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The Relationship of Neighborhood Factors, Parental Behaviors and Peer Relations  
and Their Effects on Delinquency

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6/18/17

## Introduction:

Children and adolescents all have the potential of falling into delinquency. Research has shown that there are various factors that can influence the rate that adolescents commit delinquent behavior. Some of these factors tie together and are intrinsically linked. We will be looking at the connection between neighborhood factors, the peer relations that these individuals have growing up and how these two factors impact the likelihood of delinquency. The research is being looked at in the timeframe of the last 20 years. We will be asking the question if neighborhood factors affect peer relations and how that might lead to delinquency.

For this thesis, we will be looking at two different types of sources for our research. The first type of sources used for our work was peer reviewed articles that focus on how peer relations and neighborhoods affect delinquency. One of the key articles that we will be reviewing for our thesis is Chung & Steinburg 2006. This article discusses how various factors, including neighborhood factors and peer activities, might lead to juvenile delinquency. The articles that we will be looking at will follow the similar vein as "Relations Between Neighborhood Factors, Parenting Behaviors, Peer Deviance, and Delinquency Among Serious Juvenile Offenders". However, we will not be focusing on solely serious offenders, and will be looking at delinquency on a national level.

For the second type of sources we used for our research from the National Longitudinal Survey (NLS) from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. This survey began in 1997 and looks at various aspects of an individuals' life. The survey is broken down into various categories. These include area one lives, education, work, peer groups, training, marriage, income, and others. We will be

narrowing down the information of the surveys and focus on the data that discusses about the behavior of peers, the neighborhoods of peers, and if individuals have at any point been arrested as minors.

Many past research articles that discuss delinquency focus on singular factors that impact the rate of delinquency. These articles lack the connection of multiple factors that are impactful on adolescent behavior. Modern research has looked at the various levels of factors that lead to delinquency. This research will be looking at multiple factors and will be able to create a better understanding on how these interactions of neighborhood factors, parenting behaviors and peer relations together might increase the chances of an individual partaking in delinquent behaviors.

### Summary:

The research of the interaction of neighborhood factors, parenting behaviors and peer relations affecting the likelihood of delinquency was looked at before in Chung & Steinburg (2006). This study wished to find more empirical data in regards to the mediated effects of neighborhood factors on adolescent delinquency compared to the more theoretical model that previous works focused on. Chung and Steinburg (2006) wished to fill the empirical gap that these works have left empty with this work. They used data from the Research of Pathways to Desistance (RPD) project to look at the relationship of neighborhood functioning, parenting behavior, peer deviance and juvenile delinquency.

One of the main aspects of studying neighborhoods is the understanding of the distinction of neighborhood structure and neighborhood social processes. Chung and Steinburg refer to neighborhood structure as the “Sociodemographic or compositional features of communities (e.g., employment rate)” and that neighborhood social processes as the “community’s social organization” (e.g., social connection among neighbors). It has been proposed in earlier research that neighborhoods that had weaker neighborhood structural factors, areas that had higher concentrations, residential mobility, and racial- ethnic heterogeneity, are linked with higher rates of juvenile delinquency due to the effect they have on social disorganization (Shaw & McKay 1942/1969). Works have explained how this process functions “the inability of a community structure to realize the common values of its residents and maintain effective social controls” (Sampson & Groves, 1989, p. 777). There are other factors of the community that affect the rate of delinquency amongst neighborhoods: neighborhood disorder, weak social connections with the neighborhood, low levels of informal social control, and low levels of collective efficacy. As it can be seen, the major factors of the neighborhood that affect the delinquency rate is the lack of collectivism and connections of the members of the community.

There are two primary models that have been developed in order to better understand the variations of how neighborhood factors affect juvenile behaviors: the relationships and ties model and the norms and collective efficacy model. The former model derives mostly from family stress theories and suggests that the link between neighborhood factors and delinquency is derived from parenting behaviors and the home environment. The later model also takes from family stress theories but says that the link between neighborhood factors and

delinquency is from peer group norms and behavior. Chung and Steinburg's work focuses on how these two models come together and studies on the interactions of these factors mentioned lead to delinquency for serious offenders.

