

Review Article

**BIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL  
THEORIES ON JUVENILE DELINQUENCY**

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**Abstract.** *In this paper, the author notes that a child is born with bio-psychological predispositions which are distinctive characteristics of humankind. Every single stage in human development is idiosyncratic and the process of human development involves moving from a lower to a higher and more qualitative stage of development. The roots of asocial behaviour and delinquency may be traced back to the early childhood. The child's psychological and physical characteristics in preadolescence may have a significant impact on one's deviant behaviour, such as commission of criminal acts, gang initiation and suicide. Puberty is the most significant transitional stage involving one's effort to be break free from any form of dependence. The age of adolescence is the most sensitive period in developing one's emotional maturity. Every stage in human development features specific psychological traits entailing not only a risk of child victimization but also the roots of child's propensity to deviant behaviour. The author particularly focuses on the basic tenets of anthropological, bio-psychological and psychological theories dealing with the causes of deviant behaviour among children and juveniles, their recidivism and victimization.*

**Key words:** *personality, juvenile delinquent, criminological theories, bio–psychological theories, child molestation, adolescence, recidivism, victimization.*

INTRODUCTION

Different issues concerning specific types of criminal behavior, including juvenile delinquency, may be approached and interpreted from different points of view: the anthropological, sociological and legal aspect. Yet, each of these aspects reflects only one particular standpoint which is largely predetermined by the researcher's specific field of interest. Hence, the historical development of criminology provides an excellent oppor-

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tunity to explore the interactions between natural sciences and social sciences, as well as between law and medicine.

In the contemporary scientific thought pervaded with predominant cultural standpoints, childhood and adolescence are perceived as being indisputably different from adulthood, particularly in terms of their biological, psychological and social aspects. From the outset of human civilization, the ever-changing social circumstances have always had a significant impact on the process of child's psychological development, which largely depended on the specific social setting and the underlying cultural attitude to children and youth. Human offsprings have never had an opportunity to choose the particular features of the socio-cultural environment which they would be born into and grow up in. Their identities and personality traits have developed only after their birth, upon undergoing complex processes (such as: cultivation, socialization and individualization) and given the circumstances governed by their parents' cultural heritage (Wilson, 1990, pp. 20-24).

The child's biological and psychological characteristics, formed in the circumstances of his/her physical inferiority and existential dependence on the adults, have engendered the child's subordinate position in the society; some of these characteristics and social circumstances have largely remained unchanged until the present day (Kostić, 2010, p.16). The children's existential dependence is reflected in the fact that adults frequently make unilateral decisions concerning the extent of their disposition to adjust their own needs to the needs/wants of the child in each period of child's formation and development.

In broad terms, the youngsters' unacceptable behavior may be designated as deviant behavior or delinquent behavior (in criminal law terminology). Such behaviour features a number of common "deviations" from the adult behavior which are frequently subject to disapproval and misunderstanding of the child's immediate living environment and which, ultimately, call for a special treatment of juveniles. This negative social phenomenon is characterized by a number of highly distinctive phenomenological and etiological features which differentiate this kind of conduct from the criminal behaviour of adults. In criminology, this phenomenon is called juvenile delinquency (Knežević, 2010, p. 11; Konstantinović-Vilić, Nikolić-Ristanović, Kostić, 2012, p. 219). There is a large number of published studies, researches and analyses dealing with the causes of juvenile delinquency observed from the aspects of criminal law, criminology, criminal psychology, psychiatry, victimology and many others. Yet, this specific type of criminal behavior still remains a subject matter of considerable interest of scholars and experts alike in different walks of life.

#### BIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES ON JUVENILE OFFENDERS

Many sciences and scientific disciplines have developed numerous theories, comprising a number of prevailing ideas of a limited "life span" as well as a tendency towards a further elaboration on the underlying ideas. These theories have been progressively replaced by other overriding theories and, in that respect, criminology has been no different from other sciences (Kostić, 2001). During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the analysis of crime, criminal behavior and delinquency (Konstantinović-Vilić, Nikolić-Ristanović, Kostić, 2012, p. 50) principally rested on the underlying concepts embodied in the theo-

ries of punishment. This conception largely lost its momentum in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly given the prevalence of Darwin's theory of evolution. In the historical development of criminology, Darwin's theory had a considerable impact on the criminological studies which emphasized the effects the physical/biological factors on the criminal behaviour of an individual. In criminology, biological and psychological explanations on criminal behaviour were disregarded for a long time; the interest of criminologists in these biological and psychological factors has been revived only recently (Reid, 2003, p. 88).

In criminology, the biological, psychological and psychopathological explanations on the notion of causality concerning the operation of the perpetrator's internal endogenic characteristics are rooted in the anthropological concepts originally laid down by Lombroso and other criminologists of the positivist school of thought. Although some authors believe that anthropology falls into social sciences rather than humanities (Gell, 1998), it does not significantly affect the ensuing Lombroso's concept of a "born criminal", which implies the biological and psychological preconditions for deviant behaviour.

The proponents of the biological and psychological school in criminology emphasize the interrelatedness between the delinquent's physical constitution, biological factors and psychological personality traits (Konstantinović-Vilić, Nikolić-Ristanović, Kostić, 2012, p. 269). The impact factor is a result of the operation of one's nervous system, endocrine system and physical constitution. In addition, the "biological" school in criminology ascribes considerable importance to genetic inheritance of criminal disposition as well as to a genetic anomaly in human chromosomes. The proponents of this approach were Lombroso, Lombroso-Ferrero, Garofalo, Tappan, Kretschmer and Sheldon.

Lombroso, the founder of the anthropological school in criminology, noticed that a large number of criminal offenders were either born out of wedlock by "sinful" parents or were orphans. Apart from the impact of hereditary factors on the emergence of criminal behavior, Lombroso emphasized the importance of the upbringing and education the child receives in his/her family. Only bad upbringing may trigger perverse instincts which are generally most distinctive in childhood but may often continue being displayed in later periods of human development. Lombroso believed that the process of upbringing should be carried out without violence because the adults who were exposed to extremely stringent upbringing in their childhood are more prone to making mistakes and committing crimes than those whose parents were not so strict (Lombroso, 1968, p.303). Lombroso also conducted separate studies observing orphaned children (foundlings) and illegitimate children (born out of wedlock). He believed that unruly behaviour and a lack of education could turn foundlings and adopted children into criminal offenders. Thus, Lombroso posed a question: "How can an unhappy child protect himself/herself from the evil which is displayed in the brightest colours or, even worse, which is imposed by parental authority or bad example given by a parent or another person responsible for the child's upbringing?" On the other hand, Lombroso noted that the juvenile delinquency records in the period of 1871 – 1872 showed that there was a total of 84% of boys and 60% of girls who came from families practicing good moral training. Ultimately, he concludes that the origins of many crimes are innate and that many individuals are born with perverse propensities, regardless of their parent's attempts to turn them around (Lombroso, 1968, p.147).

Gina Lombroso-Ferrero observed criminal behaviour among children as acts committed by psychologically and physically underdeveloped human beings; she compared

children's behaviour with that of savages. She believes that primitive instincts, which are common among savages, could be found proportionally in almost every child, providing that children are not influenced by "moral training and good examples". This does not mean that all children without educative restraints would necessarily become criminals.<sup>1</sup> Lombroso-Ferrero believes that the desire for revenge and anger are quite common in children, and that their moral sense (awareness) of what is right and wrong correlates with what is allowed or forbidden by their elders. A child is incapable of understanding abstract notions of justice or property rights until he/she is deprived of some possession.<sup>2</sup> Besides, Lombroso-Ferrero emphasizes the importance of injuries and accidental falls that children experience in early childhood as they may be consequential in terms of causing permanent or temporary harm to child's physical and mental health. She provides an example of a young man of a good family and well-developed character who sustained a head injury at the age of 14 by being hit in the head, as a result of which he became epileptic and subsequently developed into a gambler, thief and murderer; but, she believes that such cases are rather uncommon (Lombroso-Ferrero, 1972, p. 141). She concludes that children manifest a large number of impulses which are observed among criminaloids; these impulses could be classified as: anger, a spirit of revenge, idleness, volubility and lack of affection even for the next of kin.<sup>3</sup>

