

Family Type and Parent's Education: Relationship with Boys in Conflict with Law in Assam

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ABSTRACT

Juvenile delinquency, or the involvement of minors in illegal or deviant behavior, is a growing social concern that demands critical examination. Among various factors influencing juvenile delinquency, family type and the educational level of parents are often cited as significant predictors of children's behavioral outcomes. The present study is an attempt to explore family type and parental education affect the likelihood of boys coming into conflict with the law. Statistical analysis using chi-square tests revealed a significant association between family type and group membership, indicating that boys from broken families are more likely to be in conflict with the law. Similarly, parental education showed strong associations. The mother's education level and father's education level were both highly significant, suggesting that boys whose parents had lower educational attainment were overrepresented among juveniles in conflict with the law. No significant differences were observed for age or the boys' own education level.

Keywords: *Juvenile delinquency, boys in conflict with the law*

Juvenile delinquency, or the involvement of minors in illegal or deviant behavior, is a growing social concern that demands critical examination. Among various factors influencing juvenile delinquency, family type and the educational level of parents are often cited as significant predictors of children's behavioral outcomes. In Assam, a northeastern state in India characterized by ethnic diversity and socio-economic variation, examining the nexus between family structure, parental education, and delinquent behavior among boys in conflict with the law holds special relevance. This study focuses on understanding how different family types and parental education levels correlate with the emergence of delinquent tendencies among boys in conflict with law in Assam.

Understanding Juvenile Delinquency in India and Assam

India has witnessed a steady increase in juvenile crimes over the years. According to the *National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)*, juveniles in conflict with the law account for a significant proportion of total crime statistics, with boys being more frequently represented than girls (NCRB, 2022). Assam, despite being a relatively less urbanized state, has shown an upward trend in juvenile offenses, especially among boys aged 16–18. The phenomenon

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is deeply intertwined with socio-economic stressors, family instability, lack of access to quality education, and poor parental supervision.

The *Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015*, defines a “child in conflict with law” as a child alleged or found to have committed an offense and who has not completed 18 years of age at the time of the commission of such offense. Boys make up a vast majority of juveniles in conflict with the law, which brings the gendered nature of delinquency into focus (Ministry of Women and Child Development [MWCD], 2016).

In the context of Assam, issues like insurgency, ethnic conflicts, poverty, illiteracy, child labour, and migration also complicate the juvenile justice landscape. These socio-political dynamics shape the environment in which families raise their children and thereby influence children's behavior, values, and emotional development.

Role of Family Structure in Child Development

Family is the primary unit of socialization and plays a central role in shaping the behavior and personality of a child. The structure and functionality of a family significantly influence children's emotional well-being, moral development, and susceptibility to antisocial behavior. Scholars have long debated the merits and drawbacks of various family types, namely: nuclear families, joint families, single-parent families, and broken families.

Numerous studies have established a correlation between broken or dysfunctional families and delinquent behavior among adolescents (Agnew, 2005; Wells & Rankin, 1991). Broken homes often lead to lack of supervision, inconsistent discipline, and emotional neglect, which may push children toward deviant behavior. Similarly, children from single-parent families may experience economic deprivation and lower levels of parental involvement, increasing their risk of engaging in antisocial activities (Amato, 2000).

In Assam, traditional joint family systems are gradually being replaced by nuclear or fragmented family structures due to urbanization, economic migration, and changing socio-cultural dynamics. This transformation has led to a decrease in community-based supervision and traditional value systems, thereby altering the psychosocial environment of children.

Parental Education as a Determinant of Child Behavior

Parental education, particularly the mother's level of education, is widely acknowledged as a key determinant of children's health, academic performance, and behavioral adjustment. Educated parents are more likely to be aware of child development principles, adopt effective parenting techniques, and provide a nurturing home environment (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003). Conversely, low levels of parental education are associated with permissive or authoritarian parenting styles, lack of awareness about child rights, and poor communication between parents and children—all of which may foster delinquent behavior. A study by Achakanalli and Kumbhar (2017) found that lower educational attainment among parents was significantly associated with higher rates of juvenile delinquency. In Assam, the literacy rate is relatively lower than the national average, and significant gender disparities in education persist. Mothers often have limited formal education, especially in rural and marginalized communities, affecting their ability to provide adequate emotional and educational support to their children.

