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THE EFFECTS OF SINGLE PARENTHOOD  
ON JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

by  
Lisa A. Barbetti

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of  
the Master of Arts Degree in the Graduate Division of  
School Psychology of Rowan College of New Jersey  
1996

Approved by  
Dr. John Klanderma

Date Approved 5/7/96

## ABSTRACT

Lisa A. Barbetti

### The Effects of Single Parenthood on Juvenile Delinquency

1996

Dr. John Klanderma  
Seminar in Educational Psychology

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the effects of parental separation and divorce on the occurrence rate of delinquent acts committed by male youths. The age of the child at the time of parental breakup, parental education, and parental employment were also measured for effects on delinquent behavior. The sample consisted of sixty male youths between the ages of twelve and fourteen. The students were sampled while in homeroom at several Vineland, New Jersey public schools. The data analyzed in this study was obtained through administration of a twelve question self report in which the students circled their responses. The data was examined using one-way analysis of variance. Several relationships were established which can be used to help predict the likelihood of a child engaging in delinquent behavior. The subjects from broken families reported significantly higher rates of delinquent activity than those from married families. Second, the subjects who experienced parental breakup at young ages reported the highest rate of delinquent offenses. Next, the subjects with delinquent behavior reported lower paternal education levels than nondelinquents. Finally, parental employment did not have an effect on reported delinquent behavior.

MINI-ABSTRACT

Lisa A. Barbetti

The Effects of Single Parenthood  
on Juvenile Delinquency

1996

Dr. John Klanderman  
Seminar in Educational Psychology

This study explored the effects of parental breakup on the occurrence of male juvenile delinquency. The effects of time of parental breakup, parental education, and parental employment were also examined. The results revealed that delinquency was significantly related to parental marital status, parental education, and time of breakup, and was unrelated to parental employment.

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## CHAPTER 1 - THE PROBLEM

Professionals who deal with Juvenile Delinquents (JD) tend to focus on the offense they have committed and therapy to help prevent the recurrence of this activity. Unfortunately, little research or emphasis is placed on the cause(s) for JD. Due to various stressors that the youth may encounter at the time, it is difficult to identify all of the factors that contributed toward the delinquency.

Personal experience working with the JD population who are products of divorced or separated parents has inspired this research to determine if a significant relationship exists between JD and broken families. This study will also examine several parental characteristics of the JD sample group, as compared to two parent models, to determine if significant differences exist, and how they may affect the child's behavior. The results should be beneficial for professionals who have the opportunity to work with children at risk for delinquency due to stated circumstances.

### Purpose

The primary purpose of this study is to compare the occurrence rate of the delinquent acts of male youths between the ages of twelve and fourteen from two-parent families and broken families resulting from divorce and separation. In



addition, the influence of timing of breakup, and differences in parental education and employment between the JD and non-JD population is also examined.

### Hypothesis

Male youths from broken families are more likely to engage in delinquent acts than male youths from two parent families.

### Theory

Historical Information: Despite the recent attention JD has received, it is not a new phenomenon. Three hundred years ago, John Locke, the great English educator, deplored delinquency in much the same way that we do today. Six thousand years ago, an Egyptian priest carved on a stone, "Our earth is degenerate.... Children no longer obey their parents" (Johnson, 1959). Currently, increasing rates of delinquency are reason for serious concern world wide.

Delinquency is considered to be a legal concept that is identified in various ways, depending on the time and place. In our society, JD is most commonly applied to individuals under eighteen years of age who exhibit behavior that is punishable by law. It is important to conceptualize that what we label delinquency includes not only serious offenses such as burglary, assault, and rape, but also "status offenses" such as curfew violations, truancy, running away, sexual misconduct, or "incorrigibility" that would not constitute violation of the law if they were committed by an adult

(Binder, 1988).

As related to delinquency, the problems of single parenthood may have an adverse affect on all involved. Single parenthood usually has a very emotional, tragic, and disruptive beginning. The problems facing the single parent family are some of the same problems facing the nuclear family, but in this case there is only one parent to handle the problems. When single parenthood begins, the family may have to move to a smaller, less expensive home in a less desirable neighborhood. The single parent will also have to cope with making decisions about child care, discipline, and other situations that may arise. The stress and hardships of this reorganization may be compounded if the children are forced to change schools, leave old friends, and adjust to a new neighborhood. These factors can lead to problems in school, emotional withdrawal, deviant behavior, and JD.

The significance of the broken home to delinquency has varied in research depending on whether other characteristics of families have been taken in to account, as well as the severity of the crime. West and Farrington (1973) take the position that being raised by one parent is not the cause in the pure sense. It is only the tip of a bigger spectrum. The West and Farrington study reveals that the primary factor is not so much the separation of the parents, but the turmoil that may have led up to the separation. Parental preoccupation with tensions and problems in the marital

relationship may result in reduced time with children and to inconsistent monitoring and regulating of children's behaviors. Thus, children may engage in "acting out" behavior and develop symptoms as either conscious or unconscious attempts to attain their parent's attention. Additionally, children may respond to conflict in the family by developing their own problems as a means of functionally adapting to the distressed family's system (Minuchin, 1974).

Many theorists have developed theories linking JD and single parent families. The following information is based on theoretical perspectives of JD and how it may be linked to a broken home environment.

From a social theoretical point of view, the family determines the culture into which a child is born. It is the culture and subculture that defines the expectations, norms, and values that children are to internalize. If the family is effective in helping youths internalize these norms, their chances of remaining nondelinquent are increased. However, if the family is not effective, the youths may become delinquent in behavior as defined by a larger society. Additionally, other variables such as those involved in the broken home have been found to correlate with delinquent behavior.

