

[DOI: 10.20472/IAC.2015.020.037](https://doi.org/10.20472/IAC.2015.020.037)

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GENDER DIFFERENCES ON DELINQUENCY AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

Abstract:

The main purpose of this study was to evaluate the gender differences among secondary school students who demonstrate delinquent behaviours.

A total of 242 juveniles of age 14-17 years old participated voluntarily in the research. The mean age of the participants was $M=16.2$ years ($SD=1.14$). 137 (56.6 %) of them are female and 103 (42.6%) of them are male. The Delinquency Scale of Wave II questionnaire was used as a data collection instrument.

The Cronbach alpha coefficient (α), which was used to measure the internal consistency of the questionnaire, showed the value of .612. The T-test for independent groups was used to verify potential differences across indicator variables.

Results revealed that there are no statistical differences between boys and girls on most of the variables that describe delinquent behaviours. There were only three behaviours that showed statistical differences between them: in the last 12 months, how often did you steal something worth more than fifty euros ($p=.012$); how often have you used or threatened to use a gun to take, steal something from someone ($p=.022$); and have you been part of a group, gang known in the neighborhood, or school ($p=.036$). In all three variables boys showed the higher mean values than girls.

These results challenge the perception of our society about the expectations for delinquent behavior. We expect boys to show more delinquent behavior than girls, so there is a need for further studies involving cultural variables in order to explore more in depth the issue

Keywords:

delinquency, gender, differences, students

JEL Classification: I29

INTRODUCTION

During the 18th Century, the definition of juvenile delinquency shifted from “a form of misbehavior common to all children” to a euphemism for the conditions and behaviors of poor children (Roberts 2004). Very lately, according to Random House Webster's college dictionary, delinquency is defined as "wrongful, illegal or antisocial behaviours" (2005:327).

The definitions of the term delinquency used in Kosovo, refer to the definition used by Halili (2011) according to which ‘delinquency includes all deviant, antisocial behaviours of juveniles, regardless of whether they are incorporated in the positive legal provisions of a country as criminal offences’. The same author also gives a restrictive (narrow) definition of the term delinquency: delinquency includes only deviant behaviours of minors, explicitly defined in positive criminal law provisions of a country (2011).

Situated in the heart of the Balkans, bordering Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, Kosovo has a population of 1,815,606 (Statistical Office, 2014:10). According to 2011 Census, the population in Prishtina is 198.897 and 99.361 of them are male while 99.536 of them are female. Approximately 10.0 % of this population is aged 15-19 years old (17,427), which in comparison to the rest of the countries in the region is relatively high, making Kosovo the country with the youngest population.

There are various sources that referred to the presence and the distribution of delinquent behaviours in Kosovo which contains considerable inconsistencies in their data. However, all those sources point to considerable increase in the number of delinquent behaviours among juveniles in the recent years, from 1,313 in 2005 to 2,059 in 2008 (UNICEF, 2010). Approximately 30 per cent of all reports of juvenile offending, and almost half of all reports of serious offences by juveniles, occurred in the capital, Pristina. Almost half of the offences by juveniles reported in 2008 (47 per cent) involved theft, and 20 per cent involved assault or homicide. Among the causes most frequently referred to in these reports are the difficult economic situations in Kosovo families, familial conflicts, unemployment, child-parent relations, migrations from villages to towns, etc.

Our research covered only the town of Pristina, and its main goal is to unveil the differences between boys and girls on delinquency behaviours. It was hypothesised that: $H_1 =$ Boys demonstrate higher levels of delinquent behaviours than girls.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many factors which contribute to the development of delinquency. It is logical to assume that gender affects people differently. Given that boys and girls experience

life differently due to varying socialization methods, it is likely that gender is a significant variable. Many differences in the experiences of male and female juvenile delinquents are expected to be present. Each gender is socialized differently due to deeply ingrained norms about gender roles that shape people from the day they are born. Since members of each gender have similar experiences it is logical to assume that gender does affect the way individuals interpret, experience and develop within the world (Trogon, 2006).

