



## Educational Level and Delinquent Behaviour among Children in Conflict with the Law (CCL)

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### ABSTRACT

Children in conflict with the Law (CCL) or juvenile delinquency continues to be a chronic societal problem, of concern to policymakers, educators and law enforcement. It is important to identify the causes of delinquent behaviour among children to create effective prevention and intervention programs. Among the numerous factors contributing to juvenile delinquency, educational level and school experiences play a critical role. The objective of the present study was to compare the effect of education level on delinquent behaviours among children in conflict with the Law (CCL). A between-group design was used to compare the effect of education level on delinquent behaviours. There were 50 participants in each group, thus, a total of 150 juvenile delinquents participated in this study. The age of the juvenile delinquents was between 12 and 18 years. A self-reported delinquency scale was used to assess the delinquent behaviours. Results revealed that illiterate juveniles exhibited higher levels of delinquent behaviours as compared to juveniles who have primary and upper primary levels of education. Based on the present study, it may be concluded that education level had a significant impact on reducing delinquent behaviours among children in conflict with the Law (CCL) or juvenile delinquents.

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## Introduction

Children in conflict with the Law (CCL) or juvenile delinquency is currently a global problem that is getting increasingly concerning. In today's scenario, juvenile delinquency is a major issue for every society. This is a global pandemic and needs serious attention. Every society has its own rules, conduct and way of life; delinquency or crime is unacceptable (Antwi, 2016). A widely used definition was proposed by Hirschi (1969): "Delinquency is defined by acts, the detection of which is thought to result in punishment of the person committing them by agents of the larger society." In India, the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015 defines "juvenile or child as a person who has not completed 16 years of age". As per this definition, children under 16 who commit crimes are called juvenile delinquents or child crimes. This child crime is treated specially and separately per the provision of the JJ (C&P) Act of 2015.

According to UNICEF's global databases (2023), there are around 30 per 100,000 children in detention on any given day in 2022. Based on the information available, North America has the highest regional rate of children in incarceration (126 per 100,000 children), whereas East Asia and the Pacific have the lowest rates (19 per 100,000 children). According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB, 2022), the number of juvenile crimes in India decreased by 30% over ten years, from 43,506 in 2013 to 30,555 in 2022. However, the crime rate against children in India increased by approximately 9% in 2022 compared to 2021, from 33.6 to 36.6 incidents per lakh children.

Delinquency in children is a result of multifactorial interaction between social, economic, and psychological factors. These involve parental neglect, ineffective teaching, disorganization of the community, poverty, illiteracy, and significant psychological factors such as mental health problems (e.g., Depression, anxiety and stress), cognitive distortions, and maladaptive personality traits. Empirical literature has also brought to the forefront the positions of parental acceptance-rejection (Khanam & Singh, 2025), cognitive distortions (Maurya & Asthana, 2019a), and psychological distress among institutionalized youth (Maurya & Asthana, 2019b), as the key to understanding delinquent pattern of behaviours (Agnew, 2005; Becker & Grilo, 2007; Hirschi, 1969; Shader, 2004; Shoemaker, 2017; Siegel & Welsh, 2017; Walters, 2012). Among all these factors, education is one such factor that enhances children's cognitive ability, positively impacting their decision-making ability, leading to good social adjustment.



## Review of Literature

Research indicates that low educational levels may contribute to social exclusion, influence mental health, and restrict economic opportunities, all of which can increase tendencies toward criminal behaviour (Agnew, 2006; Hirschi, 1969). Through a review of existing research and an analysis of factors such as academic achievement, school engagement, and socioeconomic background, we explore the connection between low educational levels and increased likelihood of delinquent behaviour. Past research highlights that juveniles with lower educational levels are more prone to delinquency, possibly due to limited socioeconomic opportunities, school disengagement, and affiliation with delinquent peers (Maguin & Loeber, 1996; Lochner & Moretti, 2004). It is also sometimes observed that Theft, property destruction, physical aggressiveness, and other juvenile delinquent behaviours contribute to low educational performance, school absenteeism, escape from home, self-harm, drug abuse, anxiety, and other negative outcomes (Stenbacka et al., 2019). Juvenile delinquents always lack affection, instability and low moral standards. Juvenile delinquents have a low level of intelligence and lack of ability to differentiate between the right and wrong side of a situation (Chakma, 2022).

