

## Female Juvenile Delinquency in Egypt from Institutions Key Workers' Perspective: A Qualitative Study

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### Abstract:

**Background:** For history, girls have been less delinquent than boys. Local media and press suggest increasing involvement of females in violent crimes. Further, those females who become involved in delinquent activities appear to be doing so as a result of specific needs, and complex interactions between certain dominions: individual, family, and community. **Aim of the study:** Aim of the present study was to explore the phenomenon of female juvenile delinquency in Egypt from institutions key workers' perspective. **Subjects and methods:** a qualitative research approach was performed by conducting in-depth interviews with 16 key workers from three residential correctional institutions affiliated to the Egyptian Ministry of Solidarity and Social justice. **Results:** female juvenile delinquency is conceptualized as resulting from stacking sets of child personal, familial and extra-familial factors. Female juvenile delinquency is the result of influence, association, pressure, imitation, needs, wants and desires. **Conclusion:** Risk factors can be captured in every life domain and they exert different effects and do not operate in isolation. The most important cause of female juvenile delinquency as prioritized by key workers is the family. **Recommendation:** it is recommended that the study be expanded quantitatively to permit for generalization.

**Keywords:** Female juvenile delinquency; delinquency institutions; Egypt.

### Introduction:

Aggressive and violent behaviors are being increasingly viewed as a public health problem. <sup>(1)</sup> Adolescent engagement in violent delinquency is a major social concern because of the substantial associated psychological, physical, and economic costs. Accordingly, this concern has inspired a large body of literature on why youth engage in delinquent behaviors and how it can be prevented. <sup>(2)</sup> Juvenile delinquency is a critical problem that is becoming rampant in Egypt. <sup>(3)</sup> Although, the exact number of juvenile delinquents is unknown, according to the Ministry of Interior Statistics; more than 25 percent of all arrested children in Egypt in 2001 were arrested on charges of being vulnerable to delinquency. However, their number has more doubled since 2000, rising from 17.228 arrests to 32.957 in 2008. <sup>(4)</sup>

Today's adolescents are tomorrow's workforce, parents and leaders; and their future is shaped by the opportunities created for them today. <sup>(5)</sup> The second decade of life is

often a turbulent period in which adolescents experience hormonal changes, physical maturation, and, frequently, opportunities to engage in risk behaviors. The patterns of behavior they adopt may have long-term consequences for their health and quality of life. <sup>(6)</sup> While adolescence is a time of tremendous growth and potential, it is also a time of considerable risk during which social contexts exert powerful influences. <sup>(7)</sup>

In contrast to male offenders, female offenders have remained a relatively understudied population, leading to calls for more research on this population. <sup>(8)</sup> Although females may be affected by the same risk factors as males, females have to experience more risk factors before they start offending. When the threshold is passed by females, it is believed that the manifestation of delinquency is more severe than in males, the so-called 'threshold effect'. <sup>(9)</sup> Early theories on delinquency and crime either fail to include girls (and women) or if included, theorize

about them in sexist and stereotypical ways. The ramifications of the traditionally male-centered approaches to understand delinquency not only involve ignorance about what causes girls' delinquency but also threaten the appropriateness of systemic intervention and treatment responses to girls. <sup>(10)</sup>

Delinquency is defined as a legal phenomenon and refers to officially registered unlawful behavior, whereas antisocial behavior refers to acts that are considered inappropriate because they harm others or the society. <sup>(11)</sup> A delinquent is a person under age, who is guilty of antisocial act and whose misconduct is an infraction of law. <sup>(12)</sup> Juvenile delinquency is a complex phenomenon that is difficult to define, measure, explain, and prevent. One reason for this challenging nature is because juvenile delinquency shares a relationship with many other social institutions, including families, schools, media, law enforcement agencies, and juvenile and adult courts. <sup>(13)</sup>