Statistics show that delinquent behaviours among the youth, particularly among juveniles, are a growing concern. Moreover, it is argued that the youth incorporate multiple factors that exercise direct and indirect effects on their behavior (Hinton, Sheperis, and Sims 2003). According to the literature the majority of research is focused on males, and so a full understanding of the differences in male and female juvenile delinquency remains elusive. This is due in large part, to the fact that males historically make up the majority of delinquents. However, in the last decade crime amongst female juveniles has grown at a faster pace than that of male offenders (Chesney-Lind and Okamoto 2001). Female juvenile delinquency has been “ignored, trivialized or denied” by many researchers (Chesney-Lind and Okamoto 2001:3).

Numerous factors have been identified as possible correlates of juvenile delinquency. For example, children who experience abuse of any kind have typically been found to run away at higher rates than their non-abused peers. However, the relationship between abuse and delinquency has not been studied according to gender with great frequency (Trogon, 2006).

Research indicates that in the last decade crime amongst female juveniles has grown at a faster pace than that of male offenders (Chesney-Lind and Okamoto 2001). In their study Inderbitzin, Bates, and Gainey (2013) claimed that delinquency is a class-specific behaviour, so the impoverished youth are often labelled as delinquents. As a consequence, social bonding, class consciousness, alienation, and negative labelling are the mediators on the relationship between the socioeconomic status of the family and delinquent behaviour. A conception of delinquency largely restricts to the lower class because the behavior that trigger labels occur more frequently in this group than that in other groups, Clinard and Meier (2008).

METHODOLOGY

The participants of our study were 242 juveniles, aged 14-17 years old, attending secondary schools of the town of Pristina. The mean age of the participants was $M=16.2$ years ($SD=1.14$). 137 or 56.6 % of the study participants were females and 103

or 42.6 % of the participants were male students. The chi-square test showed statistical differences between them ($\chi^2(2, N=242)=122.40, p=.000$).

Data collection instrument and method

Data related to delinquent behaviours of juveniles were collected through participants' self-reporting of delinquent behaviours in the study, using the questions Section 28: Delinquency Scale based on Wave II questions, adapted to and validated in our context. The questionnaire asks how often the adolescent engaged in the certain activities within the last 12 months. Responses range from 1 (never) to 4 (more than 5 times). The Cronbach Alpha is .612.

Meetings were held with all students in their schools, wherein the purpose of the study was explained to them. The teachers organized the meetings where they obtained the consent for voluntary participation in the research. The questionnaire was completed individually by each student and was returned to the author on the same day.

The procedure of data analysis

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α) was used to measure the internal consistency of the questionnaire. The chi-square goodness-of-fit test was administered in order to identify the differences among the responses. In order to detect the potential correlation between the gender and delinquent behaviours, we used the Pearson's chi-square of association test. The data were analysed through the SPSS Ver. 21.0 statistical package.

RESULTS

When we evaluated the correlation between gender and delinquent behaviours as a variable, the values obtained $\chi(2, N=242) = 10.653, p = .021$, showed a correlation of statistical significance between gender and delinquent behaviours, which means that boys and girls do not have the same predispositions for developing delinquent behaviours. From the results obtained, boys show higher values for the occurrence of those behaviours in comparison to girls (11.3 % vs. 9.7 %).

The Pearson's chi-square of association test was also used to see the statistical associations of gender with the items of the delinquency scale questionnaire, in order to find the behaviours where the boys and girls differ between them. Most of the items of the questionnaire showed no correlation of statistical significance between gender and some of delinquent behaviours, which means that girls and boys equally develop such delinquent behaviours. These results are obtained for the item related to: paint graffiti or signs on someone else's property or in a public place? $\chi(5, N=242) = 6.887, p = .229$.

The values obtained from Phi and V Cramer test, two tests of the correlation strength, also show a very weak correlation ($r=.165$) between those two variables.