Many of the social structural theories emphasize that the type of broken home may be important in explaining specific delinquent behaviors. Geismar and Wood (1986) suggest that a favorable home atmosphere can do much to neutralize the

adverse affect of having only one parent in the home, and that psychosocial behavior and functioning may be the best perspective for understanding family dynamics. From a sociological point of view, the events preceding the formal breakup is the major contributing factor to delinquent behavior, and this is often overlooked in studies of broken homes. Family tension is believed to significantly contribute to delinquent behavior. The associated tension can stem from hatred, hostility, and bickering. This type of activity between parents obviously does not make the child feel secure. When a great deal of tension and hostility exists in the home, the youngster is often forced to find "peace of mind" in groups outside the family environment, a breeding ground for delinquency.

An additional component in the sociological perspective is the control theory. This theory hypothesizes that a person is free to commit delinquent acts because of feelings that his ties to the conventional world have been broken. The affected youth may drift into delinquency because he is no longer under the influence of social control. In this theory, the problem of delinquency is stated in such a way that neither the question of goals nor the question of causes is directly considered. The question, "Why do they do it?", is not the question that the theory seeks to explain. The question is "Why don't we do it?". Social control theories assume that everybody is capable of committing offenses and that we all

have certain unfulfilled needs. In respect to the broken home, the unfulfilled needs might be the absence of a parent or the need to be in a normal environment without marital stressors.

Personality theorists also have perspectives of broken homes in relation to delinquency. Karen Horney discusses a neurotic personality, focusing on basic anxiety as the main concept. Basic anxiety stems from anything that causes insecurity in the child, especially in relationship to the parent's marriage. The child may try to cope with the feelings of anxiety by various adjustments and irrational acts. If the anxieties are intense and prolonged, these adjustment methods become crystallized into enduring motivational patterns, in the form of "neurotic needs".

The neurotic needs, as discussed by Horney, become excessive and unrealistic. They are called neurotic because they become excessive and uncontrollable forces in the adolescent personality. All of us have needs, but in the case of divorce or separation, the need to have both parents reunited, and the stress involved in the separation, can leave the child feeling abandoned. The child feels as though his needs are not met and may turn to delinquency.

On the contrary, the psychoanalytic theory relates to delinquency in respect to the three parts of the personality; the id, ego, and superego. The id is the source of motivation of all our needs and desires, without any regard for right,

wrong, or consequences.

The ego is the part of the personality that is concerned with the relationship between the id and the outside world. The ego strives to secure the needs and desires of the id. If the demands cannot be gratified, the ego induces the id to give up, modify the demand, or accept changes.

The superego begins to develop when the ego matures (around the age of six). The superego incorporates the morals, virtues, and prohibitions of the parents. When these rules are violated by the youth, guilt feelings develop. Psychoanalysts theorize that JD is a behavior problem caused by an inner conflict between the adolescent's super ego and the oral, anal, and phallic impulses of the id. The superego may be abnormal or underdeveloped. It may have a defect caused by a negative emotional experience suffered during childhood, resulting in abnormal behavior at puberty.

If the negative behavior is extremely serious, the youth may not develop a superego. A youth without a superego does not feel guilty. His crimes may be extremely severe. He may rape or kill without feeling remorse. Also, a youth with a weak or defective superego will not be able to challenge or control the primitive urges of the oral, anal, and phallic stages, as well as the lack of morals and values related to divorce or separation. Therefore, the early-childhood behavior is expressed at puberty as delinquent behavior.

Psychoanalysts have discovered that the absence of a

parent during infancy and early childhood can cause the child to develop a distorted image of masculinity an/or femininity. The affected child may imitate a role model outside of the family who has criminal tendencies. Children of single parents of the opposite sex usually have to look to the community for the same-sex role model.

The developmental stage theorists present a contrasting opinion of the causes of delinquency. Eric Erickson divided personality into eight psychosocial crisis stages. If the child's interaction with parents and others in the environment is normal, the personality development will be good. If the child is faced with the stressors involved in the separation of the family as they move through the early stages of their personality development, abnormal personality development may result and the child may express their personality by committing delinquent acts.

In agreement with the social theory, the role theory states that a child grows into his role through social interaction with the family and environment. The parents and siblings usually serve as role models for the child. If there is separation and stress in the family during early childhood, the child may develop an inability to effectively manipulate the environment. The inability to effectively adapt to society may be manifested in delinquent behavior.

### Definitions

1. Broken Homes - Homes in which one parent is absent due to

divorce or separation.

2. Crystallized - Abilities acquired as the result of cultural experiences.
3. Favorable Home Atmosphere - A family structure that fits an acceptable image in most aspects in which the child feels safe and comfortable in his/her environment.

#### Assumptions

1. The participating teachers distributed the questionnaires to all boys in the selected classes. The teachers were trained to read only the directions and to remind the students before beginning and after five minutes that this is anonymous and to be as honest as possible.
2. The questionnaires were distributed during homeroom periods to reflect a random sampling of students representing various academic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

#### Limitations

1. Due to educational differences, there may be several students who have difficulty reading the questionnaires.
2. The accuracy of the results is limited by the honesty and knowledge of the subjects providing the self-report information.

#### Overview

The aforementioned theories on JD and broken families provide a framework to their relationship. However, theories tend to be broad and can be applied to numerous areas of



study. Statistical data provided through research is a clearer indicator of the existence of significant relationships.

In Chapter Two, a review of literature regarding the relationship between JD and broken families will be conducted. Additionally, the strengths and weaknesses of the studies will be reviewed and summarized. A discussion section at the end of the literature review will summarize the findings and introduce Chapter Three.

In Chapter Three, a design of the study will be reviewed in which the following information is described: the sample, the operational measures, the testable hypotheses, the design, and the analysis. A summary of Chapter Three will briefly reflect important aspects contained in the chapter as well as lead into Chapter Four. In Chapter Four, the analyzed results will be presented along with summaries of the statistical studies.

