

Exploring Levels of Delinquency Proneness Among Adolescents in Relation to Some Demographic Variables

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Abstract

Adolescence is a transformative phase characterized by heightened emotional reactivity and shifting social allegiances. During this period, "delinquency proneness"—the underlying psychological and social susceptibility to violate norms. This study explores the influence of demographic variables—gender, family type, and school type—on delinquency proneness among adolescents in Haryana, India. Using a descriptive survey method, a sample of 1,000 11th-grade students from government and private schools was selected through stratified random sampling. The Delinquency Proneness Scale (Chopra & Kaur, 2012) was employed to measure tendencies toward delinquent behaviour. Findings revealed that 4.9% of adolescents were highly prone to delinquency, 44.8% moderately prone, and 24.9% low prone, confirming that delinquency proneness is widespread but concentrated in moderate-risk groups. Significant differences were observed across gender and family type: male adolescents scored higher than females, and those from joint families scored higher than those from nuclear families. School type differences were less pronounced, with private school students showing slightly higher delinquency proneness than government school students. These results align with prior studies emphasizing the role of gendered socialization, family supervision, and school environment in shaping adolescent behaviour. The findings underscore the importance of multi-level interventions involving families, schools, and communities.

Keywords: Adolescence, delinquency proneness, gender differences, family type, school type, demographic variables.

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Introduction

Adolescence is a transformative phase characterized by heightened emotional reactivity and shifting social allegiances. During this period, "delinquency proneness"—the underlying psychological and social susceptibility to violate norms. Adolescent delinquency refers broadly to behaviours by young people that violate laws or social norms. Classic definitions emphasize persistent rule-breaking: Kvaraceus and Miller described delinquency as "behaviour by teenagers which violates norms, customs, or laws to a degree that provides a basis for legal action". This pattern underlies the interest in delinquency proneness which we understand as an individual's propensity to engage in delinquent behaviour given certain opportunities and stresses. Adolescents are conventionally defined as

individuals aged roughly 10-19 years (with late teens often included in “young adults”). Delinquency proneness is a psychological/sociological construct denoting a youth's tendency to commit such acts, even if not yet detected by law enforcement. It implies measurable risk factors and behaviours (e.g. lying, stealing, fighting) that signal higher future involvement in delinquency.

Exploring delinquency proneness in relation to these demographic variables is crucial for developing a nuanced understanding of adolescent behaviour. Demographic variables are social and personal attributes such as age, gender, socioeconomic status (SES), family background, ethnicity or caste, education level, and urban/rural residence, thereby affecting their likelihood of engaging in delinquent acts. Similarly, school environments and urban-rural contexts expose adolescents to varying degrees of social pressures and opportunities for deviance. Scholars explain delinquency through several key theories. Social control theory (Hirschi, 1969) argues that strong bonds to family, school, and society deter delinquency, whereas weak attachment and commitment lead youth into crime. Merton (1938), posits that social pressures (e.g. blocked opportunities, poverty) create strain that some youth relieve through delinquency. Criminological research consistently documents a "gender gap". Where males typically exhibit higher rates of delinquent acts and greater severity in criminal activity (Haynie et al., 2014). Male delinquency is often linked to "differential exposure," where boys are more frequently exposed to risk factors such as delinquent peer groups (Haynie et al., 2014). In contrast, female delinquency proneness is more closely tied to "differential reaction," specifically involving internalizing symptoms like anxiety and depression which mediate the transition to externalizing behaviors (Punia et al., 2024) (Fig no.1)

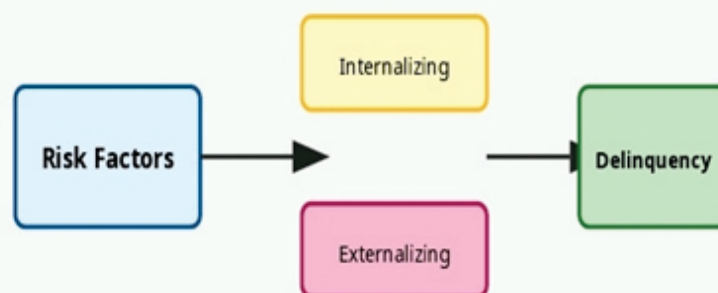


Figure 1: Mediational Model of Delinquency Proneness based on General Strain Theory (Punia et al., 2024).

