

Causes and Factors of Juvenile Delinquency in Bangladesh

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Abstracts

Background: Juvenile delinquency has become a growing social and legal concern in Bangladesh, reflecting the combined effects of poverty, family instability, peer pressure, and rapid urbanization. Understanding its underlying causes is essential to developing preventive strategies and improving rehabilitation efforts for youth offenders.

Objective: To assess the types, patterns, and associated factors of juvenile crimes among adolescents in Bangladesh.

Methods: This cross-sectional study was conducted at the Child Development Centre (CDC) in Tongi, Gazipur, among 200 juvenile offenders aged 12–18 years. Data were collected through a semi structured questionnaire and institutional records. Sociodemographic, familial, social, psychological, and behavioral variables were analyzed using SPSS version 26, applying descriptive and inferential statistics including Chi-square and Fisher's exact tests.

Results: Most participants were male (74%), aged 12–15 years (54.5%), and from urban, low-income families. The most common crimes were rape (28.5%), murder (22.5%), and theft (16%). Poverty (63%), domestic violence (29%), and parental disharmony (22%) were major familial contributors. Peer influence was reported by 75% of participants, while substance use—mainly smoking (47.5%)—was prevalent, particularly among males. Significant gender differences were found in crime type, media exposure, and substance use ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusion: Juvenile delinquency in Bangladesh is multifactorial, rooted in socioeconomic deprivation, family conflict, and peer influence. While psychological disorders were rare, substance abuse and social pressures played substantial roles. Preventive efforts should emphasize family counseling, educational retention, community support, and targeted rehabilitation within juvenile facilities.

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Introduction

Children are the foundation of a nation's future, and its progress depends on nurturing them through proper care, education, and moral guidance. Adolescence, a critical phase of emotional and biological change, requires strong family support to shape responsible citizens. When this guidance is lacking, young people may struggle with confusion and poor judgment, making them vulnerable to antisocial behavior and delinquency.¹ A delinquent youth disobedient and unruly, often runs away from home or school, resists parental and institutional control, disregards discipline, acts willfully, and repeatedly engages in behaviors harmful to both others and themselves.² The term "delinquency" originates from the Latin word *delinquent*, meaning "to omit" or "to fail." The Romans used the term to describe an individual's failure to fulfill assigned duties.³ Juvenile delinquency is a critical and emerging issue in both criminal and human rights jurisprudence. While it is a relatively new phenomenon in the legal framework, its historical roots stretch deep within societies across the world. From ancient times to the modern world, juvenile delinquency has been observed in every society.⁴ The complexity of juvenile delinquency remains a pressing concern in today's world. It is a societal issue that has long-lasting implications, as many adult criminal behaviors can be traced back to early patterns of juvenile delinquency. Bangladesh, similar to many other nations, is confronted with multiple causes behind the growing problem of juvenile delinquency. Economic inequality, poverty, insufficient access to education, broken family structures, peer pressure, substance use, and exposure to violence are major forces driving children and

adolescents toward criminal acts. Moreover, the effects of rapid urbanization, poor infrastructure, weak law enforcement, and limited access to justice collectively create conditions that make young people more vulnerable to engaging in delinquent behavior.⁵ In Bangladesh, juvenile delinquency has become an increasingly concerning issue. The frequency of juvenile offenses has been rising steadily, and several contributing factors can be identified. These include widespread poverty, family problems, lack of parental control, broken homes, societal discrimination, criminal behavior of parents, peer influence, industrialization and urbanization, migration, illiteracy, lack of recreational activities, and the influence of media and films. These factors collectively contribute to the rise in juvenile delinquency across the nation

Objectives

General objective: To evaluate the reasons and issues responsible for juvenile delinquency in Bangladesh.