## CHAPTER 2 - REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Minimal research exists which focuses on the relationship between broken families and JD. Three associated studies will be discussed to review their strengths, weaknesses, and relevant findings.

First Study The first study, "A Longitudinal Study on the Impact of Parental Divorce on Adolescents' Evaluations of Self and Parents", was published in the Journal of Adolescence (T. Parish, S. Wigle, 1985). This study is being reviewed first to gain an understanding of how children from intact families rate themselves as compared with children of family who recently underwent the trauma of a divorce.

The study was conducted over a three year time span (1979-1982) during which six-hundred and thirty-nine students from fourteen Kansas school districts were asked to complete various forms of the Personal Attribute Inventory for Children (PAIC). After both sets of PAIC were collected, three randomly selected experimental groups consisting of thirty subjects each were chosen. The intact group consisted of families that were intact at the time of the 1979 collection and remained intact up to the 1982 collection. The second

group consisted of those subjects who had experienced father absence due to divorce prior to the 1979 collecting of the data with a mother who did not remarry. The third group consisted of subjects from families that were intact during the 1979 collection but experienced father loss prior to the 1982 collection of data.

The research revealed that the findings were consistent at both times of assessment. Subjects of the intact group tended to evaluate themselves and their parents significantly more positively than did subjects of the divorced group. From this data, it can also be concluded that father absence subsequent to divorce is strongly associated with relatively negative evaluations of self and parent on the part of children. (T. Parish, S. Wigle, 1985).

The results of this study provided an overall view of how children rate themselves and their parents after parental divorce as compared to ratings from children of intact families. One significant weakness of this study was that children filled out the scale after they experienced divorce. There was no information to determine if the divorcing process itself was associated with behavioral and/or attitudinal changes in the children who experienced it. Other significant weaknesses are related to the lack of information regarding the subjects of study. The breakdowns of the ages and sex of the individuals in the sample were not provided in the published literature. A significant strength of this study

was the large sample size used.

The results of this study are related to the emotional aspects of divorce as reported in the participants' self evaluations. Divorce can be significantly traumatic to all family members. As with most crisis situations, the effects of divorce generally tend to diminish with time. However, the emotional events that lead up to the divorce, and the separation subsequent to divorce, tend to be associated with negative outcomes. Depending on the family dynamics and abilities to cope, these children are at higher risk for JD than those children from intact families (K.Camara, G.Resnick, 1989).

Second Study The second study, titled "Long-Term Effects of Parental Divorce on Young Adult Male Crime", was published in the Journal of Youth and Adolescence (B.Mednick, C.Reznick, D.Hocevar, R.Baker, 1987). Four-hundred and twenty-three males were randomly selected from a Danish birth cohort. The information about criminality that constitutes the outcome variable in this study was obtained from the Danish National Police Register. The Danish Police Register, which documents all police contacts, has been described as being beyond criticism with respect to validity and reliability. According to M.E.Wolfgang (1977), this register is probably the most accurate of the Western world.

The subjects of this study included all deliveries that took place at the State University Hospital (Rigshospitalet in

Copenhagen) over an approximately two year time span from September 1959 through December 1961. The subjects analyzed in this study are from the male sub-sample of an approximately ten percent random sample of the original subject population. This sub-sample was followed up to ages nineteen to twenty-one to examine the influence of biological and environmental factors on developmental outcomes. The sample represented the entire range of social economic status (SES) distribution, but had a slightly lower mean than the general Danish population, likely due to the location of the inner-city hospital.

The boys were divided into three subgroups based on family structure: traditional families (mother, father, and child), divorced families who started out as two-parent families (mother, child, and lack of biological father), and non-traditional families (child and grandparent/other relatives). The time of divorce was divided into three age periods: preschool (0-4 years), latency (5-10 years), and adolescence (11-15 years).

The results of this study revealed that young adults had the highest number of arrests when they came from the divorced or non-traditional families. The child's age at the time of the divorce was insignificant, as the results indicated that this factor was not related to the arrest rate.

A weakness of the study is the fact that the sampling represented only one nationality (Danish). Additional

weaknesses are the unknown aspects regarding the familial situations such as the child's relationship with the parents, and the lack of information regarding communication between the divorced parents. Strengths in this study include the use of families with comparable SES, and the large quantity of data collected over significant periods of time.

Third Study Professionals may question the type of future that children from broken homes may face. The third study, titled "Patterns of Family Instability and Crime: The Association of Timing of the Family's Disruption with Subsequent Adolescent and Young Adult Criminality", is a follow-up of the previous Danish study, and was also published in the Journal of Youth and Adolescence (B.Mednick, R.Baker, and L.Carothers, 1990). Data was used from a sample of four-hundred and ten males, ages nineteen to twenty-one, who took part in an eighteen year Danish Prospective Perinatal Cohort follow-up study.

This study revealed the importance of the definition of the broken home versus the stable home. Simply coding the home as either broken or intact tends to obscure other variables regarding the actual stability of the home. Other factors affecting the chances of JD were SES, criminal behavior of the father, and the age of the child at the time of parental breakup.

The results of this study suggested that youths who experienced significant changes in SES due to divorce

correlated with higher rates of criminal activities. This was most pronounced in the youths who experienced instability during the first eleven years of age. Additionally, the youths who experienced continued stability of SES throughout and after the divorce occurred had lower rates of criminal behavior.

The correlation between criminal behavior of the father prior to divorce has significant independent associations with criminal behavior in the male offspring. The following data regarding the effects on the child related to the timing of the divorce are highly correlated with criminal behavior. Overall, if the unstable family stabilized before the male reached age twelve, the association was insignificant. Instability during adolescence clearly constituted a strong correlation of criminal behavior. Divorce coupled with one more changes within the family structure was related to the highest level of delinquent behavior observed in this sample (65%).

