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# Juristat

Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics



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## PROBLEM BEHAVIOUR AND DELINQUENCY IN CHILDREN AND YOUTH

by Jane B. Sprott, Anthony N. Doob and Jennifer M. Jenkins\*

### Highlights

- As is found in almost all studies of delinquency, girls were less likely to report being involved in delinquent acts than were boys. For example, 29% of girls aged 12 to 13 reported being involved in some type of aggressive behaviour, including such things as, threatening someone and getting into fights, compared to 56% of boys aged 12 to 13. The majority of aggressive behaviours were relatively minor.
- Self-reported rates of aggressive behaviour were highest in the Prairies. Quebec 12 or 13 year old youths report the lowest level of aggressive behaviour compared to 12 to 13 year olds living in other regions.
- Many children involved in delinquent acts involving property were also likely to be involved in aggressive behaviour. Forty-seven percent of the 12 and 13 year olds who reported high frequencies of delinquent acts involving property also reported high frequencies of aggressive behaviour.
- Data demonstrate the challenges of dealing with aggressive youth by focusing solely on those who are 'highly aggressive' at age 10 and 11. For example, of the children who were at the highest frequencies of aggressive behaviour at age 10 and 11, 45% were not reporting any aggressive behaviour two years later at age 12 and 13.
- Of the youths who were not aggressive at age 10 and 11, only 5% reported involvement in relatively high frequencies of aggressive behaviour at age 12 and 13.
- Children who reported being bullied at school were more likely than those who were not bullied to be aggressive. Ten percent of 12 and 13 year olds who were never or rarely bullied reported high frequencies of aggressiveness whereas 20% of 12 and 13 year olds who reported being bullied a lot were involved in high frequencies of aggressive behaviour.
- Children who experience higher levels of punitive parenting and lower parental nurturance are also more likely to report high frequencies of aggressive behaviour.
- Children who were involved in aggressive behaviour were more likely to be depressed. Of those who were not very depressed, 5% were involved in high frequencies of aggressiveness whereas seventeen percent of youths who were very depressed reported being involved in high frequencies of aggressive behaviour at age 12 and 13. The same pattern emerged with delinquent acts involving property.

\* Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Guelph; Centre of Criminology, University of Toronto; Department of Human Development and Applied Psychology, OISE/UT; University of Toronto; respectively.



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## Introduction

Most young people, during adolescence, do things that could be considered delinquent. Many of these behaviours or offences, which never get reported to the police, are non-violent in nature. There is some evidence, however, that those youths who are involved in aggressive acts may be different from the youths who are largely involved in delinquent acts involving property.<sup>1</sup> A number of factors in children's lives such as aspects of family and school life and characteristics of individual children have been found in previous studies to be associated with various types of delinquent behaviour.

Using data from Statistics Canada's National Longitudinal Survey on Children and Youth, this *Juristat* will examine delinquency as reported by youths between 10 and 13 years of age. Specifically four different issues will be explored. First, the demographic variation in delinquency is assessed. Second, to understand life-course trajectories of children and youth involved in aggressive behaviour and delinquent acts involving property, stability in delinquency is examined. Third, to understand *why* young people commit delinquent acts, it is important to differentiate aggressive behaviour from other types of delinquency. Therefore, the relationship between aggressive behaviour and acts involving property is examined. Finally, the most common risk factors in childhood and early adolescence are presented.

## Measuring Delinquency

Delinquency has been measured in many different ways. The data to be reported in this report are based on the self-reports of children and youth who participated in the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth. Through this survey a representative sample of children and youths across Canada were asked questions about their own delinquent behaviour. This method of measuring delinquency has the advantage of obtaining information about offences that are not reported to the police or in any other way recorded officially.

Are people willing to admit that they have committed delinquent acts? Studies have examined self-reported delinquency where the offender indicated that there was police contact and, generally speaking, there was a relatively high degree of correspondence between self-report measures and "official" records of contact. It should be remembered, however, that rates of offending depend on the nature and specificity of the questions asked. Detailed questions (e.g. Have you broken a window in a house?) are more likely to result in reports of delinquency than are general questions (e.g. Have you damaged someone's property?). Further, most of the incidents that are reported in self-report surveys are relatively minor. The most serious types of delinquent acts have too low an incidence to be reliably estimated using relative small samples.

The focus of this paper is largely on whether groups of youths differ in their delinquency rates, and thus the patterns that they show in their rates of delinquency. Hence the concern is more with whether groups differ in a particular direction in their rates of delinquency, rather than the exact rate of delinquency. This is because the specificity or form of the question that has been asked in a self-report instrument affects the rates. Given that the findings in this report are largely consistent with theories and findings from a variety of other studies that used a variety of different self-report questions, the results are considered reliable. When the apparent differences between groups could easily have occurred by chance, the finding has been labelled "non-significant". In the absence of an indication that something is *not*

<sup>1</sup> Moffitt (1993) suggests that the background of youths who appear to be troublesome early in their lives and who, in adolescence, are likely to be involved in violent offending (labelled by Moffitt as "life-course persistent") is different from youths who are only involved in high volume (largely property) offending during adolescence ("adolescent limited" delinquents).

<sup>2</sup> The questions in the NLSCY tended to be general.

statistically significant, the observed differences between the groups can be assumed to be statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ).<sup>3</sup>

**Text Box 1**  
**National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth**

The data that are reported here are derived from the National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth, a joint project of Statistics Canada and Human Resources Development Canada. As the survey's name implies, this is a longitudinal study where a group of children from shortly after their birth to age 11 are being studied every two years until they reach the age of 25. For the younger children (age 9 and under), data are collected from the person in the household most knowledgeable about the child (Person Most Knowledgeable, or PMK<sup>4</sup>). For children in school (kindergarten and higher), data are collected, as well, from teachers and the school principal. And from age 10 onwards, the youths themselves answer questions. The data that "delinquency" rates are based on derive largely from written "self-report" forms filled out by the children and returned to Statistics Canada. The first "cycle" of data was collected in 1994/95. At that time, the oldest children in the sample were 10 or 11 years old.

