

1925

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### Recommended Citation

John Slawson, Size of Family and Male Juvenile Delinquency, 15 J. Am. Inst. Crim. L. & Criminology 631 (May 1924 to February 1925)

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## SIZE OF FAMILY AND MALE JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

JOHN SLAWSON<sup>1</sup>

The size of the families of delinquent boys as judged from the number of children in their families has generally been considered by social workers as a factor meriting consideration from the point of view of delinquency causation. The general trend of thought in this direction has been that an influence might be exerted upon the production of boyhood delinquency by the presence of large families among delinquent boys with the possible consequences of congestion and parental neglect, especially in the homes of an inferior social status where facilities for the proper upbringing of a large number of children are generally unavailable.

In order to determine this possible influence upon delinquency we collected data relative to the size of families of delinquent boys in three institutions for delinquent boys in New York State in connection with a larger study which we were then making.<sup>2</sup> The populations of these institutions are typical of those generally found in New York State institutions for delinquent boys. The data on 1,522 delinquent boys were collected individually for each boy from the history books kept at these institutions, which number represents the total population at these institutions during the time the study was made. In order to compare to what extent the distribution of number of children in families of delinquents differs from that found in the non-delinquent population we utilized for comparative purposes the data of Burdge who made a study of 147,925 sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen year old employed boys of New York State during the year 1918 for the Military Training Commission of New York State.<sup>3</sup> This study was made by the Military Training Commission for the purpose of obtaining accurate information concerning these employed boys in order to enable them to comply with the Military Training Law which was then in operation. The data were procured by means

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<sup>1</sup>Division of Mental Defect and Delinquency, New York State Board of Charities.

<sup>2</sup>"A Socio-Psychological Study of the Delinquent Boy," by John Slawson, New York State Board of Charities, Albany, N. Y.

<sup>3</sup>"Our Boys," by Howard G. Burdge, State of New York Military Training Commission, Albany, 1921.

of questionnaires sent out to various school systems throughout the State, the filling out of the questionnaires being carefully supervised.

SIZES OF FAMILIES OF DELINQUENT BOYS COMPARED WITH  
THOSE OF NON-DELINQUENT BOYS

In Table I the distributions of number of children in families of delinquent boys found at the three institutions, New York House of Refuge at New York City, State Agricultural and Industrial School at Industry, and the Hawthorne School (Jewish Protectory) at Hawthorne are given together with the distributions of the number of children for all of the three institutions, combined as a unit. The average number of children in the families of boys at each of the institutions and at all of the institutions, combined as a unit, are given at the bottom of the table together with the S. D.'s of these averages.

The distributions of number of children in families of the 147,925 sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen year old employed boys of New York State as obtained by Burdge in his study are also given in this table for comparative purposes. The distributions for the Burdge data are given for his three principal groups separately, namely, for boys living in greater New York, for boys living in cities whose population is over 25,000 and for boys living in cities whose population is under 25,000. All averages and S. D.'s were computed by us from his original data. By comparing these three distributions for non-delinquent employed boys in New York State with the distributions for each of the three institutions for delinquents and for all of the institutions, combined as a unit, we can determine to what extent there is an excess of large families or vice versa among delinquent boys as compared with a group which may be considered for practical purposes as non-delinquent.

If we consider the average for the three institutions, combined as a unit which is 5.23, and compare it with the averages for the three New York State employed boy groups we get the following differences:

|   |      |       |
|---|------|-------|
| Between the average number of children in families of 1,522 delinquent boys and the average number of children in families of 16, 17 and 18 year old employed boys residing in New York City..... | +.74 | ±.041 |
| Between the average for the delinquent group and the average for employed boys residing in cities of over 25,000 population   | +.54 | ±.041 |
| Between the average for the delinquent group and the average for employed boys residing in cities under 25,000 population....   | +.50 | ±.043 |

The differences therefore between the average for our delinquent group and the averages for the three employed boy groups range from +.74 children to +.50 children, depending upon which of the em-