The strengths of this study consisted of the large sample size used, as well as the relatively long test duration. The results of this study were comprehensive, with few weaknesses evident to this reviewer. As in the previous study discussed, the sample group consisted of only one nationality. Information regarding the present stability of the young men who were involved in criminal behavior during adolescence would be of interest. However, there was no mention regarding

this issue. Additionally, the follow-up study did not reference all of the research in the first study.

Of course, scientific data is useful in making judgements. However, as professionals in the context of the social fields, a journey should be taken backward toward the root of the problem, the effects of the broken home on children. When the father is absent, the mother is often the wage earner, the disciplinarian, and the main support of the family. With only so many hours in a day, and more than one child in the family, time is limited. A question of concern is how do these children cope with divorce within their own limits? Robert M. Regoli, PhD. in Sociology (1994), was able to capture "voices of children after divorce" as follows:

"On Mother's Day, everyone was making cards. The other kids asked 'why aren't you making one?' I just didn't say anything".

"I have a dream every night that there's a dragon that looks like my dad and he's eating my mom."

"My parents took my neck and they were choking me and saying, 'She's mine, no she's mine.'"

"I love my father, but I don't know if he loves me."

#### Summary

Children from broken families are often confused regarding their present and future. The situation may bring about feelings of loneliness and lack of attention from parental figures. For this reason, children may seek compassion from



their peers. If a sense of compassion and security is not acknowledged from their peer group, they may go one step further and become involved in delinquency. Such actions may help to get accepted into a group as well as gain the attention of parents who did not have time for them when they were good.

A review of the first study revealed a significant relationship of negative feelings of self and parents following divorce. The dependent variable measures (evaluation of self, mother, and father) of each group were analyzed using a repeated measures analysis of variance techniques.

A significant main effect for structure was found for each dependent variable (evaluation of self,  $F[3,112]=13.28$ ,  $p<.001$ ; evaluation of mother,  $F[3,112]=37.40$ ,  $p<.001$ ; evaluation of father,  $F[3,112]=33.55$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

A significant main effect for time of assessment was found for each dependent variable (evaluation of self,  $F[1,112]=5.88$ ,  $p<.05$ ; evaluation of mother,  $F[1,112]=11.53$ ,  $p<.001$ ; evaluation of father,  $F[1,112]=11.53$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

The findings of this study reflected that children who were living in intact families were found to consistently evaluate themselves and their parents more positively than those children who experienced parental divorce. The study focused on the perspective of the emotions of the child involved in parental divorce. Throughout the divorce, this is

one area that is at times, overlooked by the parents.

The second study was a review of research regarding the long-term effects of parental divorce on young adult males. The results were as follows: The number of arrest per subject as of 1981 was analyzed by family structure group (traditional, divorced or other nontraditional families) in a one-way analysis of variance. The results supported the hypothesis that the number of juvenile arrests is associated with the type of family structure. [ $F(2,420)=4.83, p<.01$ ].

Post hoc comparisons of means using the Tukey B procedure indicated that divorced and other nontraditional families did not differ. However, there were differences between divorced and traditional families ( $p<.05$ ). The subjects tended to have a higher number of arrests when from divorced or other nontraditional families as compared with the rates of arrests within a traditional family structure.

The results relating to the child's age at the time of divorce and the number of related arrests did not appear to be systematically related. However, there was a slightly higher rate of criminal arrests if the divorce occurred between the ages of eleven to fifteen. For a sample of forty males, means of 1.50, 1.34, and 1.60 corresponded to age groups, 0-4, 5-10, and 11-15, respectively.

Research from the third study, a follow-up to the previous study, revealed that divorce was only one factor in the broken home and that other factors such as SES, criminal

activity of the father, and the timing of the divorce should be considered.

The results indicated that both the SES level and father's criminality are significantly related to type of family structure ( $F[2,380]=14.05, p<.001$  and  $F[2,399]=19.060, p<.001$  respectively). For SES, Tukey B post hoc comparisons reflected that the intact family differed significantly from the divorced family ( $p<.05$ ).

The research regarding the age of onset of criminal activity was revealed through chi-square analysis. The test was determined to be statistically insignificant. Only 16% of the total sample was over age eighteen of the time of the first criminal charge, and approximately the same rates of early versus late onset of criminal behavior were found within the study.

The results of these studies provided support for this study's hypothesis which states that male youths from broken families are more likely to engage in delinquent acts than male youths from two parent homes. The review of the studies revealed that other variables in combination with the process of divorce may significantly affect the child.

## CHAPTER 3 - DESIGN OF THE STUDY

### Sample

The sampling procedure used for this study was designed to represent a normal distribution of the adolescent, male, public school population. The population was represented by a total sample size of sixty males between twelve and fourteen years of age from the Vineland New Jersey Public School System. The subjects attended "middle school", which consisted of sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. The students were sampled during homeroom in order to obtain a random distribution of ethnic, social, academic and SES backgrounds.

### Measures

The data was collected through the administration of a self-report by the subjects' teachers during homeroom. The questions in the self report addressed parental marital status, employment, education, as well as the number of offenses and the age of the subject at the time of the breakup. Additional questions were included to identify other potential variables which may be examined in future studies. The self report was comprised of twelve questions.

Administration of the self reports was supervised by the

homeroom teachers. The students were ensured anonymity to prevent potential bias from fear of providing potentially self-inflicting responses. The questions in the self report were randomly ordered, and required the student to circle one response for each question.

The subjects were divided into three groups based on family structure: married, divorced, and separated. Time of the breakup was divided into three periods; preschool (0-4 years), latency (5-10 years), and adolescence (11-15 years).

