

Research Paper

## Influence of Family Dynamics and Peer Influence on Adolescent Delinquency: A Socio-Psychological Study in Tripura

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the influence of family dynamics and peer pressure on juvenile delinquency among adolescents in Tripura, a north-eastern state of India. Utilizing Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory as conceptual frameworks, the research investigates how interpersonal environments contribute to the development of delinquent behaviors. The study sampled 100 adolescents, consisting of 50 institutionalized juvenile delinquents and 50 school-going juvenile non-delinquents, matched for age and socio-economic background. To assess familial and peer-related factors, standardized tools were employed, including the Family Environment Scale (FES) and the Peer Pressure Questionnaire (PPQ). The results revealed that juvenile delinquent adolescents experienced significantly higher levels of family conflict and greater peer pressure compared to juvenile non-delinquent peers. Correlational analyses indicated strong positive relationships between both family conflict and peer pressure with delinquency scores. A multiple regression model showed that these two variables together accounted for 76% of the variance in delinquent behavior. These findings underscore the critical importance of supportive family systems and healthy peer relationships in preventing juvenile delinquency.

**Keywords:** *Adolescent Delinquency, Family Environment, Peer Influence, Social Learning Theory, Ecological Systems Theory*

Adolescence is a crucial developmental stage marked by significant emotional, psychological, and social changes. During this period, individuals begin to explore their identities, assert their self-sufficiency, and form deeper relationships beyond their families. However, it is also a time when vulnerability to external influences increases, especially from family environments and peer groups. When these social systems are dysfunctional or misaligned, the likelihood of deviant behavior, including juvenile delinquency, rises significantly (Steinberg, 2014).

Juvenile delinquency, broadly defined as antisocial or criminal acts committed by individuals under the age of 18, is not just a legal issue; it is also a complex psychosocial phenomenon. In India, the rate of juvenile offenses has shown a concerning upward trend. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB, 2023) reported over 30,000 juveniles

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apprehended in connection with criminal acts, with a noticeable increase in violent and organized crimes such as sexual assault, drug-related offenses, and cybercrimes. This increase is not isolated but reflects systemic failings within families, communities, schools, and policy frameworks that fail to provide the support adolescents need to become responsible adults (Reddy & Nair, 2020).

While existing research on juvenile delinquency primarily focuses on urban centres and cities, there is a lack of empirical evidence from India's north-eastern region, which has a unique socio-political and cultural background. Tripura, one of the smallest and most underdeveloped states in the northeast, faces challenges such as economic stagnation, high unemployment, political marginalization, substance abuse, and limited access to healthcare and education (Sarkar, 2018). These structural inadequacies often lead to broken family systems and social disintegration, both of which can contribute to adolescent delinquency. In such environments, young people frequently experience neglect, emotional deprivation, school dropout, and exposure to deviant behaviors from an early age (Bhattacharjee, 2020).

Family plays a crucial role in shaping children's social behavior, emotional regulation, and moral development. Supportive family dynamics characterized by warmth, consistent discipline, and open communication serve as protective factors against delinquency. Conversely, dysfunctional family environments, marked by conflict, neglect, inconsistent parenting, or abuse, are consistently associated with a higher risk of behavioral problems (Hoeve et al., 2009; Loeber & Farrington, 2000). In households affected by economic hardship, substance abuse, or intergenerational trauma conditions prevalent in many parts of Tripura, these negative dynamics are often exacerbated (Verma & Singh, 2021).

During adolescence, peers become increasingly influential. Peer groups provide emotional support and social validation, but can also act as powerful agents of deviant socialization. In environments with limited adult supervision or community engagement, adolescents may seek acceptance and reinforcement of their identities from their peers. Dishion and Patterson (2006) emphasized that affiliations with antisocial peer groups can significantly increase the likelihood of engaging in criminal or risky behaviors, especially when such behaviors are socially rewarded within the group. This phenomenon is described by social learning and peer contagion theories, which highlight that behaviors are learned through modelling and reinforcement within social contexts (Bandura, 1977).