TABLE I

COMPARING THE DISTRIBUTIONS OF NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN FAMILIES OF DELINQUENT BOYS AT THREE INSTITUTIONS WITH SIMILAR DATA OBTAINED BY BURDGE ON 16, 17 AND 18 YEAR OLD EMPLOYED NEW YORK STATE BOYS COMING FROM VARIOUS LOCALITIES

| No. of Children in Family | Delinquent Boys        |          |                          |          |                 |          |                   |          |               |                    | Employed N. Y. State Boys—Burdge |          |          |
|---------------------------|------------------------|----------|--------------------------|----------|-----------------|----------|-------------------|----------|---------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|----------|----------|
|                           | N. Y. House of Refuge. |          | State Agr. and Ind. Sch. |          | Hawthorne Sch.  |          | Three Inst. Comb. |          | Greater N. Y. | Cities Over 25,000 | Cities Under 25,000              | Per Cent | Per Cent |
|                           | No. of Families        | Per Cent | No. of Families          | Per Cent | No. of Families | Per Cent | No. of Families   | Per Cent | Per Cent      | Per Cent           | Per Cent                         | Per Cent | Per Cent |
| 1 .....                   | 42                     | 7.0      | 26                       | 4.1      | 1               | 0.3      | 69                | 4.5      | 7.1           | 7.1                | 6.7                              | 7.1      | 6.7      |
| 2 .....                   | 52                     | 8.7      | 54                       | 8.6      | 9               | 3.2      | 115               | 7.6      | 12.3          | 12.8               | 13.1                             | 12.3     | 13.1     |
| 3 .....                   | 85                     | 14.3     | 65                       | 10.4     | 21              | 7.0      | 171               | 11.2     | 16.2          | 15.3               | 15.9                             | 16.2     | 15.9     |
| 4 .....                   | 75                     | 12.6     | 97                       | 15.4     | 44              | 14.8     | 216               | 14.2     | 17.4          | 15.4               | 15.5                             | 17.4     | 15.5     |
| 5 .....                   | 118                    | 19.8     | 109                      | 17.4     | 66              | 22.1     | 293               | 19.2     | 16.2          | 14.3               | 13.4                             | 16.2     | 13.4     |
| 6 .....                   | 83                     | 14.0     | 96                       | 15.3     | 48              | 16.1     | 227               | 14.9     | 12.7          | 12.3               | 11.5                             | 12.7     | 11.5     |
| 7 .....                   | 64                     | 10.7     | 78                       | 12.4     | 49              | 16.4     | 191               | 12.5     | 8.9           | 9.2                | 9.1                              | 8.9      | 9.1      |
| 8 .....                   | 39                     | 6.5      | 53                       | 8.4      | 38              | 12.8     | 130               | 8.5      | 4.9           | 6.4                | 6.7                              | 4.9      | 6.7      |
| 9 .....                   | 20                     | 3.4      | 26                       | 4.1      | 14              | 4.7      | 60                | 4.0      | 2.5           | 3.9                | 3.5                              | 2.5      | 3.5      |
| 10 or more.....           | 18                     | 3.0      | 24                       | 3.9      | 8               | 2.6      | 50                | 3.4      | 1.8           | 3.3                | 4.6                              | 1.8      | 4.6      |
| Totals .....              | 596                    | 100.0    | 628                      | 100.0    | 298             | 100.0    | 1522              | 100.0    | 100.0         | 100.0              | 100.0                            | 100.0    | 100.0    |
| Averages .....            | 4.90                   |          | 5.27                     |          | 5.81            |          | 5.23              |          | 4.49          | 4.69               | 4.73                             | 4.49     | 4.73     |
| Standard Deviations.      | 2.29                   |          | 2.35                     |          | 1.90            |          | 2.27              |          | 2.14          | 2.34               | 2.40                             | 2.14     | 2.40     |

ployed boy groups is used for the comparison. All of these differences, of course, indicate a greater number of children among the delinquent group but as can be seen the differences, although reliable, are rather small.

If instead of simply considering the central tendencies of the distributions of number of children in families of delinquent boys and among New York State boys, we make comparisons on the basis of the proportion of large families in these groups, we get another view of the relative preponderance of number of children in families of delinquent boys as compared with those of non-delinquents. In Table II the percentages of delinquent boys and the percentages of New York State employed boys coming from families consisting of seven children or more are given. The percentage for the employed boy group was obtained by weighting proportionally the total percentages of the six locality groups as given by Burdge.