The outcome measure, criminal behavior, was divided into six levels: 0-5 or more arrests. The offenses were divided into two types, status and serious, but no differentiation was made between the types of crime in this study.

Parental employment history was divided into three types for each parent: unemployed, part-time, and full-time. Parental education was divided into four levels for each parent, based on the highest degree pursued: high school, trade school, two-year college, and four-year college. These measures provide insight into the student's SES.

### Design

The experiment was designed to generate data for analysis using inferential statistics in order to make a generalization regarding the relationship between parental marital status and JD.

### Testable Hypothesis

Null hypothesis: Parental marital status and delinquency

are independent for twelve to fourteen year old male youths.

### Analysis

To test the null hypothesis, which states that parental marital status and delinquency are independent, against an alternative hypothesis which states that the characteristics are dependent, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) will be conducted. A level of significance of 0.05 will be used to determine the critical value of F. If the observed F exceeds the critical value, it is unlikely that the samples were from populations with equal means.

### Summary

A review of chapter three entails that a sample of sixty students from various ethnic and SES backgrounds will be used as a representation in this sample. The students will be directed to answer a self report questionnaire pertaining to juvenile delinquency and marital status of their parents. The questionnaire contains twelve questions, each requiring one word responses.

Inferential statistics will be used to generate an analysis of data regarding the relationship between parental status and JD. A one-way ANOVA will be used to test the null hypothesis. Analysis of the results and discussion will follow.

## CHAPTER 4 - ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

### Overview

The analysis strategy used in this study examined the effects of four separate, but possibly related activities. The first activity described the differential amounts of male youth criminal behavior across three family structure types: married, divorced, and separated. Second, the divorced and separated subgroups was examined to determine whether the timing of the breakup in the child's life had any differential effects on the level of delinquent activity committed. Next, parental education levels were examined for a relationship with the delinquent activity of male youths. Finally, parental employment was examined for a relationship with the delinquent activity of male youths.

### Hypothesis 1 - Parental Marital Status

The primary null hypothesis, which stated that the samples representing the three structure groups (married, divorced, or separated) are from populations with equal means (offenses per student), was rejected. The number of delinquent offenses per student was analyzed by family structure group in a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Table 4.1 shows the ANOVA, along with the statistical summary for the number of offenses per subject from each family structure group. The results support the alternate hypothesis that the mean number of offenses per subject is differentially associated with the type of family structure [ $F(2,57) = 3.18$ ,  $p < .05$ ].

Table 4.1

Summary of the Offense Rate for the Three Family Structures

<u>PARENTIAL STATUS</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>MEAN</u>	<u>MINIMUM</u>	<u>MAXIMUM</u>	<u>STANDARD DEVIATION</u>
Married	29	0.79	0	6	1.57
Divorced	17	2.06	0	6	2.04
Separated	14	1.93	0	6	2.16

ONE-WAY ANOVA RESULTS

<u>SOURCE</u>	<u>DF</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>P</u>
Between Groups	2	21.96	10.98	3.18	0.05
Within Groups	57	196.69	3.45		
Total	59	218.58			

Since the ANOVA test resulted in rejection of the overall null hypothesis, post-hoc comparisons of the paired means were performed using the Fisher LSD (least significant difference), a protected t-test procedure. The results indicate that the means of the divorced and separated groups did not differ [ $p < .05$ , Probability= 0.87]. However, there were significant differences between the divorced and married groups [ $p < .05$ , Probability=0.02], and the separated and married groups [ $p < .05$ , Probability=0.06]. The subjects from divorced and separated families reported the highest number of delinquent



offenses.

Hypothesis 2 - Age of Child at Time of Breakup

The second null hypothesis stated that the age of the child at the time of the parental divorce or separation has a differential effect on subsequent delinquent behavior. To assess the importance of the subject's age during the breakup, the time of occurrence was divided into three categories on the basis of the child's age at the time of the breakup: preschool (0-4 years), latency (5-10 years), and adolescence (11-15 years). Table 4.2 presents the mean number of offenses committed for the three time-of-breakup categories. The null hypothesis was rejected based on the results of a one-way ANOVA which indicated that the time of divorce or separation is differentially related to the number of offenses committed [ $F(2,28) = 4.29, p < .05$ ].

Table 4.2

Offense Rates of the Three Age of Parental Breakup Groups

<u>AGE GROUP</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>MEAN</u>	<u>MINIMUM</u>	<u>MAXIMUM</u>	<u>STANDARD DEVIATION</u>
Preschool	4	4.00	0	6	2.45
Latency	13	2.39	0	6	2.10
Adolescence	14	1.07	0	3	1.14

ONE-WAY ANOVA RESULTS

<u>SOURCE</u>	<u>DF</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>P</u>
Between Groups	2	30.00	15.00	4.29	0.02
Within Groups	28	98.00	3.50		
Total	30	128.00			

Post-hoc comparisons using the protected t-test procedure

indicated that the means of the preschool and latency groups, as well as the latency and adolescence groups, did not differ [ $p < .05$ , Probability=0.24 and  $p < .05$ , Probability=0.06 respectively], although the probabilities that they are from populations of equal means is very low. However, there was a significant difference between the preschool and adolescence groups [ $p < .05$ , Probability=0.01]. The subjects who experienced a parental breakup at a young age reported the highest number of delinquent offenses.