Garofalo argues that a born criminal and his/her propensity for "violence and bloodshed" could be recognized by the physical appearance and other morphological and physiological characteristics of the child. He particularly emphasizes the importance of the description of the "typical physiognomy" which contains physical and moral elements of an instinctive killer or a thief (Garofalo, 1968, p. 201).

Tappan points out that the influence of the physical constitution factors, especially the hereditary ones, is significant in terms of mental deviations, but he also notes that the specific mode of operation of hereditary characteristics (as causes of deviant behavior) is still largely unknown. This issue inspired diverse opinions, primarily within the biological/psychological theories in criminology.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the observations made by the professor Mario Carrara, gangs of neglected children running wild in the streets of the capital of Sardinia began stealing and became addicted to other more serious vices but they spontaneously corrected their behaviour when they reached the age of adolescence. Abnormality among children, as well as some adults, can be manifested in the lack of moral sense (awareness), which is designated as "moral insanity" by psychiatrists and "a born criminal" by criminologists. (Lombroso-Ferrero, 1972, p. 130).

<sup>2</sup> Lombroso-Ferrero mentions the research conducted by Moreau (*De l'Homicide chez les enfants*, 1882) who established that a large number of observed children had passionate outbursts of emotions if their wishes were not immediately complied with. He observed a highly intelligent eight-year old boy who exhibited violent anger whenever he received the slightest reprimand by his parents or others, grabbed the nearest object and used it as a weapon to get revenge, or simply kept breaking anything he could lay his hands on. In another case observed by Lombroso, a mentally retarded and slightly hydrocephalic boy (aged 6) started demonstrating signs of violent irritation at the slightest reproof or correction. In case he was able to hit the person who had annoyed him, his rage would immediately subside; if not, he kept screaming and thumping his arms in a fashion similar to the behaviour of "caged bears which are provoked but unable to retaliate" (Lombroso-Ferrero, 1972, pp. 132-133).

<sup>3</sup> Lombroso-Ferrero compares children with domestic animals. Her comparison is based on the fact that children (just like animals) love teasing each other and show great animosity towards unfamiliar and scary objects. By the age of seven and even later, children show very little true attachment to anybody. Even after a short period of separation, children may quickly forget their caring and loving mothers (Lombroso-Ferrero 1972, p. 134).

Kretschmer and Sheldon believe that it is sufficient to observe one's physical constitution and physical appearance in order to learn about a person's psychological characteristics (character traits, temperament, abilities, dynamic strength of one's personality). The physical constitution entails the size and the development of certain body parts, good proportion of these body parts, regular features of certain organs and some other bodily features. Given the fact that different physical appearance causes different reactions from the immediate environment, it has a significant impact on the formation of certain psychological personality traits which are directly generated under the influence of the environment (such as: arrogance, vanity, self-confidence, bashfulness). People with physical defects are usually regarded and treated with contempt, compassion and disgust (Rot, 1980, p.147, p.155).

