Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to inform the reader about the currently employed theories, research, and interventions in developmental criminology, with a particular emphasis on parental influences.

**Design/methodology/approach** – As well as evoking the classical theories and relevant research in psychology and developmental criminology fields, some of the significant recent contributions are also evaluated to reveal how parenting is linked to youngsters’ delinquency in the extant literature.

**Findings** – While parental factors do not directly affect delinquency of children and adolescents, it is an effectual mediator.

**Research limitations** – Not a systematic (statistical) review, rather a hermeneutic one with righteous justifications.

**Practical implications** – Evidence-based suggestions, regarding the allocation of time and resources for the modification of implicated parenting factors in planning preventative and interventional programs, are made.

**Originality/value** – This review is an up-to-date instructional source that presents the major developmental criminology theories including the recent ones.

**Keywords** Antisocial behaviour, Parenting, Juvenile delinquency, Forensic psychology, Delinquency, Developmental criminology

**Paper type** General review

Introduction

Parenting refers to the values, beliefs, and attitudes adopted by and reflected in the behaviors of a parent as a socialization agent toward his/her child (Hoghughi and Long, 2004). Unfavorable developmental outcomes such as academic underachievement, conduct problems, and criminal involvement are often associated with a list of parental factors including insecure attachment behaviors (e.g. Kim et al., 2010), poor parenting style, frequent parental change (e.g. Fergusson et al., 2004), intense interparental conflict (e.g. Greeson et al., 2014), early parental victimization (e.g. Boel-Studt and Renner, 2013), insufficient parental support/involvement (e.g. Yang and McLoyd, 2015), and low parental SES (Hope et al., 2003; Fergusson et al., 2004). This review particularly concerns the parental factors that influence the relationship between parenting and delinquency of youngsters.

Throughout this review, delinquency will be used interchangeably with criminal involvement, perpetration of criminal acts, offending, and deviance seen in young people who did not yet complete their 18th years of age, therefore who are legally children. Harassment issues like school bullying, spanking, and narcotic addiction are also taken into the definition of delinquency here, since they are indicators of youngsters’ propensity to act delinquently. Delinquency is a palpable and predictable consequence of the diverse interactions between personal (e.g. temperament, predispositions, attitudes, and genes), and environmental variables (e.g. parenting, parental factors, peer circle, residential setting) (Burt et al., 2012; McGuire, 2004). Forecasting when and by whom criminal acts would be carried out is one outstanding aim of developmental criminal psychology, since foreseeing future deviant behavior would trigger prevention efforts, and help with the maintenance of a safe and healthy society. In the same vein, understanding the liaisons and interactions between parents and their youngsters’ criminality would benefit the construction of effective interventions to cut back on existing crime rates. This is important, because the legal, ethical, psychological, and...
economic costs of crime are high, and they pose a major burden on society (DeLisi and Vaughn, 2014; Hope et al., 2003). Consequently, disentangling the relative influences of contributing factors is an impending task for the practitioners and researchers in related fields.

Against this backdrop, the aim of this review is to enlighten the role of parents in the formation of child and adolescent criminal involvement. The review is designed such that first the theories and models explaining youth delinquency at least partially as a function of parents will be unveiled together with recent research findings; afterwards examples to useful prevention and intervention schedules will be shared, with their strengths and practical implications.

Theories and research indicating parental impact on youth delinquency

While the main characteristic of childhood status (⩽18 years of age) is its condition of dependency due to social and psychological immaturity, this dependency status results in different forms of criminal involvement (Finkelhor, 2007). This section elaborates on possible parental influences on juvenile and adolescent delinquency, according to different theories and related research. Rather than the classical and well-known psychology-originated explanations used for delinquency such as Sigmund Freud’s Frustration-Aggression Theory or Julian Rotter’s Social Learning Theory, less known but currently highly acclaimed ones originated in sociology or criminology are preferred.

The presentation order of these theories is intentional. First, the social control explanation of youth criminality will be presented. The Social Bonding Theory (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990), the Self-Control Theory (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990) and the Age-graded Theory of Informal Social Control (Laub and Sampson, 1993) are versions of “social control” theories. They ground on the tenet that society as an environmental factor forces people to abide by the norms, and to practice self-control. Insufficient self-control has been tied to behavioral and impulse-control issues, including overeating, substance abuse, violent behavior, delinquency, sexually impulsive behavior, unwanted pregnancy, and overspending (e.g. Baumeister et al., 2007; Farrington and Welsh, 2007; Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). Parenting, besides the other socialization trainers such as the educational institutions, is a major societal tool to shape unimpulsive, norm-abiding citizens. Therefore, according to these three theories, delinquency may be a “direct” reflection of inefficient parenting.