The subjects for Chung & Steinburg (2006) were comprised of 488 male participants that were a part of the RPD project. The RPD project was a longitudinal study that focused on serious juvenile offenders that were deemed relevant for policy discussions and heterogeneous enough to allow examination of the social context, court involvement and behavior outcomes. The subjects were between the ages of 14 and 17 years of age of the time that they committed an offense and were found guilty. The crimes consisted of all felonies, the exception being less serious property crimes, and misdemeanors related to weapons and sexual assault. The offenders that were studied were all located in the Philadelphia area in Pennsylvania. The subjects all had similar profiles, they were economically disadvantaged and were ethnic minorities. The subjects were interviewed for the process of data collection.

Chung & Steinburg (2006) looked at seven different measures for the research: neighborhood location, neighborhood structural characteristics, neighborhood social organization, parental education, parenting behavior, peer deviance, and individual offending. Neighborhood location was measured primarily by the median household income of the neighborhoods that the subjects lived in. The data show that 75% of the subjects in the study lived in areas with a median household income of less than \$30,000 per year. For neighborhood structural characteristics, the study looked primarily at three factors that affected neighborhood structure: concentrated poverty (how many households lived below the poverty line), residential instability (how often people have moved in and out of the neighborhood), and

ethnic diversity (how many different races and foreign-born residents live in the area). For the factors of neighborhood social organization, there were two factors that researchers measured from the participants, neighborhood disorder and social cohesion. Neighborhood disorder was measured by looking at the physical and social disorder of the neighborhoods in question. Social cohesion was measured by two previously made scales, social integration, how well an individual was able to socially integrate with the neighborhoods, and intergenerational closure, how well parents and adolescent generations were acquainted with each other.

Parental education was measured by looking at the highest level of education completed by the adolescents' biological parent or guardian. Parenting behavior was measured in three categories: parental warmth, parental knowledge, and parental monitoring. Parental warmth is referred to the amount of time together, and whether that time was used in a positive or negative manner. Parental knowledge was considered the extent of the parents' knowledge of where their children were and what activities they were participating in. Monitoring was how much parents supervised their children as well as enforcing rules. Peer deviance measured the antisocial behaviors of the peers of the subjects. And individual offending looked at the amount of offending the subjects have done of their life.

Several discoveries were made through the Chung and Steinburg (2006) survey, some were consistent with previous studies, while some others were contrary to previous thought regarding the community and social relations affecting serious offending. There were three conclusions that confirmed previous work: The first being that neighborhood structural disadvantages were correlated to adolescents' perceptions of social disorganization in the community. Also like previous work, there was a strong relation between neighborhood

disorder, ineffective parenting, and youth involvement with deviant peers associated with higher amounts of adolescents offending. The third finding was that community factors only account for a small amount of variance in juvenile offending, but lower levels of neighborhood social organization are indirectly associated with peer deviance through the links of parental behaviors and peer relations.

Chung and Steinburg (2006) has shown that research that focuses on one aspect of an adolescent's life, either peers or parents, is too simplistic a means to predict the likelihood of delinquent behavior. The major link found in this study was that neighborhood disorder and peer deviance were explained partially by ineffective parenting behaviors and that the relation between social cohesion and peer deviance became an important factor after parenting behavior was taken into consideration. In regards to the first correlation, it was an interesting note that strong neighborhood social ties in poorly functioning communities can actually interfere with efforts to establish an informal social control and can actually increase the risks for youth to be involved with deviant peers.

This study has focused on the social connectedness in relationship to peer deviance and parenting behavior. However other works that have reported lower peer deviance in neighborhoods with higher levels of social organization, looked at collective efficacy, the neighborhood social connections as well informal social control, which is described as the extent that residents help each other regulate the behavior of adolescents. These studies have shown that in order for community aspects to have a greater influence of adolescent behavior, there needs to be a collective community goal of deterring antisocial behavior. This has also been called activation of social ties (Sampson et al., 2002). Chung & Steingburg (2006)



measured that the neighborhoods the subjects lived in, on average, had low levels of social cohesion, so this finding about the influence of community on the behaviors of the adolescence must be taken with a grain of salt. However, Sampson et al., 2002, had higher levels of social cohesion and had evidence of the impact of the community on delinquent behavior, so there is some, if limited, data showing this phenomenon occurring.

