

Factors influencing juvenile sexual crimes: An eco-system-based analysis

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Abstract

This paper explores the social and cultural factors contributing to juvenile sexual offenses. It examines how family environment, school education, peer influence, and cultural norms shape adolescents' understanding of sexuality and interpersonal boundaries. The paper argues that dysfunctional family relationships and insecure attachment patterns may impair emotional regulation and social development, increasing the likelihood of maladaptive behaviors during adolescence. In addition, inadequate or absent sex education in schools may lead adolescents to rely on unreliable sources such as peers or online media, which can distort their understanding of sexuality. Peer influence and social learning processes may further reinforce risky or deviant behaviors. Cultural norms and patriarchal social structures are also discussed as potential contributors, particularly where sexual topics are highly taboo or restricted, potentially leading to repression and misunderstanding. Finally, the paper acknowledges the limitation of focusing primarily on social factors and suggests that future research should incorporate biological influences, including genetic predispositions related to impulsivity and aggression, to provide a more comprehensive explanation of juvenile sexual offending.

Keywords

Sexual crime, sexual offense, adolescent, culture, sex education

1 Introduction

In today's society, juvenile sexual offenses are on the rise. This phenomenon is closely related to a variety of complex factors, including but not limited to family education, school education, and cultural differences.

With rapid societal development, the internet provides a space for teenagers, exposing them to a dramatic increase in information, including various sexual content. This leads teenagers to imitate or experiment with such behaviors without sufficient psychological preparation, resulting in a surge of issues such as sexual shame, sexual repression, and sexual desire.

Meanwhile, family education plays a crucial role in preventing juvenile sexual offenses. However, in reality, many families, for various reasons, fail to provide sufficient attention and guidance to their teenagers. This instability in the family environment may lead to teenagers lacking proper judgment and self-control when facing sexually related issues.

Through school education, teenagers learn important factors for preventing sexual offenses. However, if school sex education is flawed, it can lead to misunderstandings about sex among teenagers, thereby increasing the risk of sexual offenses.

Due to globalization, teenagers from different cultural backgrounds encounter each other in the same educational environment, and their behavior and thoughts are impacted and influenced by multiculturalism. This influence is not only reflected in their daily interactions but also leaves a deep imprint on their behavioral patterns and values. Differences in understanding and expectations regarding sex are highly likely to lead to conflicts and even sexual offenses such as sexual harassment or assault.

2.1.1 family environment

Everyone is born into a family environment where basic skills, values, and cognitive frameworks are gradually formed. Through prolonged interaction with family members, children move from simple imitation to the development of independent cognitive and emotional systems.

As primary caregivers, parents play a crucial role in early socialization, serving as the first and most influential relational models observed by children.

During adolescence, parents are not always the primary source of explicit sexual information, as peers and online media often play a significant role. However, parents continue to function as implicit moral and relational models. Adolescents tend to interpret sexual concepts and interpersonal boundaries through the values, behaviors, and emotional responses demonstrated within the family. Even indirect parental responses and attitudes can shape adolescents' understanding of intimacy, consent, and relationships.

The combination of adolescents' independent information-seeking behaviors and their emotional reliance on parental approval may contribute to confusion regarding appropriate sexual boundaries. During adolescence—a period characterized by emotional instability and identity formation—attachment relationships with parents often become more complex. In families marked by instability or emotional unavailability, adolescents may struggle with emotional regulation and social understanding, which can increase vulnerability to maladaptive behaviors.

Carpenter et al. examined personality differences among juvenile sex offenders and found that adolescents who committed offenses against children exhibited stronger avoidant and schizoid personality traits than those who offended against peers. Using the MCMI scale, the study identified patterns of compliant dependency, low self-esteem, and social withdrawal among this group, characteristics often associated with problematic attachment experiences (Carpenter et al., 1995). These findings suggest that family instability and dysfunctional parent-child relationships may contribute to personality deviations that increase the risk of serious antisocial behaviors.

