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Examination of Factors Influencing Juvenile Delinquency in Iran and France

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ABSTRACT

Juvenile delinquency represents one of the fundamental challenges facing legal and social systems, rooted in a complex interplay of individual, familial, social, and economic factors. A comparative analysis between Iran and France reveals that elements such as poverty, weaknesses in the educational system, domestic violence, and peer pressure play decisive roles in shaping delinquent behaviors in both countries. However, significant differences exist in the foundational principles and criminal policies of the two legal systems. Iran, grounded in Islamic teachings, emphasizes relative criminal responsibility and individual rehabilitation, whereas France adopts a preventive and protective approach that prioritizes alternatives to punishment. The findings of this study indicate that integrating reformative, protective, and preventive policies and revising juvenile criminal laws can provide a foundation for reducing delinquency among this population. Furthermore, drawing upon the successful experiences of progressive legal systems can offer an effective model for improving Iran's criminal policy toward children and adolescents.

Keywords: *juvenile delinquency, Iranian law, French law, juvenile criminal responsibility, crime prevention, criminal policy*

Introduction

Juvenile delinquency is among the most fundamental challenges confronting modern societies and has attracted the attention of researchers, criminologists, and policymakers since the late nineteenth century (1, 2). During this period, the growing rate of criminal acts committed by individuals below the age of legal responsibility prompted many nations to seek specialized educational and criminal justice systems tailored to this demographic (3). The significance of this issue lies in the fact that behavioral deviance during childhood, if neglected by family and society, becomes difficult to correct in adulthood and may perpetuate the cycle of criminality within society (4). Childhood and adolescence constitute a sensitive stage of physical and psychological development, during which individuals require support, guidance, and healthy opportunities to express their abilities (5). In contrast, violence, discrimination, poverty, and social neglect create fertile ground for behavioral deviation at these ages (6).

Societies that have attained a proper understanding of the characteristics of this developmental stage have succeeded in reducing delinquency rates and effectively rehabilitating young offenders by adopting supportive and



educational policies (7). The historical evolution of criminal law demonstrates a transformation from a punitive to a reformatory and protective approach toward juvenile delinquency (8, 9). In earlier eras, children were held criminally responsible in the same way as adults and subjected to severe punishment. However, with the advancement of legal and psychological thought, judicial systems gradually moved toward differentiating between juvenile and adult offenders (10, 11). This shift laid the foundation for the establishment of specialized juvenile justice systems in many countries and the adoption of international instruments for the protection of children's rights (12, 13).

In Iran, drawing inspiration from Islamic jurisprudence and the principles of criminal justice, specific regulations have been enacted regarding juvenile criminal responsibility; however, in certain areas, a need for revision and strengthening of preventive policies remains (14). Conversely, the French legal system emphasizes early intervention and alternative measures to punishment, striving to interpret delinquency not merely as a crime but as a manifestation of broader social harm (15). A comparative analysis of the Iranian and French legal systems in this context can open new horizons for reforming and improving Iran's juvenile criminal policy and propose an integrated model of prevention, protection, and rehabilitation to reduce child and adolescent delinquency (7, 16).

A specialized examination of judicial systems and factors influencing juvenile delinquency in Iran and France indicates that adolescent offenders are closely supervised by judicial and correctional institutions (17). In France, the juvenile justice system encompasses police and judicial stages aimed at protection and reform; for instance, the detention of children under thirteen is permitted only under exceptional conditions, and judicial proceedings are conducted with priority on speed to avoid prolonged cases (18). Since 1945, French criminal law has progressively evolved, emphasizing protective and rehabilitative measures, even addressing group and violent crimes committed by minors (12).

Moreover, the factors influencing juvenile delinquency are diverse, encompassing social, economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions (6, 19). Cultural contexts—such as traditions, customs, and educational systems—shape children's personalities and affect their likelihood of engaging in delinquent acts (5). Economic conditions, including poverty, unemployment, economic crises, and unequal distribution of wealth, are also recognized as major contributing factors (20). The family, as the primary institution of upbringing, plays a decisive role in either preventing or facilitating delinquent behavior; violent or neglectful families, weak communication, and the absence of affection are among the familial problems most associated with delinquency (21, 22). Additionally, societies afflicted by social instability, war, or environmental crises tend to produce higher rates of juvenile crime (1). Given the intertwined cultural, social, and legal dimensions of this issue, a comparative examination of the factors influencing juvenile delinquency in the legal systems of Iran and France is essential for proposing comprehensive reformatory and protective policies (2, 14).

Fundamental Concepts of Juvenile Delinquency and Its Historical Development

In the Iranian legal system, a child from the criminal perspective is defined as an individual who has not reached the age of religious maturity—that is, girls under nine lunar years and boys under fifteen lunar years are exempt from criminal responsibility (11). According to Article 146 of the Islamic Penal Code (2013), minors bear no criminal responsibility; however, in certain circumstances, security and educational measures may be applied to prevent recurrence of the behavior (Article 148). The legislator's goal is thus not punishment but reform and rehabilitation of the child (10). Nevertheless, comparative legal analysis indicates that Iran's criminal justice system, like that of

many other nations, has been more active in protecting child victims than child offenders—a reflection of the insufficient understanding of the vulnerability of young offenders (21).

Given that many adult criminals have prior histories of delinquency in childhood, neglecting early behavioral deviation perpetuates criminality into adulthood (23). Therefore, juvenile criminal policy must be designed based on the unique physical, psychological, and social characteristics of this age group (4). Adopting an approach tailored to these conditions not only promotes effective rehabilitation but also contributes to the long-term strengthening of civil society and sustainable crime prevention (3).

