

Juvenile
Delinquency: A
Comparative
Analysis
Between
Divorced and
Married Homes

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Abstract

- The purpose of this research was to determine if children being raised in divorced homes are more likely to be juvenile delinquents than children being raised in married homes. Additionally, this study sought to determine if the age of the child during parental divorce further contributes to the likelihood of delinquent behavior. Five hundred forty-four participants, using a self-reporting, anonymous questionnaire, were asked questions about their childhood home structure and their adolescent delinquent activity. The results of this study indicated children from divorced homes have higher level of delinquency rates. It was also determined the age at the time of parental divorce was not a factor in determining the level of delinquency.

Research Questions

- This study answered the following two research questions:
 1. Is there a difference in juvenile delinquency rates between divorced and married homes?
 2. For children from divorced homes, is there a relationship between the age of the child at the time of divorce and juvenile delinquency rates?



Methodology

- Quantitative causal comparative study
- Self-reporting questionnaire
- Anonymous
- Participants recruited through Facebook and EIU email
- Available online via www.surveymonkey.com
- One time, took less than 5 minutes to complete

Procedure for Data Analysis

- Data analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 20
- Is there a difference in juvenile delinquency rates between divorced and married homes?
 - *T*-test (comparing two groups)
- For children from divorced homes, is there a relationship between the age of the child at the time of divorce and juvenile delinquency rates?
 - Correlation (relationship between variables)

Sample Demographics (N = 544)

Demographic	Participants
Sex	
Female	77.6%
Male	22.4%
Ethnicity	
Caucasian	87.5%
African-American	7.2%
Multi-Racial	2.4%
Hispanic/Latino	1.7%
Asian	.7%
Other	.6%
Current Marital Status	
Single	56.8%
Married	36.6%
Divorced	6.6%
Primary Childhood Structure	
Married Home	71.0%
Divorced Home	24.0%
Other	5.0%
Parents Divorced	
Yes	36.9%
No	63.1%
Reside in Home During Parental Divorce	
Yes	89.0%
No	11.0%

Sample's Juvenile Delinquent Behaviors

Type of Delinquency	Participants Admitted to Behavior
Underage Alcohol Consumption	54.2%
Underage Tobacco Use	36.9%
Curfew Violation	31.3%
Illegal Drug Use	25.4%
Motor Vehicle Violations	16.9%
Theft	15.1%
Vandalism	9.0%
Property Damage	7.0%
Illegal Drug Distribution	4.4%
Assault	1.3%
Arson	0.9%
Burglary	0.7%
Other	0.7%
Statutory Rape	0.4%
Concealing a Weapon	0.2%
Attempted Murder/Manslaughter	0.0%
Murder/Manslaughter	0.0%

Note: Other provided by participants included: illegal protesting, breaking and entering, shop lifting and running away

Sample's Overall Delinquency Scores ($N = 544$)

Parents Divorced	n	M	SD
Yes	201	2.44	2.30
No	343	1.81	2.09

Participants with divorced parents reported higher juvenile delinquency rates.

Sample's Rating of Delinquency Levels (N = 544)

Rating Level	Participants
Rating from Self Perspective	
None	41.7%
Mild	47.8%
Moderate	9.6%
Extreme	0.9%
Rating from Parental Perspective	
None	50.7%
Mild	31.4%
Moderate	14.2%
Extreme	3.7%

Results:

Research Question #1

- Is there a difference in juvenile delinquency rates between divorced and married homes?
 - Yes, a significant difference was found between divorced and married homes.
 - Levene's test ($p = .037$) indicated equal variances could not be assumed.
 - $t(387) = 3.18, p = .002$
 - Divorced homes reported higher delinquency rates

Results:

Research Question #2

- For children from divorced homes, is there a relationship between the age of the child at the time of divorce and juvenile delinquency rates?
 - No, the age at time of divorce and delinquency rates were not related
 - $p = .29; r = -.08$

Prior Research & Developmental Theories

- Prior research and theories developed by Erikson and Kohlberg were used to provide a theoretical base for child behavior, development, and adaptability to their change in home structure. Their work confirms that changes in family structure during particular phases can cause permanent damage to children and have effects into adulthood.
- Prior research has indicated single-parent homes have less control, lack of boundaries, and flawed communication which allows for delinquent behaviors to occur.
- The majority of studies concur that children from divorced homes are more susceptible to negative behaviors, including juvenile and adolescent delinquency.

Benefits of Study

- In order to promote security and safety for families, it is imperative people are aware of the potential risks for children involved in parental divorce.
- Families, educators, and psychosocial professionals can benefit from the findings of this study.
- This study reaffirmed the importance of family structure with regard to successfully raising children. The circumstances leading to divorce can have equally as devastating consequences for the children, as the divorce itself.

Conclusions

- The role of family structure and parenting is extremely important with regard to the development of children.
- This research supported prior research, concluding that home structure was related to creating/deterring juvenile delinquency. Although , it should not be concluded that divorce alone is the primary contributing factor to juvenile delinquency.
- As long as family structure continues to change, and juveniles are committing crimes, further investigation into the relationship or lack thereof, is important to social and behavioral sciences.

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