

# Juvenile Delinquency in China and the Influential Factors

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## ABSTRACT

Referring the crime data published by China Supreme People's Court and its judicial document system after the Reform and Opening-up as samples, this paper analyzes the current situation of juvenile delinquency in China. The author also discusses the historical trends and influencing factors of criminal behaviors. Generally, juvenile delinquency issue in China has been improving in recent years. Furthermore, there were significant changes in the age, type, motive and gender distribution of crimes. Meanwhile, economic level, educational circumstance, family structure and personal hobbies are the main factors influencing juvenile crimes.

**Keywords:** Juvenile Delinquency, Case Distribution, Influencing Factors, Historical Changes

## 1. INTRODUCTION

With the enhance of China's social security and the strengthen of legal enforcement, situation of juvenile delinquency in China was improved considerably in recent years. The definition of juvenile delinquency varies from country to country. But by far the most widely accepted argument is that it is defined as criminal offenses committed by juveniles and teenagers between the ages of 14 and 25. According to the data released by the Supreme Court of China, since 1990s, the amount of juvenile delinquents has decreased sharply. Nevertheless, the number of crimes committed by those who is under the age of 18 has been rising again since 2017.

Today's crime of juveniles is characterized by more impulsive behaviors, more ferocious means, and a high rate of recidivism. The current situation of juvenile delinquency in China and various factors that contribute to it are analyzed in this paper. Besides, the author makes a comparison of the past and present of this issue in terms of type, age, motivation and regional distribution of the crime. In addition to the analysis, the paper offers reasonable suggestions for the government, schools and parents in order to better reduce the amount of juvenile delinquents and create a safer environment for the growth of young generation.

## 2. COMPARISON OF THE CURRENT AND PAST SITUATION

### 2.1. Age Distribution

Since 2000, the proportion of juvenile delinquents in China has experienced an increasing trend, from 18.9% in 2000 to a peak of 27.8% in 2008. In the following decade, with the widespread attention paid to this issue and the continuous

decline of the proportion of young people in the total population, the number dropped to 14.1% in 2018.

However, the juvenile criminals still shows a trend of younger age. As early as the middle and late 1980s, some criminologists found that the age of juvenile delinquency was getting lower and lower, which was called the "younger age" phenomenon of juvenile delinquency [1]. In recent years, this trend is becoming more and more evident in China. According to the data released by Daxing District People's Court in Beijing, the proportion of 14 - and 15-year-olds in adolescent criminals has increased from 11% in 2005 to 24% in 2010, and in 2016, the number has reached 51.3%. Thus, trend of younger age that juvenile delinquency indicates should be causing alarm.

### 2.2. Type of crimes

From 1981 to 1982, a sample survey of juvenile delinquency conducted by Hangzhou University showed that larceny, robbery and rape were the top three crimes. In 2017, among the random selected 2098 judicial documents on juvenile delinquency in China, the top five crimes included drug trafficking (658), larceny(370), intentional homicide (166), intentional injury (159), and crime of provocation (158) [2]. It can be seen from the data that in recent years, juvenile drug-related crimes in China are becoming more and more severe. The amount of drug trafficking cases which is in the first place is even higher than the sum of the second and third places. According to statistics, nearly 80% of the drug addicts in China in recent years are teenagers, and this high ratio is even rare worldwide[3].

On the border between China and Myanmar, people known as "mules" use their bodies to transport drugs to China every day. In February 2018, Nanjing Police seized a human drug trafficking case. The criminal Li you, Gao Ming and Ma Qiang were all minors under the age of 18 and came from Wenshan, Yunnan Province. The three were manipulated by

criminal gangs and once sold drugs to China from Myanmar. They were paid 10000 to 12000 yuan for drug trafficking. Most of the young people who become "mules" are "troubled youths". They have no education background or ability to make their living, so they can only choose to take risks. This typical case reflects the severity and social harmfulness of juvenile drug crimes in China.