The Legal Concept of the Child

In Iranian law, determining the end of childhood and the onset of civil and criminal responsibility is a fundamental issue (24). A minor is defined as a person who has not yet achieved the necessary physical and mental maturity for independent life and, as a result, is not considered a “rational adult.” According to Articles 146–148 of the Islamic Penal Code (2013), minors are exempt from criminal liability, though they may still be held responsible for civil damages (11). The legislator sets the age of religious maturity at nine lunar years for girls and fifteen for boys, applying security and educational measures for minors.

Under Note 1 of Article 304 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and Article 1 of the Law on the Protection of Children and Adolescents (2020), any individual who has not reached religious maturity is considered a “child,” while anyone under eighteen solar years who has reached religious maturity is considered an “adolescent” (20). Similarly, Article 1210 of the Civil Code provides the same age benchmarks for maturity. Internationally, Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as any person under the age of eighteen unless national law provides otherwise. Consequently, while Iran relies on religious maturity to determine criminal and civil responsibility, the international system recognizes eighteen years as the general threshold of childhood (7, 19).

The Concept of Delinquency

Essentially, *delinquency* is not a psychological but a legal concept (25). It refers to conduct that violates societal norms, rules, and laws, leading to legal prosecution, and those who engage in such acts are deemed offenders or delinquents (23). Herbert Blumer posits that any action consciously and voluntarily committed by an individual, in contravention of a social organization’s laws, constitutes a crime (6). When such conduct occurs within childhood or adolescence, it is termed juvenile delinquency (26).

In general, delinquency refers to law-violating behaviors committed by minors (27). Shoemaker also defines delinquency as deviant behavior among youths who have not reached the legal age, classifying them as delinquents; he further distinguishes between childhood and adolescence, with most delinquents belonging to the latter category (28).

Theoretical Perspectives on Delinquency

A wide array of theories and models has been advanced by sociologists and scholars in education and psychology to explain the spread of delinquent behavior among youth; a number of these perspectives are outlined here. Social control theory holds that delinquency results from the absence or weakness of social bonds between adolescents and one or more conventional institutions such as parents and other role models, teachers and schools, or prosocial programs that channel everyday activity (1, 26). The academic failure model posits that conduct-

disordered behavior emerges in the wake of poor scholastic achievement, with educational underperformance weakening commitment to school and loosening conformity to rules (4). Leisure-boredom theory contends that when arousal, challenge, or stimulation are not secured through socially approved means, adolescents are more likely to engage in delinquent acts such as aggression and gang formation (28). Interactionist accounts of crime and delinquency trace back to George Herbert Mead and Charles Cooley and stress the centrality of identity or self-concept as a powerful predictor of behavior (6). Differential association—the most prominent theory within socialization or learning approaches to deviance—builds on symbolic interactionism and maintains that delinquency is learned through intimate peer relations that transmit definitions favorable to law violation (26, 29). Finally, strain perspectives argue that adolescents—especially those in lower socioeconomic positions—turn to delinquency when legitimate channels fail to satisfy their needs, fostering frustration that can escalate into aggression toward proximate others (3, 22).

Internal and External Factors Influencing Juvenile Delinquency

Certain individual characteristics and traits can orient a child toward delinquency. These intrinsic features, tied to the offender's personality, include heredity, non-hereditary innate factors, and mental disorders (4, 14).

Internal Factors of Delinquency

From a criminological standpoint, the internal factors that influence juvenile delinquency fall into three principal categories: heredity, non-hereditary innate factors, and psychological disorders. First, heredity is regarded as a foundational element in the formation of personality; just as an individual may inherit property from relatives, so too can he or she inherit temperamental tendencies and dispositions via genetic transmission, a point long noted in both psychological science and, in Islamic teachings, under the rubric of *'irq* (lineage) (4). The observable similarities in parents and children—from gaze and affective expression to emotional reactivity—underscore the role of heredity in structuring personality (14).

Second, non-hereditary innate factors comprise the influences exerted on the fetus from conception to birth, which shape the child's future personality. These influences can be divided into two phases. (a) During pregnancy, maternal age, malnutrition, use of certain pharmaceuticals, alcohol or drug dependence, gestational illnesses, severe anxiety and emotional upheavals, and exposure to ionizing radiation may disrupt normal fetal development and increase later risks of behavioral and psychological problems (4, 30). (b) At delivery, excessive use of anesthetics or instrumental techniques such as forceps can affect the neonatal nervous system and later manifest as behavioral disturbances or aggressive reactions (4).

Third, psychological disorders are among the most consequential internal variables in the emergence of delinquent conduct. Although biological and physical conditions contribute to crime, they are rarely sufficient on their own; rather, they interact with an individual's psychological status and personality structure (14). Human beings are an integration of soma and psyche, and disequilibrium in mental health can present as antisocial behavior or delinquent deviation; thus, psychological analysis of juvenile delinquency that ignores the deep interconnection of biological and psychological components remains incomplete (31).

External Factors of Delinquency

Determinants of delinquency extend well beyond the biological and psychological domains; social and familial variables play a decisive role in the genesis of criminal behavior. The social environment and the family—primary sites of a child’s socialization—form the initial matrices of norm learning, and dysfunctions in these institutions can facilitate deviance and delinquency (21, 26). Familial disorganization, emotional deprivation, instability in parental relations, and lack of supervisory parenting directly or indirectly heighten a child’s propensity toward delinquency (1, 32). A child raised without affection, care, and a sense of security often seeks compensatory environments, thereby becoming susceptible to deviant peer groups, maladaptive friendships, and antisocial role models (2, 29). Moral and cultural corruption within the family, parental discord, the absence of one parent, or extreme familial strictness can, over time, estrange the child from home and draw him or her toward risky behaviors (20).