Specific objectives: To explore the types of juvenile crimes in Bangladesh. To assess the factors leading to juvenile delinquency

Methods

This cross-sectional study was conducted at the Child Development Centre (CDC) in Tongi, Gazipur, Bangladesh, over a period of one and a half years, from July 2024 to December 2025. The study aimed to investigate the prevalence, patterns, and socio-economic determinants of juvenile delinquency in Bangladesh. The study population consisted of 200 juvenile offenders, aged between 12 and 18 years, who were currently detained at the CDC for

criminal offenses. These juveniles were selected based on specific inclusion criteria, including their age and status as legally convicted juveniles. Informed consent was obtained from the participants, and parental consent was acquired for minors, ensuring that all participants were fully aware of their voluntary participation in the study.

Sampling

A convenient sampling method was employed for the study.

Results

Out of 200 participants, more than half (54.5%) were aged 12–15 years, while 45.5% were between 16–18 years, with a mean age of 15.31 ± 1.27 years. The majority of respondents lived in urban areas (61.5%), and most were students (68.0%), followed by unemployed (18.0%) and employed (14.0%) individuals. Regarding family income, the largest group (37.0%) had a monthly income between 10,000 and 29,999 Taka, while equal proportions (26.5%) reported earning less than 10,000 Taka or above 50,000 Taka. Only 10.0% of participants belonged to families with an income between 30,000 and 50,000 Taka. This suggests that most participants were adolescents from urban, student-dominant, and lower- to middle-income households.

Out of 200 participants, the majority were male (74.0%), while females comprised 26.0% of the study population, indicating a male predominance among respondents.

The figure shows that the majority of participants (64%) had primary education, followed by 24.5% with secondary education.

A smaller proportion (11.5%) of participants had no formal education.

Among the participants, the most common crime committed was rape (28.5%), followed by murder (22.5%) and theft (16.0%). Hijacking accounted for 15.0%, while 11.0% were involved in other types of crimes. Acid violence (4.0%) and robbery (3.0%) were the least common offenses. These findings indicate that serious violent crimes such as rape and murder were more prevalent among the participants.

The table presents the distribution of psychological factors associated with criminal behaviour. Psychotic or major depressive disorder was identified in 4.5% of the participants, while schizophrenia and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) were present in 1.0% and 2.0%, respectively. These findings suggest that severe psychological disorders were relatively uncommon among the offenders. However, the presence of such conditions in a small subset highlights that mental health disturbances may act as contributing factors in certain criminal behaviours.

The table highlights the role of substance abuse as a contributing factor to criminal behaviour. Nearly half of the participants (47.5%) reported smoking, making it the most common form of substance use. Alcohol consumption was reported by 11.0% of respondents, Ganja (cannabis) use by 12.0%, and amphetamine/Yaba use by 9.5%. These findings indicate that substance abuse—particularly smoking and drug use—was prevalent among the offenders, suggesting that addiction and substance dependence may play a significant role in promoting or sustaining criminal activities.

Table I: Distribution of the participants according to sociodemographic characteristics (n=200)

Sociodemographic characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age Category (years)		
12–15	109	54.5
16–18	91	45.5
Mean $\pm$ SD		
Median (Min-Max)	15.31 $\pm$ 1.269	
15 (12-18)		
Area of Residence		
Urban	123	61.5
Rural	77	38.5
Employment Status		
Student	136	68.0
Unemployed	36	18.0
Employed	28	14.0
Monthly Family Income (Taka)		
< 10,000	53	26.5
10,000 – 29,999	74	37.0
30,000 – 50,000	20	10.0
> 50,000	53	26.5

Data are presented as frequency and percentage for categorical variables, and as mean $\pm$ SD and median (min–max) for continuous variables

Table II: Distribution of respondents according to the type of crimes committed by the participants

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Theft	32	16
Robbery	6	3
Hijacking	30	15
Murder	45	22.5
Rape	57	28.5
Acid violence	8	4
Others	22	11