The second explanation of delinquency is based on inborn characteristics. The At-Risk Infant (based on neurological deficits) Model (van Goozen et al., 2007), the Temperament-based Theory (DeLisi and Vaughn, 2014), and the Developmental Taxonomic Model (Moffitt, 1993) emphasize the genetic and biological influences. Here inadequate parenting and adverse family environment emerge as “mediating” stimuli on the linkage between youngsters’ genetic/biological makeup and their social drift toward criminality (Baglivio et al., 2015; McGuire, 2004; Hoghughi and Long, 2004).

Another explanation of youngsters’ deviant behavior is an extension of the Social Learning Theory. Marshall and Barbaree’s Integrated Theory and the Differential Association Theory are the leading examples. Their fundamental principle says, from very early infancy on, children learn which values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors are appreciated and which are reproached. The likelihood of children’s replicating the appreciated behaviors is high, while it is low for the reproached behaviors. According to these theories, deviant, deviance-favoring, and deviance- permissive parenting might bring forth deviant behaviors in children.

More information about the representatives of these theories and selected research applications are presented below.

Self-Control Theory or the General Theory of Crime

It is the product of a theory improvement endeavor, which led Gottfredson and Hirschi, in their 1990 book A General Theory of Crime (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990) to make the claim that all criminal and deviant behavior can be explained by the one-dimensional trait “low self-control.” According to this, having high self-control makes a person considerably less likely to commit criminal acts for a lifetime, while being at the opposite end of the self-control spectrum doomed
one to be a persistent criminal. The General Theory was constructed to be a generic one applicable to anybody irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity, or social status and valid for any type of crime. Since both crime and deviant behavior arise from low self-control, individuals with low self-control are likely to be repeat offenders (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). Gottfredson and Hirschi believed that low-control adolescents tend to bring their criminal tendency into adulthood. The main differentiating characteristic that predisposes such people to crime is impulsivity, or acting out before thinking about the results (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). The definition of self-control as a stable trait limits its applicability. Therefore, while Social Control Theory is a significant explanation of continued crime patterns and criminal careers, it fails to elucidate one-time or sporadic offenses peculiar to adolescence.

This theory proposes that it is social bonds (Hirschi, 1969) that confine impulsive and deviant urges. Attachment to parents, family stability, and attachments to school are among these social bonds. When a person’s attachments with these social entities fall apart, engagement in deviance will start to take its toll on the person and the society. Deviance may be in the form of nonconformity with familial, societal, institutional, organizational, or statutory rules. Social control theory clarifies the associations between social disadvantage (e.g. coming from a broken family, low education level, low income level) and crime, whereby socio-economic inequality deteriorates informal social control systems (e.g. parental, peer and public pressure, eyewitness intervention, or neighborhood guardianship to ensure norm conformity), which eventually increases crime rates (Fergusson et al., 2004; Alarid et al., 2000). The existence of punishments or disciplinary sanctions in society backs up the maintenance of communal stability and order by the suppression of public criminal activity. Law abidance by most citizens is generally a function of other dynamics such as positive reinforcement or reward for socially accepted behavior, and informal social controls employed within close social circle. However, for the highly experienced and thus ostracized individuals, disciplinary or punitive sanctions or public reproach may have lost their impacts (Fergusson et al., 2004; Alarid et al., 2000).

In a study conducted in the USA with a sample of 160 women, the relationships among intimate partner violence (IPV), mothers’ parenting practices, and their children’s externalizing behaviors were assessed over three data collection periods (Greeson et al., 2014). All of these women were from low socio-economic background, and all were seriously victimized (i.e. physically assaulted) by their intimate partners several times. Path analysis showed IPV led to externalizing problems in children as well as higher maternal authoritative parenting. It was a surprising finding, since it was expected to find that higher levels of IPV contributed to more child behavior problems due to its mediating effects on maternal parenting. In other words, mothers were expected to show defective parenting after IPV, yet they tried to compensate the negative effect of IPV through opting for a better parenting style, the authoritative one. As a result of path analysis, it was overt that the increase in child externalization problems was an indirect result of constant cumulative IPV experiences (rather than inefficient parenting), which deteriorated children’s bonds to society and made them act impulsively. The results may still be interpreted in light of Gottfredson and Hirschi’s (1990) contention that the chief source of low self-control is ineffective parenting, which refers to the composite parenting behaviors of both mother and father. Although mothers became better parents in time, paternal behaviors might have led to an increase in externalization problems.