### Hypothesis 3 - Parental Education Level

The third null hypothesis stated that the parental education level has a differential effect on the child's subsequent delinquent activity. To determine the degree of association between parental education and criminal behavior, four levels of education were established based on the highest degree pursued: High School (Level 0), Trade School (Level 1), Two-Year College (Level 2), and Four-Year College (Level 3). Table 4.3 presents the mean parental education levels for youths with and without reported delinquent behavior. The maternal and paternal mean education level of the two groups was compared using two-tailed t-tests. There was no significant difference in the mean maternal education levels [ $p < .05$ , Probability= 0.53]. However, the third null hypothesis was rejected due to the significant difference between the two paternal education levels [ $p < .05$ , Probability= 0.01]. The subjects who reported a history of delinquent

behavior reported a lower mean paternal education level than those without reported delinquent behavior.

Table 4.3

Maternal Education Levels for JD and non-JD Groups

<u>GROUP</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>MEAN</u>	<u>MINIMUM</u>	<u>MAXIMUM</u>	<u>SD</u>
Delinquent	28	1.11	0	4	1.23
Non-delinquent	32	1.31	0	3	1.24

Paternal Education Levels for JD and non-JD Groups

<u>GROUP</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>MEAN</u>	<u>MINIMUM</u>	<u>MAXIMUM</u>	<u>SD</u>
Delinquent	28	0.71	0	3	1.10
Non-delinquent	32	1.63	0	3	1.32

Hypothesis 4 - Parental Employment

The fourth null hypothesis stated that parental employment has a differential effect on the child's subsequent delinquent activity. To determine the degree of association between parental employment and criminal behavior, three types of employment were established: Unemployed (Type 0), Part-Time Employed (Type 1), and Full-Time Employed (Type 2). Table 4.4 presents the mean parental employment type for youths with and without reported delinquent behavior. The maternal and paternal mean employment types were compared between the two groups using two-tailed t-tests. There was no significant difference in the mean maternal or paternal employment levels [ $p < .05$ , Probability = 0.68 and  $p < .05$ , Probability = 0.87 respectively], therefore failed to reject the null hypothesis. The subjects who reported a history of delinquent behavior

reported statistically equal parental employment means to those without reported delinquent behavior.

Table 4.4

Maternal Employment Levels for JD and non-JD Groups

<u>GROUP</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>MEAN</u>	<u>MINIMUM</u>	<u>MAXIMUM</u>	<u>SD</u>
Delinquent	28	1.29	0	2	0.80
Non-delinquent	32	1.38	0	2	0.82

Paternal Employment Levels for JD and non-JD Groups

<u>GROUP</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>MEAN</u>	<u>MINIMUM</u>	<u>MAXIMUM</u>	<u>SD</u>
Delinquent	28	1.82	0	2	0.54
Non-delinquent	32	1.84	0	2	0.51

Summary

The first hypothesis stated that the married ( $x_1=0.79$ ), divorced ( $x_2=2.06$ ), and separated ( $x_3=1.93$ ) subgroups represent populations with unequal means (delinquent offenses per student). Table 4.5 summarizes the outcome:

Table 4.5

Summary of the Offense Rate for the Three Family Structures

<u>H<sub>0</sub></u>	<u>TEST</u>	<u>SIGNIFICANCE</u>	<u>P</u>	<u>REJECTED</u>
$x_1=x_2=x_3$	One-Way ANOVA	0.05	0.05	Yes
$x_1=x_2$	Two-Tailed T	0.05	0.02	Yes
$x_1=x_3$	Two-Tailed T	0.05	0.05	Yes
$x_2=x_3$	Two-Tailed T	0.05	0.87	No

The second hypothesis stated that the three age at the time of breakup subgroups: preschool ( $x_1=4.0$ ), latency ( $x_2=$

2.4), and adolescence ( $x_3=1.1$ ) subgroups represent populations with unequal reported criminal activity. Table 4.6 summarizes the outcome:

Table 4.6

Offense Rates of the Three Age of Parental Breakup Groups

<u>H</u>	<u>TEST</u>	<u>SIGNIFICANCE</u>	<u>P</u>	<u>REJECTED</u>
$x_1=x_2=x_3$	One-Way ANOVA	0.05	0.02	Yes
$x_1=x_2$	Two-Tailed T	0.05	0.24	No
$x_1=x_3$	Two-Tailed T	0.05	0.01	Yes
$x_2=x_3$	Two-Tailed T	0.05	0.06	No

The third hypothesis stated that the delinquent youths' maternal ( $x_1=1.1$ ) and paternal ( $x_2=0.7$ ) education levels was different than the respective nondelinquent maternal ( $x_3=1.3$ ) and paternal ( $x_4=1.6$ ) education levels. Table 4.7 summarizes the outcome:

Table 4.7

Parental Education Levels for JD and non-JD Groups

<u>H</u>	<u>TEST</u>	<u>SIGNIFICANCE</u>	<u>P</u>	<u>REJECTED</u>
$x_1=x_3$	Two-Tailed T	0.05	0.53	No
$x_2=x_4$	Two-Tailed T	0.05	0.01	Yes

The fourth hypothesis stated that the delinquent youths' maternal ( $x_1=1.3$ ) and paternal ( $x_2=1.8$ ) employment levels was different than the respective nondelinquent maternal ( $x_3=1.4$ ) and paternal ( $x_4=1.8$ ) employment levels. Table 4.8 summarizes the outcome:

Table 4.8

Parental Employment Levels for JD and non-JD Groups

<u>H<sub>0</sub></u>	<u>TEST</u>	<u>SIGNIFICANCE</u>	<u>P</u>	<u>REJECTED</u>
$\mu_1 = \mu_2$	Two-Tailed T	0.05	0.68	No
$\mu_2 = \mu_4$	Two-Tailed T	0.05	0.87	No

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## CHAPTER 5 - SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

### Summary

The purpose of this study was to correlate characteristics of single parents as compared to two parent family structures to determine their affect on juvenile delinquency. Many theorists have conducted research to explain the causes of juvenile delinquency, but have different perspectives pertaining to the reasons for this behavior. A summary of the theories involved in the explanation of the relationship between the broken home and JD are as follows:

1. Social Theoretical: It is the culture and sub-culture that children are to internalize. If the family is effective in helping youths internalize these norms, their chances of remaining nondelinquent are increased. However, if the family is not effective, the youths may become delinquent.