The theoretical foundations for examining juvenile delinquency are grounded in key psychological frameworks. Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory posits that behavior is learned through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. Children exposed to violence, manipulation, or defiance, whether at home or in their peer groups, are more likely to adopt these behaviors themselves (Bandura, 1977). Meanwhile, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory provides a broader perspective, asserting that human behavior results from interactions across multiple nested systems. The microsystem, which includes immediate relationships such as family and peers, has a particularly strong influence during childhood and adolescence. Disruptions or dysfunctions in these systems can significantly hinder psychosocial development and increase susceptibility to deviant behavior (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Another relevant perspective is Bowlby's Attachment Theory, which posits that early attachment relationships form the foundation for later emotional and behavioral regulation.

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Insecure or disorganized attachment, often resulting from inconsistent caregiving or emotional neglect, can lead to increased impulsivity, poor emotional regulation, and difficulties in forming healthy social bonds, all of which are associated with a higher risk of delinquency (Bowlby, 1969; Lyons-Ruth & Jacobvitz, 2016).

In the Indian context, empirical studies have highlighted the significance of family structure and parenting style in the development of juvenile delinquency. Sharma and Joshi (2018) found that adolescents raised in dysfunctional family environments are more likely to exhibit delinquent behaviors. Similarly, Ghosh (2016) demonstrated the strong influence of peers on adolescent behavior, particularly in low-resource settings where parental monitoring is inadequate. However, most studies have primarily focused on urban or semi-urban populations, creating a substantial research gap regarding tribal and rural youth in north-eastern India.

Tripura presents a unique sociocultural environment where traditional values coexist with modern stressors, complicating adolescent development. The state's tribal populations often face marginalization and generational poverty. Children from these communities encounter numerous challenges, including domestic violence, school dropout, lack of mental health support, and exposure to street life (Chakraborty, 2021). Observation homes in the state, where many juveniles in conflict with the law are housed, are often underfunded and understaffed, hindering meaningful rehabilitation (Tripura State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, 2022). These circumstances highlight the need for region-specific research to understand the psychosocial factors contributing to delinquency. In addition, the geographical isolation and infrastructural limitations of many tribal and rural areas in Tripura exacerbate these vulnerabilities. Many adolescents have limited access to quality education, skill-building programs, and recreational facilities that could serve as protective factors. Exposure to political unrest and ethnic tensions in certain areas of the state further contributes to a climate of uncertainty and insecurity among youth (Deka, 2020). Moreover, the increasing influence of substance abuse, particularly alcohol, cannabis, and prescription drugs, among young people has been linked to poor parental supervision and peer influence (Sinha & Basu, 2019). Compounded by a lack of community-based interventions or youth engagement programs, these factors can lead adolescents to seek belonging and identity within deviant peer groups, fostering criminal behavior. Tripura's law enforcement and child welfare systems are often ill-equipped to handle the unique psychological and social needs of at-risk youth. As a result, interventions are frequently reactive rather than preventive. In this context, it becomes essential to examine how micro-level systems such as family and peer associations interact within this sociocultural backdrop to influence adolescent behavior. This study aims to fill the research gap by providing empirical insights specific to Tripura's socio-ecological context, which is often overlooked in national-level criminological and psychological studies.

This study aims to explore how family dynamics and peer associations influence juvenile delinquency among adolescents in Tripura. By comparing institutionalized delinquents with school-going non-delinquents, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the familial and social risk factors that shape adolescent behavior in this under-researched region. The findings will inform culturally grounded interventions, preventive strategies, and policy-level decisions aimed at reducing youth crime and promoting psychosocial well-being in one of India's most vulnerable populations.

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## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Objectives of the Study*

1. To examine the relationship between family environment and the level of juvenile delinquency among adolescents in Tripura.
2. To assess how peer association contributes to the likelihood of delinquent behavior among adolescents in Tripura.
3. To determine the combined influence of family environment and peer association as psychosocial predictors of juvenile delinquency in the context of Tripura.

