentally abused them. This can lead to depression, substance abuse, running away, and an unsafe home environment; 59% of the juveniles had a family history of drug or alcohol abuse, which can lead to an increased likelihood of juveniles engaging and experimenting in substance use.



In this study, 40% of the participants were female and 60% were male. When looking at gender differences females were much more likely to report experiencing some sort of sexual abuse by a family member and much less likely than males to feel they have the support of family members.

Regarding the types of offenses committed by gender, the largest crime category for female juveniles was status offenses. Nearly one-third of the female participants were booked on status offense charges related to running away and truancy. This could be due to the fact that females feel less family support than males and are more likely to experience sexual abuse in the home.

Crime Category*	Female Participants	Male Participants
1 - Violent	19%	25%
2 - Property	7%	<b>30%</b>
3 - Drugs	19%	20%
4 - Status	<b>30%</b>	4%
5- Other	25%	21%

\*Juveniles' primary charges were categorized on a scale of 1-5.

For male participants, they scored the highest in property crimes such as petit theft and malicious injury to property. This may be in effort to create something to brag about to their peers. Of the 159 participants, 33% of them had secondary charges.

The ACE trauma assessment scores were categorized into three levels.



<b>ACE Category</b>	<b>Female Participants</b>	<b>Male Participants</b>
3 (score 7-10)	<b>47%</b>	21%
2 (score 4-6)	31%	35%
1 (score 0-3)	22%	<b>44%</b>

Nearly half of the female participants had a score in the highest traumatic experiences category, between 7-10, indicating a higher number of risk factors. Nearly half the male participants had a score in the lowest traumatic experiences category, between 0-3, indicating a low number of risk factors. Barrett et al. (2015) stated that, “Females not only experience higher levels of mental health problems than male peers, but they are also less likely to receive treatment and more likely to abandon treatment” (p. 431). Youth who are experiencing mental health issues and are not seeking and completing treatment are more likely to act out and repeatedly engage in delinquency.

### **Discussion and Implications**

Using principles from criminological theories helps explain the role parents play in preventing delinquency. Research shows that youth who have too much unsupervised time are more likely to engage in delinquency. Social control theory suggests that parents who provide more supervision of their children reduce their risk of behavioral problems. While social bonding theory suggests that delinquency is less likely when attachments between children and their parents are strong. Children are going to be more successful if they feel like they have their parents support. Finally, social learning theory suggests that children adopt positive behaviors from watching others. Parents who exhibit positive behaviors are more likely to have children who exhibit those same behaviors

Juveniles need positive relationships with their families in order to be successful in rehabilitation. Family conflict has a distinct correlation with deviant behavior and substance

abuse. Practitioners need to form effective interventions that interrupt family conflict (Mowen & Boman, 2018, p. 286). The data gathered in this study supports these findings; between 50%-70% of juveniles did not have positive parental interaction or family support and experienced neglect. Parental involvement does contribute to juvenile delinquency.

The data strongly supports how female and male juveniles react differently to childhood trauma and dysfunction. The male participants overall had lower ACE trauma scores and engaged in more physical and destructive crimes. Nearly half the female participants had high ACE scores and largely engaged in status offenses. Females involved in CPS cases or placed in foster care are at an increased likelihood of engaging in delinquency (Barrett, et al., 2015, p. 431). This could be why female juveniles largely commit status offenses such as running away. Being involved in CPS cases shows there is some sign of neglect or abuse, and living in foster care, you have been taken away from your family.

Half of the participants reported that they did not have a family support system. Two-thirds of the male participants reported having a parent who verbally abuses them. Strengthening parenting skills and promoting nurturing and supportive family environments can build a strong foundation for children and protect them from multiple forms of violence, substance misuse, and other negative health outcomes.

Skill-based learning is an important approach to prevent risk factors related to juvenile delinquency. Research shows that teaching children and youth skills to handle stress, resolve conflicts, and manage their emotions and behaviors can prevent violence, victimization, and perpetration. It is also important for youth to be educated on dating and intimate partner relationships that promote caring, respect and non-violence.

Children who are put down and have low self-esteem are going to lack the confidence in

themselves to be successful and make good choices. Children learn from their parents and look to them for guidance in their actions. Parents need to give their children positive guidance throughout every stage of childhood, offer support in times of struggle, and stay consistent in their discipline in order to reduce the risk factors that can lead to juvenile delinquency.

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