TABLE II

PROPORTIONS AMONG DELINQUENTS AND NON-DELINQUENTS COMING FROM FAMILIES OF SEVEN CHILDREN OR MORE

| Group  | Per Cent |
|--|----------|
| New York House of Refuge.....                    | 23.6     |
| State Agricultural and Industrial School.....    | 28.8     |
| Hawthorne School .....                           | 36.5     |
| Three Institutions for Delinquents Combined..... | 28.4     |
| Employed New York State Boys.....                | 20.9     |

From these percentages it will become evident that there is a slight preponderance of large families among delinquent boys as compared with those of non-delinquents, namely, 28.4 in the former group, and 20.9 in the latter. The greatest proportion of large families is found among the delinquent boys of the Hawthorne School.

#### THE INFLUENCE OF DENSITY OF POPULATION UPON SIZE OF FAMILY

It will be noted upon the examination of the distributions of the three non-delinquent employed boy groups, that as the density of the population in the localities from which the non-delinquent employed boys are recruited decreases, the average number of children in the families of these boys increases, i. e., there seems to be an inverse relation between size of families and density of population. If we add to the three groups of employed boys already represented in Table I the other three groups upon whom Burdge obtained his data, this relation becomes more apparent.

| Locality Group              | Average No. of Children | S. D. |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| Boys employed on farms..... | 4.94                    | 2.53  |
| Places under 5,000.....     | 4.84                    | 2.45  |
| Villages over 5,000.....    | 4.70                    | 2.40  |
| Cities under 25,000.....    | 4.73                    | 2.40  |
| Cities over 25,000.....     | 4.69                    | 2.34  |
| Greater New York.....       | 4.49                    | 2.14  |

It will be seen from the above figures that with one slight exception there is a definite tendency for the average number of children to increase as the density of the population of the locality decreases. The locality distributions for each of our delinquent groups are as follows:

| Locality                           | N. Y. House of Refuge | State Agr. & Ind. School | Hawthorne School | All Institutions Combined |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| Greater New York .....             | 56.6                  | .....                    | 100.0            | 42.2                      |
| Cities over 25,000.....            | 24.9                  | 59.9                     | .....            | 34.2                      |
| Cities under 25,000.....           | 6.9                   | 12.6                     | .....            | 7.8                       |
| Villages over 5,000.....           | 3.2                   | 7.9                      | .....            | 4.5                       |
| Places under 5,000 and farms ..... | 8.4                   | 19.6                     | .....            | 11.3                      |
|                                    | <u>100.0</u>          | <u>100.0</u>             | <u>100.0</u>     | <u>100.0</u>              |

From these figures the expected average from the point of view of locality distribution was computed for each of the delinquent groups. These expected averages together with the averages actually obtained and the differences between the two are given below:

| Institution                    | Expected Average | Obtained Average | Difference |
|--------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------|
| New York House of Refuge.....  | 4.60             | 4.90             | .30        |
| State Agr. & Ind. School.....  | 4.73             | 5.27             | .54        |
| Hawthorne School .....         | 4.49             | 5.81             | 1.32       |
| All Institutions Combined..... | 4.63             | 5.23             | .60        |

In every case the obtained average exceeds the expected average by amounts varying from .3 to 1.3, indicating that there is still an excess among the delinquent groups even when the factor of locality is taken into consideration.

THE FACTOR, NATIONALITY

We note that at the Hawthorne School, which consists solely of Jewish boys, the average number of children in the families is larger than at any of the other institutions and of course much larger than among the non-delinquent groups. This is also true when we consider the percentage of boys coming from families consisting of 7 children or more. In this connection we may note also that although

the average number of children at the Hawthorne School (Jewish Protectors) is larger than that at the other two institutions, it can be discerned from Table I that its S. D. is smaller, which implies a relatively smaller variability at this institution, and therefore signifies that there is a greater tendency at this institution for the frequencies of the distribution of number of children to cluster around the central tendency than at the other two institutions. Examining the distribution for the Hawthorne School, we see that there are relatively very few families of 1 or 2 children or even 3 children, but that there is a big aggregation of frequencies of from 5 to 7 children, and that although the average for this group is relatively high and the frequencies for 1 or 2 children are relatively low, the frequency for 10 or more children is lower than that for the other groups. This relatively small variability is an indication of a relative homogeneity of the distribution of number of children among the Hawthorne boys, who are all of Jewish parentage. It would seem, therefore, that in this case the nationalistic factor is operative when we consider either the magnitude of the average, the proportion of large families, or the variability.