At the time of the writing of this report, the only self-report delinquency data that were available for analysis came from cycle 1 (1994/95) and cycle 2 (1996/97). There were some changes made in the questions that were asked of young people in the two "cycles" of data. Therefore, when comparing cycle 1 and cycle 2 data only those questions that were asked in both cycles were included in the analysis. This means that when cycle 1 data were compared to cycle 2 data, one subset of questions was used. When groups (e.g. males and females) were compared on delinquency at age 12 and 13 (cycle 2) a different subset of questions was used. In each case as complete a measure as possible was used for that comparison. Comparisons across tables are, therefore, problematic.

**Male youth more likely than female youth to display delinquent behaviour**

As is found in almost all studies of delinquency and in police reported statistics, females were less likely to be involved in delinquent behaviour than were males (Table 1). For example, 70% of females were not involved in delinquent acts involving property compared to 60% of males. In addition, 71% of females did not report any aggressive behaviour but only 44% of males reported no aggressive behaviour.

Table 1



Type of delinquent behaviour	Gender	Level of delinquency			
		None	Some	High	Total
Delinquent acts involving property	Females	70%	23%	7%	100% (967)
	Males	60%	27%	13%	100% (964)
Aggressive behaviour	Females	71%	22%	7%	100% (981)
	Males	44%	40%	16%	100% (974)

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1994/95 and 1996/97.

**Text Box 2**  
**Defining delinquency**

Questions related to delinquent acts involving property asked of both 10-11 and 12-13 year olds inquired about the frequency (never, sometimes, often) of: stealing at home, stealing outside the home, destroying other people's things and vandalizing. These four questions were added together to produce a scale which was then re-coded into "none", "some" or "a lot" of delinquent acts involving property. There were only two questions related to aggressive behaviour asked of both 10-11 and 12-13 year olds: frequency (never, sometimes, often) of getting in fights and physically attacking people. Again, these two questions were summed to produce a scale that was re-coded into "none", "some" or "a lot" of aggressive behaviour. For all of these questions there was no specific reference period (i.e. past year or in lifetime).

When using only cycle two data (12 and 13 year olds), the acts involving property measure consisted of the following eight questions: past year stolen something from a store, stolen something from school, taken money from parents, broken into a house, sold something you knew was stolen, damaged something, taken a purse or wallet, and taken a car. The aggressive behaviour measure included the addition of the following nine questions: past year threatened to beat someone up, was in a fight but no serious injuries, fight with serious injuries, fight and used weapon, used knife for attack, threatened to get money, attempted sexual touching, forced sex, and set fire to something. In order to include as many cases as possible, children were retained if they answered at least half of the questions. The modal response (never engaged in the delinquent behavior) was substituted for their few missing responses. With both scales, the questions were added together and then re-coded into "none", "some" or "a lot" of aggressive behaviour or acts involving property.

Readers are cautioned that it is probably not meaningful to make simple comparisons across "types" of delinquency. The fact that, for example, delinquent acts involving property appears to be less prevalent than aggressive behaviour (See Table 1) may reflect more the nature and specificity of the two types of questions that were asked rather than any "real" underlying difference.

It is suggested that readers focus on the broad trends rather than specific results. Some irregularities that occurred in some of the findings may have more to do with how different measures were constructed as opposed to real underlying differences. For example Figure 8 – the general result is that the more risk factors children experience the more likely they are to be involved in delinquency. The readers are cautioned against making specific inferences about how the exact number of risk factors relate differently to aggressive behaviour or delinquent acts involving property. In addition, the statistical tests that were performed tested whether there were overall differences rather than differences between specific subsets of the data.

<sup>3</sup> Each child in the National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth can be seen as representing a certain number of youths in the Canadian population. The exact number depends on sampling decisions and on the ability of interviewers to locate and interview chosen youth. The difference between the characteristics of the sample and the relevant characteristics of the Canadian youth population can be minimized by using a "weight" for each person representing the number of youths in the Canadian population each sampled youth represents. These weights, calculated by Statistics Canada, were then divided by a constant to ensure that the total sample size in each analysis approximated the size of the sample contributing to the analysis for the purpose of calculating the "statistical significance" of differences between groups of respondents.

<sup>4</sup> For presentation purposes, the "person most knowledgeable" about the youth (the "PMK") is referred to as the "parent" because in most cases it is the mother or father (usually the mother).

### Rates of delinquency highest among youth living in the Prairie Provinces

There was also variation across provinces in self-reported delinquency. For both delinquent acts involving property and aggressive behaviour, the Prairies appear to be relatively high (Table 2). Quebec 12-13 year old youths report the lowest level of aggressive behaviour. Youths from the Atlantic provinces, Quebec, and B.C. were most likely to report no involvement in delinquent acts involving property. Comparisons of these data to criminal justice indicators (e.g. police reports of crime or youth court data) are problematic since these latter measures reflect criminal justice decision making and citizen reporting as well as youth behaviour.

Table 2

		Level of delinquency			
		None	Some	A lot	Total
Aggressive behaviour	Atlantic	60%	28%	12%	100% (469)
	Quebec	68%	23%	9%	100% (378)
	Ontario	55%	32%	12%	100% (499)
	Prairies	47%	39%	14%	100% (462)
	B.C.	60%	31%	9%	100% (144)
Delinquent acts involving property	Atlantic	68%	23%	8%	100% (461)
	Quebec	68%	19%	13%	100% (373)
	Ontario	63%	28%	9%	100% (494)
	Prairies	61%	27%	12%	100% (456)
	B.C.	69%	24%	8%	100% (144)

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1994/95 and 1996/97.

### Income not a strong indicator of youth delinquency

There was not a strong link between income adequacy<sup>5</sup> and involvement in delinquency. Looking at aggressive behaviour first (Table 3), anywhere between 39% to 44% of children from all income groups reported being involved in some or a lot of aggressiveness.