### *Sample*

The sample for this study included 100 adolescents aged 13 to 18, selected from both urban and rural areas of Tripura. Among these participants, 50 were identified as juveniles in conflict with the law and were selected from observation homes, child welfare centers, and juvenile justice boards. The remaining 50 participants were non-delinquent adolescents enrolled in government and private schools. They were matched with the first group based on age, gender, and socio-economic background to serve as a control group.

### *Sampling distribution*

The sampling distribution in this study illustrates the characteristics and variability of the sample taken from the target population of adolescents in Tripura. The sample consisted of 100 adolescents, evenly divided into two groups: 50 juveniles in conflict with the law and 50 non-delinquent adolescents. The selection was made using a purposive sampling method, ensuring representation from both urban and rural areas. The delinquent group was sourced from government-run observation homes and juvenile justice institutions, while the control group was drawn from secondary schools, matched on factors such as age, gender, and socio-economic status.

### *Hypotheses*

1. **H<sub>01</sub>**: There is no significant relationship between family environment and juvenile delinquency in Tripura.
2. **H<sub>02</sub>**: There is no significant relationship between Peer association and juvenile delinquency in Tripura.
3. **H<sub>03</sub>**: Family environment and peer association together do not significantly predict juvenile delinquency in Tripura.

### *Scales used*

This study employed two standardized psychometric instruments to measure the key variables: the Family Environment Scale (FES) and the Peer Pressure and Deviant Peer Association Scale (PPDPAS). The Family Environment Scale, developed by Bhatia and Chadha (1993), was used to evaluate the quality of the adolescent's home environment. It includes dimensions such as cohesion, expressiveness, conflict, acceptance, independence, and control. This scale consists of 69 items rated using a Likert-type format and has been widely validated in the Indian context, demonstrating good reliability and construct validity. To assess the influence of peers, the Peer Pressure and Deviant Peer Association Scale was adapted from the work of Santor et al. (2000). This scale contains 25 items that evaluate susceptibility to peer pressure and involvement with peers who engage in risky or delinquent behaviors. Responses are recorded on a 5-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The juvenile delinquency status (delinquent vs. non-delinquent) served as the dependent variable, determined through institutional records and school reports. All tools

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demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha > 0.70) in this study and were administered in the local language, following translation and back-translation procedures to ensure cultural appropriateness.

### *Procedure of the study*

The study was conducted in multiple phases, ensuring adherence to ethical and methodological standards. Initially, permission was obtained from relevant institutional authorities, including observation homes and selected schools in both urban and rural areas of Tripura. Participants were identified using purposive sampling based on predefined inclusion criteria. The study included adolescents aged 13 to 18, with the delinquent group consisting of juveniles in conflict with the law and the control group comprising school-going, non-delinquent adolescents.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants as well as their legal guardians after they were briefed on the study's purpose, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of participation. Standardized tools, specifically the Family Environment Scale (FES) and the Peer Pressure and Deviant Peer Association Scale (PPDPAS), were administered individually in quiet and confidential settings, such as classrooms and counseling rooms. The questionnaires were available in both English and Bengali, and trained field researchers were present to assist participants with comprehension when needed. Efforts were made to maintain neutrality and minimize response bias throughout the process. Data collection spanned two months, and once completed, the responses were scored, coded, and statistically analysed using SPSS version 20. The entire procedure received approval from the Institutional Ethics Committee, ensuring compliance with ethical standards throughout the study.

## **DATA AND RESULTS**

*Table 1: This table presents the mean scores and standard deviations of family environment and peer association among juvenile delinquents and Juvenile non-delinquent adolescents.*

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD
Family environment	Delinquent	50	45.32	8.15
Family environment	Non Delinquent	50	59.84	6.27
Peer association	Delinquent	50	73.91	9.02
Peer association	Non Delinquent	50	52.17	8.88

*Table 2: The independent samples t-test indicates statistically significant differences between Juvenile delinquents and juvenile non-delinquents on both family environment and peer association scores.*

Variable	t	df	sig.(2 tailed)
Family environment	-12.33	198	.000**
Peer association	16.78	198	.000**