At the societal level, macro-conditions—economic, cultural, political, and media ecosystems—shape behavioral patterns. Two factors are particularly salient: the *social environment* and *mass media*. Social environments can be parsed quantitatively into micro-settings (family, school, neighborhood) and macro-settings (city, society), and qualitatively into cultural, economic, and natural milieus, each exerting distinctive effects on attitudes, values, and norms; structural discord or weakness in any one of these can incubate deviance (6, 17). Mass media, depending on orientation and content, can either cultivate education and social awareness among children or, by promoting violence, conspicuous consumption, and normlessness, catalyze deviance and delinquency (5). In contexts where content governance for youth is weak, media can become a pivotal vector of deviant modeling (18).

Applied criminology thus counsels that, because criminogenic factors are multidimensional, prevention and control must likewise be multifaceted and interdisciplinary. While the complete eradication of delinquency is unrealistic, it is possible to curb its spread by strengthening supportive, educational, and cultural policies and by improving the functioning of the family and social institutions (7). Prevention in this sense is comprehensive, addressing both structural reform and the elevation of moral and cultural standards. As Italian criminological thought has long emphasized, incremental gains in preventive measures outweigh the marginal utility of harsher punishments (3). Contemporary preventive frameworks—social and situational alike—retain this insight, and global experience shows that an exclusive focus on punishment, rather than on root causes, fails to reduce crime and can even reproduce delinquency (9). In this vein, modern child-justice reforms underscore state investment in early prevention and social support programs to contain delinquency in its earliest developmental stages (12).

Typology of Offenses by Children and Adolescents

Juvenile delinquency has accompanied human social life since its inception. However, prior to the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century, children’s offenses were not recognized as a distinct “social problem” and were largely analyzed within the framework of adult criminality (33). Urbanization, industrialization, and family transformation in the nineteenth century brought juvenile delinquency to the foreground as an independent socio-legal phenomenon in criminal law and criminology. Empirical research shows that juvenile delinquency differs fundamentally from adult crime with respect to motives, modes of commission, and behavioral quality; children tend to offend in peer groups, small gangs, or collectively, whereas adults more often act alone (34). Moreover, the gender composition of juvenile offenders indicates that in most societies—particularly in developing countries—the

rate of girls' delinquency is significantly lower than that of boys (15). Among offense categories, property crimes account for the largest share of juvenile delinquency in many jurisdictions (19).

Offenses Against Persons

Offenses against persons committed by children and adolescents include intentional or negligent battery and injury, threats, physical altercations, and, at times, indecent acts. Although the severity of these behaviors is often lower than comparable adult offenses, their significance lies in roots traceable to psychological disturbance, inadequate upbringing, and family dysfunction; if unchecked, these factors can mature into violent conduct in adulthood (4).

Offenses Against Property

Across many legal systems, theft is the most prevalent juvenile offense. Children and adolescents typically offend for relatively straightforward reasons—curiosity, financial need, a desire for status among peers, or susceptibility to familial and social environments. This offense is critical because it often constitutes the initial step toward persistent deviance, and without timely rehabilitative intervention, it can escalate into more complex criminality (8, 17).

Offenses Against Public and Social Order

Human society, founded upon its moral, cultural, economic, and political principles, maintains a system of behavioral rules that guarantees public order. Any conduct contrary to this system—such as addiction, vagrancy, truancy, or association with deviant groups—constitutes a disturbance of public order and, consequently, acquires a criminal dimension. It should be noted that this category of offenses reflects, more than it derives from strong criminal intent, the repercussions of social disorganization, poverty, weak familial control, and educational deficits (30). Accordingly, juvenile delinquency is a multifactorial phenomenon arising from the interaction of internal variables (psychological and biological) and external variables (familial, social, cultural, and economic). The first group includes factors such as bodily constitution, endocrine activity, and neuro-psychological disorders; the second group encompasses environmental, familial, social, and cultural influences situated outside the offender (31).

The Role of the Family and the Social Environment in the Formation of Delinquency

In Iran's legal and social order, the family—as the primary social institution—plays a foundational role in shaping personality, socialization, and the internalization of legal and moral values. Any dysfunction in its structure and performance—especially in parental relationships and modes of interaction with children—can directly affect tendencies toward deviance and criminal behavior during adolescence. In criminological functionalism, deviance is viewed as the result of a functional rupture in social institutions: when the family fails to perform its core functions—emotional support, moral supervision, and transmission of norms—the conditions for juvenile delinquency are created (28).

Parental Conflict

Among the circumstances that can ultimately lead to delinquency in adolescents and youth are parental disputes and sustained friction, whose effects extend to other family members and even relatives. At times, family problems

result in estrangement or even the departure of one parent from the household. These familial crises disrupt children's psychological security and hygiene and exert immediate, adverse effects upon them. When children do not experience the tranquility, harmony, and intimacy that are basic needs within the home, they seek them elsewhere and are likely to fall prey to exploiters and corrupt individuals, thereby being drawn toward delinquency. In any case, parental discord leaves harmful psychological traces on the entire family. Sometimes, because their peace of mind has been disturbed, children lose interest in school or work, run away from home, and, in the end, become prone to various forms of delinquent behavior. A study of 800 offenders found that 65% had mothers who were divorced or at the point of separation; another investigation showed that 88% of offenders had parents who lived apart and were engaged in ongoing conflict. These observations indicate that parental conflict provides a fertile ground for adolescent and youth deviance (6).