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Furthermore, uneducated or semi-literate parents may lack awareness about legal provisions, children's rights, and institutional support systems, further limiting their capacity to intervene early when behavioral problems arise.

Interplay of Family Type and Parental Education

Family structure and parental education are not independent variables; they interact in complex ways to influence child development. For instance, a child from a nuclear family with highly educated parents may receive better quality parenting than a child from a joint family where parental education is low. Conversely, in joint families with low parental education, the presence of elders might offer compensatory supervision.

The interplay between family type and parental education can shape children's emotional regulation, academic performance, peer interactions, and responses to authority. Children from stable and educated family backgrounds are more likely to develop a sense of responsibility, empathy, and respect for societal norms.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) offers a valuable framework for understanding how microsystems (e.g., family) and exosystems (e.g., parents' workplaces, educational backgrounds) interact to shape a child's development. This theory underscores the importance of viewing the child within a nested system of relationships, where the educational level of parents and the type of family structure play pivotal roles.

Boys in Conflict with Law: A Gendered Perspective

Gender is a critical dimension in understanding juvenile delinquency. Boys are more likely than girls to engage in risk-taking behaviors, physical aggression, and rule-breaking activities. Social expectations around masculinity, peer pressure, and lack of emotional expression contribute to the overrepresentation of boys among children in conflict with the law (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2004).

In Assam, gender norms often discourage emotional openness among boys, and punitive disciplinary practices may compound feelings of alienation and aggression. The absence of father figures, lack of positive male role models, and exposure to family violence can particularly affect boys, pushing them toward gangs or deviant peer groups for identity and support.

Educational neglect and school dropouts are also more common among boys, especially those from marginalized communities and educationally backward families. When combined with a dysfunctional family environment, these factors can significantly increase the likelihood of engaging in delinquent acts.

Policy Context and Research Gaps

While the Government of India has implemented several child protection programs and juvenile justice reforms, including setting up Child Welfare Committees and Special Juvenile Police Units, much of the policy response remains reactive rather than preventive. There is a lack of context-specific data and research focusing on Northeast India, especially Assam, which suffers from socio-political marginalization and underrepresentation in national discourse.

Most existing studies are either pan-India or urban-centric, overlooking the unique cultural and socio-economic variables that influence juvenile behavior in Assam. The intersectional

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impact of family structure, parental education, and socio-economic status on juvenile delinquency remains under-researched in this region. This study attempts to bridge that gap by focusing specifically on boys in conflict with the law in Assam and examining how their family background contributes to their behavior.

Significance of the Study

Understanding the relationship between family type, parental education, and juvenile delinquency is crucial for designing effective intervention and rehabilitation programs. If certain family configurations or educational deficits are found to be strongly correlated with delinquency, policy interventions can be more effectively targeted. For instance, parent education programs, family counseling services, and school-based mental health interventions can be designed keeping in mind these findings.

In Assam, where resources are limited and cultural diversity is vast, such targeted interventions can make a substantial difference in preventing juvenile offenses and rehabilitating children already in conflict with the law.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in two major theoretical frameworks:

- **Social Control Theory (Hirschi, 1969):** This theory posits that individuals refrain from delinquency due to their bonds with society—particularly family, school, and community. Weak or broken bonds with family (due to low parental education or dysfunctional family structure) may lead to deviant behavior.
- **Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1978):** This theory suggests that family is an emotional unit, and each member's behavior affects the entire system. Problems in parenting, lack of education, or family disruption can therefore impact children's behavior and emotional development.

These theories guide the research design and inform the analysis of how family structure and parental education relate to boys in conflict with the law in Assam.