Table 3

		Level of aggressive behaviour			
		None	Some	A lot	Total
Lowest/lower middle		56%	29%	15%	100% (286)
Middle		56%	35%	9%	100% (635)
Upper middle		61%	27%	12%	100% (713)
Highest		57%	33%	11%	100% (296)

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1994/95 and 1996/97.

Table 4 shows the relationship between income adequacy and delinquent acts involving property. Again, there is no clear relationship. Children from the middle and upper middle income groups appeared to be the least likely to be involved in delinquent acts involving property.<sup>6</sup>

Table 4

Income	Level of delinquency			
	None	Some	A lot	Total
Lowest/lower middle	59%	27%	14%	100% (31)
Middle	67%	25%	8%	100% (628)
Upper middle	67%	22%	11%	100% (704)
Highest	63%	28%	9%	100% (292)

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1994/95 and 1996/97.

### Does delinquency in childhood continue into adolescence?

It is important to understand not only whether children who display delinquent or problem behaviour when they are young are likely to continue this behaviour into adolescence, but also to understand whether their behaviour increases or decreases in severity with age.

There are three ways to assess “stability” in delinquency. One way is to examine the level of delinquency from the two different groups of 10 and 11 year olds. This is one way to examine whether different cohorts of children are getting “worse” over time. As shown in Table 5<sup>7</sup>, there were no substantial differences in the level of delinquency of 10-11 year old youths in 1994/95 (Cycle 1) and 10-11 year olds in 1996/97 (Cycle 2). For example 62% of 10 and 11 year olds in 1994/5 reported no aggressive behaviour and 67% of 10 and 11 year olds in 1996/97 reported no aggressive behaviour. Obviously, this is not a very long time period. But the suggestion that youth during this period got “worse” (in terms of delinquency) is not supported by the data.

Another way to measure “stability” in delinquency is to examine how the youths themselves changed across the two-year period as they moved into early adolescence. It would appear that, in comparison to their behaviour when aged 10-11, these youths at age 12-13 were less likely to report being involved in aggressive behaviour and very slightly more likely to report some delinquent acts involving property (Table 6). For example 63% of 10 and 11 year olds reported no aggressive behaviour, but when they were 12 and 13, a higher proportion were reporting no involvement in aggressiveness (71%). With

<sup>5</sup> “Income adequacy” is a measure that combines household income with family size such that a larger family with an income equal to that of a smaller family is likely to have a lower “income adequacy” score.

<sup>6</sup> The relationship between income and delinquency is quite complex. See Wright et al. (1999).

<sup>7</sup> The Ns vary in the tables due to missing data on one or both of the variables.

respect to delinquent acts involving property, 83% of 10 and 11 year olds reported no acts against property and when they were 12 and 13, 78% reported no acts involving property.

Table 5

Level of delinquency of 10-11 year olds in the two cycles of data					
Type of delinquent behaviour	Cycle	Level of delinquency			
		None	Some	High	Total
Delinquent acts involving property	1994/5	82%	10%	8%	100% (n=1746)
	1996/7	83%	10%	7%	100% (n=1779)
Aggressive behaviour	1994/5	62%	24%	14%	100% (n=1782)
	1996/7	67%	21%	13%	100% (n=1886)

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1994/95 and 1996/97.

Table 6

Level of delinquency of youths at age 10-11 and two years later at age 12 and 13 (longitudinal comparison)					
Type of delinquent behaviour	Age	Level of delinquency			
		None	Some	High	Total
Delinquent acts involving property	10 to 11 year olds	83%	10%	7%	100% (n=1746)
	12 to 13 year olds	78%	15%	7%	100% (n=1775)
Aggressive behaviour	10 to 11 year olds	63%	24%	13%	100% (n=1782)
	12 to 13 year olds	71%	18%	11%	100% (n=1838)

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1994/95 and 1996/97.

A third way to investigate “stability” in delinquent behaviour is to examine whether the youths who were most involved in delinquency when they were 10-11 years old were the same youths who were highly involved in delinquency two years later, when they were 12-13 years old. As can be seen from Table 7, there is a good deal of consistency. For example, of the youths who were not aggressive at age 10 and 11, only 5% reported involvement in relatively high levels of aggressive behaviour at age 12 and 13. When one looks at those who were showing the highest level of aggressiveness at age 10-11, 24% were (relatively) highly aggressive at age 12-13. At the same time, however, the level of *inconsistency* is also important to consider. For example, of the children who were at the highest level of aggressive behaviour at age 10 and 11, 45% were not reporting any aggressive behaviour two years later at age 12 and 13. It is important to recognize, then, that while there is relative stability in these behaviours, many children have changed dramatically in their level of delinquency.

Data such as these demonstrate the challenges of dealing with aggressive youth by focusing solely on those who are “highly aggressive” at age 10-11. Two years later many of these youths are not exhibiting high levels of aggressiveness.

The same type of “stability” in delinquency can be examined for delinquent acts involving property. Again, there is considerable stability – 81% of youths who were not involved in acts involving property at age 10 and 11 were still not involved in any acts involving property at age 12 and 13 (Table 8). However, 63% of those youths who were involved in high levels of delinquent acts involving property at age 10 and 11 reported no acts involving property two years later at age 12 and 13. This again suggests that while there is consistency in delinquency, there is also some unpredictability in their pattern of delinquent behaviour as children get older.

Table 7

Level of aggressive behaviour at age 10 to 11	Level of aggressive behaviour at age 12 to 13			
	None	Some	A lot	Total
None	82%	12%	5%	100% (n=1006)
Some	55%	28%	17%	100% (n=386)
High	45%	31%	24%	100% (n=233)

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1994/95 and 1996/97.

Table 8

Level of delinquent acts involving property at age 10 to 11	Level of delinquent acts involving property at age 12 to 13			
	None	Some	A lot	Total
None	81%	13%	6%	100% (n=1269)
Some	68%	26%	7%	100% (n=159)
High	63%	20%	17%	100% (n=110)

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1994/95 and 1996/97.