Identifying which risk factors may cause delinquency for particular sets of youth at specific stages of their development may help programs target their efforts in a more efficient and cost-effective manner. <sup>(14)</sup> A team approach is necessary in management of juvenile delinquency including social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, pediatricians, community health nurses, schoolteachers, family members and parents. Modification of social environment and rehabilitation of the delinquent child should be promoted. <sup>(15)</sup> Part of the debate centers around whether juvenile justice should be focused on retribution or rehabilitation. Those who favor the retribution role of juvenile justice assert that juveniles should be held accountable for their actions, punished accordingly, and segregated from society. Any treatment they receive must therefore be provided in an institutional setting (e.g., juvenile detention centers, wilderness program). By contrast, those who favor rehabilitation assert that providing

community-based treatment may be a more effective way to rehabilitation. <sup>(16)</sup>

#### **Significance of the study:**

Many studies were carried out to explain juvenile delinquency in general, and fewer studies to shed light on female juvenile delinquency specifically, but most of those studies was carried out on delinquent females themselves with a possibility of bias or not telling truth; henceforth, the current study tried to explore the determinants of female juvenile delinquency from the perspective of neutral and fertile exemplars.

#### **Aim of the study:**

Explore the phenomenon of female juvenile delinquency in Egypt from institutions key workers' perspective.

#### **Research question:**

- What are the institutions key workers' perspective regarding female juvenile delinquency in Egypt?

#### **Subjects and methods:**

##### **Research design:**

Descriptive exploratory design, which was achieved by using a qualitative approach that added personal descriptions in context and individual voices, which demonstrated how the nature of relationships are very complicated and can involve many harmful aspects that put adolescent girls at risk for delinquent behavior.

##### **Setting:**

The current study was conducted in three different females' correctional institutions in Egypt (Fatyat El Mansoura - Dakahlia, Elmolahza department in Dar El Tarbeya- Giza, and Quaserat Ain Shams - Cairo).

##### **Sample and sampling:**

Because the goal of qualitative research is enriching the understanding of an experience, it needs to select fertile exemplars of the experience for study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can

learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term "purposive sampling".<sup>(17)</sup> Hereafter, the key workers were irreplaceable participants. A purposive sampling method was used taking into account only those who were willing to participate in interactive interviews, they were 16 key workers (managers [n=3], psychiatrists [n=3], Social specialists [n=5], and Supervisors [n=5]). The sample size was determined by the completeness of the data (theoretical saturation).

#### **Pilot study:**

Prior to the researcher's first in-depth interview, the researcher trained self as a tool of data collection on some relatives. But this step was preceded by a lot of readings about qualitative research methods, then in-depth interviews with two social workers (in Fatyat El Mansoura). It was very useful step for the researcher to be more experienced in applying qualitative research.

#### **Field work:**

The final letter of authorization was gained from the General Directorate of Social Defense, but with a condition of not video or audio tapping, hence there was extra burden on the researcher (facilitator) and the assistant to be more attentive in note taking. The researcher conducted 30 minutes to 1 hour in-depth interviews with the 16 key workers. Recruitment and data collection continued until no new themes emerged from the interviews. The sessions started with a brief introduction about the aim of the interview and an ice-breaker activity to make participants ready to engage in the discussion.

Probe questions were used to take the discussion into still deeper territory, "Please tell me more about that" or "I don't think I know what you mean, can you explain?". In an effort to obtain detailed responses, the researcher responded to the interviewee by utilizing active listening, and silence to distill participants' responses. The tool used was in the

form topic guide which was prepared beforehand. The script of the topic guide included open ended questions about: the prevalence of female juvenile delinquency, individual characteristics, role of family, school, and friends, surrounding factors (abuse, child labor, and media), and prevention and treatment. Data collection occurred over a three months period (from end of January 2012 to the beginning of May 2012).

#### **Administrative and ethical considerations:**

A letter containing the aim of the study was issued from faculty of nursing Zagazig University to the security department - Ministry of Solidarity and Social justice from which the first letter of approval was gained, and then the final letter of authorization was gained from the General Directorate of Social Defense.

Participants were told there were no wrong answers, research results will be anonymous, their participation is voluntary, and there is no penalty for refusing to take part in the research. And finally they were assured that may refuse to answer any question or stop the interview at any time.

