

Problem Children

Problem Children: Special Populations in Delinquency

Robert Hartmann McNamara
and Carrie Coward Bucher

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To:

*Mary Ann and Dan—the enormity of your gift
continues to amaze and humble me.*

RHM

*I would like to thank all of you who work tirelessly
for the children, and those who are suffering with them,
described in this text.*

We are grateful for your efforts.

CCB

Contents

Tables and Figures	xi
Preface	xiii
Acknowledgments	xv
Chapter 1 • Introduction	3
Other Perceptions of Delinquency	5
Media Images of Delinquents	6
Social Problems and Youths	7
Risk and Protective Factors	8
Definitions of Juvenile Delinquency	9
Delinquency and Public Policy	12
Summary	14
Notes	15
Chapter 2 • Juvenile Sex Offenders	19
Case Studies in Delinquency	19
Defining a Juvenile Sex Offender	21
Juvenile Sex Offending versus Problem Behaviors	22
Myths about Sex Offenders	23
Differences between Adult and Juvenile Sex Offenders	25
Statistics on Juvenile Sex Offenders	25
A Typology of Juvenile Sex Offenders	27
Juvenile Female Sex Offenders	30
Differences between Male and Female Sex Offenders	32
Explaining Juvenile Sex Offending	32
Treatment of Juvenile Sex Offenders	34

Types of Treatment for JSOs	35
Residential Treatment	36
Community-Based Treatment	37
Registry Laws	40
Summary	43
Notes	45
Chapter 3 • Juvenile Prostitution	53
Case Studies in Delinquency	53
Juvenile Female Prostitution	56
A Profile of Juvenile Female Prostitutes	57
Age	57
Race	58
Entrance into Prostitution	58
Runaway Behavior	59
The Influence of Friends, Relatives, and Other	
Prostitutes	60
The Influence of Pimps and Juvenile Female Prostitution	60
Substance Abuse and Juvenile Female Prostitution	61
Physical and Mental Health and Juvenile Female	
Prostitution	62
Types of Prostitution	63
Streetwalkers	63
Hotel Prostitutes	64
Escort Services and Call Girls	64
House or Brothel Prostitutes	64
Exiting Prostitution	65
Juvenile Male Prostitution	66
Differences and Similarities between Juvenile Male	
and Female Prostitutes	67
Sexual Orientation and Male Prostitution	68
Heterosexual Male Prostitutes	69
Homosexual Male Prostitutes	71
The International Trafficking of Children	71
Summary	73
Notes	74

Chapter 4 • Fire Starters and Juvenile Arson	83
Case Studies in Delinquency	83
The Nature of the Problem	84
Sociological Factors to Explain Firestarting	87
Psychological Factors to Explain Firestarting	90
A Typology of Fire Setters	91
Curiosity Fire Setters	91
Crisis Fire Setters	92
Delinquent Fire Setters	93
Pathological Fire Setters	95
Intervention and Treatment Programs	96
Community-Based Treatment and Education Programs	97
Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment	100
Residential Treatment	101
Summary	102
Notes	102
 Chapter 5 • Juvenile Domestic Violence	 107
Case Studies in Delinquency	107
The Nature of Family Violence	109
Corporal Punishment as Family Violence	111
The Social Acceptability of Intrafamily Violence	113
Sibling Abuse	115
Child to Parent Violence	116
Juvenile Dating Violence	117
Explaining Family Violence	119
Addressing Domestic Violence	121
Summary	123
Notes	123
 Chapter 6 • Chronic Violent Juvenile Offenders	 129
Case Studies in Delinquency	129
Juvenile Homicide	132
Gangs and Chronic Offending	134
Extent of Gangs	139
Why Youths Join Gangs	140
The Changing Nature of Gangs	142

