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Gordon H. Barker

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PARENT ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATION AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

Gordon H. Barker

The author is Professor of Sociology in the University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado; President of the Colorado Conference of Social Welfare, he is a member of the Governor's Committee on Recreation and of the Citizen's Committee on Children and Youth.—EDITOR.

It is becoming increasingly accepted that behavior is never the result of a single factor. The simple dichotomy, heredity or environment, is a meaningless oversimplification, in trying to explain as complex a thing as behavior. This is nowhere more clearly noted than in the phase of behavior classified as the delinquent behavior of juveniles. Psychological studies in the biological factors of delinquency, including heredity, indicate that environmental factors are even more significant than originally assumed in accounting for this behavior.¹ The studies of Healy and the Gluecks typify this trend. Sociological studies point up the significance of family factors, disorganized areas and patterns of relationships in developing the complex behavior patterns of delinquency.

On the whole sociologists agree that the etiology of crime must be sought primarily in group experience and cultural factors and that personal association is the most important influence. As a result of these association patterns both sociogenic traits (attitude-value systems) which are derived from the definitions of situations furnished by the culture to which a person belongs and psychogenic traits or personality traits emerge.

The family association has been shown to be the most important of all personal associations in the formation of behavior, both delinquent and non-delinquent. The significance of parents living together, of harmonious relationships in the family, of both parents working, have been the subject of considerable research as is indicated in the studies of Sutherland, Barnes and Teeters and the Gluecks.²

The present study isolates one phase of family relationship and indicates its significance to the causation of delinquency. It is the number of organizations to which the parents of juvenile delinquents belong. The

1. The following are two studies exploring the biological significance of delinquency: William Sheldon, Emil Hartl, and Eugene McDermott, *Varieties of Delinquent Behavior*, Harper, N.Y., 1949; Tucker, William B., "Is There Evidence of a Physical Basis for Criminal Behavior?" *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, November-December, 1940.

2. Edwin H. Sutherland, "Principles of Criminology" (4th ed.), J. B. Lippincott Co., New York 1947; Harry Elmer Barnes and Negley K. Teeters, "New Horizons in Criminology," Second edition, Prentice-Hall, Inc., New York 1951; Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, "Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency." The Commonwealth Fund, New York 1940.

isolation of this particular characteristic of juvenile delinquents becomes important only when the frequency of this variable in the non-delinquent population is compared with it. Furthermore, it is important to note that the size of the community affects this factor, the assumption being that the larger the city the more significant this factor becomes. The number of organizations involves social relationships and association, which are of a more secondary character in the great city. This study, therefore, is limited to a small city, Boulder, Colorado, and for a certain period of time. Also a control group of non-delinquents was used for statistical comparison.

Boulder has a population of 20,000 not including the students attending the state University in the city. Dr. Frederick A. Bushee, Emeritus Professor of Sociology from the University of Colorado, conducted a survey of organizations in Boulder and their membership. This survey was used to furnish information about the parents of delinquents in a small city.

Apparently the number of organizations to which the father of juvenile delinquents belongs is of no significance in explaining delinquency. By contrasting the observed facts in the instance of juvenile delinquency and male parent organizational membership with the expected juvenile delinquency, there is little difference noted. In other words, random sampling errors would cause such difference. Statistically, a Chi Square of .282 would occur approximately only 15 percent of the time were the factors related, and 85 percent of the time due to errors of random sampling. The two factors, father-membership in organizations and the delinquency of his child, are not related significantly.

However, in contrasting the observed facts in the instance of juvenile delinquency and mother-membership in organizations, a different relationship is recognized. Here random sampling errors, faced by a Chi Square of 7.887 are reduced to insignificance, being a potential causative factor in only 2 percent of the cases, while in 98 percent of the cases there is significance in the relationship of juvenile delinquency to the mother's membership in organizations. Common sense might conclude that there would be less delinquency among children if the mothers would give them more attention by being at home more with their children. This study indicates exactly the opposite, however. To the extent that organizations take mothers away from home, the fact apparently has nothing to do with the delinquency of the children. The data indicate that children become delinquent if the mothers do not belong to organizations. Several ideas are suggested by this fact. It may reflect a lack of social approval on the part of society toward the

mother, which affects the social relationships in the family. Apparently in contemporary society, the successful mother seems to be the one who belongs to organizations. (Perhaps the children are sensitive to the fact that society does not freely accept the mother). Further study may be needed to determine the significance of the time schedule of the mother with her organizations to see if there is a conflict with the child's non-school hours.

It is pertinent to indicate the large number of mothers of juvenile delinquents who belong to no organization or only one organization. 80.5 percent of the mothers are in this category. Dr. Bushee includes church membership as organizational. It may be a question as to whether belonging to a church is strongly indicative of social participation. Hence this large percentage might point up mothers with no organizational membership at all. One instance tended to skew the curve slightly. A small group of children of prominent families first stole an auto and then were caught shooting off the insulators from the electric wires. The data indicated that the mothers of these children belonged to several organizations. If this unique instance were not included it would point up even more the fact that the mothers belonging to no organizations at all have children who become delinquent.

Where the combined parent-organizational membership is studied, as would be expected there is a greater amount of significance shown than in the case of the male parent alone and a less amount in the instance of the female parent alone. However, the possibilities of errors due to random sampling are as significant as the possibilities of a necessary correlation between the factors studied.

From this study of the organizational membership of parents of juvenile delinquents, at least two further studies are suggested. An interesting study of the possible compensatory nature of a father's social role might be made. Herein such a role would negate the delinquency-producing tendencies of the non-social mother (belonging to no organizations). In the category of only one organizational membership a significantly greater delinquency is observed than is expected. The nature of this organization might be determined, as for example, one might find that the bulk of the parents whose children become delinquent, might be members of an organization whose traditions are in conflict with the mores. Undeniably the type of organization is important in discussing membership in them from their significance to the delinquency of the children. Simply naming an organization is not meaningful, for the name or even description of the kind could be mis-

leading. The behavior involved in the organizations is of great importance, however, as is suggested by this second need for further research.

In conclusion about the membership in organizations of parents of juvenile delinquents, it would appear that the lack of such membership on the part of fathers does not necessarily indicate a maladjustment to the culture in which they live, while in the case of mothers such a relationship appears to exist. This study does not support the hypothesis that mothers belonging to organizations contribute to their children's delinquency. Perhaps it does not test the hypothesis as an universal truth either. As a result of this study of one isolated community, the hypothesis that working mothers contribute to the delinquency of their children might be challenged. It is of greater value to think in terms of the fact that both attitudes and personality traits must be considered in the lives of delinquents and these sociogenic traits and psychogenic traits result from association with others.