Data are presented as frequency and percentage for categorical variables

Table III: Psychological Factors Related to Crimes among the Study Participants

Psychological Disorders	Response	
	Yes n (%)	No n (%)
Psychotic or Major Depressive Disorder	9 (4.5)	191 (95.5)
Schizophrenia	2 (1.0)	198 (99.0)
Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)	4 (2.0)	196 (98.0)

Data are presented as frequency and percentage

Table IV: Substance Abuse Factors Related to Crimes among the Study Participants

Substance Abuse Factors	Response	
	Yes n(%)	Non (%)
Smoking	95 (47.5)	105 (52.5)
Alcohol use	22 (11.0)	178 (89.0)
Amphetamine/Yaba use	19 (9.5)	181 (90.5)
Ganja (cannabis) use	24 (12.0)	176 (88.0)

Data are presented as frequency and percentage

Table V: Association of Psychological Disorder-Related Factors with Gender

Psychological Disorders-Related Factors	Gender		p-value
	Male n (%)	Female n (%)	
Psychotic or Major Depressive Disorder	7 (4.7)	2 (3.8)	ns1.000b
Schizophrenia	1 (0.7)	1 (1.9)	ns0.453b
Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)	3 (2.0)	1 (1.9)	ns1.000b

Data are presented as frequency and percentage

b = Fisher's exact test

ns=non-significant

There was no statistically significant association between gender and the presence of psychological disorders among participants. The occurrence of psychotic or depressive disorders, schizophrenia, and OCD was low and comparable between males and females.

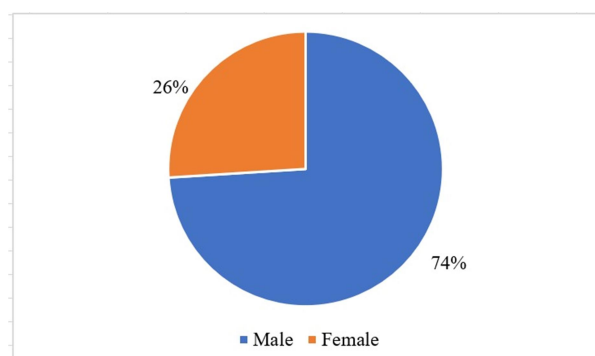


Figure 1. Gender distribution of the respondents (n=200)

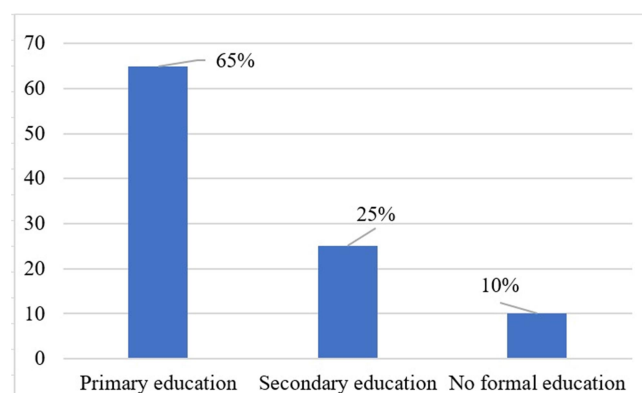


Figure 2. Distribution of Participants by Level of Education(n=200)

Discussions

The present study explored multiple dimensions of juvenile delinquency in Bangladesh, emphasizing sociodemographic, familial, social, psychological, and behavioural determinants influencing youth criminality. The analysis revealed that most juvenile offenders were males aged between 12 and 18 years, with a mean age of 15.31 years, and the majority resided in urban areas. This age pattern corresponds with the developmental vulnerability described by Haque et al., who noted that adolescents aged 15–19 years constituted the highest proportion