**Age-graded theory of informal social control**

It was proposed by Sampson and Laub in 1993. It is a variant of the social control theory. The difference lies in its prediction that the relationship between parenting and delinquency is time-dependent. With changing life circumstances and the formation of new social bonds to friends, work life or marriage, the juvenile trajectories of criminal involvement may mutate, as a result of which the penetrating and evocative effects of early childhood adverse family experiences gradually taper off (Laub and Sampson, 1993).

Laub and Sampson challenged the senselessness of an “invariant or deterministic” image of human development (Schroeder et al., 2010, p. 310). While it is true that interpersonal deficits arising from early family practices (including parenting) interfere with the development of healthy adult adjustment to society and hence there are some stabilities in criminal careers, for many developing human beings there are also turning points, some of which arising naturally over time, others
ensuing certain life events. Thus, criminal involvement patterns from participation, to maintenance, escalation, and desistance, and criminal involvement motives from pleasure to subsistence are not essentially steady across different stages of development from childhood to death. Then, a framework that explains juvenile delinquency may not be applicable for explaining adult cases.

To test their assumption, Laub and Sampson monitored a sample of boys in residential institutions up until they turned 70 years of age, and personally interviewed 52 of them including those who recorded little progress as well as those who developed very good prognosis keeping in mind the level of their former troubling behavior and psychological state (Sampson et al., 2006). The study revealed that many life-changing experiences including a stable marriage had a protective effect against crime involvement: a decline in crime roughly around 40 percent was reported associated with a change in marital status (Sampson et al., 2006). Laub’s interviews indicated that marriage provided not only a stable and committed attachment relationship, but also created a new affiliation unit and a new peer circle, besides the pervasive steering by the wife. As a result, marriage was purported to be a life-changing experience, where new social bonds are formed. Another study of Sampson and Laub showed that in a similar way to marriage, military service positively affected refrainment from deviance, signposting alternative ways of socio-economic improvement for the disadvantaged via embedded educational opportunities and informally enforced delay of marriage (Sampson and Laub, 1996).

To further test their theory, Laub and Sampson also carried out a longitudinal study with 1,000 participants and revealed that there was a particular continuity from juvenile deviance to adulthood crime, yet significant life events related with family and employment somehow changed the aspects of criminality. These studies validated their assumptions that life changing events providing positive life experiences can help much to counter the dire outcomes of early adversities if they can put a stop to the past and provide new opportunities.

The age-graded theory of Sampson and Laub was tested by many other researchers. For example, in a study using a large sample in Ohio, the USA (Schroeder et al., 2010), two measurements were taken with a ten-year interval, in adolescence and in adulthood. With this study, the effect of race on parenting and crime involvement linkage from adolescence to adulthood was addressed the first time in the criminological literature. Remarkably, results revealed that adult social bonds (e.g. having a romantic partner) did not exert a significant mediating influence in the relationship between any of the parenting measures employed and adult criminality, contrary to the age-graded theory. Although love affairs did not influence criminal-engagements well into adulthood among neither White nor Black samples, employment bonds did. In explanation of this finding, the researchers implicated the transformed quality of romantic relationships since the conception of this theory (Schroeder et al., 2010). This study further disclosed that the direct effects of parenting style on adult criminality varied notably by race, while the long-term effects of parenting worked slightly differently among African American and White respondents. Within the Black sample, indulgent and uninvolved parenting styles were concomitant with meaningfully higher criminal involvement in adulthood, while such a significant influence of parenting on criminality was not observed within the White sample. Uninvolved parenting aggravated negative affect for both the White and Black individuals, which then augmented the criminality scores in adulthood. Another finding was that Black parents drew on anger, while Whites used depression and anger together as a trampoline affect-state linking their former (juvenile) uninvolved parenting experiences with later (adult) crime involvement.