### Relationship between aggressive behaviour and delinquent acts involving property

Generally it appears that youths at age 12-13 who are involved in one type of delinquency (e.g., aggressive behaviour) are more likely to be involved in the other type of delinquency (e.g., delinquent acts involving property) than are youths who do not self-report delinquency at age 12-13 (Table 9). For example, of the youths who were not involved in any delinquent acts involving property, 69% also reported not being involved in any aggressive behaviour. Of those youths who reported being highly involved in delinquent acts involving property,

Table 9

**Relationship between level of involvement in delinquent acts involving property to the level of involvement in aggressive behaviour for 12 to 13 year olds**

Youths who report	Level of aggressive behaviour			Total
	None	Some	High	
No delinquent acts involving property	69%	26%	5%	100% (n=1271)
Some delinquent acts involving property	45%	42%	13%	100% (n=461)
High levels of delinquent acts involving property	17%	35%	47%	100% (n=186)

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1994/95 and 1996/97.

only 17% reported no involvement in aggressive behaviour. A similar relationship was found when the youths were age 10-11 (not shown).

**Risk factors and delinquency**

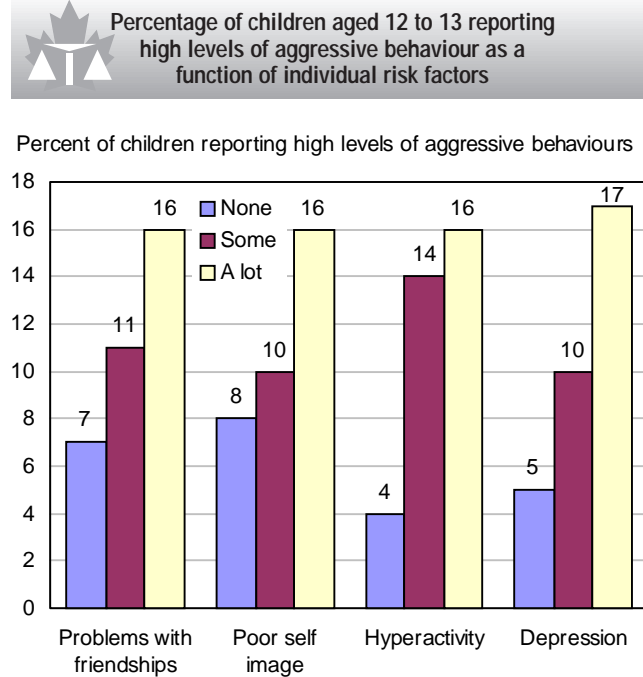
Factors that are associated with an increased likelihood that children will engage in delinquency are typically referred to as risk factors. Given that the major focus of this analysis is on cycle 2 when the children are age 12 and 13, these factors should not be thought of as causes of delinquency. It is not possible to determine which came first — the delinquent behaviour or the various risk factors. Therefore, the following tables of risk factors should be interpreted as correlates of delinquency – they are not necessarily causes.

Individual, family and school risk factors that have been found in previous research to be related to delinquency were examined. Where possible different perspectives were used for the risk and outcome variables (e.g. a child's report on involvement in aggressive behaviour and the parent's report on parenting style).<sup>8</sup>

**Youth who were depressed were likely to be involved in aggressive behaviour**

Individual risk factors include the child's self-report of social interactions with friends, general self-image, hyperactivity, depression and the parent's report of learning disabilities. Figure 1<sup>9</sup> shows the relationship between the prevalence of these risk factors and high levels of child aggressiveness. Only those children showing the highest level of aggressive behaviour are represented in the figure (for complete data see Table A). Figure 1 shows the proportion of children within various levels of risks that are showing high levels of aggressiveness. For example, 7% of those children with no problems with friends are involved in high levels of aggressive behaviour compared to 16% of the children who report a lot of problems with friends.<sup>10</sup> Children who reported negative self-images, higher levels of hyperactivity, and depression were also more likely to report involvement in aggressive behaviour. For those children with a learning disability (assessed from reports of the parent<sup>11</sup>) 21% report a high level of aggressive behaviours. For those without a learning disability, 11% report a high level of aggressive behaviours (see Table A).

Figure 1



Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1996/97.

**Depression was also related to delinquent acts involving property among youth**

Looking next at the relationship between individual risk factors and delinquent acts involving property, a similar pattern emerges (Figure 2. For full data see Table B). For example, 14% of children who report a lot of problems with friendships also reported high levels of delinquent acts involving property. However, only 8% of the children who reported no problems with friends reported high levels of delinquent acts against property. Generally, the lower the children's self-image, the higher the hyperactivity and depression, the more likely they were to be engaging in high levels of delinquent acts involving property. The presence of a learning disability did not appear to be related to acts involving property. That is, children with learning disabilities were not significantly more likely to be involved in delinquent acts involving property than children without learning disabilities (see Table B).

<sup>8</sup> The reason for this is that it was preferable to eliminate the possibility that associations found between risk factors and outcome variables could be explained by informant bias (the same person reporting on both types of variables).

<sup>9</sup> The Figures generally contain the significant (p < .05) findings. However, the Figures only contain a portion of the findings which were tested (only those children displaying the highest level of delinquency). In order to understand the overall significant relationships, readers should consult the complete tables (Tables A to G). In addition, for ease of presentation, the same labels were used for all variables in the Figures. Please consult the full tables for a clearer understanding of the exact labels for each variable.

<sup>10</sup> By implication 84% of children reporting a lot of problems with friends report low levels of aggressiveness and 93% of children reporting no problems with friends report low levels of aggressive behaviour.

<sup>11</sup> The parent was asked if the child had a learning disability.