With the exception of the data obtained at this institution we have no additional data bearing on this topic, and, consequently, it is impossible to tell definitely to what extent the nationalistic factor might have contributed to the small differences in averages and proportions of large families between delinquents and non-delinquents which we found. Burdge does not make any nationalistic differentiations and hence no comparisons can be made. It seems, however, judging from the trend of the results at the Hawthorne School, that if it were possible to take the nationalistic factor into consideration there might be a reduction of even the small differences between the delinquent and non-delinquent groups which we found. The nationalistic and racial distributions at the three delinquent institutions are roughly as follows:

|                             | American<br>Born<br>Parents<br>(both) | Italian<br>Born<br>Parents<br>(one<br>or both) | Polish<br>Born<br>Parents<br>(one<br>or both) | Jewish<br>Parents | Colored<br>Parents | Other<br>Nation-<br>alities | Total |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|---|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|-------|
| N. Y. House<br>of Refuge..  | 32.4                                  | 26.5   | 4.7   | 11.0              | 9.3                | 16.1                        | 100   |
| State Agr. &<br>Ind. Sch. . | 34.4                                  | 22.1   | 19.5  | 1.4               | 2.3                | 20.3                        | 100   |
| Hawthorne Schl. ....        | ....                                  | ....   | ....  | 100.0             | ....               | ....                        | 100   |

#### THE FACTOR, FOREIGN PARENTAGE

Burdge's data seem to point to the fact that foreign or mixed families tend to be larger than American families. In reference to his

data on this topic Burdge says, "In the case of American boys with American parents the median boys come from families of three and four children while in the mixed and foreign parentage groups the median boy comes from families of five children."<sup>4</sup>

If, therefore, there should be a preponderance of foreign families among our delinquent boys as compared with the employed boys of New York State, the larger averages for number of children which we have obtained for the delinquent groups as compared with the employed boy groups might be partly attributed to the presence of this excess. It is necessary, therefore, to compare the proportions of foreign and American families among our delinquent groups with those among the employed boy groups in order to determine the similarity or dissimilarity of such proportions among the two groups. These percentages are as follows:

|                                     | Foreign and<br>Mixed Parentage | American<br>Parentage |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Delinquent Group .....              | 69.1                           | *30.9                 |
| N. Y. State Employed Boy Group..... | 73.0                           | *27.0                 |

\*Includes colored boys.

It will be seen from the above percentages that the differences between the proportions for the delinquent boys and the New York State employed boys are rather small and it is therefore doubtful whether the factor of foreign parentage has materially influenced the comparisons thus far made.

#### THE FACTOR, SOCIAL STATUS

The effect of social status upon the influence of size of family cannot be determined accurately because Burdge does not make any social status analysis. However, since his data were obtained on *employed* boys there is present, of necessity, in the social status distributions of Burdge's groups a relative preponderance of boys from an inferior social status and a relative dearth of boys of superior social status, due to the fact that boys between sixteen and eighteen years of age who come from the professional and upper middle classes generally continue their education in the high schools or private schools and do not go to work permanently until later years. Hence boys between sixteen and eighteen of the higher social status classes are not well represented in the Burdge groups. Elsewhere we have shown that there is a preponderance of inferior social status among our delin-

<sup>4</sup>Op cit., p. 57.

quent boys.<sup>5</sup> Using the occupational status of the father as an indicator of the social status of his son we get the following data for the delinquent groups relative to their social status:

|   | Average<br>Paternal<br>Occupation | Per Cent<br>Unskilled<br>Workers |
|---|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| New York House of Refuge.....           | Smelter worker                    | 56.0                             |
| State Agricultural and Ind. School..... | Switchman                         | 57.5                             |
| Hawthorne School .....                  | Plumber                           | 24.2                             |

It would appear, therefore, that the social status constitution of Burdge's groups is much more similar to ours than the social status constitution of the unselected population, which fact implies that, if the factor of social status is operative in determining the size of families, it would not materially influence our results because of the fairly similar distribution of social status in the delinquent and non-delinquent populations.