Discrimination Among Children

Within the family, greater parental attention to some children and lesser attention to others can engender feelings of resentment and mistrust. Rivalry and competition among siblings leave lasting destructive effects on children's psyches, prompting comparisons that, in the face of differential parental affection, produce a sense of inferiority. Discrimination at home clashes with children's sensitivity and self-respect, inflicts irreparable harm upon their mental well-being, and, by generating frustration and emotional crises, channels them toward negative reactions such as theft, addiction, and running away. Thus, fostering discrimination among children can predispose them to delinquency (26).

Lack of Affection

The need for affection is a primary and essential human need, especially for children. Just as a child requires nourishment for physical growth, he or she likewise needs affection for emotional development, socialization, and integration into society. More than good food, warm clothing, toys, or fresh air, children need parental acceptance and love. A shortage of affection is a powerful factor propelling adolescents and youth toward delinquency. An adolescent who has not received sufficient parental affection is more susceptible to behavioral disorders and moral deviance. The affection children receive at home produces psychological calm that helps deter many ethical lapses. Although the form of affection varies with age, parents' warmth and care must illuminate children's hearts so that this innate need is met. Many scholars of delinquency consider emotional deprivation to be a primary root of crime and deviance; research indicates that a high proportion of offenders suffer from some form of emotional problem related to their crimes. Consequently, a lack of affection lays the groundwork for later educational shortcomings in adulthood (24).

The Impact of Economic, Educational, Religious, and Psychological Factors on Delinquent Behavior

Since antiquity, the economy—one of the most fundamental social variables—has occupied a central place in philosophical, sociological, and criminological accounts of deviance and delinquency. From Plato to Marx, the consensus is that poverty and class stratification are not merely economic phenomena but structural forces in the breakdown of moral and social order. In the *Republic*, Plato contends that poverty is the source of hostility among classes and the cause of social disintegration: by stripping individuals of dignity and temperance, poverty inflames resentment, whereas excessive wealth breeds arrogance, egocentrism, and the erosion of virtue. This stance rests

upon his moral philosophy, which locates justice in a balance among desires and needs. Marx, adopting a structural perspective, roots delinquency in class antagonism and the relations of production under capitalism. For him, inequality in the distribution of resources alienates the individual from labor, society, and self, and this alienation ultimately manifests in various forms of antisocial and criminal behavior. Within Marxian conflict theory, crime is not merely individual deviance but a social reaction to structural injustice—a form of resistance by the oppressed against an unequal economic order (4).

In contemporary criminology, empirical findings likewise show a meaningful relationship between economic conditions and delinquency. Particularly in transitional societies, poverty and income inequality correlate with unemployment, unequal educational opportunities, and the absence of social safety nets. From the standpoint of Merton's strain theory, when individuals cannot attain culturally sanctioned goals through legitimate means, they experience psychological and social pressure that can produce deviant action; thus, poverty functions less as a direct cause than as a context for deviance amid frustrated aspirations. Economic crises and recessions also directly affect families and adolescent socialization: declining incomes, rising unemployment, and relative deprivation weaken family cohesion, increase domestic violence, spur school dropout, and ultimately push youth toward criminogenic environments. Urban areas with concentrated poverty—what Shaw and McKay described under social disorganization—become epicenters of juvenile delinquency. Yet the poverty–delinquency nexus is neither absolute nor deterministic: many persons living in poverty avoid crime through adherence to ethical, religious, and familial values, while certain affluent strata exhibit financial, moral, and social offenses rooted in poor upbringing, hedonism, and lax parental oversight. This demonstrates that economic factors take effect in interaction with cultural, psychological, and familial variables and must be analyzed within the value systems and support structures of a given society (35).

Within Islamic thought as well, the link between poverty and deviant behavior is expressly affirmed. Religious texts portray poverty not only as an obstacle to spiritual growth but also as a source of moral lapse. On this basis, Islamic criminal policy emphasizes economic justice, fulfillment of basic needs, and social balance as preventive strategies against delinquency. In the same vein, contemporary policy recommendations in Iran highlight the need for integrated social and policing strategies to address juvenile delinquency by investing in prevention and social support so that deviance is contained in the earliest stages of child development (17).

Evolution of Laws and the Protective System for Juvenile Offenders in Iran

In the Public Penal Code enacted in 1925, the legislator for the first time divided children by age into three groups: children under 12 were deemed non-prosecutable; those aged 12–15 who committed an offense were entrusted to their guardians for correction; and those aged 15–18, upon committing felonies or misdemeanors, were sentenced to confinement in a reformatory or to mitigated punishments. These provisions reflected a protective and educational approach toward young offenders. In the 1959 Law on the Establishment of Juvenile Courts, a more precise age classification was envisaged: children under 6 were non-prosecutable; those 6–12 were, depending on circumstances, either entrusted to guardians or sent to the Correction and Rehabilitation Center; and those 12–18, depending on age and type of offense, were subject to admonition, counsel, or placement in the Correction and Rehabilitation Center (11). Under this law, placement in the Center had a corrective and educational, rather than punitive, character.