2. Control Theory: This theory hypothesizes that a person is free to commit delinquent acts because of feelings that his ties to the conventional world have been broken. The affected youth may drift into delinquency because he/she is no longer under the influence of social control.

3. Personality Theory: Karen Horney, a personality

theorist, suggests that all of us have needs, but in the case of divorce or separation, the need to have both parents reunited, and the stress involved in the separation can leave the child to feel as though his needs are not met and the child may turn to delinquency.

4. Psychoanalytic Theory: Psychoanalysts have discovered that the absence of a parent during infancy and early childhood can cause the child to develop a distorted image of masculinity and or femininity. The affected child may imitate a role model outside of the family who has criminal tendencies.

5. Developmental Theory: Erik Erickson, a developmental theorist, suggests that if a child's interactions with the parents and others in the environment is normal, the personality development will be good. If the child is faced with stressors involved in separation as they move through the early stages of their personality development, abnormal personality may result and the child may express their personality by committing delinquent acts.

6. Role Theory: The parents and siblings serve as role models for the child. If there is separation and stress in the family during early childhood, the child may develop an inability to adjust to society which may be manifested in delinquent behavior.

In addition to the wealth of theories, several studies were reviewed regarding the relationship between the broken



home and delinquency. The first study, "A Longitudinal Study on the Impact of Parental Divorce and Adolescents' Evaluations of Self and Parents", was reviewed in order to gain an understanding of how children of an intact family rate themselves as compared with children of a family who recently underwent a divorce or separation. The research reveals that the findings were consistent at both times of assessment. Subjects of the intact group tended to evaluate themselves and their parents significantly more positively than did subjects of the divorced group.

The results of the second study, "Long Term Effects of Parental Divorce on Young Adult Male Crime", revealed that young adults had the highest number of arrests when they were from divorced or non-traditional families. The child's age at the time of divorce was insignificant as the results indicated that this factor was not related to the arrest rate.

The results of the third study, "Patterns of Family Instability and Crime: The Association of Timing of the Family's Disruption with Subsequent Adolescent and Young Adult Criminality", revealed the importance of the definition of the broken home versus the stable home. Classifying the home as either broken or intact may not reveal other variables regarding the actual stability of the home. Other factors affecting the chances of JD were SES, criminal behavior of the father, and age of the child at the time of divorce.

The results of this study suggested that youths who

experienced significant changes in socioeconomic status due to divorce had higher rates of criminal activity. Additionally, the youths who experienced continued stability of SES during and after the divorce had lower rates of criminal behavior.

The data regarding the effects on the child related to the timing of the divorce are highly correlated with criminal behavior. Overall, if the unstable family stabilized before the male reached age twelve, the association was significant. Instability during adolescence constituted a strong correlation of criminal behavior. Divorce coupled with one or more changes within the family structure was related to the highest level of delinquent behavior observed in this sample.

The design of the study used for this thesis was as follows:

**Sample:** The sample consisted of sixty male youths between the ages of twelve and fourteen. All subjects attended middle school in Vineland, New Jersey. The students were sampled during homeroom in order to obtain a random distribution.

**Measures:** The data used for this study included a twelve question self-report in which the students were asked to circle the correct response. The students were assured anonymity to prevent potential bias.

**Design:** This experiment was designed to generate data for analysis using inferential statistics in order to make generalizations regarding the relationship between

parental marital status and juvenile delinquency.

Hypotheses: The four examined in this study are as follows:

1. The samples representing the three structure groups (married, divorced, or separated) are from populations with unequal mean delinquent offense rates.
2. The age of the child at the time of parental divorce or separation has a differential effect on subsequent delinquent behavior.
3. The parental education level has a differential effect on the child's subsequent delinquent activity.
4. The parental employment has a differential effect on the child's subsequent delinquent activity.

Analysis: The data was analyzed using one-way ANOVA's and two-tailed t-tests with a significance level of 0.05.

### Conclusions

The results of this study reveal remarkable findings regarding how a child may be emotionally affected by the separation of a parent. The following results were indicated:

1. The subjects from divorced and separated families reported the highest number of delinquent offenses.
2. The subjects who experienced a parental breakup at a young age reported the highest number of delinquent offenses.
3. The subjects who reported a history of delinquent behavior reported a lower mean paternal education level than those without reported delinquent

behavior.

4. The subjects who reported a history of delinquent behavior reported statistically equal parental employment means to those without reported delinquent behavior.

### Discussion

The effects of four separate parental factors in a child's life were examined for association with reported delinquent activity. A number of statistically significant results were found. These are summarized below, and theoretical implications are discussed.

Hypothesis #1 - Parental Marital Status The mean number of offenses per subject was associated with the type of family structure (married, divorced or separated). The subjects from divorced and separated families reported higher number of delinquent offenses than the subjects from married families. From a theoretical perspective, the problems facing the single-parent family are some of the same problems facing the nuclear family, but in this case there is more likely only one parent to handle them. The stress and hardships of being a single parent may be compounded if the children are forced to change schools, leave old friends, and adjust to a new neighborhood. These factors can lead to problems in school, emotional withdrawal, deviant behavior, and JD.

### Hypothesis #2 - Age of the Subject at the Time of Breakup

The age of the subject at the time of divorce or

separation was differentially related to the number of offenses committed. The subjects who experienced a parental breakup at a young age reported the highest number of delinquent offenses.