#### **Analysis:**

Upon gathering the data, the researcher established a permanent written record of the discussions (Transcription) to facilitate further analysis. Data was coded and categorized; then, the researcher spent much time reading and re-reading transcripts searching for a pattern. Next, ongoing comparison of the participants' responses with each other was performed. After that, the data were subjected to a thematic analysis (the extraction of the common themes emerging from the interviews). Finally, the emergent themes were revised many times.

#### **Result:**

Real lived stories of girls as perceived by 16 key workers were taken into consideration. The results revealed that, one quarter of the key workers had years of experience more

than 25 years, and slightly less than one quarter their experiences ranged from 6 to 9 years. The phenomenon of female juvenile delinquency described by many key workers as being prevalent or much prevalent, and they gave an estimation (based on their experiences, and not an official information) of the prevalence as ≥40% of the females aged 7 to 18 years. They also added that the society will suffer from the consequences of delinquents' antisocial attitude, and delinquent females will be a reservoir of risk behaviors on the long run.

who experience jeopardized and/or negative familial and peer relationships often resort to delinquent behaviors. <sup>(18)</sup>

**Disintegrated family:** The majority of key workers remarked disintegrated family as the most common feature of families with which delinquent females live. In disintegrated families there might be absent or incomplete monitoring of child, girl is distracted between parents, lost sense of belongingness and affection, and hence searches for it elsewhere.

**Risky family context:** Because family is so central in children's socialization, the values of those surrounding the young person will hold influence. Crime and norms supportive of deviance begin to flourish when adequate circumstances are present. From key workers' point of view the girls are born in already flourished risky context, in addition to wrong child nurturing methods which are considered as a pivotal factor.

**Economic problems:** While some of the key workers see that delinquent females develop in poor families, others see that not only poverty can force the family to depend on the child as a source of income, but also greediness of families which consider their girls commodities for sale.

**Emergent themes and subthemes matrix**

Familial strain	School	Community
Disintegrated family	Bad company	Child labor
Risky family context		Media
Economic problems		
Victim of abuse		

Profile	Management
Physical; strong body built	Prevention
Behavioral; lying, aggression, and theft	Treatment
Psychological; unfulfilled needs	
Social ; emotional intelligence	

Following data analysis, five themes emerged: familial strain, School, Community factors, delinquent girls' profile, and management modalities.

**I. Familial strain:**

Girls often place much value on their relationship with others. Girls

is that they are able to gain money at a very young age, the thing which gives them a sense of independence so they are not in need for family, and they can do whatever they want.

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**Victimization:** Many crime theorists believe that victimization breeds later delinquency. As the general proverb says "Violence breeds violence", any form of maltreatment can have reaction; this reaction is considered the last chain of violence cycle, henceforth, many key workers believed that abuse play a role in female juvenile delinquency.

Media: as for to the role played by media in females' juvenile delinquency, over different types of media television received the lion's share, where its content encourages the imitation, and spread of immorality. But, the family must have control over their girls by monitoring the content of the media they watch.

**II. School problems:**

**Bad company:** Bad company in school context can play a role in female juvenile delinquency as from the key workers point of view other factors in the school context exert lesser influence compared to bad company .

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**III. Community:**

**Child labor:** half of the key workers believed that child's labor play a role in female juvenile delinquency. Generally it can be said that the hidden risk in child labor is that those children are deprived from the experiences of childhood which can lead to unmet developmental needs, not only that, but they are also with their little lived experiences are liable to contact with older ones who can put them in a risky situations. The most dangerous thing

**Delinquent Girls Profile:**

**Physically (strong body built):** In relation to physical characteristics of

delinquent females some of the key workers went to say that those girls tend to be in fit physical appearance to help them in their delinquent acts, while others see that they are physically fit because of living in gang world.

**Socially (Emotional intelligence):** Regarding personal characteristics of delinquent females, emotional intelligence was dominant as reported by the majority of key workers.