This study expanded Sampson and Laub’s age-graded theory in that it demonstrated the long-term impact of parental behaviors on adult criminality depended somewhat less on the formation of life-changing social bonds than on negative affect. In other words, the core social psychological mechanism linking adolescent parenting practices and adult criminal offending was divulged to be negative affect (i.e. anger and depression in this study). Besides, parenting devoid of demandingness (alone or coupled with deficiencies in responsiveness), aggravated adult crime involvement for the Blacks, a finding which emphasized the importance of strictness and supervision (i.e. social control) among African American parents in discouraging criminal behavior in their children. This study also demonstrated that a new variable, race, could be situated in the age-graded theory as a mediating factor with potential to explain some of the variance in the childhood parenting experiences-adulthood offending linkage.
The at-risk infant (based on neurological deficits) model

It was proposed by Fairchild, van Goozen, Calder, and Goodyer in 2007. They formulated an integrative theoretical model linking genetic factors, early adversity, cognitive and neurobiological regulatory mechanisms, and childhood antisocial behavior. In this sense, they provided a combination of classical criminological theories with a biopsychosocial modeling approach. Empirical studies show that all antisocials, including both the adolescence-limited (AL) and life-course-persistent groups, have common modifications in brain morphology and associated neurodevelopmental disorders rendering them more susceptible (at-risk) to criminal involvement. They are tardy in mastering developmental tasks such as walking, talking, playing, reading, and learning in the appropriate time. Compared to normal people, the at-risk infant’s blood cortisol level (that is a biological marker of stress) is elevated, they are irritable and impulsive. Difficulties in affective information processing make them callous and unempathetic toward the emotions and reactions of other people. Disinhibited cognitive functioning leads to impulsivity and hostile bias, while disinhibited emotional functioning culminate in increased anger. For this persistent malady and accompanying drift toward criminality, an interaction of aforementioned individual neurological weaknesses with environmental adversities such as inadequate parenting and pathological background are blamed (van Goozen et al., 2007).

Longitudinal studies demonstrate that adolescence-onset antisocial behavior habitually perseveres into adulthood and the probability of amelioration with enrichments in prosocial perspective and behavior is rather limited (Fairchild et al., 2013). In parallel to the developmental taxonomic theory, the at-risk infant theory claims that childhood-onset antisocial behavior is a life-course persistent (LCP) neurodevelopmental disorder, yet it differs from it concerning the premise that adolescence-onset antisocial behavior does not have neurodevelopmental roots and is limited with the pubertal period (Fairchild et al., 2013). Supporting evidence comes from genetics field. Genes influence brain processes, therefore they are related to neuropsychological and behavioral outcomes. Researchers in the USA used a very large national sample and divulged that “poor parent-child relationship interacts with the genes (MAOA and DATI genotype) to expand risks for both developing low self-control and involvement in delinquent activities” (Watts and McNulty, 2016). Remarkably, while the authors say: “These findings support the utility of self-control theory as a theoretical model to explain previous findings concerning genetics, neuropsychological deficits approximating low self-control, and antisocial behaviors” (p. 486) they are actually giving robust evidence to the At-risk Infant (based on neuropsychological deficits) theory.

Similar theories underpinning the importance of genetic/biological/constitutional factors are DeLisi and Vaughan’s Temperament-based theory and Moffitt’s Developmental Taxonomic Theory. According to DeLisi and Vaughan (2014), effortful control and negative emotionality are very important constructs for the scientific differentiation of normative vs pathological behavior, as much as for the right functioning of the criminal justice system. Unresolved self-regulation problems coupled with a coercive relational style rooted in negative emotionality may be featuring the transformation of today’s difficult to soothe infant into tomorrow’s repeat-criminal adult.

The Developmental Taxonomic Theory was proposed in 1993. It assumes that LCP antisocial behavior is a neurodevelopmental malady, while AL antisocial behavior is ephemeral and basically emerges under influence of an antisocial friend circle (Moffitt, 1993). Age and crime linkage is mediated by both genetic makeup (e.g. temperament) and a history of adverse childhood environment including the maltreatment, and deprivation of basic affective, cognitive and/or material resources. Conventional developmental processes are thought to be interrupted on the LCP trajectory, since they present with symptoms of severe neurobiological deficits which intermingle with poor and criminogenic environments in early infantile years. At large, the pathological infantile histories include neurocognitive problems, behavioral problems, and inadequate (e.g. neglectful, avoidant, inconsistent, and punitive) parenting. Neurobiological difficulties in criminals who started their offending careers very early in life were confirmed by later research (Fairchild et al., 2013; Baglivio et al., 2015).