Explaining Chronic Violent Offenders	145
Treating Chronic Violent Offenders	146
Formal Processing Instead of Handling Cases Informally	147
Juvenile Waiver Laws	148
Intensive Surveillance	148
Shock Incarceration	149
Residential Placement	150
Effective Programs for Violent Juvenile Offenders	150
Summary	151
Notes	151
Chapter 7 • Non-Violent Chronic Offenders	157
Case Studies in Delinquency	157
Computer Hacking	158
Explaining Computer Hacking	159
Recent Trends: Ethical Hacking	162
Vandalism	163
Types of Graffiti and Artists	164
Broken Windows Theory, The Police, and Graffiti	165
Underage Drinking	167
The Role of the Media in Underage Drinking	172
The Impact of Underage Alcohol Use	174
Academic Achievement	174
Physical Health Issues	174
Sexual Behavior	175
Psychological Effects	175
Auto Accidents	176
Underage Smoking	176
Extent of the Problem	177
The Connection of Tobacco Use and Other Drugs	179
The Effects of Smoking	180
Effects of Secondhand Smoke	181
Have Media Campaigns Reduced Teen Smoking?	183
Summary	184
Notes	184
Index	191

Tables and Figures

Chapter 1

Table 1-1	Lowest Age for Juvenile Court Jurisdiction in Delinquency Matters by State*	10
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Chapter 3

Table 3-1	Uniform Crime Reports Arrests for Prostitution 2009	55
Table 3-2	Uniform Crime Reports Female Arrests for Prostitution by Age under 18	57
Table 3-3	Uniform Crime Reports Female Prostitution Arrests by Race under 18	58
Table 3-4	Male Arrests for Prostitution by Age under 18	67

Chapter 4

Table 4-1	Juvenile Arrests for Arson by Age 2009	85
Figure 4-1	2009 Uniform Crime Reports Arson by Property Type	86
Table 4-2	Curiosity Fire Setters	92
Table 4-3	Characteristics of Crisis Fire Setters	93
Table 4-4	Characteristics of Delinquent Fire Setters	94
Table 4-5	Characteristics of Pathological Fire Setters	95

Chapter 5

Figure 5-1	Family Violence Myths	110
Table 5-1	Sociological Theories of Family Abuse	119

Chapter 6

Table 6-1	Ten-Year Trend of Arrests for Violent Crimes by Suspects under Age 18 1998–2008	132
Figure 6-1	The Gang Continuum	137

Chapter 7

Table 7-1	Uniform Crime Reports Arrests for Vandalism by Age	163
Table 7-2	National Drug Use and Health Survey Alcohol Use by Gender	168
Table 7-3	National Drug Use and Health Survey Alcohol Use by Race/Ethnicity	168
Table 7-4	2009 Uniform Crime Reports Liquor Law Arrests by Age	170
Table 7-5	National Drug Use and Health Survey Youths 12 to 17 Years of Age Past 30 Day Tobacco Use by Ethnicity	178

Preface

While the public's concerns about delinquency remain focused on the chronic and violent offender, there are many areas of delinquency that are important and relevant, but do not receive attention in a traditional textbook. This book focuses on a few of those populations, where offenders pose a risk to society, but most of them can be effectively treated. What is needed, of course, is a recognition that such youths are salvageable and that their acts, while offensive and harmful, are a reflection of the trauma they have experienced at some point in their lives. It is a mistake to think of these offenders as destined for a career as an adult criminal since most of the research suggests that treatment is a more appropriate and effective alternative than incarceration or detention. However, the prevailing view of the need to increase the severity of sanctions against juveniles only results in higher rates of recidivism. Thus, while it may be frustrating to think that holding youths accountable for their actions cannot be accomplished through punitive means, it may mean that we have to re-examine the goals and objectives related to youth crime. In other words, in the process of implementing a tough law and order approach to delinquency we may be creating and enhancing the very class of individuals we most fear. Our hope is that this book will shed some light on the nuances and problems relating to behaviors such as juvenile sex offending, prostitution, arson and firestarting, computer hacking, graffiti, underage drinking and smoking as well as gang-related behavior. In short, the public's fears about juvenile crime have overshadowed virtually all aspects of juvenile justice and we appear to be returning to a time

when we treated juveniles and adults alike in terms of punishment. There may be good reasons for doing this, however there remain a sizeable portion of youths who are actually victims of neglectful and abusive parents, dysfunctional families, or are caught in difficult circumstances that result in their coming to the attention of the justice process. We believe this book can serve as a starting point for a new dialogue about how to prevent youths from becoming hardened delinquents.

RHM/CCB

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