Following the Islamic Revolution, the 1991 Islamic Penal Code, drawing on Islamic jurisprudence, adopted religious puberty as the basis for criminal responsibility and deemed non-pubescent children to lack criminal responsibility. With the enactment of the 2013 Islamic Penal Code, this was elaborated in Articles 146 and 147, fixing the age of puberty at nine lunar years for girls and fifteen lunar years for boys. The 2020 Law on the Protection of Children and Adolescents, for the first time, distinguished between a “child” (under puberty) and an “adolescent” (under 18 who has reached religious puberty) and provided broader criminal-law and social protections. Alongside these legal developments, criminological studies have emphasized the effects of individual, familial, psychological, and social factors on juvenile delinquency (8). According to Hirschi’s social control framework, delinquency occurs when bonds with institutions such as family, school, and community weaken or break; thus, poor parental supervision, family disorganization, and inadequate moral education are among the principal antecedents of deviant behavior in adolescents. In reality, no person is innately delinquent; rather, a constellation of environmental, economic, and educational conditions provides the groundwork for criminal conduct (22, 26).

The Age of Criminal Responsibility and the Challenges of Its Revision in Light of Social and Medical Considerations

Determining the age of puberty and its connection to criminal responsibility in Iran faces serious challenges: the current law defines puberty solely by a religious criterion, setting nine full lunar years for girls and fifteen full lunar years for boys as the threshold for criminal responsibility. This arrangement does not align with contemporary social conditions, and the marked disparity between the ages for girls and boys has provoked significant sensitivity and criticism. The legal history of this issue—from pre- and post-Revolution statutes to amendments to the Civil Code—shows the legislator’s awareness of the need to reconsider the age of puberty and its impact on criminal responsibility (36). From the perspective of Iranian law, puberty marks the end of childhood and the beginning of a person’s legal capacity to enter juridical relations. Articles 210–213 of the Civil Code regard puberty as a general condition of capacity, while Article 1210 deems non-pubescent persons legally incapacitated and prohibits them from disposing of property and undertaking juridical acts, whether pecuniary or non-pecuniary. Nevertheless, Note 1 to Article 1210 sets puberty at nine full lunar years for girls and fifteen full lunar years for boys, and Articles 146 and 147 of the 2013 Islamic Penal Code provide that non-pubescent persons bear no criminal responsibility. In practice, these provisions exclude children from criminal responsibility; however, in society at large, acceptance of these ages does not correspond to present social realities and contemporary cognitive development.

From social and cultural standpoints, today’s children possess higher levels of cognitive development and awareness than previous generations due to widespread access to education, information, and technology; yet delayed entry into social and economic activities, limited interaction with the broader society, and prolonged dependency on the family impede their experience of real responsibility. Especially with regard to girls, society tends to adopt a stricter view, and the attribution of criminal responsibility at very young ages meets public resistance and criticism. Accordingly, legislation in this field must, in addition to juridical and jurisprudential bases, be harmonized with public acceptance. From medical and psychiatric viewpoints, puberty is a gradual and relative process with no fixed age: physical, sexual, and psychological changes typically begin around age 10 and continue until 15–16. In girls, puberty begins with breast development, pubic hair, and menarche, with full maturation usually taking up to four years after the first menstruation; in boys, puberty starts with pubic hair, testicular growth, and voice change, culminating in the maturation of sexual function and reproductive organs (36). Because physiological,

psychological, and social puberty vary and are influenced by genetics, nutrition, environment, and culture, fixing a single, uniform age for criminal responsibility does not cohere with biological and social realities.

A Comparative Study of the Factors Influencing Delinquency in Iran and France

Studying the mutual effects of individual factors and identifying the personality and psychological characteristics of children and adolescents enables the transfer of research findings to policymakers, clinicians, and researchers. It must be noted, however, that individual factors do not by themselves determine delinquency, and establishing true causes requires proof of a causal link between a factor's change and a change in criminal behavior. In this regard, Iran's criminal statutes—especially the Islamic Penal Code and the Law on the Protection of Children and Adolescents—seek not only to prevent crime but also, through rehabilitative and reformatory policies, to deter children and adolescents from entering the criminal cycle. A prominent example is the determination of the age of criminal responsibility: under Article 146 of the 2013 Islamic Penal Code, children lack criminal responsibility because they have not reached puberty (8, 11).

This question is also addressed in the French legal system. Under Article 11-1 of the French Criminal Code, the criminal responsibility of children and adolescents depends on their capacity for discernment—that is, their ability to understand their acts. As a presumption, those under 13 are deemed to lack such discernment, whereas persons aged 13 and above may, if capable of understanding their conduct and intending it, be held criminally responsible. In other words, a person below the age threshold bears responsibility only if he or she understood the act, intended to commit it, and can grasp the meaning of the criminal proceedings faced. This approach coheres with France's broader juvenile-justice reforms that prioritize protection, education, and proportional accountability (12, 13).

Psychological and Educational Disorders

Regarding juvenile delinquency, the factors that influence it, and the stance of law in this domain, explanatory accounts vary widely by political outlook; conceptions of childhood are powerfully shaped by contemporary theories of crime and findings from medicine, psychology, sociology, and criminology. In addition, collective fears in any given society are reflected in that society's attitudes toward crime, children, and especially juvenile offenders (28). Sociological accounts emphasize that children and adolescents simultaneously embody adults' hopes for the future and their anxieties about challenges to prevailing values; symbolically, then, the delinquent child is read as a threat to social order, and the justice system's response reveals both deep social consequences and the lived reality of juvenile offending (1, 2).