The biological/psychological thought has been subject to severe criticism. There are several basic morphological and physiological processes whose inception, development and regular operation have a significant impact on human behavior. The nervous system lays down the personal dispositions for intelligence, ability and temperament. The children who had intense reactions of the vegetative nervous system demonstrate "greater vigour in their reactions" as adults, while children with a slower operation of the vegetative nervous system have a "tendency towards emotional instability and nervousness" as adults. The main function of the endocrine system is to regulate metabolism by means of endocrine glands producing internal secretion. In literature, there is an opinion that personality traits primarily depend on the operation of the endocrine system. However, a majority of researchers disagree with this opinion; they believe that the regular operation of the endocrine system has an important effect only on the formation of the temperament traits and that any anomaly in the operation of these glands has a more significant impact on the development of other personality traits. Most criminologists argue that a chromosome anomaly is just an isolated and insufficiently analyzed factor in the bio/psycho/social environment that could be associated with the asocial behaviour. Furthermore, studies on criminal families cannot be taken as sufficient evidence to support the assertion on the hereditary nature of criminal dispositions because the hereditary factor is not the only one affecting family members, who also sustain the impact of the environment (Konstantinović-Vilić, Nikolić-Ristanović, Kostić, 2012, p. 274). Toch (Toch, 1978) points out that violence is a social reaction which occurs among people regardless of their age, usually as a response to hardships or obstacles imposed by individuals, groups or institutions. Violent behaviour needs to be observed within the framework of social incentives which imply proposing relevant actions that may contribute to social reform and individual rehabilitation (Toch, 1978, p. 7). Therefore, the role of the biological factors (as part of a complex set of causal impacts) cannot be explained in straightforward terms, for the purposes of either criminology or criminal law (Aćimović, 1988, p.90). In various cases of criminal behaviour among children, the importance of the biological factors can be determined only by looking into a set of other impacts which give rise to crime (such as the environment or an individual activity).

In criminal psychology, there is a number of psychological theories correlating criminal behaviour and psychological personality traits, either without taking into account the effects of social factors or recognizing only the indirect effect of these factors. Besides, many psychological explanations of criminal behaviour were based on the research involving the application of psychological methods for measuring intelligence of delin-

quents and non-delinquents alike, as well as their personality traits, value judgments and social control (Konstantinović-Vilić, Nikolić-Ristanović, Kostić, 2012, p. 276). For example, the measured IQ of the respondent juvenile delinquents is considered to be slightly lower than the IQ of the non-delinquent youth, even though the lower IQ cannot be viewed as the direct cause of delinquency (Žlebnik, 1972, p.223). The proponents of this conception are Freud, Gross, Friedlander, Aschaffenburg, Bell, etc.

The criminologists belonging to the psychological school in criminology agree that the child who experiences any sort of abuse or neglect, or any other form of child-threatening behaviour, may consequently exhibit pathological disobedience. Disobedience, which is quite common among adolescents, is a constant transfer of unfulfilled childhood desires into aggressive behaviour. In that period of life, being in the process of development, an individual demonstrates the need for self-expression in his/her immediate family environment or among his/her peers. Disobedience develops into pathological behaviour when it becomes destructive, in which case it is manifested as the child's delinquent behaviour. Belle believes that delinquent children have difficulty in accepting the authority figure, which is "the consequence of a specific fear of the father or the father-substitute figure" deeply rooted in childhood (Belle, 1969, p.355).

In his study of criminal psychology, Gross concludes that children who are prone to delinquent behaviour may be easily recognised ever in their early childhood. Upbringing and education needn't have any impact on "good" children. In that context, Gross studied the process of growing up, child's self-centeredness (selfishness) as well as special types of reaction to the occurrence of maladjusted behaviour (Gross, 1968, p. 370).

Using the psychoanalysis method, Freud explained the "origin" of crime and punishment by describing the first case of patricide, which eventually yielded the two principal taboos of totemism derived from the filial sense of guilt. According to Freud, a group of brothers living together in a primal horde could no longer bear the tyranny of the primal (patriarchal) father. One day, the brothers came together, killed the father and devoured him, which marked the end of the patriarchal primal horde. By exercising the act of cannibalism, the sons identified with the father and acquired a portion of his strength. After experiencing a sense of remorse, the sons revoked their act by forbidding the killing of the totem (the father-substitute figure) and renounced its fruits by resigning their claim to women who were set free. Thus, their filial sense of guilt served as grounds for establishing the first prohibitions and punishments for patricide and incest (Freud, 1979).