Similarly, Lyons-Ruth's longitudinal research indicates that aggressive behavior toward peers is associated with disorganized or controlling attachment patterns toward caregivers in infancy. Such attachment disruptions are linked to emotional dysregulation, heightened stress responses, and unresolved behavioral conflicts, all of which can persist into later developmental stages (Lyons-Ruth, 1996). While aggression does not equate to sexual offending, these early risk factors may contribute to broader patterns of antisocial behavior during adolescence.

In summary, dysfunctional family structures and insecure attachment relationships can undermine emotional regulation and social development from early childhood. These vulnerabilities may intensify during adolescence, a period of heightened emotional turbulence, thereby increasing the risk of aggressive or sexually inappropriate behaviors.

2.1.2 School education and peer group

School also plays an important role in shaping the values, conduct, and worldview of students. Sex education is one area that is still poorly addressed in the majority of schools. Sex has always been treated as taboo, especially by women, who were made to regard sexual issues as shameful. While the attitude has since then improved, official sexual education remains poor in the majority of regions, leaving young people ignorant and exposed.

Integrated sex education has been shown to delay sexual initiation, lower the rate of adolescent pregnancy, and lower risk sexual behavior (Kirby, 2002). Students are able to better govern their desires rather than acting on them impulsively when they are aware of the physiological mechanisms of sexual desire and how adolescence affects hormone release. Additionally, by teaching students to manage sexual desires and form healthy relationships, the schools can reduce those risk factors that may lead to sexual offenses.

Without education, teenagers are likely to seek information from peers or pornography, which can mislead them regarding sexuality. As Santelli et al. (2018) note, there is increased curiosity and fascination about sex due to the lack of reliable information, potentially energizing desires. Sexual education clears myths using accurate facts, enhancing emotional regulation and wise decision-making.

There are also cultural influences on sexual attitudes. Formal sex education in most Western schools translates into greater sexual health awareness and, in certain studies, reduced rates of sexual offenses compared to where this does not exist. Such results suggest that open communication and knowledge-sharing can create safer environments.

Dropping out of school is also another influencer of sexual behavior. Anderson and Pörtner (2010) confirmed that teenagers who drop out of high school are more likely to have multiple sex partners and are at risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. Poverty and lack of structure in education may increase one's vulnerability to risky

behavior. Dropping out does not necessarily fuel sexual desire but inhibits self-regulation and access to accurate information, thus contributing to risky behavior.

Social Learning Theory (Bandura) is yet another theoretical reason why sexual education is essential in schools. Adolescents are greatly affected by models during early years. By offering responsible sexual behavior through sex education classes, schools offer good models to follow for students. This reduces the likelihood of blind imitation of deviant behaviors.

In the schools, peers and close friends are students' learning model. In their daily learning and life, students unconsciously imitate the behavior, attitudes, and values of those around them. Peers and friends influence each other's learning motivation, social skills, and even learning methods. In such situation, if juvenile sex offenders appear in their surroundings, due to conformity and social learning theories, the students' sense of guilt will be diluted, leading them to imitate negative models and commit sexual offenses.

A paper discusses whether conformity influences individual criminal outcomes also supports this view. It proposes a peer effect social network model incorporating pre-existing heterogeneous subjects and demonstrates how conformity and deterrence influence criminal activity. The researchers applied this model to a highly detailed dataset of adolescent friendship networks. A social network-based approach allows us to identify peer effects across different types of crime. It reveals that conformity plays a significant role in all crimes, particularly minor offenses. This suggests that for juvenile delinquency, an effective policy should be measured not only by the potential reduction in crime but also by the resulting group interactions. (Patachini, 2012).

In short, schools have a central role in shaping young people's sex attitudes and behaviors. Well-designed sexual education programs can provide accurate information, promote impulse control, and show positive social role models. All three can decrease the risk of sexual offending and lead to healthier, better-educated generations in the future.