Marshall and Barbaree’s integrated theory

It was constructed as a general model of sexual crime and was employed to explain the genesis of child sexual abuse besides the other varieties of sexual deviance (Marshall and Barbaree, 1990).
It underscores the associations between childhood attachment problems and involvement in sexual offenses later in life. This is the first theory, which suggests that a personal history of developmental adversities (e.g., attachment problems) and being sexually abused would prepare the ground for personal perpetration of sexual assaults afterwards. Marshall and Marshall (2000) assume that nasty and malfunctioning relationships with parents is the first etiological factor leading a developing child to sexual offending. Research outcomes back up this assumption demonstrating that the developmental backgrounds of sexual offenders are marked with considerably high family dysfunction, abuse (i.e., physical, sexual, emotional, or combined forms) and relational problems (Gendreau et al., 2000; Sigre-Leirós et al., 2016; Mannix et al., 2013). For instance, the interviews with a forensic psychiatric sample at a high security hospital on the reasons of sexual abuse of children included statements like this: “I was abused as a kid. I felt that it was the norm to have sex with children (Mannix et al., 2013, p. 269).”

A number of distal and proximal antecedents and precipitators interact in this general theory of sexual offending to explain the progression of child sexual abuse (Marshall and Barbaree, 1990). The commencement of adolescence is a critical phase for the attainment of stable sexual schema and scripts, interest and attitudes. The transition to adolescence is particularly difficult for a susceptible individual with unfavorable childhood experiences. Being bereaved of normative sexual scripts, self-regulation and social abilities crucial for the development and maintenance of salutogenic heterosexual relationships, the adolescent could have a hard time coping with the enormous biological and cognitive changes like the surge of sex hormones and alertness in perception of sexual cues.

Some adolescents have a greater proclivity to be stimulated by these driving forces and tend to learn satiating their sexual or emotional needs aberrantly via force and violence. Drawing on the same neural structures, drives for aggression and sexuality might be perceived as analogous (Ward and Siegert, 2002). These adolescents may have beliefs of male superiority and approach heterosexual relations exclusively sexually. The positive (e.g., sexual arousal, sense of power) or negative (e.g., reduction of low mood) reinforcing effects of deviant sexual activity, and the development of implicit theories (cognitive distortions and maladaptive cognitive schemata regarding sexuality and children’s behaviors) support further offending (Sampson and Laub, 1996; Sigre-Leirós et al., 2016). For instance, at the high secure psychiatric hospital mentioned above, an inmate with child abusing history said about his victim: “She teased me […] most of the time it was her who started it” (Mannix et al., 2013, p. 269) and ignored the child’s vulnerable status, distorting child image to an equal-status grown-up individual.

For Marshall and Barbaree it is likely for anybody to offend if there are predisposing conditions. If such conditions are dominant, sexual deviance is only a matter of opportunity. When disinhibiting conditions against sexual deviance are weak, crime is less likely even if there is opportunity.

Integrated Theory can, in particular, explain male predilection for child sexual abuse, in terms of vulnerability to commit sexual offense due to multiple factors, such as the lack of proper same-sex parental figures as role models during the adolescent period, and the inability to fight the temptation when there is opportunity to sexually offend. Integrated Theory have been criticized for not amply handling the issue of individual differences in describing sexual offender’s intimacy deficit; for example, rapists are often categorized as hostile and detached, while incest offenders are often coded as dependent and fearful (Ward and Siegert, 2002).