In criminal psychology, *mental disorders* refer to states and conditions under which individuals may engage in, or be at elevated risk for, criminal behavior. Such disorders can directly affect criminal conduct or function as moderators in its emergence. Illustrative conditions include dissociative identity disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, antisocial personality disorder, dependent personality disorder, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, borderline personality disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder (14). Given the substantial increase in juvenile offending, identifying the links between mental disorders and juvenile crime is essential. Once the linkage is established, child and adolescent defendants can receive an optimal standard of mental-health care within juvenile justice systems; understanding other contributory factors likewise enables earlier prevention and intervention.

Effective coordination among mental-health clinicians, parents, and the courts is crucial to balancing justice, mental-health care, and the social needs of children and adolescents (20).

Identifying actual or potential mental disorders, mental-health challenges, and comorbid physical illnesses in children and adolescents within juvenile justice systems is critical for improving mental health, ensuring a fair trial, and preventing the successful consolidation of adult mental disorders—so that these youths can become effective members of society. It is also a widely accepted fact that children and adolescents, as human beings, face challenges in pursuing life goals that must be overcome: disappointments must be mastered, stress calmed, and anxiety and fear contained. When these difficulties cannot be managed, individuals may succumb to psychological, physical, and social problems; where families and communities fail to support children and adolescents affected by psychosocial problems, the situation worsens (4, 21).

Within Iran's legal framework, Article 3 of the 2020 Law on the Protection of Children and Adolescents defines *dangerous situations* as those that place a child or adolescent at risk of victimization or threaten physical, psychological, social, moral, or security well-being or educational status, thereby triggering legal intervention and protection. Examples include: (a) lack of guardianship or neglect by those legally or religiously obliged to care for the child; (b) a parent or legal guardian's mental illness, behavioral or personality disorder, or serious communicable physical illness, as certified by forensic medicine; (c) incarceration of a parent or legal guardian; and others (20). One of the most consequential circumstances affecting children is parental offending and the ensuing incarceration, which produces an experience starkly different from that of peers and exposes the child to multiple risks. Research shows that parental imprisonment creates effects comparable to divorce, poverty, and residence in high-risk neighborhoods, increasing the likelihood of early alcohol and drug use, aggression, academic decline, and delinquency (17, 26). By contrast, French law regulates juvenile delinquency within protective legal frameworks that prioritize rehabilitation and reform rather than harsh punishment. Given minors' age and psychosocial sensitivity, the French system adopts a distinctive approach: while persons under 18 are "children," the law distinguishes those (often 13–18) who offend, with criminal responsibility generally beginning at age 13 and hinging on discernment. The overarching aim is protection, prevention, and personality reconstruction, reflecting a comprehensive model relative to many jurisdictions (12, 13, 16).

Parenting Styles and Their Effects

Multiple theories have been advanced regarding the causes of juvenile delinquency, but most research converges on the *central* role of the family as the most important factor, since children acquire core social and behavioral learning at home. Any defect or dysfunction in family functioning can disrupt children's socialization and create conditions for deviant behavior. Empirical studies show, for example, that children of parents with substance-use disorders exhibit far higher propensities toward drug involvement than children of healthy parents; more broadly, many juvenile offenders come from disorganized or distressed families in which divorce, addiction, or offending are common (21, 26). As the primary social institution, the family exerts a decisive influence on child development; dysfunctions can be transmitted intergenerationally, diverting children from legal and moral norms. Accordingly, parents are not only responsible for raising well-adjusted and successful children; in cases of juvenile offending, they may be viewed as bearing responsibility as well. Parenting operates within a complex network of reciprocal relations among family members, in which each subsystem affects the others. As a multifaceted activity, parenting comprises methods and behaviors that—individually or in interaction—shape parent–child exchanges across

situations and generate an enduring interactional climate. This process grounds *parenting styles*, which capture parental efforts to control and socialize their children and provide a relatively stable developmental environment (29, 32).

In Iran's legal system, sub-paragraph (t) of Article 3 of the 2020 Law on the Protection of Children and Adolescents identifies certain *dangerous situations* that expose children to physical, psychological, social, moral, security, or educational harm, including "harmful addictions of any parent, guardian, or legal custodian—such as narcotics, psychotropics, or gambling." Another risk factor is preventing schooling or creating conditions that lead to dropout, since children—being at the outset of development—require education and training to cultivate personality and physical–mental talents. Furthermore, sub-paragraph (ch) of Article 6 specifies the Ministry of Education's duties to identify children suspected of dropout and refer them to support and judicial bodies; the Ministry must report non-enrollment or suspected dropout through the end of secondary school to the State Welfare Organization or the Judiciary's Office for the Protection of Children and Adolescents and undertake the necessary protective measures. Articles 7 and 8 of the same law establish sanctions for parents, legal custodians, or any person who facilitates dropout. This framework simultaneously guarantees the right to education and, through supportive measures and penalties, prevents the recurrence of educational maltreatment (20).

In France, preventing juvenile delinquency receives particular attention. The Code de la justice pénale des mineurs emphasizes crime prevention via socialization and educational and social measures—especially in schooling and mental health—while reforms have repeatedly underlined the participation of parents or legal guardians in behavior change. Preventive programs also target the social and economic risks associated with delinquency and stress the importance of structural support for at-risk children (12, 13, 16).