2.2 Culture factor norms and expectations

In today's social context, different cultures lead to varying rates of sexual offenses. In traditional societies, strict controls on adolescent sexual contact result in increasingly

strong desires for sexual activity. However, their limited access to sexual information makes them more prone to sexual repression. This repression leads to distorted and incorrect sexual perceptions, potentially resulting in sexual offenses.

In traditional societies, the level of sexual shame has increased. This makes teenagers ashamed to talk about or access sex education, and sexual repression accumulates until it explodes. Ultimately, the more repressed, the stronger the backlash, directly leading to sexual crimes (Stuewig, 2015; Jepsen, 2024).

Benbenishty's research partially explores whether gender differences in sexual assault occur between Jewish and Arab students in more patriarchal school environments. The results show a significantly greater gender difference in reported sexual harassment among Arab students than Jewish students. Furthermore, this difference exhibits different patterns across the two cultures. These findings suggest that culture influences gender differences in the field of sexual harassment.

To further examine the issues of culture and patriarchy, a comparison was made between students in Orthodox Jewish schools and secular Jewish schools. In secular Jewish schools, boys reported fewer incidents of sexual assault related to intent to sexual contact than girls. In Orthodox schools, similar to Arab schools, this trend was reversed. These patterns support viewing patriarchal structures as a social factor contributing to increased victimization.

This findings suggest that adolescents are more likely to experience sexual abuse in more traditional social environments. This is because Orthodox Judaism and Arab societies impose strict restrictions on sexual contact between boys and girls in middle and high school. All Orthodox Jewish schools and some Arab schools separate male and female students, making physical contact on campus extremely difficult. This cultural segregation and the taboo surrounding male-female contact, leading to sexual repression, may explain why the probability of sex crimes is significantly higher in schools with a higher degree of patriarchy (Benbenishty, 2005).

Therefore, the sexual risks brought about by the influence of traditional society are extremely high. As in the case of the Arab world, excessive suppression and restriction of sexual contact between men and women is very likely to provoke strong resistance, which in turn increases the

shame, repression and desire of teenagers regarding sex, ultimately increasing their likelihood of committing sexual crimes and causing the rate of juvenile sexual crimes to continue to rise.

3 Discussion

This paper does consider most of the factors influencing adolescent sexual misconduct, but it still has some shortcomings, such as not discussing innate genetic factors.

Coccaro's study investigated the heritability of self-reported personality traits associated with impulsivity, irritability, and suppression of confidence or aggressive behavior in identical and fraternal twins. The study included age-matched and age-matched twins. Both conventional methods and model-fitting procedures were used to examine factor 1 (lack of confidence/aggression) and factor 2 (impulsiveness and irritability). The model-fitting results showed that both factors were influenced by genetic factors rather than environmental factors. Bivariate model-fitting analysis indicated that while there were differences in self-reported "irritability and impulsivity" and "(lack) confidence/aggression," both showed significant genetic influence (Coccaro, 1993).

The above study introduced a gene-family interaction model, showing that impulsivity/irritability has a genetic basis, and that genetic impulsivity is amplified by family factors, but its expression is moderated by the family environment. The example of the heritability of personality traits in identical and fraternal twins mentioned in the paper supports this viewpoint.

Therefore, this paper is insufficient because it does not consider the potential influence of biological factors on juvenile sexual offenses. Future research will focus on exploring biological factors in depth, hoping to provide a comprehensive explanation for the occurrence of juvenile sexual offenses.

4. Conclusion

In summary, all the above viewpoints and their supporting evidence indicate that juvenile sexual offenses are caused by a variety of factors, including but not limited to family environment, education, peer influence, cultural differences, and biological factors, which will be further investigat-

ed. While these factors are supported by relevant textual cases, errors may still exist, and further experiments are needed to approach the correct conclusion.

This paper has mentioned the influence of cultural differences on juvenile sexual offenses, but discussing only Arab and Jewish examples is incomplete, unrepresentative, and lacks generalizability. To improve this, future research will explore other national cultures and conduct relevant experiments to support the arguments.

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