Adolescents who disengage from school or have negative experiences at school often find acceptance in peer groups that may support delinquent behaviour. Thornberry et al. (2003) highlighted that association with delinquent peers is a strong predictor of criminal behaviour, especially in adolescents who are underperforming academically. As adolescents experience academic failure or social rejection at school, they may turn to deviant peer groups, increasing their risk of criminal behaviour. Correlational research similarly identifies a strong link between education level and delinquency among juveniles. Maguin and Loeber (1996) identified that poor school performance is highly correlated with delinquent behaviour, as academic difficulties can lead to frustration, loneliness, and poor peer relationships. Similarly, Lochner and Moretti (2004) demonstrated that completing high school reduces criminal activity by improving economic prospects and facilitating social integration.

Hirschi's social bonding theory (1969) posits that individuals with weak ties to social institutions such as schools are likelier to engage in criminal behaviour. According to this theory, adolescents who experience academic failure may feel alienated from school and, as a result, from social norms. Similarly, Merton's strain theory (1938) suggests that limited academic success creates stress that leads adolescents to seek alternative means, including crime, to achieve social and economic success.

Based on the above literature, it has been found that education plays a vital role in the behaviour of children, through which positive changes can be brought to their behaviour. Keeping this in mind, the



effect of the levels of education among children in conflict with the Law (CCL) on their delinquent behaviours is being studied in the present research.

**Objective of the study:**

The objective of the present study was to compare the effect of education level on the delinquent behaviours among children in conflict with the Law (CCL).

**Hypothesis of the study:**

Based on reviews of literature, it was hypothesized that: education level had a significant impact on delinquent behaviours among children in conflict with the Law (CCL).

**Methods****Research Design:**

A between-group design was used to compare the effect of education level on the delinquent behaviours.

**Sample:**

Purposive sampling methods were used in the present study, and there were 50 participants in each group, thus, a total of 150 juvenile delinquents participated in this study. All these respondents were temporary residents in observation homes in Delhi, India. The age of the juvenile delinquents was between 12 and 18 years.

**Measure:**

Self-reported delinquency scale was used to measure delinquent behaviours in juvenile delinquents. This scale was developed by Elliott and Egiton (1980). The questionnaire consist 47 items measure to assess self-reported involvement in delinquency. In the present study Hindi translated version was used. The Cronbach's alpha of the Hindi-translated version is .916.

**Procedure**

The data for the present study was collected from the observation home in Delhi. All the legal formalities (permission, ethical considerations, etc.) were completed by the Department of Women and Child Development, New Delhi, India. Each participant in the present study was screened as per the norms and was provided with information about the aim of the research as well as the nature of the test. After obtaining consent from the participants, the above questionnaire was given with specific instructions.

## Result

**Table 1:** Mean, Standard Deviation and One-Way Analysis of Variance in Delinquent Behaviour among Children in Conflit with The Law (CCL)

Variable	Illiterates		Primary Level		Upper Primary Level		F (2, 147)	$\eta^2$	Post-Hoc
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Delinquent Behaviour	92.74	18.19	66.68	10.57	58.40	7.04	97.84	.57	1>2>3

\*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 1 shows mean, standard deviation and F-values for delinquent behaviour among children in conflict with the law (juvenile delinquents). The result indicated significant mean differences on delinquent behaviours with  $F(2, 147) = 97.84, p < 0.001$ . Findings revealed that illiterate juveniles exhibited a higher level of delinquent behaviors as compared to juveniles who had primary and upper primary levels of education. The value of  $\eta^2$  was .57, which indicated a large effect size. The Post-Hoc comparisons indicated significant mean differences between each group and with other two groups. It is also shown through the graph (Figure 1) that illiterate juveniles show more delinquent behavior than those with higher primary education.