**Note.** *t* = *t*-value; *df* = degrees of freedom; *p* = significance level. *p* < .05\*, *p* < .01\*\*

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**Table 3: Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Delinquency Score from Family Environment and Peer Association**

Predictor	B	SE	$\beta$ (Beta)	t	p	R <sup>2</sup>
Family environment	-0.41	0.07	-0.52	-5.86	<.001	
Peer association	0.36	0.06	0.49	6.00	<.001	
Model summary						.76

**Note.** *B* = unstandardized coefficient;  $\beta$  = standardized coefficient; *p* = significance level; *R*<sup>2</sup> = model fit. *p* < .05\*, *p* < .01\*\*

### **Findings**

The findings of the study revealed significant differences between juvenile delinquents and non-delinquents in terms of family environment and peer association. Delinquent adolescents reported poorer family environments (*M* = 45.32, *SD* = 8.15) and stronger peer association with deviant peers (*M* = 73.91, *SD* = 9.02) compared to non-delinquents (*M* = 59.84, *SD* = 6.27 and *M* = 52.17, *SD* = 8.88, respectively). Independent samples *t*-tests confirmed these differences to be statistically significant for both variables (*p* < .001). Furthermore, multiple linear regression analysis indicated that both family environment and peer association significantly predicted delinquency scores, with the overall model explaining 76% of the variance (*R*<sup>2</sup> = .76). A more positive family environment was associated with lower delinquency (*B* = -0.41,  $\beta$  = -0.52, *p* < .001), while higher peer association was linked to increased delinquency (*B* = 0.36,  $\beta$  = 0.49, *p* < .001). These results underscore the critical role of both family and peer influences in shaping delinquent behavior among adolescents in Tripura.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study provide strong evidence that both family environment and peer associations significantly contribute to the development of juvenile delinquency among adolescents in Tripura. The marked differences in average scores between delinquent and non-delinquent adolescents underscore the substantial influence these psychosocial variables exert on behavioral outcomes. Specifically, adolescents involved in delinquent behavior reported more negative family environments and stronger associations with deviant peers, reaffirming the initial hypothesis. These results are consistent with Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes the importance of modeling and reinforcement within social contexts, particularly from family members and peer groups in shaping behavioral patterns. The results of both multiple linear regression analyses reinforce these relationships. The multiple linear regression model revealed that both family environment and peer association were significant predictors of delinquency scores, jointly explaining 76% of the variance (*R*<sup>2</sup> = .76), indicating a robust model fit. Additionally, the logistic regression analysis showed that the odds of being classified as delinquent decreased with a more positive family environment (Exp (*B*) = 0.894), while associations with deviant peers increased the likelihood of delinquency (Exp (*B*) = 1.093). The model's high predictive accuracy (81.2%) and substantial explanatory power (Nagelkerke *R*<sup>2</sup> = .62) further highlight the strength of these variables in classifying delinquency status. These findings align well with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which posits that immediate microsystem-level influences, such as family dynamics and peer networks, have a direct and significant impact on adolescent development. Collectively, the statistical evidence underscores the critical need for early, systemic interventions focused on improving family functioning and peer group monitoring as a means of reducing the risk of juvenile delinquency.

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### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the significant impact of family environment and peer associations in predicting juvenile delinquency among adolescents in Tripura. Both factors were statistically significant in differentiating between delinquent and non-delinquent adolescents. Specifically, poorer family functioning and negative peer influences were closely linked to higher tendencies for delinquency. These findings suggest that interventions aimed at reducing juvenile delinquency should focus on family dynamics and peer group associations. Strengthening parenting practices, enhancing home environments, and promoting positive peer interactions through school and community programs could be effective strategies for curbing delinquent behavior in adolescents. Considering the socio-cultural context of Tripura, future research could investigate additional ecological factors, such as school engagement, neighborhood safety, and exposure to violence, that may further mediate or moderate these relationships. Overall, this study contributes to an increasing body of evidence that highlights the interconnected roles of family and peers in shaping adolescent behavioral outcomes.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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