

Q-Step Internship: Upbringing As A Driver Of Crime

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The Crime and Policing Analysis Unit at the Home Office provides policy-makers and ministers with the latest crime data research, which

is used to improve the functioning of the British juridical system. As a research trainee in the CPAU, I worked with the Environmental Risk (E-Risk) Longitudinal Twin Study dataset to investigate the potential causes of youth criminality.

Objectives

The aim of my project at the Home Office was to understand the reasons why, and to what extent, young people turn to lives of criminal engagement.

The topic of youth criminality is well-worn and always sensitive; views are often biased and blame is typically attributed either to the child, the parent, the social environment, or the government. I used the E-Risk dataset of 1,116 pairs of 12 year old same-sex twins to research crime types, levels of engagement, and their potential causes and protective factors.

The main purpose of the project was to analyse the E-Risk data and find out which crime types and levels of engagement relate most strongly to which factors; be it gender, parental substance abuse, parental level of education, number of siblings, or otherwise. Policy recommendations were then to be made based on the findings.

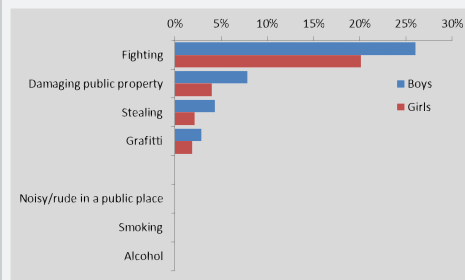
Method

Given the sensitive nature of this research, the E-Risk dataset could only be accessed by individuals cleared by Home Office security. And even though the twins had been anonymised and given reference numbers, the data remained sensitive and potentially damaging in the wrong hands.

I had to recode much of the data into smaller categories since it was so comprehensive, and this had to be done in a way which made the data more efficient whilst maintaining its integrity.

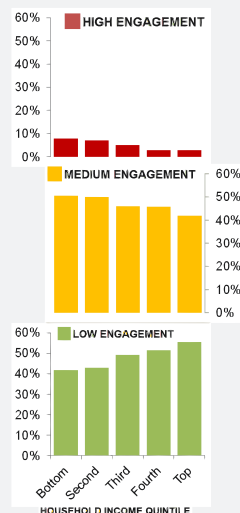
I was then able to begin running binary logistic regressions to reduce the data even further according to its relevance to the research topic. I was then able to analyse the results and produce graphs and preliminary research reports. The majority of this work was carried out using Microsoft Excel, SPSS, and Microsoft Word.

Key Findings



(Above: Percentage of boys and girls engaged in each crime type)

(Right: Stacked bar chart showing levels of engagement in risky behaviours by household income)



The data showed that: boys were twice as likely to fight as girls; children from working class backgrounds were almost 4 times more likely to engage in stealing than other children; boys with very young mothers were 12 times more likely to fight than other children; boys were almost twice as likely to be in the high engagement group as girls; participants that had been harmed between the ages of 5 and 12 were almost 3 times more likely to engage in stealing and graffiti; participants without relationships with their biological fathers were almost twice as likely to be in the medium engagement group.

Protective background factors against criminal behaviour included: families with few children; feelings of internal or external 'control'; medial participant IQ scores; participants whose fathers were married; participants whose mothers held a degree qualification; and twins identified as monozygotic.

Conclusions

- Children from working class backgrounds, especially boys without relationships with their biological fathers, require extra guidance and support to ensure they do not resort to lives of crime.
- Small families with strong bonds and academic ability are likely to produce well-behaved, law-abiding children.

- Government policy in this area should remain focused on improving the social and economic situations of disadvantaged families by ensuring that support and genuine opportunities for upward social mobility, such as education and meaningful employment, remain widely available and accessible.