Social learning theory (Sutherland, Akers 1960s) holds that delinquent behaviour is learned through interaction: youths imitate peers who model crime and perceive greater rewards than punishment for such acts. Akers emphasized that “criminal behaviour is learned through social and non-social reinforcements” and that most learning occurs via communication and modelling. Adolescents spend most of their times at school. The role of the school environment is central to Social Control Theory. While it is often assumed that private schools provide a more protective environment, empirical evidence is mixed. Some research refutes the claim that private or small schools offer superior emotional adjustment, even suggesting they can be detrimental to mental health in specific contexts (Watt, 2003). Private schools have been found to be associated with increased odds of weapon use among some cohorts, contradicting the "community benefit" hypothesis (Watt, 2003). Family type—whether intact or broken—has long been a staple of delinquency research. Traditionally,

children from "broken homes" or divorced families are found to have higher rates of status offenses and general delinquency (Buist et al., 2020). However, modern multivariate analyses indicate that the quality of the relationship (e.g., family negativity) is a more significant predictor than the structural type itself. High levels of sibling conflict and parent-adolescent negativity are more direct predictors of delinquency acceleration than merely being in a single-parent household (Buist et al., 2020). Recent global trends show youth violence and delinquency remain significant concerns, though most high-income countries report long-term declines in juvenile crime. For example, in the U.S., youth arrests peaked in the 1990s and have since fallen by about 75%. As of 2024, only 8.5% of juvenile arrests were for violent crimes, reflecting a shift toward non-violent offenses. Globally, an estimated 1,93,000 homicides occur each year among people ages 15-29 (about 40% of all homicides), and youth violence generally has decreased in many countries over the past two decades. However, variations by region and group are large, and official statistics capture only part of the problem – much delinquent behaviour (e.g. property crime, minor fights) never leads to arrest. Understanding the factors that contribute to delinquency is essential, as these behaviours not only disrupt the educational and social environment but also have long-term implications for personal development and societal well-being. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the extent to which demographic variables influence delinquency proneness among adolescents

Research Objectives

The present study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the level of delinquency proneness among adolescents.
2. To compare and analyse the influence of gender on delinquency proneness.
3. To study and compare the influence of joint and nuclear family on delinquency proneness.
4. To study and compare the influence of government and private school on delinquency proneness.

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference between in the male and female adolescents on delinquency proneness.
2. There is no significant difference in the joint and nuclear family of adolescents on delinquency proneness.
3. There is no significant difference in government and private school of adolescents on delinquency proneness.

Research Methodology:

- **Research Method:**

Descriptive survey method was used to conduct the present research.

- **Population:**

11th class students affiliated to CBSE and HBSE of Haryana state.

- **Sample:**

A sample of 1000 adolescents (male and female) from govt. and private schools were selected by stratified random sampling method from two districts of Haryana state namely, Ambala and Bhiwani.

- **Tool Used:**

Delinquency Proneness scale by Chopra and Kaur (2012) used by the researcher for current study.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

Table 1. Showing levels of delinquency proneness among adolescents

Delinquency Proneness	Score	Frequency	Percentage
High	99-120	49	4.9%
Moderate	69-98	448	44.8%
Low	60- 68	249	24.9%

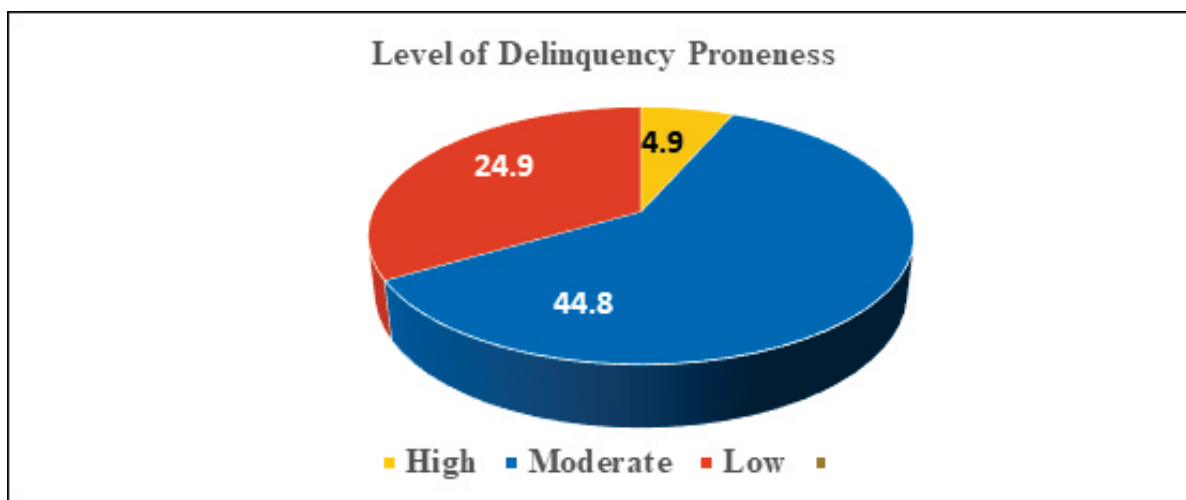


Fig. 1: Pie Chart Showing Levels of Delinquency

Table 2 : Mean and S.Ds of Delinquency Proneness of Adolescents with respect to their Gender