METHODOLOGY

Research gaps are found in studies related to family type and parent's education and its relationship with Children in Conflict with Law especially in north-east India particularly Assam – a state with multiple ethnicity and socio-cultural diversity. The present study is an attempt to explore family type and parental education affect the likelihood of boys coming into conflict with the law. The study in turn will help to plan effective interventions specifically for this group of population.

The **objectives** of the study are:

- To compare the family types of boys in conflict with the law and boys not in conflict with the law (controls).
- To compare the educational levels of parents in both groups.

Hypothesis:

- There is no significant difference in family type between boys in conflict with the law and controls.
- There is no significant difference in parental education between the two groups.

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Research design:

- The research design employed is descriptive and case-control

Sample:

Purposive sampling technique is used for the present study. Data from 50-Boys from each group - study and control respectively with a total of 100 participants is collected from different districts of Assam. In both the study and the control group age of the participants is matched to maintain homogeneity of sample.

Procedure:

According to State Child Protection Society, Social Welfare Department, Government of Assam there are three government run child care institutions/ children observation homes across different districts of Assam for boys, namely Boko, Jorhat, Silchar. Data is collected from the institutions after taking permission of the government authorities on the basis of the availability around the time period of data collection. Socio-demographic data sheet consisting of age and education of boys in conflict with law and controls, family type and parental education is used for data collection.

Ethical considerations:

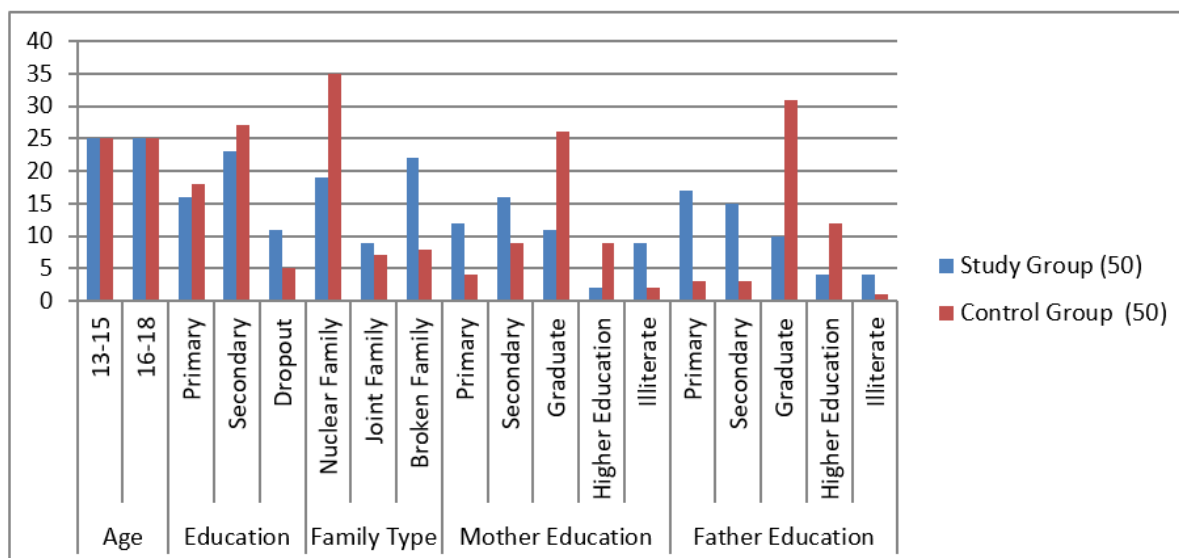
It was made sure that rapport was established before collecting data. Rights of participants were protected during the study in accordance with good practice obligations. Complete confidentiality and informed consent were emphasized using non-technical language. Every participant was helped to understand their problems and the opportunity to ventilate was provided. The issues and concerns raised by each individual were addressed.