of offenders in district correctional centres, reflecting impulsivity, curiosity, and emotional instability typical of mid-adolescence.⁶ The predominance of urban participants (61.5%) in this study reinforces the argument that rapid urbanization, unplanned migration, and social anonymity contribute to delinquency. Sarker I et al.(2023) emphasized that urban slums and densely populated areas act as breeding grounds for youth deviance due to poverty, peer pressure, and limited recreational opportunities.⁷ Similar conclusions were reached by De Coster et al, who found that city-based adolescents were more exposed to criminal networks, drug markets, and political influence.⁸ Gender distribution in this study showed a marked male predominance (74%), which aligns with findings by Sarker I et al. and Asaduzzaman et al., both of whom documented that male juveniles engage more frequently in physical, outdoor, and group-based offenses, while female involvement remains limited but is gradually increasing.^{7, 4} This trend reflects the social structure of Bangladesh, where males enjoy greater mobility and social exposure, increasing opportunities for deviant behavior, whereas females are subject to stricter familial supervision.¹ Socioeconomic status also showed a strong association with delinquent behavior, as nearly two-thirds of respondents belonged to lower- and middle-income families, with poverty identified by 63% as a major contributing factor. Sarker I et al. and Jesmin et al. both concluded that economic deprivation and limited access to basic necessities are primary precursors of juvenile delinquency, while De Coster et al. demonstrated that children from economically distressed households often perceive theft or extortion as survival strategies.^{7,9,8} Similarly, Sharmin et al. (2021) reported that over 70% of juvenile offenders originated from families living below the national poverty threshold.¹⁰ However, Hossain et al. (2024) argued that

class boundaries are gradually blurring, as adolescents from financially solvent families are increasingly engaging in delinquency through gang involvement, thrill-seeking, and peer recognition.¹¹ This divergence suggests that although poverty remains a fundamental risk factor, cultural globalization and digital exposure are expanding juvenile crime beyond purely economic motivations. Psychological disorders were relatively uncommon among participants, with only 4.5% reporting depressive or psychotic symptoms and 1–2% schizophrenia or obsessive-compulsive disorder, indicating that mental illness is not a primary driver of juvenile crime. Comparable findings were reported by Haque et al. (2020), who argued that emotional instability and maladaptive coping mechanisms, rather than clinically diagnosed disorders, play a more significant role in delinquent behavior.⁶ Statistical analysis further revealed significant associations between gender and several sociodemographic variables. Female offenders were more likely to be younger, less educated, and from rural or lower-income households, whereas male offenders predominated in urban and comparatively higher-income settings. These gender-specific patterns are consistent with previous studies, which observed that female delinquency is often linked to abuse, coercion, or family disruption, while male delinquency tends to be more proactive and organized.^{6, 7, 10} Regarding offense patterns, males in this study were predominantly involved in rape (38.5%) and hijacking (20.3%), whereas females were more frequently associated with murder (53.8%) and non-violent offenses (26.9%). These findings are consistent with reports by Sarker I et al. and Jesmin et al., suggesting that female delinquency often emerges from reactive or situational circumstances rather than habitual criminal behavior.^{7,9} In conclusion, the findings indicate that juvenile delinquency in

Bangladesh is shaped by a complex interaction of traditional and contemporary influences. While poverty and family instability continue to serve as foundational risk factors, the growing impact of peer networks, urban gang culture, and digital media exposure signals a new and evolving phase of youth deviance.

Conclusion

This study reveals that juvenile delinquency in Bangladesh is a multifactorial problem predominantly affecting young males aged 12–18 years, mainly from urban and lower- to middle-income families. The most frequent offenses were rape, murder, theft, and hijacking, indicating a predominance of violent crimes among juveniles. Familial factors such as poverty, domestic violence, and parental antisocial behavior, along with social influences like peer pressure and neighbourhood companionship, were major contributors. While psychological disorders were relatively uncommon, substance abuse—especially smoking and drug use—was prevalent, particularly among male offenders. The findings highlight that social environment, family instability, and exposure to deviant peers and media play a more substantial role in fostering delinquent behavior than mental illness alone. Therefore, prevention strategies must address both social and familial determinants to reduce juvenile crime and facilitate rehabilitation.

Conflict of Interest: none

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