Group	N(Sample)	Mean	S.D.	Df	“t” -value	Level of Sig.
Male	488	77.80	14.58	998	13.94	0.05
Female	512	65.27	13.84			

Table 3 : Mean and S.Ds of Delinquency Proneness of Adolescents with respect to their Type of Family

Group	N(Sample)	Mean	S.D.	Df	“t” value	Level of Sig.
Nuclear Family	525	65.57	13.99	998	13.54	0.05
Joint Family	475	77.81	14.57			

“The results obtained from table no. 4 are showing the mean and S.D. values of Delinquency proneness of adolescents with respect to their type of school which are 69.57 17.05 and 73.57 13.84 (Fig. 4) respectively. The “t” value obtained during analysis of data is 4.121 which is found to be significant at 0.05 level. Thus, it can be interpreted that both government and private school adolescents do not differ significantly. The results of both groups were generally distributed around their specific means, according to the standard deviation values with adolescents attending private schools exhibiting somewhat more variation in their delinquency proneness score. Therefore, from above results it can be inferred that both the groups i.e. government and private delinquency prone adolescents were found similar. The type of school had no discernible impact on adolescents, according to

the current study. Hence, the hypothesis no.3 that “There is no significant difference in the Delinquency Proneness of adolescents with respect to their type of school” has been rejected.”

Table 4 : Mean and S.Ds of Delinquency Proneness of adolescents with respect to their Type of School

Group	N(Sample)	Mean	S.D.	Df	“t” value	Level of Sig.
Government	474	69.57	17.05	998	4.121	0.05
Private	526	73.57	13.84			

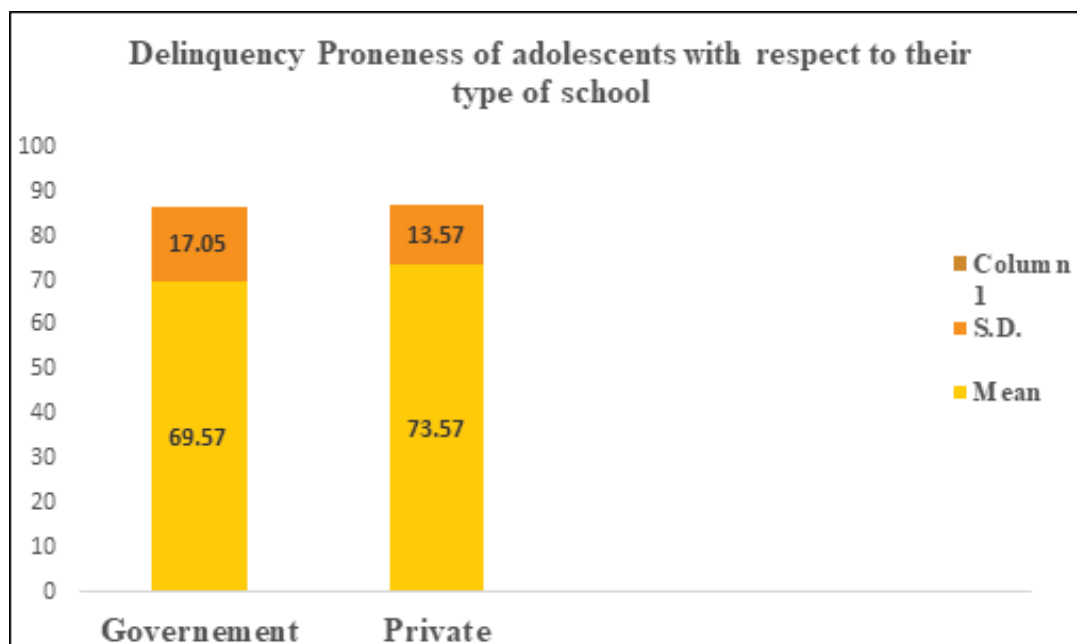


Fig. 4 : Showing Delinquency Proneness of Adolescents with respect to their type of School

Main Findings of the Study:

1. Overall Delinquency Levels

4.9% of adolescents were **highly prone** to delinquency. 44.8% were **moderately prone**, while 24.9% were low prone. This confirms that delinquency proneness is present across the adolescent population, with most falling in the moderate range.