RESULTS

Table 1: Socio-demographic profile of study group and control group

Variables		Study Group n=50	Control Group n=50	χ^2	df	p
Age	13-15 years	25	25	0.000	1	1.000
	16-18 years	25	25			
Education	Primary	16	18	2.688	2	0.261
	Secondary	23	27			
	Dropout	11	5			
Family Type	Nuclear Family	19	35	11.524	2	0.003
	Joint Family	9	7			
	Broken Family	22	8			
Mother Education	Primary	12	4	20.603	4	0.000
	Secondary	16	9			
	Graduate	11	26			
	Higher Education	2	9			
	Illiterate	9	2			
Father Education	Primary	17	3	34.356	4	0.000
	Secondary	15	3			
	Graduate	10	31			
	Higher Education	4	12			
	Illiterate	4	1			

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Graph 1: Socio-demographic profile of study group and control group

Table 1 represents Socio-demographic profile of study group and control group. Statistical analysis using chi-square tests revealed a **significant association** between family type and group membership ($\chi^2 = 11.524$, $df = 2$, $p = .003$), indicating that boys from **broken families** are more likely to be in conflict with the law. Similarly, parental education showed strong associations. The mother's education level ($\chi^2 = 20.603$, $df = 4$, $p = .000$) and father's education level ($\chi^2 = 34.356$, $df = 4$, $p = .000$) were both **highly significant**, suggesting that boys whose parents had lower educational attainment were overrepresented among juveniles in conflict with the law. No significant differences were observed for age ($\chi^2 = 0.000$, $p = 1.000$) or the boys' own education level ($\chi^2 = 2.688$, $p = 0.261$).

DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationship between family type, parental education, and boys in conflict with the law in Assam, using chi-square tests to identify statistically significant associations. The findings provide insight into the socio-demographic variables that may contribute to juvenile delinquency, particularly in the unique socio-cultural context of Northeast India. Out of the five tested variables—age, education, family type, mother's education, and father's education—three demonstrated statistically significant associations with juvenile conflict status: family type ($\chi^2 = 11.524$, $p = .003$), mother's education ($\chi^2 = 20.603$, $p = .000$), and father's education ($\chi^2 = 34.356$, $p = .000$). Conversely, the variables of age ($\chi^2 = 0.000$, $p = 1.000$) and participant's own education ($\chi^2 = 2.688$, $p = .261$) did not yield significant associations.

Age and Participant's Education: No Significant Association

The lack of association between age and conflict with law ($\chi^2 = 0.000$, $p = 1.000$) suggests that both age groups (13–15 and 16–18) are equally represented among boys in conflict with the law. This contradicts some national trends indicating higher delinquency rates in older adolescents (NCRB, 2022), but may reflect unique regional dynamics in Assam. Similarly, the participant's own educational level did not significantly differ between the study and control groups ($\chi^2 = 2.688$, $p = .261$). This finding diverges from prior research that has linked poor academic engagement and school dropout to juvenile delinquency (Achakanalli & Kumbhar, 2017). One possible explanation for this could be that most boys in both groups

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share similar educational barriers, such as under-resourced schools, language barriers, and limited parental support for education, common in both rural and semi-urban Assam.

Family Type: A Significant Predictor

The study found a significant association between **family type** and boys in conflict with the law ($\chi^2 = 11.524, p = .003$). Boys from **broken families** were more frequently represented in the delinquent group. This result is in line with a broad body of literature that associates family structure with child behavioral outcomes. Broken or single-parent families often lack the emotional and supervisory support required during adolescence, a period when children are particularly susceptible to peer influence and risky behavior (Amato, 2000). The findings also reinforce **Social Control Theory**, which argues that strong bonds to family and society inhibit deviant behavior, whereas weakened family structures reduce social control and increase the risk of delinquency (Hirschi, 1969).

In the context of Assam, the wearing away of the traditional joint family system and increasing rural-to-urban migration may contribute to fragmented family arrangements, potentially weakening social support structures. Moreover, broken families may suffer from financial instability, emotional neglect, and inconsistent discipline, all of which can create fertile ground for deviant behavior. The findings thus highlight the critical role of a stable family environment in preventing juvenile conflict with the law.