The same results were for the item: deliberately damage property that didn't belong to you? The obtained values $\chi(5, N=242) = 1.368, p = .929$ showed no correlation of statistical significance. In this analysis, too, the values obtained from Phi and V Cramer test show a very weak correlation ($r=.075$) between the variables.

The results obtained for the items: lie to your parents or guardians about where you had been or whom you were with? $\chi(5, N=242) = .149, p = .661$ (Phi and V Cramer $r=.214$); take something from a store without paying for it? $\chi(5, N=242) = 3.141, p = .247$ (Phi and V Cramer $r=.369$); run away from home $\chi(5, N=242) = 11.241, p = .418$ (Phi and V Cramer $r=.425$); drive a car without its; owner permission $\chi(5, N=242) = 2.236, p = .194$ (Phi and V Cramer $r=.216$); go into a house or building to steal something $\chi(5, N=242) = 1.187, p = .114$ (Phi and V Cramer $r=.122$); sell marijuana or other drugs $\chi(5, N=242) = .637, p = .742$ (Phi and V Cramer $r=.296$); steal something worth less than 50 dollar $\chi(5, N=242) = 6.851, p = .063$ (Phi and V Cramer $r=.121$); act loud, rowdy or unruly in a public place $\chi(5, N=242) = 10.213, p = .511$ (Phi and V Cramer $r=.425$); have been initiated into a named gang $\chi(5, N=242) = .851, p = .669$ (Phi and V Cramer $r=.183$). These results show that boys and girls do have the same predispositions for developing such delinquent behaviours.

There were only three behaviors that showed statistical differences between boys and girls: in the last 12 months, how often did you steal something worth more than fifty euros $\chi(5, N=242) = 61.214, p = .012$ (Phi and V Cramer $r=.337$); how often have you used or threatened to use a gun to take, steal something from someone $\chi(5, N=242) = 34.512, p = .022$ (Phi and V Cramer $r=.196$); and have you been part of a group and take part in a fight where a group of your friends was against another group? $\chi(5, N=242) = 41.66, p = .036$ (Phi and V Cramer $r=.$); ($p=.036$). In all three variables boys showed the higher mean values than girls. These results show that boys and girls do not have the same predispositions for developing such delinquent behaviours, as in fact it is expected in our society.

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this research was to assess whether there were differences between boys and girls in secondary school students in Pristina in the occurrence of delinquent behaviours. Our results did prove the hypothesis, according to which it was expected that boys shows more delinquent behaviour than girls.

Our results are in line with other studies that shows that girls are more likely to fight with a parent or sibling (34% compared to 9%), whereas boys are more likely to fight with friends or strangers (Girls, Incorporated, 1996). Girls are less likely than their male counterparts to engage in serious, violent crime and more likely to be involved in nonviolent property and drug offenses. In fact there is an evolving body of research documenting distinct gender differences in pathways to crime and a growing number of scholars have attempted to determine how males and females vary in terms of their paths to law breaking (Arnold 1995; Chesney-Lind & Rodriguez, 1983).

From the other side, our results are in contrary with researches that disagree greatly on the roles females play in the world of delinquent behavior. Chesney-Lind and Shelby (2004) note that girls have been in gangs a long time and that the nature of their violence is influenced by their gender. Bjerregaard and Smith (1993) found that in every offense category, female gang members had a higher rate of delinquent offenses than non-gang females. The results of our study may be attributed to internalization of traditional gender roles. Females are socialized to be submissive and therefore many do not speak out when they experience abuse.

Gender differences in correlations of juvenile delinquency are present in Pristina's juveniles. If each gender is targeted with prevention programs that fit the experiences of that gender then the results of delinquency prevention should be more successful. Finally, such results, reinforcing the fact that cultural issues are closely connected with school age and preadolescence delinquency, emphasize even more the importance of designing and implementing prevention strategies for such behaviours at the earliest possible age.

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