Table A

**Relationship between aggressive behaviour at age 12-13 and various individual risk factors from the child's perspective**

Youth self-report (12-13)	Age 12-13 aggressive behaviour			
	None	Some	A lot	Total
Problems with friends				
None	62%	31%	7%	100% (743)
Some	57%	32%	11%	100% (524)
A lot	54%	30%	16%	100% (688)
Poor self-image				
None	63%	29%	8%	100% (740)
Some	60%	30%	10%	100% (528)
A lot	51%	33%	16%	100% (687)
Hyperactivity				
None	72%	25%	4%	100% (614)
Some	55%	31%	14%	100% (596)
A lot	48%	36%	16%	100% (745)
Depression				
None	67%	28%	5%	100% (570)
Some	62%	28%	10%	100% (558)
A lot	48%	35%	17%	100% (827)
Learning disability <sup>1</sup>				
No	58%	31%	11%	100% (1859)
Yes	52%	27%	21%	100% (96)

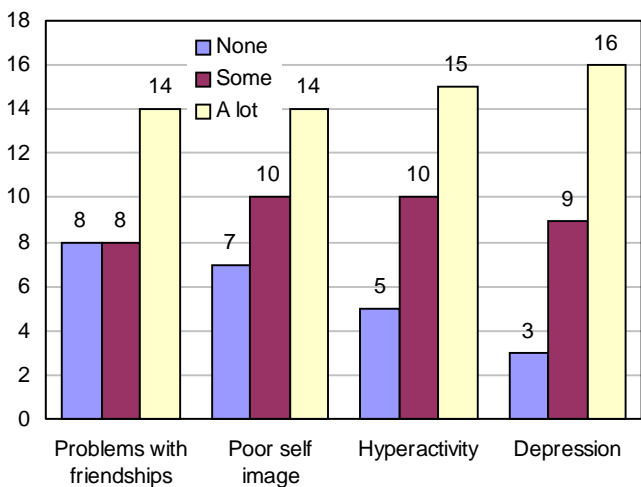
<sup>1</sup> Parent reported.

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1996/97.

Figure 2

**Percentage of children aged 12 to 13 who report high levels of delinquent acts involving property as a function of individual risk factors**

Percent of children reporting high levels of delinquent acts involving property



Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1996/97.

Table B

**Relationship between delinquent acts involving property at age 12-13 and various individual risk factors from the child's perspective**

Youth self-report (12-13)	Age 12-13 delinquent acts involving property			
	None	Some	A lot	Total
Problems with friends				
Very positive	70%	22%	8%	100% (732)
All Right	68%	24%	8%	100% (522)
Negative	58%	28%	14%	100% (677)
Poor self-image				
Positive self image	73%	21%	7%	100% (728)
Moderate self image	66%	24%	10%	100% (521)
Negative self image	56%	30%	14%	100% (682)
Hyperactivity				
None	77%	18%	5%	100% (606)
Some	62%	28%	10%	100% (586)
A lot	57%	28%	15%	100% (739)
Depression				
None	77%	19%	3%	100% (568)
Some	67%	24%	9%	100% (552)
A lot	54%	30%	16%	100% (811)
Learning disability <sup>1</sup>				
No	65%	25%	11%	100% (1836)
Yes	66%	30%	4%	100% (95)

<sup>1</sup> Not statistically significant; parent report.

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1996/97.

**Youth who experience punitive parenting and lack of parental nurturance more likely to be involved in delinquency**

Family risk factors include the parent's report of whether the child had witnessed violence between adults in the home, punitive parenting, lack of parental nurturance, parental rejection and whom the child lives with. Considering first the child being a witness to physical violence in the home, 13% of children who witnessed violence in the home report that they engage in high levels of aggressive behaviour. Eleven percent of children who do not witness violence in the home report that they engage in high levels of aggressive behaviour (See Table C for complete data). Children who experience higher levels of punitive parenting, lower parental nurturance, and higher parental rejection are also more likely to report high levels of aggressive behaviour (Figure 3).

Looking next at delinquent acts involving property, only punitive parenting and lack of parental nurturance were related to this type of delinquency (See Figure 4. For complete data see Table D) with high levels of each of these being associated with higher levels of delinquency involving property. Witnessing violence in the home, parental rejection and whom the child lives with were not significantly related to acts involving property.



Table C

**Relationship between self-reported aggressive behaviour at age 12-13 and various family "risk" factors from the parent's perspective**

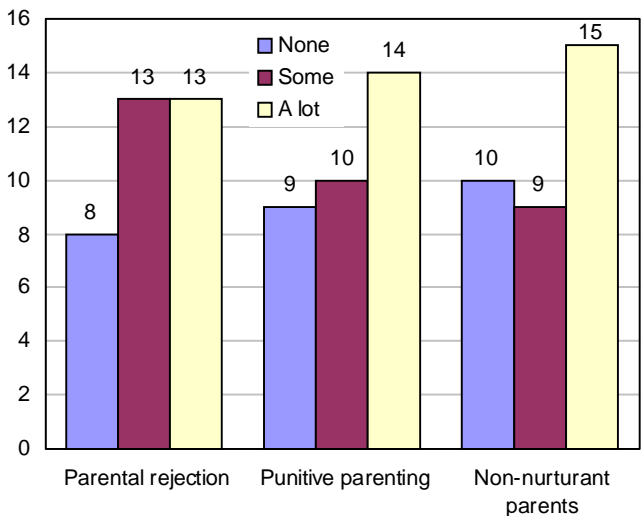
Parent's report	Age 12-13 aggressive behaviour (child's self-report)			
	None	Some	A lot	Total
Witness physical violence				
No	59%	30%	11%	100% (1751)
Yes	48%	39%	13%	100% (198)
Punitive parenting				
None	62%	29%	9%	100% (528)
Some	59%	30%	10%	100% (804)
A lot	53%	33%	14%	100% (620)
Lack of parental nurturance				
None	62%	28%	10%	100% (859)
Some	58%	33%	9%	100% (597)
A lot	51%	34%	15%	100% (496)
Parental rejection				
None	62%	30%	8%	100% (682)
Some	57%	30%	13%	100% (598)
A lot	54%	33%	13%	100% (672)
Who the child lives with				
One parent	52%	31%	17%	100% (323)
Two parents	59%	31%	10%	100% (1632)

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1996/97.