Mother's Education: Highly Significant Association

One of the most striking results was the strong association between **mother's education** and juvenile delinquency ($\chi^2 = 20.603, p = .000$). Boys whose mothers had only primary education or were illiterate were more likely to be in conflict with the law compared to those whose mothers were graduates or had higher education. This aligns with global and national research emphasizing the role of maternal education in child development. Educated mothers are more likely to engage in responsive parenting, foster open communication, and encourage pro-social behavior (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).

In the Assamese context, where female literacy rates in rural areas still lag behind national averages, the educational status of mothers becomes particularly significant. Educated mothers may better understand the emotional and educational needs of their children, actively participate in their schooling, and serve as positive role models. Conversely, uneducated mothers may rely on harsh disciplinary practices, be unaware of their children's activities, or lack confidence in engaging with educational institutions.

Moreover, maternal education is often linked to better health and nutrition outcomes, both of which contribute to cognitive development and emotional regulation (UNICEF, 2019). The results of this study emphasize the need for gender-focused educational policies that empower mothers through literacy and skill development programs, not just for their own benefit, but also for the well-being of future generations.

Father's Education: Strongest Association

Among all variables, **father's education** showed the **strongest association** with juvenile conflict ($\chi^2 = 34.356, p = .000$). The data revealed that boys in conflict with the law often had fathers with low or no formal education. This finding can be interpreted in multiple ways. First, low parental education often translates into low socio-economic status, which is a well-documented risk factor for juvenile delinquency (Agnew, 2005). Second, fathers with

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limited education may lack awareness about positive parenting techniques, children's rights, and the importance of supervision.

Educated fathers are more likely to be employed in stable jobs, have better coping mechanisms, and provide structured home environments. Uneducated fathers, especially in rural Assam, may be engaged in informal or seasonal labor, leading to financial insecurity, stress, and even substance abuse—all of which indirectly affect the child's upbringing (Srinivasan & Bedi, 2007).

This result reinforces the need for community-level interventions aimed at adult literacy and parenting education, particularly targeting fathers who may otherwise remain outside the scope of traditional child development programs. Additionally, school-based programs can engage fathers through community meetings or local campaigns, helping bridge the communication gap between home and school.

Broader Implications and Policy Recommendations

These findings carry important implications for juvenile justice interventions in Assam. Current approaches often focus on punitive or rehabilitative mechanisms after a child has come into conflict with the law. However, this study suggests the need to prioritize **preventive strategies** focusing on family dynamics and parental education. Strengthening family counseling services under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, and integrating parental education modules within community development programs can be vital steps in this direction.

he findings also support **Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory** (1979), which views child development as a product of interactions across multiple systems, including family, school, and community. In this model, parental education and family type represent proximal factors that directly influence a child's behavioral trajectory. Therefore, interventions should be holistic, targeting not just the child but the entire familial and social environment.

Moreover, in the context of Assam, which experiences ethnic tensions, poverty, and limited access to welfare services in rural regions, child protection programs must be adapted to address these regional realities. For example, local NGOs and community-based organizations can partner with schools to deliver workshops for parents, addressing both literacy and parenting skills.

CONCLUSION

The study confirms that **family type and parental education**—particularly that of the mother and father—are key variables associated with children conflict with the law. The statistically significant associations identified through chi-square tests support existing literature while also highlighting the specific context of Assam. Interventions aimed at strengthening family systems and improving parental education, especially in underserved areas, can contribute significantly to the prevention of juvenile delinquency. These findings call for an integrated approach involving families, schools, and child welfare systems to build protective environments for at-risk children.

Limitations

While the findings are compelling, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The study relies on a sample of 100 boys and does not account for girls or non-binary children in

conflict with the law. Additionally, other relevant variables such as economic status, peer group influence, or neighborhood characteristics were not examined. Future research should adopt a longitudinal design and explore these dimensions for a more nuanced understanding of juvenile delinquency in Assam.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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