The amount of information that was found in “Relations Between Neighborhood Factors, Parenting Behaviors, Peer Deviance, and Delinquency Among Serious Juvenile Offenders” by He Len Chung, and Laurence Steinburg was useful in finding correlations between the various factors of an adolescent’s life that might affect their probability of performing delinquent acts. However, there were various weaknesses of the study that should be noted in order to correct for ours, and future studies. The first caveat was the means of collecting data through a survey. These surveys were conducted by the subjects in question and it must be noted that due to the nature of the questions being asked, subjects could be inclined to changing some of the answers that don’t reflect the true conditions being asked, that leaves a question to the validity of the survey being administered. There is also the weakness that this is a correlational survey, and thus, was unable to show any causation of the various variables towards delinquency rates, and there was a difficulty of knowing specifically how the correlation between the variables being studied. The largest factor that weakened this study, was the lack of diversity of the subjects involved in the study. All the subjects were African American adolescents that lived in lower to working- class families and neighborhood. And only subjects that have committed serious felonies have been included in the survey. Due to this lack of diversity, it is difficult to argue that any of these factors studied are generalized to all

social groups and for adolescents that commit misdemeanors. Our study wishes to rectify some of the weaknesses of this study and see if there is a correlation of these variables in a larger and more generalizable data collection process.

### Method:

For this study, we will taking our data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY). The data comprises of approximately 9,000 youths that were between the ages of 12 to 16 years of age at the time of the December 31, 1996. This survey conducts surveys with the subjects of this survey every year and we will be taking data that was collected in 2000. We have made this decision as the ages of the youth in the sample would be between the ages of 15 to 19, the age that the highest likelihood of an individual committing delinquent behavior (Farrington, David 2007). The only exception of the data used in our analysis is the data regarding peer behavior as that data was not available at the time, to collect the relevant data, we used the closest available data that was collected in 1997.

We will be conducting our analysis by looking at four different independent variables: were there any gangs present in the neighborhood or schools the subjects lived in, did the subject's peers belong to any gang, and how often was the subject's behavior monitored by their mother? We will be analyzing these variables with the subjects' delinquency score index in the year 2000.

We have chosen these variables because they have been the best aspects of the NLSY that reflect the conditions in a youth's life that could lead to delinquency. The presence of gangs in an area reflect the social cohesion in a neighborhood. It shows that there is a lack of a neighborhood goal in the populace that would wish to lower the amount of delinquency. Peer activity in a gang is a good indicator of the potential delinquent behavior of the subjects' peers. Mother monitoring behavior is an indication

of the subjects' relationship of the parent. And the delinquent score index is an indicator of the subjects delinquent behavior.

The variables that were measured in the NLSY were gathered in different ways. The NLSY measured the presence of gangs in their survey with a yes or no format. The reports of peers belonging to a gang were measured in five sections: less than 10%, to almost all, more than 90%. The other three sections of amount of peers reported in gangs comprised of around 25%, about half, and around 75%. The monitoring behavior of the subjects' mothers was measured by the amount of hours the subject was monitored by their maternal figure. The sections were divided by 0 to 4, 5 to 8, 9 to 12, and 13 to 16. The Delinquency score index was comprised by the NLSY that was measured from the subject's past criminal record and how they answered the questions on the survey. The score ranges from 0 to 10, the lowest equating the least likelihood of committing a crime, and the highest, vice versa. We are grouping the index scores into six sections: 0 being a section by itself, and every two numbers paired together, 1 to 2, 3 to 4, etc.