Figure 3

**Percentage of children aged 12 to 13 reporting high levels of aggressive behaviour as a function of family risk factors**

Percent of children reporting high level of aggressive behaviour

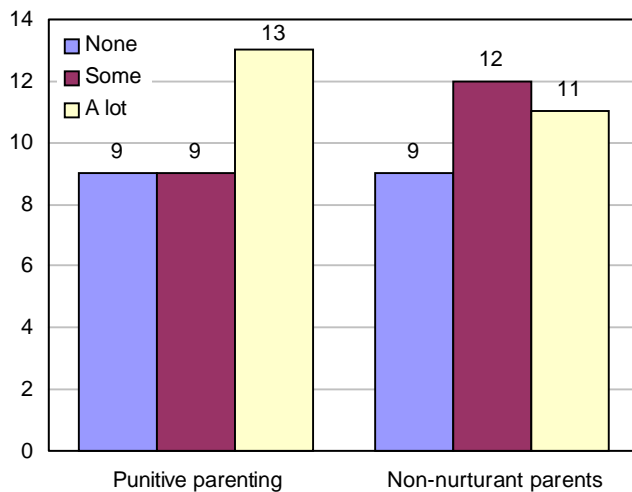


Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1996/97.

Figure 4

**Percentage of children aged 12 to 13 reporting high levels of delinquent acts involving property as a function of family risk factors**

Percent of children reporting high levels of delinquent acts involving property



Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1996/97.

Table D

**Relationship between self-reported delinquent acts involving property at age 12-13 and various family "risk" factors from the parents perspective**

Parent's report	Age 12-13 delinquent acts involving property (child's self-report)			
	None	Some	A lot	Total
Witness physical violence <sup>1</sup>				
No	65%	25%	10%	100% (1728)
Yes	66%	20%	14%	100% (197)
Punitive parenting				
None	69%	22%	9%	100% (519)
Some	68%	23%	9%	100% (798)
A lot	58%	30%	13%	100% (611)
Lack of parental nurturance				
None	68%	23%	9%	100% (850)
Some	65%	23%	12%	100% (591)
A lot	59%	30%	11%	100% (487)
Parental rejection <sup>1</sup>				
None	68%	24%	8%	100% (681)
Some	65%	24%	11%	100% (584)
A lot	62%	27%	12%	100% (663)
Who the child lives with <sup>1</sup>				
One parent	64%	26%	10%	100% (321)
Two parents	65%	25%	10%	100% (1610)

<sup>1</sup> Not statistically significant.

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1996/97.

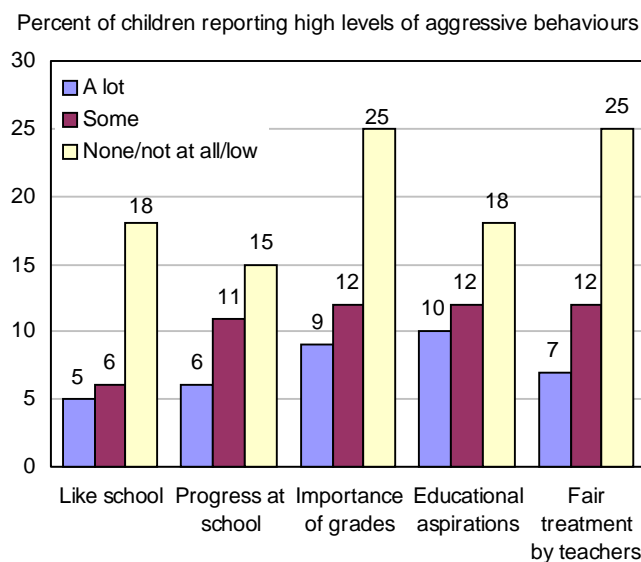
### Children who are bullied at school are also likely to be involved in aggressive behaviours

There was a relationship between youths' self-reported involvement in aggressive behaviours and perceived academic ability and aspirations. Specifically, children who were less committed to school were more likely to be involved in aggressive behaviour. For example, Figure 5 shows that only 5% of the children who report liking school a lot are involved in high levels of aggressive behaviours compared to 18% of children who report that they do not like school at all. Generally, children who do not like school, think that they are not doing well, think grades are not important, and do not want to go far in school are more likely to be involved in aggressive acts. In addition, those who think that their teacher does not treat them fairly are more likely to be involved in aggressive behaviours. Children who are skipping classes are more likely to be involved in aggressive acts (39%) than children who are not skipping classes (10%).

Finally, results for math achievement and reading achievement are somewhat inconsistent. Those with low or average math achievement were more likely to report involvement in at least some aggressive behaviour than were those with high math achievement. Contrary to expectation, however, this was not the case for reading achievement. Poor readers were not found to be more likely to engage in aggressive behaviour. (For full data see Table E).

Figure 5

Percentage of children aged 12 to 13 reporting high levels of aggressive behaviours as a function of relative academic ability and aspirations



Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1996/97.

Table E

Relationship between aggressive behaviour at age 12-13 and child's perceived academic ability / aspirations

Youth self-report (12-13)	Age 12-13 aggressive behaviour			
	None	Some	A lot	Total
How much you like school				
A lot	73%	21%	5%	100% (320)
Some	65%	30%	6%	100% (700)
Not very much	46%	36%	18%	100% (900)
Progress at school				
A lot	69%	25%	6%	100% (602)
Some	54%	35%	11%	100% (703)
None	51%	34%	15%	100% (613)
How important to get good grades				
A lot	64%	27%	9%	100% (1054)
Somewhat important	51%	37%	12%	100% (662)
Not at all important	39%	36%	25%	100% (207)
Educational Aspirations				
A lot (Complete university)	62%	28%	10%	100% (1032)
Some (Complete college)	50%	38%	12%	100% (355)
Low (Complete high school)	42%	40%	18%	100% (178)
Fair treatment by teachers				
A lot	70%	23%	7%	100% (882)
Some	53%	35%	12%	100% (749)
None	36%	39%	25%	100% (273)
Skipped classes				
Never	60%	30%	10%	100% (1760)
Once or more	23%	39%	39%	100% (63)
Reading achievement score <sup>1</sup>				
High achievement	62%	28%	11%	100% (443)
Average achievement	59%	29%	12%	100% (501)
Low achievement	57%	33%	10%	100% (557)
Math achievement score				
High achievement	64%	26%	10%	100% (447)
Average achievement	56%	31%	13%	100% (470)
Low achievement	57%	34%	9%	100% (600)

<sup>1</sup> Not statistically significant.