#### THE FACTOR, INTELLIGENCE

We have shown elsewhere that there is a great preponderance of tested intelligence deficient among the delinquent boys upon whom the data of this study were obtained when comparisons are made with the unselected population. It would, therefore, be interesting to determine to what extent there is a relation between size of family and intelligence.<sup>6</sup> The determination of this relation would enable us to ascertain the effect of the intelligence factor upon the relation between size of family and juvenile delinquency.

We have computed the relations elsewhere and find that, among our delinquent group, there appears to be no regular relation of any significance between the intelligence status of the boy, as measured by the tests which we employed, and the size of his family.<sup>6</sup> In so far as we are able to make determinations from our data there is no indication that the duller boys tend to come from larger families and the brighter boys from smaller families or vice versa. This deduction is, of course, only true for our group of boys, taking into consideration its social status, intelligence status, and size of family status ranges. No deduction as to the relation between intelligence status and the size of family for the unselected population can be made, of course, from our data.

<sup>5</sup>See "A Socio-Psychological Study of the Delinquent Boy."

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

## SIZE OF FAMILY AND EXTENT AND SEVERITY OF DELINQUENT CAREERS

Putting our data through a correlational analysis by correlating the size of the families of delinquent boys with the extent of the delinquent careers of the boys determined from the number of times they were arrested, and with the severity of the delinquent careers of the boys determined by means of a scale designed specifically for the purpose of evaluating severity of delinquent careers, we find that there is a slight tendency for the extent of delinquent careers (number of arrests) to rise as the number of children in the families increases but that even this slight tendency vanishes when the severity of the delinquent careers is correlated with the size of the family. The interesting finding in connection with these relations is the fact that the extent of delinquent careers in families consisting of one child, i. e., the delinquent boy himself, is larger than it should be as judged from the general trend of the relation. This is an indication of the existence of a curvilinear relation between extent of delinquent careers and size of family rather than a rectilinear relation as is generally supposed to obtain between variables. The detailed data of this correlational analysis are given elsewhere.<sup>7</sup>

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The presence of a slight positive association between size of family and juvenile delinquency is indicated by the fact that there is a slight excess of the number of children in the families of delinquent boys as compared with non-delinquent sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen year old employed boys of New York State. After taking account, as far as is possible from our data, of social status, foreign homes, and density of population of the localities in which the homes are situated, all of which tend to influence size of family, we obtain a significant difference of about  $+.60$  between the average number of children in families of 1,522 delinquent boys and 147,925 sixteen to eighteen year old employed New York State boys. We find, also, that there is an excess of eight per cent of large families (families of seven children or more) among the delinquent group as compared with the non-delinquent group.

Although these differences are small, the fact that they exist, when important extraneous factors are considered, adds to their significance. One important variable has not been accounted for, however,

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<sup>7</sup>See "A Socio-Psychological Study of the Delinquent Boy."

due to lack of comparable data, namely, that of nationality. Our own data point indirectly to a nationalistic influence upon size of family.

An additional support to the presence of a slight association between size of family and delinquency is the fact that there is a small positive relation between size of families and number of arrests, the boys coming from large families tending to a very small degree to have a greater number of arrests than boys coming from small families, but judging from the trend of the relation, boys coming from families of only one child, i. e., the delinquent boy himself, have a *relatively* large average number of arrests.

Judging from our results, there appears to be no relation for the group which we have studied between the size of the boy's family and his intelligence status.

Taking all of the factors into consideration the association between size of family, i. e., number of children in family, and juvenile delinquency is too low to warrant serious consideration. It should be remembered, however, that we are considering the association between size of family *alone* and juvenile delinquency, and not between size of family plus the influence of various deleterious mental and environmental factors and juvenile delinquency. It is quite likely that a composite relation would yield different results from the single relation between number of children and delinquency which we have considered in this paper. It is likely, for instance, that although there appears to be little if any association between size of family and boyhood delinquency, there might be an intimate association between the delinquency of a boy and the size of his family, if in addition to coming from a large family he is either intelligence deficient, emotionally unstable, or both. In this paper we have only considered the relation between the factor, size of family uncomplicated by other factors, and delinquency of boys.