Personality and Individual Characteristics of Children and Adolescents

Individual and personality characteristics of children and adolescents play a significant role in their delinquency. Certain psychological and personality features—whether innate or shaped by environmental and familial conditions—can place an individual at risk of offending and markedly influence social behavior. Traits such as social boldness, defiance, lack of achievement motivation, hostility, distrust, destructive conduct, and weak self-control are common among juvenile offenders. In addition, many of these children and adolescents lack empathy and display weaknesses in moral reasoning and interpersonal problem-solving, a profile often rooted in a fragile self-concept, feelings of rejection, and difficulty expressing personal needs (4, 14). Some researchers maintain that signs of delinquency can be identified from around age ten; children labeled by peers as troublesome, unpopular, dishonest, or "bullies" show greater readiness for maladaptive behavior, and those flagged by teachers as disruptive and aggressive face higher odds of delinquent involvement (10).

Across many countries, persons aged 13–18 who commit offenses are classified as juvenile delinquents. Acts such as theft, homicide, drug use, sexual assault, and violent attacks are crimes regardless of age. However, behaviors like truancy, running away from home, or smoking—though not criminal for adults—are treated as delinquency for adolescents and are often grouped as "status or situational offenses" (7, 19).

In Iran's legal system, one innovation of the 2020 Law on the Protection of Children and Adolescents is the creation of a "personality file" for child and adolescent victims and those at risk (sub-para. (b), Art. 5). This file is intended to facilitate understanding the child's personality within juvenile proceedings, although the statute offers no detailed operational mechanism for implementation. Social workers must first strive to avoid separation from the

family, since removal can have irreparable effects. Article 46 states that “in all protective measures under this Law, priority is given to actions that do not result in the child’s or adolescent’s removal from the family environment or severance of ties with them.” Where a social worker determines that referral of the child and family to public or non-governmental bodies—such as the State Welfare Organization and counseling centers—and the implementation of therapeutic and educational programs on children’s rights can provide an appropriate basis for upbringing and prevention, such action is required (37). In France, Loi n° 2007-297 (2007) was enacted to protect children and prevent delinquency, empowering local and social authorities to identify at-risk children early and to take preventive measures. These include monitoring and supporting vulnerable families and providing educational and counseling services to children; in addition, France maintains specialized rehabilitation and social-support centers for juvenile offenders to facilitate reintegration through tailored education and services (12, 13).

Social Factors

Juvenile offenses have existed since the earliest human communities; yet until the nineteenth-century Industrial Revolution they were not properly recognized as a distinct social problem and were largely subsumed under adult crime. From the nineteenth century forward, youth delinquency became a salient socio-legal phenomenon. Importantly, the types of offenses, motives, and modalities differ from those of adults: children often offend in groups—sometimes in small gangs—whereas adults more commonly act alone; in most societies, especially in the developing world, girls’ delinquency rates remain markedly lower than boys’, and property offenses account for the largest share of juvenile crime (19, 26, 33, 34).

Environmental conditions also play a major role in criminal conduct from a criminal-psychology perspective. Such factors can directly or indirectly shape behavior by creating opportunities and pressures. High-risk neighborhoods—typically marked by concentrated poverty, unemployment, weak infrastructure, and limited educational and social services—heighten frustration and relative deprivation, conditions that can foster deviant and criminal acts; criminal groups may exert localized control, amplifying illicit markets, theft, and violence, and intensifying residents’ insecurity and defensive aggression (1, 14, 17).

8-5. Cultural and Religious Factors in Preventing Juvenile Delinquency

Culture plays a foundational role in personality formation. As children transition into adolescence and beyond, they encounter and internalize their society’s nonmaterial culture—religious principles, beliefs, and moral standards—and must navigate these norms within social life. The broader cultural, economic, social, and political milieu shapes personality development and its transformations and can also channel behavior toward deviance when conditions are adverse (5, 6). Under unfavorable social circumstances, youths may experience inner turmoil and crises—manifesting as psychological complexes, internal conflicts, and feelings of deprivation—that can derail ordinary development. Accordingly, preventive strategies emphasize strengthening value transmission through family, school, and media, reinforcing religious and ethical identity, and cultivating prosocial opportunities; when combined with supportive social policies, these measures can mitigate risk trajectories and support normative development (3, 7, 32).

Legal and Policy Frameworks on Juvenile Delinquency in Iran and France

In Iran, juvenile delinquency has received focused legal attention, and several statutes aim to prevent crime and to rehabilitate and reintegrate juvenile offenders. Among the most significant are:

(a) The Law on the Protection of Children and Adolescents (2020) — enacted to safeguard the rights of children and adolescents, particularly in delinquency cases. It provides that punishments for juveniles differ from those for adults, emphasizing rehabilitation and behavioral correction rather than punitive sanctions, thereby facilitating reintegration and deterring recidivism.

(b) The Islamic Penal Code (2013) — under Article 146, persons under 18 are exempt from criminal responsibility except where other laws specifically provide otherwise. Sanctions for juveniles are determined according to their age, mental condition, and social circumstances (14).

(c) Article 40 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran — stipulates that no person may act in a way that harms others' rights, forming a constitutional basis for protecting children and adolescents at risk from delinquency and social harm.

(d) Juvenile Courts — in Iran, cases of juvenile delinquency are heard in specialized courts for children and adolescents. These courts issue age-appropriate and psychologically informed judgments with a focus on correction and rehabilitation rather than retribution. Beyond the imposition of specific penalties, Iran's legal policies highlight the preventive value of education and training; creating educational, cultural, and social opportunities within families and schools is regarded as a legal measure to forestall delinquency (21, 32).