These findings support the results by Wadsworth (1979), who reported that serious forms of criminal activity were associated with males who experienced family disruption in early childhood. In contrary to Wadsworth, the findings reported by Offord, Allen, and Abrams (1978), and Mednick, Reznick, and Baker (1987) do not support the association.

In relation to the development of criminal behavior, pre-adolescence seems to be a period particularly sensitive to the changes in the configuration of the nuclear family. If divorce or separation occurs during this young and impressionable period, the child is less likely to be supervised due to only one parent residing in the household.

Also, a younger child will have less exposure time to the authoritarian parent than an older child, and is less likely to have formed a positive moral pattern of behavior. Therefore, the younger child is more likely to search outside of the nuclear family for role models to provide support and guidance. Children of single parents of the opposite sex usually have to look to the community for the same sex role model. According to the role theory, this scenario can be a breeding ground for delinquency.

The current generation of juvenile delinquents appear to

be committing more serious offenses at earlier ages than previous generations. Therefore, the need to form positive behavior patterns at earlier ages may be more critical now than during the two aforementioned studies which do not support the relationship.

Hypothesis #3 - Parental Education Level      The parental education level has a differential effect on the subjects' reported delinquent activity. The subjects who reported a history of delinquent behavior reported a lower mean paternal education level than those without reported delinquent behavior, while the mean maternal education level of the two groups did not significantly differ.

The existence of a relationship between the male subjects and their father's education combined with the lack of a relationship with their mother's education suggests that the father plays the dominant role in setting achievement standards. Therefore, the most common type of family breakup, involving mother custody, means that the child's same-sex role model has essentially departed so the mother is the primary adult role model. Although females have approached equality with males in the workplace, they still trail behind in measures of pay and perceived authority.

The negative relationship found between male delinquency and the subjects' paternal education level may be related to the lower income potential associated with lower education levels. Less income to the family is generally an indicator

of the presence of an increased number of stressors - economic, emotional, and physical - in the lives of parents and children. All of these stressors tend to interfere with the quality of child rearing conditions. Less disposable income may also cause the child to turn to crime in order to obtain desired material goods.

Hypothesis #4 - Parental Employment The subjects who reported a history of delinquent behavior had statistically equal parental employment means to those without reported delinquent behavior. A potential reason for the lack of a relationship is the lack of specific employment information obtained from the self-report. The self-report only addressed the existence or lack of employment, and did not differentiate between employment types such as blue collar factory worker or white collar professional due to the potential for erroneous data. Many children cannot accurately describe their parents occupations in terms of skill level or position.

The relationship between delinquency and employment was examined to address several theories. If a parent or parents are not employed, there may be less disposable income for the family, and the child may consider theft in order to obtain material goods.

In contrast, if both parents are full-time employed, the child is less likely to be supervised. In this case, there may be more time for undesired peer contact and delinquent activity. Also, there is less time for the child to learn

acceptable behavior patterns from exposure to the parental role model.

#### Implications for Future Research

The results of this study suggest that future research should measure the association of other variables that may also be present in a broken home environment. Several of these are discussed below.

Parental criminality was not measured in this study due to the high potential for erroneous data. It is unlikely that the subjects providing the self-report information would have known this aspect of parental history. It is possible that a part of the reason for the observed association between the parental breakup and juvenile delinquency could be contributed to the fact that nonintact families tend to include a disproportionate number of criminal fathers.

This study did not attempt to identify the child's guardian before or after the breakup. Examples of different guardians include single mother, single father, step-parents, grandparents, foster home, and/or state guardianship. It is likely that each one of these scenarios would have a differential affect on the child's long-term behavior patterns, including delinquent activity.

The study did not measure the age of the child during the first incident of delinquent behavior, or the time elapsed between the parental breakup and the first incident. The study also did not consider parental conflict which may have



existed in the married group, but did not result in divorce or separation. The circumstances and family stability prior to the divorce also were not considered. Simply coding the subjects as being from either an intact or broken home obscures data concerning the stability of the family. For example, after the breakup some families may become more stable, while others may continue in even more pronounced patterns of instability.

Although such information is difficult to obtain and quantify, these factors should be considered when attempting to rationalize or predict a particular child's propensity toward delinquent activity.

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APPENDIX A  
Self Report Questionnaire

THESIS QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer the following 12 questions. This questionnaire is totally anonymous, so do not write your name on this paper. You will be provided fifteen minutes. If you need a question clarified, please ask the person administering the questionnaire. Thank you for your time and sincerity.

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| 1. Have you ever been in trouble with the law?  | Y  | N |
| 2. If you answered yes to question one, please circle how many times you have been in trouble with the law. | 1 2 3 4<br>5 or more   |   |
| 3. What type of offense(s) did you commit?  | Theft<br>Curfew<br>Drugs/Alcohol<br>Violence<br>Other(s) _____ |   |
| 4. Are your parents divorced?   | Y  | N |
| 5. If you answered yes to question 4, please circle how many years they have been divorced.                 | 1 2 3 4 5<br>6 7 8 9 10<br>11 12 13 14                         |   |
| 6. Are your parents separated?  | Y  | N |
| 7. If you answered yes to question 6, please circle how many years they have been separated.                | 1 2 3 4 5<br>6 7 8 9 10<br>11 12 13 14                         |   |
| 8. Does your mother work?   | Y  | N |
| 9. If you answered yes to question 8, please circle how often your mother works.                            | Part time<br>Full time   |   |
| 10. Does your father work?  | Y  | N |
| 11. If you answered yes to question 10, please circle how often your father works.                          | Part time<br>Full time   |   |

MOTHER

FATHER

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 12. Please circle the highest level of education completed by your parents. | Elementary<br>High School<br>Trade School<br>2 Year College<br>4 Year College | Elementary<br>High School<br>Trade School<br>2 Year College<br>4 Year College |
|---|---|---|