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1996/97.

Children's social relationships at school were also related to involvement in aggressive behaviours. Figure 6 demonstrates some of these relationships. Generally, when children feel unsafe at school, that they are being bullied, that other children say mean things to them, and that they feel like an outsider, they are more likely to be involved in aggressive behaviours. (Full data are given in Table F).

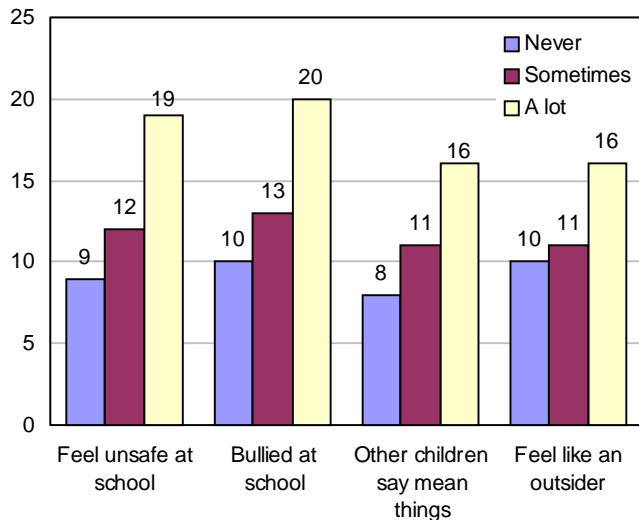
### Youth with low educational aspirations more likely to be involved in delinquent acts involving property

The relationship between academic ability and aspirations as well as school interpersonal relationships and delinquent acts involving property was also examined. Looking first at

Figure 6

Percentage of children aged 12 to 13 reporting high levels of aggressive behaviour as a function of school relationships

Percent of children reporting high levels of aggressive behaviours



Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1996/97.

Table F

Relationship between aggressive behaviour at age 12-13 and child's school interpersonal relationships

Youth self-report (12-13)	Age 12-13 aggressive behaviour			
	None	Some	A lot	Total
<b>Feel unsafe at school</b>				
Never	61%	30%	9%	100% (1085)
Sometimes	56%	32%	12%	100% (650)
A lot	47%	34%	19%	100% (190)
<b>Bullied at school</b>				
Never	62%	29%	10%	100% (1378)
Rarely	49%	38%	13%	100% (379)
Sometimes	43%	37%	20%	100% (166)
<b>How often children say mean things to you</b>				
Never	64%	28%	8%	100% (574)
Sometimes	59%	30%	11%	100% (911)
A lot	48%	36%	16%	100% (435)
<b>Feel like an outsider at school</b>				
Never	59%	31%	10%	100% (1201)
Sometimes	59%	30%	11%	100% (488)
A lot	52%	32%	16%	100% (238)

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1996/97.

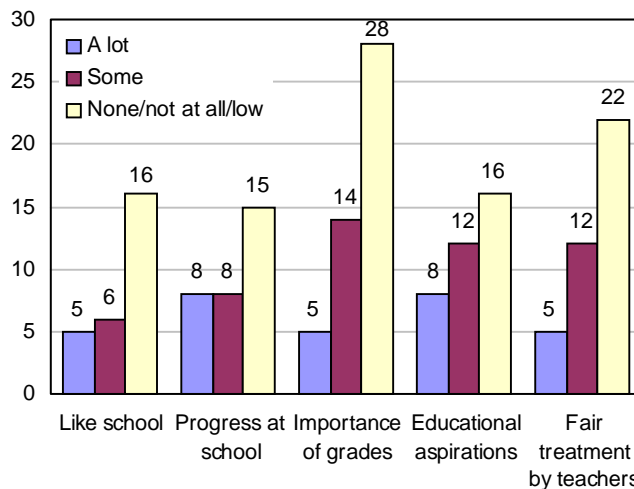
school achievement, there was a relationship between involvement in acts involving property and the various risk factors (Figure 7). For full data see Table G). For example, of the children who reported liking school a lot, 5% were involved in high levels of delinquent acts involving property compared to 16% of those who did not like school. Generally, children who do not like school, whose school progress is poor and think grades are not important are more likely to be involved in delinquent acts involving property. In addition, children who have lower educational aspirations, reported that their teachers do not treat them fairly and report skipping classes are more likely to report being involved in high levels of delinquent acts involving property. Finally, inconsistent with the findings for aggressive behaviour, those children who scored higher on reading achievement tests were less likely to be involved in delinquent acts involving property, but there was no relationship between this type of delinquency and math achievement tests.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, delinquent acts involving property did not appear to be as highly related to children's social relationships at school as aggressive behaviour was (Table 10). Only feeling unsafe at school and reporting that other children say mean things to them were related to acts involving property. Children who reported being bullied or feeling like an outsider were no more likely to report being involved in delinquent acts involving property than children who were not bullied or did not feel like outsiders.

Figure 7

Percentage of children aged 12 to 13 reporting high levels of delinquent acts involving property as a function of relative academic ability and aspirations

Percent of children reporting high levels of delinquent acts involving property



Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1996/97.

<sup>12</sup> Math and reading achievement tests were tests administered to youths as part of the NLSCY interview.