Differential Association Theory developed by the famous sociologist Edwin Sutherland in 1939 and 1947 (Matsueda, 1998) proposes that criminal involvement is a function of learning experiences, in the milieu of rudimentary life events. The rights and wrongs learned from the proximal networks, especially from the parents, become one’s thoughts and attitudes over time. The power of Sutherland’s theory is its wide scale applicability across all layers of society, not being only limited with lower-class delinquency in ramshackle slums of the city. The tenets of differential association theory are comparable to those of psychological learning theories. The greatest weakness of the theory is its conception of personality as a rather passive agent in criminal behavior acquisition. In terms of the parental influences, the Differential Association theory asserts that inefficient parenting or “bad parenting” engenders criminogenic learning, whereby a child also internalizes aggressive attitudes (Unnever et al., 2006).
Leading interventions against youngsters’ crime-involvement, and the role of parenting

Considering the expensiveness of both comprehensive rehabilitation and detention of delinquents in correctional centers, empowering evidence-based prevention programs well before a long-lasting and persistent criminal career begins would be a contribution to society (De Vries et al., 2014). If the objective of policy makers and practitioners is substantial behavioral change in the desired direction, prevention and interventions should be based on rigorous research outcomes of sound theories in the related fields (Hoeye et al., 2009; Kazdin, 2001). According to Risk-Need Responsivity Model, tailor-made preventative and rehabilitative programs matching in intensity to individual offender’s crime-involvement risk level, relating to his/her specific criminogenic needs (e.g. delinquent peers, drug misuse, antisocial values and attitudes, lack of problem-solving skills) and sensitive to the idiosyncratic learning style would increase the targeted impact level (Andrews et al., 2007). Multidimensional programs combining manifold modules (e.g. coping skills, stress-management, cognitive skills, problem-solving techniques, social communication skills) for parents, youths, and their proximal and distal environment, hence dealing with various direct and indirect factors influencing the youngsters’ crime involvement are thought to be more beneficial than very strictly structured and inflexible programs in juvenile crime prevention (De Vries et al., 2014; Borduin et al., 1995; Henggeler and Schaeffer, 2010, 2016).

Multisystemic therapy (MST) is a widespread and effective juvenile crime intervention program that lasts three to five months (Borduin et al., 1995; Henggeler and Schaeffer, 2010, 2016). It is especially well suited to the rehabilitation of crime-involved youngsters from multi-problem families and enhancement of their parents with new skills. Targeted individual problems may include learning disorders, temperamental adversity, hostile attributions, and social-skill deficiencies. Deleterious parental attachment issues, malfunctioning parenting and disciplinary practices, and escalated marital conflict are some of the family problems addressed by means of family therapy. Community issues calling for change include involvement in disordered multi-organizational networks, gang membership, and drug abuse. Unavailability of needed educational resources, absenteeism and interpersonal incivility are among the scholarly problems needing intervention. The effectiveness of MST for change is recurrently established by the scientifically robust experimental studies (randomized controlled trials) of independent researchers and organizations as well as the dedicated team in The Family Services Research Center at the Medical University of South Carolina, which is responsible for the development, validation, and propagation of treatments for severely clinical adolescents (Henggeler and Schaeffer, 2010).

The therapy is based on a flexible, individualized behavior modification technique, and addresses numerous elements impacting the particular unwanted behaviors of the antisocial youngster and his/her parents. The aim is to reduce youngster’s criminal activities and antisocial behavior in addition to empower their parents with behavioral tools to cope with the undesirable behavior of their kids. Enhancement of prosocial behavior, reduction of impulsivity, externalization and internalization problems and a parallel drop in incarceration and out-of-home placements are the underpinned targets. Scott Henggeler initiated this program for individual, household, and system intervention based on the ecological-model at the University of Virginia in the mid-1970s. Commissioned by the state’s Department of Pediatrics to treat antisocial children of the most problematic character, Henggeler started to see the adolescents in their homes; subsequently realizing that children should be observed and treated in the complete milieu of their daily lives with the help of social workers, probation experts, educators, and after-school program counselors, he developed such a compact intervention. Now, the practitioners at this center visit not only crime-involved youngsters’ homes and families, but also their schools, teachers, neighborhoods, and friends.

Currently, research on MST has very encouraging outcomes, having been spread from the USA across 15 different nations including Australia, Norway, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. Since its theoretical basis is rooted in the ecologically nested systems model of the Russian-American developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner, the practitioners of MST interpret a youngster’s behavior in terms of all circumambient sociocultural influences arising from the
A vast community, its systems (health, educational, recreational, social care and all other agencies the youngster has contact with such as the juvenile justice system), the neighborhood, extended family, school/work, peer/colleague circle, and the nuclear family (Borduin et al., 1995).