In her psychoanalytical study of juvenile delinquency, Friedlander analyzed the environment factors, which are designated as "primary factors" leading to the formation of an antisocial personality. These factors can be traced in the mother-child relationship and later in the father-child relationship, as well as in other emotional relations constituting the early family life. The environment factors (such as: poverty, unemployment, poor housing conditions, overpopulation) have a direct impact on the child until the age of five or six by interfering with the mother-child relationship. Parental personality disorders (particularly in mothers) may have the same effect on the structural development of the child's mind both in the most favourable economic conditions and in the most disadvantageous living environment, the latter of which may hinder the mother's efforts to provide sufficient child care. On the other hand, a good mother-child relationship may have positive effects irrespective of the poor environment conditions; this occurrence may be

used to explain why only some individuals living in bad economic conditions are prone to delinquency while others are not (Friedlander, 1967, p. 96).

Aschaffenburg analyses the influence of "the family disposition" on the emergence of psychological illnesses in descendants. He believes that the parents' mental illness, lack of restraint and epilepsy have a negative impact on children. Generally speaking, forms of degeneration are usually manifested as physical and mental weakness, even though research has not shown that all children of alcoholic or mentally impaired parents have these disorders. Living in a family of criminals from early childhood, a child soon starts learning from them and thinking like a criminal, never having a chance to develop different viewpoints. Over time, in the child's mind, crime is no longer perceived as a punishable act, and punishment is no longer regarded as a form of social denunciation of the perpetrator's act (Aschaffenburg, 1969, p. 124).

#### CONCLUSION

Child aggression may be a result of imitating the rough and violent parent behavior towards children. An American sociologist Daniels is the founder of the aggression and violence theory, according to which aggression and violence may be a result of the identification with the aggressor. If the child has a hostile cruel parent or parent-substitute, the child may grow into a subordinate, servile, intimidated or even masochistic person, as well as into an angry and aggressive person very much resembling his/her tormentor. Persons exhibiting violent behavior often prove to have been victims of violence themselves. In "the battered child syndrome", the parent-tormentor does not exhibit sadistic behaviour but acts in an extremely rigid and judgmental manner interpreting child's conduct as proud and spiteful. Victimized children may become cruel later in life (Daniels, 1969, p. 66). Daniels was particularly interested in the consequences of using physical violence in child upbringing. Parents who punish their children by using physical aggression have physically aggressive children. It has been discovered that punishment issued by an authority figure prevents direct violence against persons who are executing the punishment, particularly given the fact that violence may be manifested as a highly destructive aggression towards possible targets. The victim's violent reaction may be stemming from the pain and frustration provoked by the parents' punishment but it may also be an effect of parent imitation and modelling (Daniels, 1969, p.425, p.122). Daniels and his associates conducted experimental laboratory studies which showed that children who were exposed to different models of physical aggression exhibited by adults would demonstrate more physical aggression in the future than children who were not exposed to such models. The experimental sample included three groups of kindergarten children. The first group was exposed to models of violent behavior exhibited by adults; the second group was exposed to models of non-aggressive and inhibitory behavior exhibited by adults; the third (control) group was not exposed to any particular model of adult behaviour. First, the children were asked to observe the adults' physical and verbal aggression towards a large plastic blow-up doll. In the second case, the children were asked to observe the adult individuals who behaved non-violently, sat quietly and ignored the doll completely. As soon as the demonstration ended, the children were put in the same positions as the adults. A vast majority of children who observed the exhibition of violent

adult behavior demonstrated an exact imitation of the adults' violent behavior; on the other hand, there was almost no violence in the other groups of children who were exposed to other models of behavior (Daniels, 1969, p. 80).