### **2.3. Criminal motives**

At the beginning of the 1980s, the criminal motives mainly focused on "seeking stimulation", "imitation out of curiosity", "self conceit", "personal loyalty" and "revenge". Nowadays, considerable changes have taken place in teenagers' psychology. Although delinquency committed on impulse still exist, current criminal behaviors possess characteristics that are influenced by today's social background, such as the impact of wrong values in the society. The current criminal motives of juvenile delinquency can be classified into the following types.

Firstly, incorrect values and outlook on life. With the development of society and the improvement of people's living standard, the social atmosphere is becoming impetuous. Under the influence of individual heroism, adolescents started to pursue unrestrained freedom. Due to this wrong outlook on life, more and more teenagers have embarked on the career of crime.

Secondly, immature cognition. In contemporary modern society, juveniles' access to information has become more and more diversified. They often blindly choose to accept everything due to lack of experience, which eventually leads to their misbehavior.

Thirdly, increasing impulsive crime. Generally speaking, adolescents express their emotions explicitly, when others are mocking them or showing rude attitude, for example, their psychological inversion sometimes lead to criminal behaviors[4].

### **2.4. Gender distribution**

Due to the physical and psychological differences between male and female, as well as the influence of traditional concepts in China, the female crime rate has always been lower than the male's in China. However, in recent years, the female crime rate has increased significantly nationwide. Take Tianjin as an example. From 1990 to 1999, the proportion of female juvenile delinquents in Tianjin was very low, generally about 2%. By 2017, the figure has climbed to about 12.5%. From the perspective of crime types, female juvenile delinquency mainly includes property crime, violent crime and sexual crime, and those types has gradually approached that of male[5].

## **3. INFLUENTIAL FACTORS**

### **3.1. Economic Levels**

Economic standard of a region is one of the primary factors that affects juvenile crime rate. As early as 1950s, American scholars indicate economic level of a region. Juvenile delinquency behaviors are highly correlated with poverty and with low income[6]. In 2017, Xinjiang, Hunan, Shanxi, Liaoning and Yunnan had the most criminal justice documents under the age of 25. As far as we know, per capita disposable income is an important indicator to measure the economic development level of a region and the living standard of residents. The five provinces rank 25th, 13th, 23rd, 14th and 28th in per capita disposable income, all among China's poorer provinces. In addition, for other provinces with more serious poverty as well as criminal issues, it is the low population that leads to the relatively lower number of criminal cases. In Qinghai, Tibet and Ningxia, for example, which have the bottom three populations, the absolute amount of crimes is low, leaving them with fewer documents.

### **3.2. Educational circumstances**

The educational circumstances of a region is also inversely proportional to the crime rate. Random sample for the United States study found that every year increase in the average years of education can lower the crime rate up to 11%[7]. On the contrary, poor areas, especially the marginalized farmers and rural education resources, will lead to the lack of teenagers education. Entering the society in a young age, they lack the ability to make a living, which makes them start the career of crime. Judicial practices in China also prove this theory. In Xinjiang, Hunan, Shanxi, Liaoning and Yunnan, compulsory education rate among all population is 60%, 66%, 74%, 60%, 51%, far lower than the standard of over 80% in developed regions such as Beijing and Shanghai.

### **3.3. Family Structure**

Differing family structures may directly impact the stability of the family and the functioning of children and adolescents[8]. A sample survey of 100 juvenile delinquents in Hubei Province includes 22 parents divorced, 16 from single parent families, 11 living alone and 9 living with

other relatives. It demonstrates emotional discord between parents can bring psychological harm to teenagers. Lack of parental role will also lead to a lack of care and discipline for juveniles. Thus their behavior deviates and they started career of crime[9].