## Results:

For the presence of gang activity in a neighborhood, there were 7783 subjects that were available in the NLS. The data showed that for 6030 subjects (77%), there were no gang activity in their respected neighborhood. 4744 individuals with a delinquency index score of 0 made up of these individuals, 61% of the total amount of individuals. 14% of the total subjects had a delinquency score of 0, but did say that there was gang activity in their neighborhood. The data that we collected from the NLSY showed that the largest group of individuals had an index score higher than 0 was the 1 to 2 group with 1468 individuals in total (18.9%). This group was

primarily individuals who did not have a gang activity in their neighborhood, with 1046 individuals (13.5%). When comparing the amount of individuals with higher index scores amongst those that gang activity in their neighborhood, it was seen that for those that had gang activity in the area, there were more individuals that had an index score of 5 or higher compared to subjects that did not have gang activity in their area. The ANOVA test that we conducted showed that there was a significant influence of gang activity in an area influencing the subjects' likeliness of conducting delinquent behavior with a chi-square value of 277.78 and a significance value of .00.

For the percentage of peers belonging to a gang, there was a similar pattern of the most amount of individuals were in the group of an index score of 0, with 5922 of the available 7869 (75%). 23% of the individuals in the group that had less than 10% of their peers in gangs had an index score higher than 0. This is compared to the group with the highest percentage of individuals with a crime index score higher than 0 being those that had 75% of their peers affiliated with gangs, making up 34% of that group. The other groups had the similar percentage of individuals having a score higher than 0 for their respected categories with around 27%. The chi-square test showed that there was a value of 76.67 and a significance of .00, showing that there was a significant influence of peers affiliated with gangs.

The third analysis that we conducted was monitoring of the subjects' behavior by their mother and the crime index score. As was expected, the trend that we saw with the previous analyses, the largest group was those with an index score of 0, making 74% of the 4281 available subjects. The analysis showed that those that had the lowest amount of monitoring by their parent had the highest chance of having a score index higher than 0; out of the 338

subjects that had 0 to 4 hours of parents monitoring them a week, 40% of them had an index score of at least 1. This is compared to the group with lowest chance of delinquent behavior occurring, being the group with the most amount of monitoring, 13 to 16 hours, having only 14% of the total 795 subjects having an index score of 1 or higher. In this group there were no individuals that had a delinquent index score of higher than 6. The chi-square test of this analysis had a value of 139.39 and a significance of .00, showing that monitoring of a parent is influential in the delinquent behavior of youth.

### Discussion:

As we have predicted, there were correlations between the independent variables, gang presence, peer participation in gangs and parental monitoring with the dependent variable of individual delinquent behavior. The analysis that we have done corresponds with the literature that we have reviewed. These aspects of youth upbringing influence their behavior, in either prosocial or delinquent ways.

The analysis that we have done has shown that the most impactful influence was the monitoring of parents. We made this distinction because the percentage of adolescents with lower delinquency scores were more prevalent when comparing parent monitoring compared to the other analyses. This contrasts with the literature that we have reviewed that claimed that the biggest influence was peer relations. Which is contrary to our analysis as peer gang activity showed the least amount of impact on the behavior of the subjects. However, this

analysis was similar to previous literature that in influence of social cohesion was important to determine the likelihood of juvenile behavior.

However, there were various caveats of our research that we need to take note of. We need to understand that the variables that we have chosen from the NLSY are not perfect representations of factors that we wanted to study. They are simply approximations on the aspects of a youth's life to give a better understanding on what can influence the behavior of youth. It is also important to understand that there is a discrepancy in the number of subjects for each section that we studied. There was a larger difference in the number of available subjects in regards to parental monitoring compared to the other analyses. There was also the issue with the year for peer affiliation with gangs, as it was measured in 1997 compared to the other variables that were taken from the year 2000.

For further studies, it would be more prudent to find better variables to get a better approximation of the factors. We should also find a better means of getting more consistent number of subjects for all the variables that we wish to look at.

### Conclusion:

There are various factors that influence the likelihood of delinquent behavior of youth. We have looked at the factors of neighborhood social cohesion, parental behaviors and peer relations and how they affect the chances of an individual performing delinquent behavior. We have shown that there are strong correlations between these independent variables impact the delinquent behavior of youth.

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