Similarly, Koshischek believes that aggressive men often take after their violent fathers. The victims of their aggression are their wives and children. The aggression may be qualified as an attempt of a neurotic to hide from himself the actual reasons for abusing his children. His/her aggression is primarily a kind of self-attack, an expression of hatred and contempt towards oneself. Therefore, the parents' physical punishment sends a negative message to the child and promotes a model of violent behaviour as the only appropriate one. The child gets frustrated; he/she is given a role model and he/she learns to be violent by imitating the violent behavior of adults (Koshischek, 1983, p. 190). Children may be subjected to any kind of criminal victimization, which may come as a result of specific family relations or issues (such as: adolescent parents, alcohol addiction in one or both parents, underprivileged socio-economic status of the family, the incomplete family, etc).

Some family relations (including conflicts between the spouses, insufficient children supervision or overt demonstration of sexuality in front of the children) may give rise to the sexual abuse of the child by a family member or another (un)known person. As a consequence of the parents' marital conflicts, children may be exposed to sexual victimization because they receive contradictory "messages" about sex; thus, the sexual confusion stemming from these mixed messages is an impediment in preventing possible sexual molestation. Moreover, in marital conflicts, the child largely remains unprotected because he/she is not sure which parent to turn to for help. When the child feels unprotected, he/she may engage much more easily in a sexual relationship with an adult, which only reinforces his/her feeling of vulnerability and helplessness.

The incomplete (single parent) family is the cause of a poorly developed feeling of a lasting parent-child relationship, the consequence of which is insufficient socialization of the child. The absence of one parent engenders a great emotional deficiency in the family structure. The child is thus devoid of the object of identification, which is the most important factor in the formation of child's character and one of the reasons for the development of delinquent behaviour among children and youth (Hajduković, 1971, p. 92).

It is a fact that adults demonstrate their own power in their relations to children. The family and the school (later on) play the major ideological role in the process of adjusting the child to accept the authority without defiance and with due respect. The right to decide on child's life or death (which used to exist in the past) was replaced by the rigidity of habits and customs embodied in the patriarchal family relationships, which are much harder to change than the laws in spite of being quite harmful for human relationships. In the authoritarian family relations, the parental position of power and authority gives rise to a repressive attitude towards children. Given the fact that our future rests on upbringing and nurturing healthy children of sound mind, it is necessary to further explore the complex phenomenon of child abuse (both inside and outside the family unit) and find relevant solutions for this social problem. The social action aimed at eliminating the causes of children's criminal victimization may not completely eradicate children's deviant behaviour but there is no doubt that it is highly important for preventing and counter-acting such behaviour.



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## **BIOLOŠKO-PSIHOLOŠKE TEORIJE O MALOLETNOM PRESTUPNIKU**

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*U radu autorka navodi da se dete rađa sa bio-psihičkim dispozicijama koje su karakteristične za ljudski rod. Svako razvojno razdoblje je posebna celina, a razvoj se, kao proces, sastoji od prelaženja sa nižeg i specifičnog razvojnog stepena na viši i kvalitativno novi. Začeci asocijalnosti, pa čak i delinkventnosti upravo mogu biti u najranijim godinama života. Psihičke i fizičke osobine deteta u pretpubertetu utiču na ispoljavanje devijantnih ponašanja (vršenje krivičnih dela, uključivanje u gangsterske bande, samoubistva). Za vreme puberteta, borba za oslobađanje od zavisnosti ulazi u najznačajniju fazu. Najosetljiviji period emocionalnog sazrevanja je doba adolescencije. Svaka faza u razvoju odlikuje se izvesnim psihičkim karakteristikama koje u sebi nose, kako rizik viktimizacije po dete, tako i začetak sklonosti ka devijantnosti. Autorke su posebno izdvojile osnovne postavke antropoloških, biološko-psiholoških i psiholoških koncepcija o uzrocima devijantnog ponašanja dece i maloletnika, njihovog recidivizma i viktimizacije.*

*Ključne riječi: ličnost, maloletni delinkvent, kriminološke teorije, biološko-psihološke teorije; zlostavljanje deteta, adolescencija, recidivizam, viktimizacija.*