Due to the improvement of people's living standards, China's social life is becoming more and more enriching. On the other hand, teenagers are very vulnerable to the influence of all kinds of temptation and possess various bad habits. It has

almost come to mean that activities that are delinquents in nature are incorporated by bad habit and pastimes[10]. According to the statistics of the Supreme People's Court in 2014, 86% of juvenile delinquents have dropped out of school, of which 79.6% have did that for more than three months. The top bad habits were truancy, playing violent video games, fighting, smoking, staying out at night and socializing with troubled young people. Nearly 67% of the juveniles surf on the Internet for their main activity before committing crimes, and 21.4% of them choose gambling as primary hobby. Their crime track often starts from playing unhealthy games, smoking and drinking, and then trying to play truant. Finally, these bad habits lead to crimes such as fighting and robbery[11]. In this process, families and schools are actually powerless to them.

## **4. SUGGESTIONS AND IMPROVEMENTS**

### **4.1. Society**

Social influence plays an important role in the growth of teenagers. Nowadays, unhealthy cultural products that promote violence and pornography can be seen everywhere, which will have a negative impact on the growth of teenagers. The author believes that the government should rectify social atmosphere and eliminate spread of those culture by strictly censoring literary and artistic works. On the other hand, teenagers may have bad habits such as smoking and drinking in entertainment places, and they may also get to know troubled youths. Therefore, minors should be obliged to prohibited from entering bars, nightclubs and other entertainment places.

In terms of legislation, in order to deal with the juvenile delinquency and prevent young criminals from violating the law, it is suggested to lower the age of criminal responsibility. In the United States, there are 37 states that do not set the minimum limit of criminal responsibility, while in the United Kingdom, criminal responsibility is imposed when they are over 10 years old. The author believes that China should also make appropriate adjustments according to the specific national conditions.

### **4.2. School**

Currently, China's educational resources are seriously unequal between regions. Balancing urban and rural educational resources and providing better teaching circumstances, including teaching equipment and teachers, for students areas in poverty like Yunnan, Guizhou and other provinces can not only promote talent training, but also reduce student crimes. Meanwhile, schools should not only pay attention to the cultivation of intelligence, but also should strengthen students' sense of law as well as moral education.

Schools should also take the primary responsibility for the frequent bullies on campus. Some developed countries, such

as the United States and Japan, have adopted legislation to solve school bullying problems. For example, several overseas Chinese high school students in Southern California abused their classmates. The school attached great importance to the incident and immediately called the police to deal with it. Finally, they were sentenced to six to thirteen years' imprisonment. These countries pay attention to school bullying from the school level, which is worth learning from by China.

### **4.3. Family**

Parents are the first teachers of children, so family plays an important role in the growth of children. Given the reasoning and examples we discussed, parents should first correct their own bad behaviors such as smoking, drinking, gambling and so on, on the purpose of preventing their children from having similar bad habits under their influence. Secondly, parents should try their best to create a harmonious family environment for their children. They are supposed to solve family conflicts in a rational way, to avoid causing psychological trauma to children.

For parents who cannot bring up their children due to imprisonment, drug abuse, alcohol abuse and other reasons, a suitable guardian should be found for teenagers. Li Wei, 16-year-old in Qingdao, was charged with theft. His parents were unable to show up because of the long journey to the court. It was his uncle and his new guardian who appeared in court. After that, with the help and support of his uncle, Li Wei went back to school and got back on the correct track. He also regained his confidence in life. It can be seen that suitable guardian could provide great help for problem teenagers.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This essay mainly investigated situation of criminal delinquency in China. For the starters, the author compares its current characteristics with the past, which is younger age, severer drug crime and more female criminals. At the same time, their criminal psychology has also changed significantly. Then, the author analyzes the main factors affecting the number of juvenile delinquency, which are economic level, educational circumstance, family structure and personal hobbies. However, due to the uncertainty of juvenile delinquency behavior itself and the huge differences in economic and cultural factors among different regions in China, there are still probably potential influencing factors. Therefore, more data should be collected for wider discussions.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

I would like to thank the my teachers and TA for giving me help, when I was doing this research.

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