By contrast, the French legal system has adopted a markedly different trajectory throughout the twentieth century. Historically rooted in repressive and fear-based attitudes toward juvenile offenders, French law gradually evolved—through developments in psychology, psychiatry, and sociology—toward a protective and therapeutic paradigm. This orientation rests on the principle that the delinquent child is above all a *victim of social and familial conditions* who can be reformed through treatment and education. The French juvenile justice system comprises statutes, procedures, courts, and institutions dedicated exclusively to minors, emerging from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and repeatedly reformed—particularly after World War II—to reflect minors' psychological and social needs. Preventive measures within this framework include monitoring and supporting vulnerable families, providing counseling and educational services for children and adolescents, and establishing rehabilitation and social-support centers for young offenders (1, 12, 13).

The Role of Legal and Judicial Institutions in Reforming Juvenile Legislation

Legal and judicial institutions play a pivotal role in reforming and structuring laws on juvenile delinquency. Legislative reforms in this field must account for the distinctive characteristics and needs of this age group and prioritize the protection of children's rights and early delinquency prevention. These institutions can enhance juvenile justice through several channels: promoting child-oriented legal protections, advancing preventive policies, and designing effective rehabilitative sanctions (20, 21).

The judiciary, as the main body for enforcing laws and overseeing justice, holds special responsibility for implementing fair processes in juvenile cases. Its foremost duty in legislative reform is ensuring that laws conform to human rights standards, especially the rights of the child. The development of specialized juvenile justice systems, including dedicated courts and judges, aims to ensure that legal provisions are applied appropriately, reflecting the developmental and psychological status of minors. Judicial authorities can promote crime prevention by issuing directives and policies that steer enforcement bodies toward preventive and supportive action—such as family counseling programs and community-based interventions. Reassessment of juvenile sanctions can shift from

punitive measures toward rehabilitative and empowerment-oriented responses, ensuring that correction rather than punishment remains the core objective (16, 37).

Specialized juvenile courts—operating in many countries, including Iran and France—serve as independent forums for hearing juvenile cases. Beyond adjudication, these courts consider the psychological, emotional, and social context of each youth and employ corrective and educational measures aimed at reform and reintegration rather than stigmatization or exclusion (12, 13).

Crime Prevention and Rehabilitation of Offenders

Criminal psychology examines the mental and behavioral processes underlying criminal acts. Within this domain, crime prevention and offender rehabilitation hold particular importance. Prevention entails identifying and mitigating risk factors—such as poverty, social injustice, and psychological distress—that predispose individuals to criminal behavior. Educational and training programs that strengthen social awareness and life skills are among the most effective preventive strategies (14).

Rehabilitation, in turn, seeks to restore offenders as constructive members of society. This process requires a detailed understanding of the psychological and social problems driving criminal behavior and the provision of psychotherapeutic and counseling services tailored to individual needs. Vocational and social-skills training, fostering positive interpersonal relationships, and offering sustained social support significantly reduce recidivism. Person-centered approaches—those that account for each offender's unique psychological and social profile—have proven more effective than generalized methods. Ultimately, the goal is to build a safer society by reducing crime through reform and reintegration rather than repression, aligning criminal justice with humanitarian and developmental principles (1, 14, 20).

Conclusion

Juvenile delinquency typically manifests with lower levels of violence and is often seen as part of the developmental transition from childhood to adolescence. However, when delinquent behavior becomes organized or violent, it poses serious social and legal challenges. Delinquent gangs often recruit adolescents—especially urban migrants—for their activities, while many young offenders are themselves victims of unfavorable social conditions. Factors such as identity crises, social exploitation, and economic poverty place adolescents at heightened risk of engaging in delinquent acts.

From the perspective of Islamic jurisprudence and law, the family bears responsibility for the delinquent acts of minors, particularly in cases that require financial compensation. A comparative study of Iranian and French laws reveals that both systems focus on the prevention of delinquency and the correction of deviant behavior, though they differ substantially in their legal frameworks and approaches. In Iran, the family is regarded as the main pillar of prevention, and the moral and educational responsibilities of parents—including the legal principle of *'aqilah* (collective familial responsibility for compensation)—are legally emphasized. Constitutional principles such as access to free education, the improvement of social and economic conditions, and the promotion of Islamic culture serve as key preventive mechanisms. Additionally, strengthening support institutions and implementing preventive programs play a crucial role in reducing delinquency.

In France, the judicial and child-protection systems are based on a rehabilitative and supportive model whose primary objective is to re-educate and reintegrate juvenile offenders into society. Criminal responsibility is

determined according to the adolescent's age and level of discernment, and the focus lies on education, treatment, and social support rather than harsh punishment. French law underscores the roles of families, teachers, and social institutions in preventing and correcting juvenile behavior, considering victim protection and public awareness as integral elements of crime reduction.

A shared cornerstone in both countries is the emphasis on **education and upbringing**. In Iran, formal education coupled with religious instruction is viewed as a prerequisite for preventing delinquency, while in France, education with a preventive orientation serves as the principal tool for reducing juvenile misconduct. Both legal systems also acknowledge the family's role in shaping adolescents' character and behavior and assign legal responsibilities to parents in this regard. Identity crises and economic deprivation are identified as major factors contributing to delinquency, and addressing them can significantly reduce crime rates.

Overall, the comparative analysis of Iran and France demonstrates that **rehabilitative approaches**, rather than purely punitive ones, are more effective in reconstructing the personalities of juvenile offenders. In Iran, reliance on Islamic teachings and social-cultural programs, and in France, emphasis on re-education and reintegration, constitute central tools for prevention and reduction of youth crime. Mutual exchange of experiences and the modernization of laws in line with social and cultural transformations can enhance the effectiveness of preventive policies in both countries.

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All authors equally contributed to this study.

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The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

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Transparency of Data

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