**Behaviorally (Lying, aggression, and stealing):** being lyres, aggressive, and having stealing abilities were on the top of the behavioral characteristics profiling delinquent female from the key workers perspectives. Possible explanation is that, all people tell untruths at some time, but when it becomes frequent it can turn to a habit, by time this bad habit becomes a problematic behavior. The cause behind lying might be attributed to escape punishment, obtain reward, to cover for peers, or because of lost sense of trust. Also socially intelligent children can tell better lies that are less easily detected. It also can be used as a cover for other delinquent behaviors as stealing. By time the child can use an overt behavior as aggression instead of lying.

As a final point, the main cause behind female juvenile delinquency, all the key workers see that family is the main cause, their rational for accusing the family for many reasons as abuse, disintegrated family, and absence of monitoring, modeling, and belongingness.

**Psychologically (Unfulfilled needs):** Belongingness, love and affection needs, key workers indicated that delinquent females have need for attention.

In conclusion the researcher adds her voice to the key workers, as the whole burden of bringing up good citizens is the responsibility of the family as the general proverb says "A vessel filters what it contains".

**Management:** According to suggestions offered by key workers, female juvenile delinquency can be managed by legislations (Elimination of unemployment and child labor, fighting customary marriage and illiteracy, family planning, financial support, psychological counseling for families, school activities, .....etc); raising awareness about concept of family and child rearing; constructive media content; besides the role played by social care institutions, creating new

future, and changing the attitude of society.

the scene which becomes normal; and the repetition of this scene can give a false perception about the number of delinquent females, and hence over estimation.

In the same line, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia <sup>(19)</sup> reported that, it is estimated that there are some one million street children in Egypt (both girls and boys). Despite efforts based on the concept that street children are vulnerable or at risk and therefore in need of protection, the prevailing view is that they are in reality delinquents from very poor backgrounds with uncaring parents.

On the other hand, the failure to get the correct and sound proportions that reflect the size of the actual delinquency in society are due to that criminal statistics do not reflect honesty and integrity of delinquency ratios. It has been proven that some competent systems which combat juvenile delinquency in some Arab countries often overlooked intentionally or negligently much of the crime in the statistics provided, not to be credited with laxness in their duty. In addition, many people refuse mentioning disadvantages of their children especially in rural areas and use discipline instead; therefore it cannot be known whether actual delinquency is in decline, in a case of sleep, or in a case of escalation. <sup>(20)</sup>

As regards considering female juvenile delinquency a troublesome problem, the key workers point of view excel in that, the society will suffer from the consequences of delinquents' antisocial attitude, and delinquent females will be a reservoir of risk behaviors on the long run. In a similar vein, it is well known that the consequences of crime are substantial and long lasting to individuals and to the society <sup>(21)</sup>. On the other hand, anti-social behavior is not constant over time for individuals, but it is also constant in families, where it can predict similar behavioral patterns to the individual's children. <sup>(22)</sup>

**Discussion:**

Concerning the prevalence of female juvenile delinquency phenomenon, slightly more than two thirds of key workers described the phenomenon as being prevalent or much prevalent. This high prevalence might be explained by the assumption that communities are facing a lot of challenges. Cultural, social and political. Great number of Egyptians is living under poverty line. Also in light of community openness that the world is witnessing the Egyptian society has undergone many societal changes which in turn affected the family negatively, where the standards of right and wrong are going to be replaced by modernized ones, where the females have more freedom to do anything. These cultural overlapping made communities are no longer able to reduce the impact of others that pay different cultures and values. Also it is well noticed that the phenomenon of street children is escalating in Egypt,

Adolescents who join gangs are often assumed to have deficient or destructive family lives whether the source of the deficiency is family structure, poor parenting skills, lack of warmth, lack of supervision, poor disciplinary practices, poverty, or parental criminality/substance use.<sup>(23)</sup> Concerning the most common features of families with which delinquent females lived; majority of key workers reported the disintegrated families. In disintegrated families there might be absent or incomplete monitoring of child, girl is distracted between parents, lost sense of belongingness and affection, and hence searches for it elsewhere. A similar finding revealed that, the relationship between family disruption and delinquency was strong among females [When the family was disrupted, females were more likely to engage in delinquent behavior].<sup>(24)</sup>