2. Gender Differences

Male adolescents (Mean = 77.80) scored significantly higher than females (Mean = 65.27). The **t-value = 13.94** was significant at the 0.05 level, rejecting the null hypothesis. Gender has a strong impact, with boys more prone to delinquency.

3. Family Type Differences

Adolescents from **joint families** (Mean = 77.81) scored higher than those from **nuclear families** (Mean = 65.57). The **t-value = 13.54** was significant, rejecting the null hypothesis. Family structure influences delinquency, with joint families showing higher proneness.

4. School Type Differences

Private school students (Mean = 73.57) scored slightly higher than government school students (Mean = 69.57). The **t-value = 4.121** was significant, but the difference was relatively small. School type had limited impact, though private school adolescents showed marginally higher delinquency.

Discussion of Results

1. Overall Delinquency Levels

The study revealed that **4.9% of adolescents were highly prone to delinquency**, while the majority (44.8%) fell into the moderate category. This distribution supports the **age-crime curve** described in criminology, where delinquency peaks during adolescence and declines in adulthood. **Kaplan (1996)** similarly observed that moderate delinquency is common during adolescence due to identity exploration and peer influence. **Sharma, Grover, & Chaturvedi (2008)** also found that nearly half of adolescents reported involvement in physical fights, confirming that moderate delinquency is widespread. Thus, the present findings align with global and Indian studies showing that delinquency proneness is not universal but concentrated in moderate-risk groups.

2. Gender Differences

Male adolescents scored significantly higher (Mean = 77.80) than females (Mean = 65.27), with a **t-value of 13.94**. This finding is consistent with **Habersaat et al. (2019)**, who reported that boys were more prone to delinquency, though girls' delinquency was more strongly linked to emotional stress. **Sharma et al. (2008)** also found boys more involved in interpersonal violence than girls. Globally, **Heimer & De Coster (1999)** explained this through gendered socialization, where boys are encouraged toward risk-taking behaviours. Hence, the present study confirms that gender is a strong determinant of delinquency proneness, with boys consistently showing higher involvement.

3. Family Type Differences

Adolescents from **joint families (Mean = 77.81)** scored higher than those from **nuclear families (Mean = 65.57)**, with a **t-value of 13.54**. This contrasts with Western findings but aligns with **Kapur (2005)**, who noted that joint families in India may dilute parental monitoring, leading to higher delinquency risk. **Bhatia (2017)** also highlighted that family environment and socio-economic factors strongly influence delinquency, with boys in particular showing higher tendencies when supervision is weaker. Thus, the study reinforces the idea that family structure plays a critical role, and in the Indian context, joint families may inadvertently increase delinquency proneness.

4. School Type Differences

Private school students (Mean = 73.57) scored slightly higher than government school students (Mean = 69.57), with a **t-value of 4.121**. **Kaur (2018)** found no significant differences between government and private school adolescents, though boys consistently scored higher than girls. The present study's small but significant difference suggests that private school adolescents may face unique pressures—peer competition, consumerism, and social media exposure—that elevate delinquency risk. **Shen & Zhong (2018)** similarly reported that urban adolescents and rural migrants exposed to new environments showed higher delinquency due to weakened social bonds. Thus, while school type differences are less pronounced, private schooling contexts may subtly contribute to delinquency proneness.

Educational Implications

- 1. Gender-Specific Interventions:** Schools should design **male-focused programs** that address aggression, peer pressure, and risk-taking behaviours. Female students may benefit from emotional regulation and stress management programs, given their lower but still significant delinquency proneness.
- 2. Family Engagement Programs:** Parents in joint families should be encouraged to strengthen supervision and communication. Parenting workshops can help families adopt more supportive and consistent disciplinary practices.
- 3. School-Based Preventive Strategies:** Both government and private schools should integrate **life skills education, counselling services, and peer mentoring** to reduce delinquency. Private schools, in particular, should address issues of consumerism, peer competition, and social media influence.
- 4. Policy Recommendations:** Educational authorities should promote **community-school partnerships** to monitor and support at-risk adolescents. Curriculum reforms can include modules on **social responsibility**,

empathy, and conflict resolution to foster resilience.

5. Holistic Approach: Since delinquency proneness is influenced by multiple demographic factors, interventions must be **multi-level**—involving family, school, and community stakeholders. Programs should emphasize positive socialization, resilience building, and constructive peer networks.

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