Annually, 23,000 youth and families go through MST for change interventions. Over 100 peer reviewed journal articles have already been published before the start of 2016 by miscellaneous researchers across the world. The results of recent MST studies demonstrate its widespread success with repeat and violent juvenile offenders (Henggeler and Schaeffer, 2016): For example, Norwegian, British, and Dutch studies reported MST helped the criminally active youngsters become more socially competent, while decreasing their externalizing and internalizing behaviors, and out-of-home placements, with at least one-year maintenance in positive behavioral change. Observations regarding significant parenting improvements due to MST were ubiquitous. Associated with the therapy program, enormous amounts of cost savings (as much as $343,455 per sex-offender MST participant in the USA) were reported.

New perspectives (NP) is a relatively less well-known multidimensional and community-based program born in the Netherlands. This short-term prevention schedule with strong theoretical foundations in Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change (a complementary biopsychosocial model of purposeful behavior change) and Risk-Needs-Responsivity model (delineating the characteristics of effective rehabilitation programs) addresses the individuals at the brink of adopting a persistent criminal career. So, compared to MST, NP is a preventive rather than interventional program which is suitable for predelinquents or one-time offenders rather than violent and persistent offenders. The effectiveness of this highly individualized prevention program is evaluated in terms of decreased problem behavior (e.g. antisocial behavior, offending, and recidivism) and life quality improvements (e.g. better relationships with family and friends; self-esteem enhancements and decline in cognitive misrepresentations). Predelinquent individuals aged between 12 and 23 years experiencing problems in several realms of life (e.g. school, family, friends, leisure time), and having propensity for a deviant life style (e.g. cherishing antisocial values, having trivial police contacts) are suitable for the prevention. At the time of referral, adolescents and their parents are enlightened about the schedule which consists of a three-month rigorous coaching period with a three-month aftercare follow-up. The social care practitioners serve on a 7/24 schedule, and their services include setting goals together with the youngster, challenging tough issues with knowledge, confidence and skill, coaching, motivational interviewing for smooth behavior modification, strengthening ties with the social support systems by involvement of parents, friends and teachers, helping with cognitive restructuring, teaching problem-solving skills, and role-modeling. Earlier empirical NP studies revealed positive changes in parenting, social relationships and crime involvement attitudes and behavior (De Vries et al., 2014).

Conclusion via an exemplar research case

This review focused on the theories and research about the criminal involvement of children and adolescents. Based on extant literature in relevant fields, the authors tried to make out the case for the conflation of multiple parental factor trajectories. Overall, the stuff presented hereby or could not be included in the compass of this review indicated to the authors that there are a lot more convergent than divergent tendencies regarding the direct and mediating relationships of parental factors to youth crime involvement.

Recently there are incrementally more meta-analytical (e.g. see Fairchild et al., 2013) and empirical studies (Fergusson et al., 2004; Heidi et al., 2010; Hoeve et al., 2009; Unnever et al., 2006), which compare or test multiple theories simultaneously, thereby revealing the relative importance of factors promoted in these theories. Since one of these studies (i.e. Fergusson et al., 2004) made an attempt to summarize the respective explanatory powers of leading developmental criminology theories mentioned previously in this paper (i.e. self-control theory, differential association theory) it would be enhancing to share their assumptions and findings as an exemplar research case.

In this study based in the Netherlands and including 603 participants, parenting did not emerge as a direct influence on delinquency against the researchers’ assumptions; rather, self-control,
delinquent attitudes, peer delinquency, and time spent in criminogenic settings were affected by a number of parenting factors (i.e. limit setting, monitoring, maintaining high quality relationships), which in turn predicted criminal involvement. On the condition that the effects of these four variables drawn from major criminological theories were added together, they could fully explain crime involvement. In other words, parenting is the antecedent to many factors which directly influence delinquency: parenting influences whether the youngster knows and stands by the social norms (self-control theory), how positively he/she evaluates norm violation (differential association theory), and with whom (differential association theory) he/she spends time.

Moreover, yielding support to the age-graded theory of informal socialization by Sampson and Laub, the data indicated that changes in delinquent attitudes and peer delinquency directly led to changes in delinquency; yet, remarkably, changes in parenting preceded this causality. This finding denotes that although adolescents become more oriented to spend more time with friends out of home as they grow up, and attain more autonomy and rights, parents still have a determining power concerning their friendships and crime-related attitudes.