Concerning family context, more than half of key workers reported that juvenile delinquent females develop in bad family context (risk behaviors). Because family is so central in children's socialization, the values of those surrounding the young person will hold influence. From researcher point of view crime and norms supportive of deviance begin to flourish when adequate circumstances are present, but here the girls are born in already flourished risky context. A similar finding emerges from the study conducted in USA<sup>(25)</sup> to examine the relationships between Predictive Factors of Female Juvenile Delinquency, and found that parental deviance, drug abuse, and family criminality are significant in the development of delinquency in adolescents.

There are other pivotal factors which are considered as risky in the family context; as wrong child nurturing methods which was reported by three quarters of key workers, in addition to low cultural level, and weak religious commitment/ religious domineering. In the same context, it is identified that, child's healthy growth and development occur best in a safe,

stable, and nurturing environment.<sup>(26)</sup> As regards family poverty, more than three fifths of the key workers reported the presence of poverty. In the same context, many findings indicate that the spatial distribution of crime is linked with the amount of poverty within an area, so the higher the level of economic deprivation, the higher the level of delinquency and crime.<sup>(27)</sup> Poverty, overcrowded homes, unemployment, living on social aid, and poor domestic conditions are the most important factors that reflect the poor socio-economic level of the family and that increase the children's risk of behavioral disorders and delinquency.<sup>(22)</sup>

Youth who experience an accumulation of negative or stressful life events, such as parental divorce, increase their risk of engaging in juvenile delinquency.<sup>(28)</sup> There is a long established relationship between childhood victimization and delinquency. Children are most likely to become victims of physical and sexual abuse within their homes with the typical offender being a male member of the family.<sup>(29)</sup> Child maltreatment has long been assumed to be a precursor to youthful offending. In this respect, a study conducted to determine intra-familial physical violence among Mexican and Egyptian youth, the study suggested that having experienced intra-familial violence Egyptian females were at slightly greater risk than their male counterparts.<sup>(30)</sup> Congruently, many have noted that females who engage in antisocial or delinquent juvenile behavior are more likely to have histories of abuse and victimization within the family environment.<sup>(31)</sup> In addition, research indicates that adverse life events, especially physical or sexual abuse, are stronger predictors of serious offending in girls. It is possible that abuse by caregivers plays a causal role in girls' withdrawal from key conventional bonds (e.g., parents, school) that would otherwise deter involvement in serious delinquent behavior.<sup>(32)</sup>

Bad company in school context can play a role in female juvenile delinquency as reported by one quarter of the key workers. Congruently, research study indicated that, the relationship between deviant group behavior and delinquency is strong for females. Being in groups that are involved in nuisance behavior leads to delinquent behavior more often in females.<sup>(24)</sup> Regardless of differences in time and place, bad friends are one of the features found in all ages and all countries, and it is part of human history. The nature of humans either good or bad and the complexity of social life and the large number of requirements can force any person to do wrong things, but the difference here is that good people can stop at early stage, but those who have persistent source of influence (bad friend) will continue doing wrong things even if they were good.

The risk factors cited at the community level for development of female juvenile delinquency, the present study revealed that media and child labor can play an important role. Correspondingly, Human Rights Watch<sup>(33)</sup> viewed the problem from a parallel perspective, as work at an early age frequently increases the amount of time children spend unsupervised, especially when a child's workplace is the street. Poor families are more likely to send their children to work at an early age, and poor families are less likely to have the necessary resources to provide a nurturing environment for children. Finally, working children may gain false sense of their ability to provide for themselves that encourages them to risk leaving a family environment that they consider unsatisfactory.

Consistently, research results<sup>(34)</sup> clarified that; the media can indirectly lead people to choose violence. For example, television, movies, newspapers, and magazines show happy, fun-loving people. Television parades all the wonders money can provide. Such polarization between what is available and what is possible

provides fertile ground for the development of abusive patterns. Frustration, unfilled dreams, and unmet wishes are often handled through hunting someone who cannot fight back.