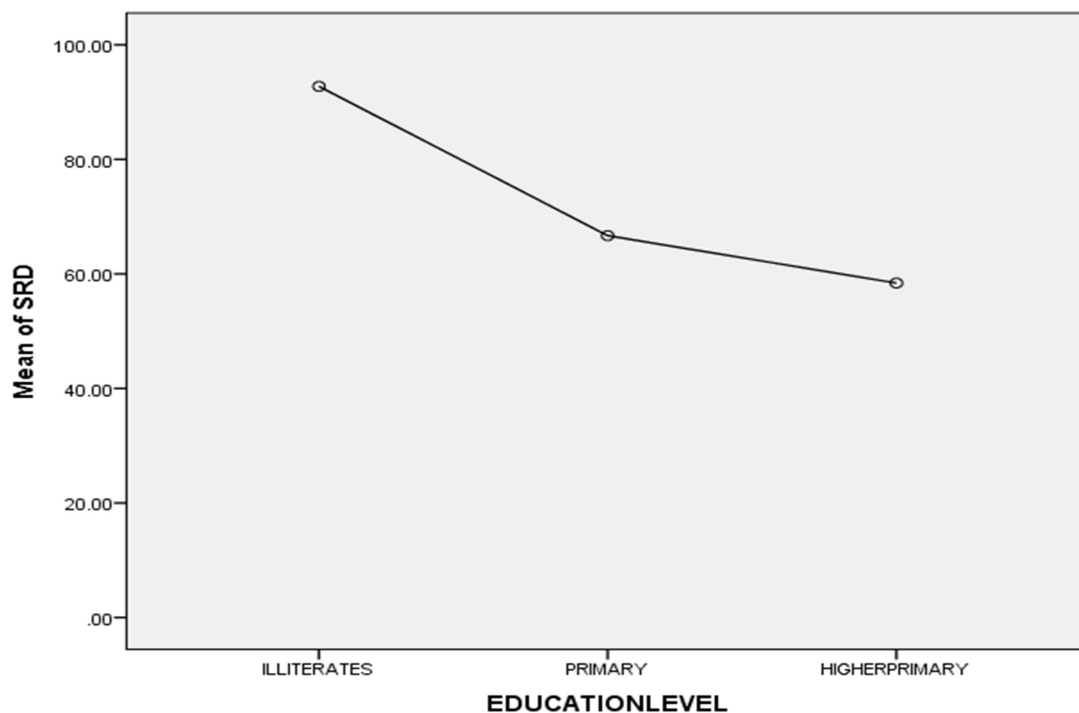


Figure 1: Graph showing the mean scores of self-reported delinquency by illiterate, primary and upper primary educational levels of juveniles.

## Discussion

These results highlight the significant importance of education in shaping behavioural outcomes among juveniles. Education has been shown to enhance cognitive ability, moral reasoning, and social integration- all protective factors against engaging in delinquent behaviour (Loeber & Farrington, 2000). Illiterate juveniles may miss out on these developmental benefits, making them more susceptible to engaging in antisocial acts.

The findings are supported by the literature that presents low educational levels as a stable predictor of delinquency. For instance, Maguin and Loeber (1996) reported that poor academic performance and school disengagement tend to result in delinquent behaviour. Education can be a stabilising factor, offering structured routines, positive role models, and potential for future success, whereas its absence can contribute to frustration, isolation, and contact with deviant peer groups (Shader, 2001).

Additionally, educationally disadvantaged adolescents typically come from backgrounds where educational opportunities are either very limited or non-existent, which may increase their risk of committing crimes. These adolescents may not only face cognitive and behavioural deficits, but they are also deprived of life skills that can help them cope with adversity.

## Conclusion

In Conclusion, the significant variation in delinquent behaviour among juvenile delinquents on their levels of education indicates that education plays an essential role in deterring delinquency among juveniles. The level of delinquent behaviour was found to be higher among illiterate juveniles than those with primary and upper primary education, indicating that lack of education is a major risk factor for delinquency. These findings suggest a need for education reforms and interventions, particularly on literacy, school retention, and rehabilitation education programs for delinquent and at-risk youth. Investing in early education may be a long-term option to reduce juvenile delinquency and facilitate reintegration and rehabilitation in the juvenile system.



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