The practical implication of this study is that parental control and support are two important, indirectly protective factors precluding youngsters from involvement in crime by influencing self-control, delinquent attitudes, peer delinquency, and time spent in criminogenic setting; hence families should be trained about how to control (i.e. monitor and set limits) and support (i.e. via high quality relationship) their children and adolescents, if prevention of crime involvement is desired. The theoretical implication of this study, on the other hand, is that an integrative approach would better predict criminality. While individual factors central to each theory fall short of explaining criminal involvement, combined together, the featuring factors of many theories can fully explain it.

**Brief notes regarding a change in youth crime-involvement patterns**

First, it is easier and more effective to prevent youngsters’ nonconformity, deviant behaviors, and progressive drift to criminal involvement, than intervening after the signs of undesirable behaviors are apparent. Therefore, preventions should be given primary funds and attention. However, when preventions were not planned ahead wisely and the target groups were not ethically and accurately identified and recruited, the outcomes may turn out to be frustrating. An example to such an ill-formed and executed prevention is the Troubled Families Program (Bate, 2016) launched in 2012 by the Department of Communities and Local Government in the UK. It reserved a large budget (£448 m) to rehabilitate 120,000 “families from hell” as dubbed by David Cameron after the 2011 riots. Since the target group was publicly stigmatized, this program started as an ethical mistake. Target misformulation led to recruitment of truly poor and disadvantaged but hardly dysfunctional and antisocial people. The outcome was failure, disillusionment about science, and loss of huge funds which could have been usefully put in service of people. Second, effective parenting seems to be a more rewarding source of intervention, because it has the potential to affect many leading risk factors (i.e. self-control, delinquent attitudes, peer circle, time spent in criminogenic setting). Nurse Family Partnership Program is an effective one administered by nurses to at-risk mothers in their home environment. Functional family therapy is another in-house program applied by therapists. It is successful in improvement of family motivation, problem solving, and engagement issues. Third, when family, school, or community interventions are prepared, low self-control (high impulsivity), and aggressive attitudes should be targeted for modification in youngsters, since they are the most frequently observed predictors of criminal involvement. Aggression Replacement Training is a proven program in prevention of recidivism via increasing moral reasoning, aggression, and anger management. Fourth, finding an unfailing method to improve self-control is desirable, since it would not only illuminate how an individual functions without going deviant, but also be practical for parents, educators, and therapists to shape the norm-abiding individual. Alternative thinking strategies were developed to promote emotional and social skills in elementary school children so that they can grow up in accord with their community. Fifth, early life adversities can be countered by life changing events designed by the state institutions to provide positive life experiences, thereby ceasing the past negativity and offering new positive opportunities. Of course causing real life changes needs resource allocations and macro-level arrangements, but even small
modifications would indicate there is hope for a better life. Sixth, people should be mindful of children around, as informal control agents. If there is indication of being abused sexually, physically, or emotionally, or if there are signs of a nasty and malfunctioning relationships with parents, the etiological factors leading a developing child to offending, they should inform the responsible bodies. Introduction of legal policies and regulations to facilitate informal control and announcement of them by popular and respected figures and authorities would be beneficial in increasing policy adoption. Seventh, to lift the stress on developing disadvantaged children and adolescents, the state should provide some advantages which will decrease the gap between different socio-economic layers.

Research limitations

This paper draws on a hermeneutic analysis of parenting and sub-adult delinquency literature accumulated in the last 30 years. Hermeneutic analysis is a deliberate choice, since this topic requires more clarification and insight than information gathering and statistical analysis due to the widespread availability of already accumulated and numerically summarized data. Hermeneutic review is based on Ludwig Wittgenstein’s philosophy, and suits best to the analysis of ill-defined, interdisciplinary, and practical subject fields (Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014). In this frame, the way parenting interacts with child and adolescent delinquency is apt for hermeneutic work. While the aim of hermeneutic review is to get a better intellectual grasp of a field, immaculate insight will never be attained, and this emerges as a research limitation. It should also be expressed that although hermeneutic review is quite different from a statistical systematic review in its emphasis on reflection and interpretation, it is not haphazard. On the contrary, the search phase requires a highly systematic process of filtering search terms, trailing references, and sub-references and keeping in mind related information, and recording them in harmony (Greenhalgh, 2016).

References


Further reading


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