Many etiological factors can trigger juvenile delinquency and criminal acts including personality factors, family dynamic environment, and sociocultural factors.<sup>(35)</sup> In the current study, certain personality profiles that appeared to be associated with delinquency include physical, behavioral, psychological, and social aspects. In the same context, externalizing behaviors can be categorized in behavioral subtypes, such as aggressive and delinquent behaviors. The delinquent subtype points to more covert rule breaking behaviors such as stealing and lying.<sup>(36)</sup> Recent research suggests some girls are beginning to react with physical aggression.<sup>(18)</sup> Female juvenile offenders display significant amounts of both physical and relational aggression, behaviors that are related to concurrent and future internalizing and externalizing problems in girls.<sup>(37)</sup>

Also, sense of belonging is considered a symbolic attachment or investment to a place in terms of a feeling of "rootedness or centeredness". Researches show that it is important for children to "feel at home" when they are between nine and eleven years old.<sup>(38)</sup> On the other hand, a contradictory result was found by Chinese researcher<sup>(39)</sup> who found that; self-management of the emotions was negatively associated with all types of problem behavior. Lower levels of trait emotional intelligence are associated with higher levels of such internalizing behavior as depression, anxiety and stress and such externalizing behavior as aggression and delinquency.

In conclusion, from key workers perspective the main cause behind female juvenile delinquency is the family. Consistent with this result, through surveys and focus groups with

justice-involved girls and their staff and administrators, family problems were the top risk factor for girls' delinquency.<sup>(40)</sup> Furthermore, the critical role the family plays in juvenile delinquency has been said to be the single most replicated finding in the juvenile deviance literature.<sup>(41)</sup>

### Conclusion:

In today's society crime is an aspect of life that is present whether it is acknowledged or ignored. Delinquents are the first structure of adult criminals, where many of the scientific studies indicated that they have entered the world of crime through the door of juvenile delinquency. Overall, the family's influence on a child's behavior is powerful and stable, as well as generational in scope

### Recommendations:

This study opens a window on female juvenile delinquency which continues to be a serious concern for both its immediate and long-term effects, so it is necessary to look behind the delinquency problem in a scientific way to arrange for rapid and encyclopedic interventions to prevent or alleviate the magnitude of female juvenile delinquency phenomenon. In addition to parental health education about how to look after their children, should be provided in every health care setting. Also booklets providing information about needs, and care of children (from birth to 18 years) should be available in every health care setting. Furthermore, it is recommended that the study be replicated or expanded quantitatively to untangle the interconnected relationships between the internal and external environment factors (each separately).

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Abstract Delinquent peers have a strong influence on adolescent delinquent behavior. However, few studies have investigated adolescents' and in particular young females' own perspectives of the role of peers on their delinquent behavior. The purpose of the present study was to explore how young female offenders described their delinquent behavior and more specifically the role they assign to peer relations in committing or avoiding delinquent acts. Nine female adolescents, sentenced to youth service, were interviewed, and the data was analyzed using the Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) Juvenile delinquency, also known "juvenile offending", is the act of participating in unlawful behavior as minors (juveniles, i.e. individuals younger than the statutory age of majority). Most legal systems prescribe specific procedures for dealing with juveniles, such as juvenile detention centers and courts, with it being common that juvenile systems are treated as civil cases instead of criminal, or a hybrid thereof to avoid certain requirements required for criminal cases This review considers juvenile delinquency and justice from an international perspective. Youth crime is a growing concern. Many young offenders are also victims with complex needs, leading to a public health approach that requires a balance of welfare and justice models. The UK and other high-income countries worldwide have established forensic child and adolescent psychiatry, a multifaceted discipline incorporating legal, psychiatric and developmental fields. Its adoption of an evidence-based therapeutic intervention philosophy has been associated with greater reductions in recidivism compared with punitive approaches prevalent in some countries worldwide, and it is therefore a superior approach to dealing with the problem of juvenile delinquency. [View HTML](#).