Table G

**Relationship between self-reported delinquent acts involving property at age 12-13 and child's perceived academic ability/aspirations**

Youth self-report (12-13)	Age 12-13 delinquent acts involving property			
	None	Some	A lot	Total
How much you like school				
A lot	74%	20%	5%	100% (322)
Some	71%	24%	6%	100% (691)
Not very much	55%	28%	16%	100% (889)
Progress at school				
A lot	71%	21%	8%	100% (594)
Some	66%	26%	8%	100% (690)
None	58%	27%	15%	100% (612)
Importance of good grades				
A lot	70%	25%	5%	100% (1040)
Some	63%	23%	14%	100% (658)
None	41%	31%	28%	100% (202)
Educational aspirations				
A lot (Complete university)	67%	25%	8%	100% (1017)
Some (Complete college)	59%	29%	12%	100% (354)
Low (Complete high school)	66%	18%	16%	100% (174)
Fair treatment by teachers				
A lot	75%	20%	5%	100% (874)
Some	62%	26%	12%	100% (735)
None	40%	38%	22%	100% (272)
Skipped classes				
Never	68%	25%	7%	100% (1744)
Once or more	17%	24%	58%	100% (62)
Reading achievement score				
High achievement	69%	22%	8%	100% (443)
Average achievement	66%	23%	11%	100% (502)
Low achievement	60%	31%	9%	100% (553)
Math achievement score <sup>1</sup>				
High achievement	67%	23%	10%	100% (438)
Average achievement	67%	24%	9%	100% (465)
Low achievement	63%	28%	9%	100% (601)

<sup>1</sup> Not statistically significant.

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1996/97.

**The more risk factors children experience the more likely they are to be involved in delinquency**

Examining risk factors individually is instructive because one can see the exact nature of the relationship between self-reported delinquency and specific factors. However, another way of conceptualizing risk is to see it as an accumulation of negative individual, family and environmental factors. That is, researchers usually add together all of the individual, social, situational and neighbourhood risk factors to create a scale ranging from zero risk factors to the highest number of risk factors present in the child's life.<sup>13</sup> All of the risk factors within

<sup>13</sup> See, for example: Born et al. (1997); Farrington (1998); Jenkins & Keating (1998); Jessor et al. (1995); Loeber & Farrington (1998).

Table 10

**Relationship between delinquent acts involving property at age 12-13 and child's school interpersonal relationships**

Youth self-report (12-13)	Age 12-13 delinquent acts involving property			
	None	Some	A lot	Total
How often do you feel safe at				
Always	71%	20%	10%	100% (1077)
Most of the time	58%	31%	12%	100% (636)
Sometimes	60%	30%	10%	100% (188)
How often bullied at school <sup>1</sup>				
Never	66%	25%	9%	100% (1364)
Rarely	62%	26%	12%	100% (369)
Sometimes	62%	25%	13%	100% (165)
How often children say mean things to you				
Never	72%	20%	8%	100% (570)
Rarely	64%	26%	10%	100% (901)
Sometimes	57%	29%	14%	100% (427)
Feel like an outsider at school <sup>1</sup>				
Never	65%	25%	10%	100% (1185)
Rarely	64%	25%	11%	100% (481)
Sometimes	63%	27%	10%	100% (236)

<sup>1</sup> Not statistically significant.

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1994/95 and 1996/97.

the different domains (individual, family and school) were summed and recoded to a maximum value of 3 risks within each domain. Scores for the three domains were then summed.

Figure 8 (see also Table H) illustrates the relationship between the proportion of children who report high levels of delinquency and the number of risk factors they face. Generally speaking, the more risk factors children face, the more likely they are to report heavy involvement in delinquency.

Table H

**Proportion of children (12-13) who report high levels of involvement in delinquency as a function of the number of risk factors**

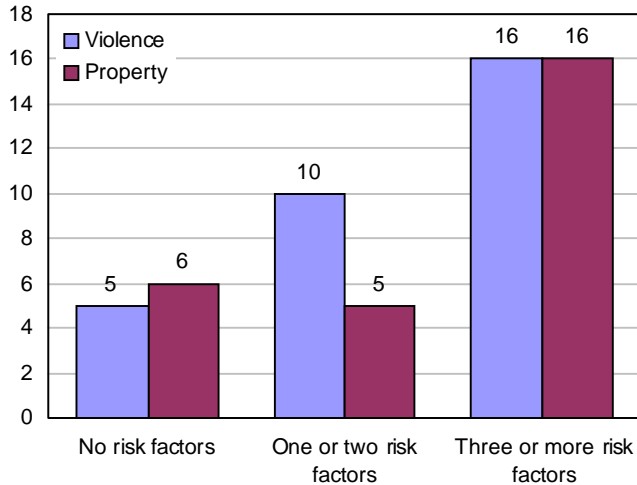
Number of risk factors	Aggressive behaviour	Delinquent acts involving property
No risk factors	5% (272)	6% (269)
One or two risk factors	10% (329)	5% (328)
Three or more risk factors	16% (191)	16% (189)

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1996/97.

Figure 8

**Proportion of children aged 12 to 13 who report high levels of involvement in delinquency as a function of number of risk factors**

Percent of children reporting high levels of delinquency



Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1996/97.

### Conclusion

What is, perhaps, most interesting about the findings reported here is that simple demographic variation – gender, income adequacy – may not be as important as simple predictors of delinquency of young people as are factors about their personal and social environment. Clearly certain school and family experiences are strongly related to delinquency. And, when one looks at certain factors as “risks” faced by the child, it is clear that those youths with the largest numbers of risks are considerably more likely to be involved in delinquency.

One should be cautious, of course, in interpreting these relationships as being causal. It may not make sense, for example, to consider skipping classes as a “cause” of high levels of involvement in delinquency. It is perhaps more plausible that youths for whom school is a negative experience are more likely to skip school and to be involved in various types of delinquency.

What does emerge, however, is a rather coherent picture of 12-13 year old delinquents. Although they are well distributed across income groups and provinces, they tend, disproportionately, to be experiencing risks in their interpersonal lives, their homes, and their schools.<sup>14</sup>

As further cycles of the National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth collect more data on youths from birth through adolescence, these data will contribute to an understanding of not only what appears to be important in causing youths to get highly involved in delinquent behaviour, but also what types of experiences help protect youth from beginning or continuing these disturbing patterns of behaviour.

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<sup>14</sup> For a similar description of 10-11 year old aggressive children (from the National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth), see Sprott & Doob (2000).

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