

# Empirical study on the influencing factors of adolescent recidivism

Lee Young-ae<sup>1, a</sup>, Jung Woo-sung<sup>1, b, \*</sup>,

<sup>1</sup>Chung-Ang University, 84 Heukseok-ro, Dongjak-gu, Seoul, 03977, South Korea  
a.youngae65\_lee@yahoo.com, b.jung85294588@163.com

**\*Corresponding Author**

**Abstract:** Individual, family, and society are the three main factors influencing adolescent recidivism. By employing in-depth interviews to develop a questionnaire on "real-world social treatment" affecting adolescent recidivism, and combining it with the commonly used "low self-control" and "family functioning" scales in adolescent crime measurement, a survey was conducted among 49 incarcerated adolescents who had reoffended. After statistical analysis of the survey data, it was found that the factors of "low self-control" and "real-world social treatment" significantly influenced adolescent recidivism, while the factor of "family functioning" had no significant impact. There is a certain correlation between family socioeconomic status and the factor of "real-world social treatment." Changing the situation of "real-world social treatment" can influence the psychology of adolescent recidivism.

**Keywords:** Adolescent crime, Low self-control, Real-world social treatment, Family functioning

## 1. Introduction

The concept of adolescent crime can be divided into broad and narrow definitions. The narrow definition is a legal concept, as stipulated by China's criminal law, referring to criminal acts committed by individuals aged 14 to 18 that are punishable by law. The broad definition of adolescent crime encompasses individuals aged 6 to 25.[1]

The concept of "recidivism" also has broad and narrow definitions. In this study, adolescent recidivism refers to individuals under the age of 26 who, after serving a criminal sentence or undergoing reeducation through labor, commit another crime punishable by law after their release. Adolescent recidivism refers to the reoffending behavior of adolescents who have been released from prison and reintegrated into society (referred to as rehabilitated adolescents).

Adolescent recidivism is a global concern. Research worldwide consistently shows that "the younger the age at first offense, the greater the likelihood of reoffending; the more frequent the reoffending, the lower the likelihood of desisting from crime." [2] In China, the overall situation of adolescent recidivism is not optimistic. Therefore, studying the psychological factors influencing adolescent recidivism is of great significance for preventing recidivism and reducing the overall crime rate in society.

## 2. Current research status and issues in adolescent recidivism

### 2.1. Current research status

Theories of juvenile delinquency can be divided into interpersonal factors and individual factors. The theory of interpersonal factors suggests that juvenile delinquent behavior primarily arises from problems in adolescents' interactions with others. In contrast, the theory of individual factors posits that the main causes of juvenile delinquent behavior stem from the internal characteristics of adolescents themselves. General strain theory is an important paradigm for explaining the causes of juvenile delinquency. It introduces the concepts of "low self-control" and "opportunity for crime." According to this theory, poor or ineffective socialization leads to low self-control traits in offenders. Poor family upbringing can result in low self-control, and while schools are also a primary means of socialization, their efforts are less effective without family cooperation. Research on the relationship between family and juvenile delinquency, both

domestically and internationally, indicates that the family function system, primarily characterized by emotional relationships within the family, is closely related to juvenile delinquency. Family function has a significant predictive effect on juvenile delinquency. Studies by Robert et al. have shown that family relationship problems and parenting issues, as risk factors, are significantly positively correlated with juvenile recidivism rates and psychological maladjustment.

Empirical studies on juvenile recidivism in the United States have confirmed labeling theory and demonstrated that both social and non-social factors are triggers for juvenile delinquency. Juvenile recidivism is related to non-social stimuli—such as neurophysiological characteristics—and social stimuli, including social exclusion caused by deviant labels and negative self-concept identification, leading labeled adolescents to join deviant groups. The non-social reinforcement stimulus theory employs neuropsychological methods to explain the causes of juvenile recidivism. Wood et al. found that offenders often view crime as a beneficial experience, gaining intrinsic rewards and "neurophysiological pleasure" from their criminal activities.

Empirical studies on recidivism have been conducted by researchers in China. Zeng Yun designed and compiled a risk prediction scale for recidivism among released prisoners based on the age-graded life-course theory of crime [6]. Kong Yi conducted a follow-up survey of released adolescents, finding a recidivism rate of 7.2% within five years [7]. The survey identified 13 factors influencing adolescent recidivism, including current behavior, employment placement, social attitudes, the reason for the first offense, marital status upon return, family relationships, home address, household registration, pre-arrest occupation, family economic conditions, sentence length, age at first offense, and marital status before sentencing. Among these, current behavior was a significant influencing factor. Researchers summarized factors affecting adolescent recidivism, such as employment, marital status, family, and social attitudes, as the degree of social integration and acceptance of rehabilitated adolescents. They suggested that promoting the integration of rehabilitated adolescents into professional groups is a fundamental path to controlling recidivism.

Wang Zhiqiang's analysis divided the influencing factors of recidivism into individual factors, correctional experiences, and social treatment [8]. Individual factors include educational level, employment status and stability, objective economic income, and subjective poverty. Correctional experiences encompass behavior in prison and recognition of the effectiveness of rehabilitation. Social treatment refers to the overall living conditions received by released individuals upon reentering society, primarily involving family life and resettlement assistance provided by relevant social sectors.

## 2.2. Statement of the problem

Existing research on adolescent recidivism, both domestically and internationally, although based on different theoretical assumptions, generally focuses on the susceptibility factors of juvenile delinquency, as well as the influence of family and social factors. Most studies suggest that characteristics of the adolescents themselves, their employment status, family relationships, and social prejudices all affect the likelihood of recidivism. In China, empirical studies on adolescent recidivism often use cross-sectional comparisons, comparing differences between recidivist and non-recidivist adolescents among rehabilitated youths to identify influencing factors. However, these studies lack longitudinal tracking to analyze how specific factors significantly influence the process of recidivism among rehabilitated adolescents.

This study does not employ a longitudinal tracking method but instead focuses on incarcerated recidivist adolescents. Using a survey questionnaire, it investigates the subjective self-evaluations of these adolescents to analyze the impact of individual characteristics, family factors, and social factors on recidivism. The study hypothesizes that: the factor of low self-control among adolescents significantly influences recidivism; parenting styles within family function factors significantly influence recidivism; and real-world social treatment factors significantly influence recidivism after rehabilitated adolescents reintegrate into society.

From a psychological perspective, this study examines the impact of low self-control, family factors, and social factors on adolescent recidivism. It broadens the research scope on the issue of adolescent recidivism and provides suggestions from different levels—individual, family, and society. This exploration aims to offer insights for effectively preventing, reducing, and intervening in adolescent recidivism, contributing to the understanding and addressing of this issue.

### 3. Research methods for juvenile recidivism

#### 3.1. subjects of research

This study initially selected 15 incarcerated adolescents who had reoffended from a prison and conducted in-depth interviews based on a pre-prepared interview outline to understand the factors influencing juvenile recidivism. This step was aimed at preparing for the development of a questionnaire on real-world social treatment that induces juvenile recidivism.

After revising and perfecting the questionnaire on real-world social treatment, the study selected 49 adolescents under the age of 25 who had reoffended from the prison and distributed the survey questionnaires. A total of 45 valid questionnaires were recovered. All participants were male, with ages ranging from 18 to 25 years old, and an average age of 24 years.

#### 3.2. research tools

##### 3.2.1. *Questionnaire on real - world social treatment factors*

Three psychology PhDs conducted in-depth interviews with 15 incarcerated adolescents who had reoffended to understand the factors influencing their recidivism and to develop a questionnaire on real-world social treatment factors that affect their reoffending.

What were the happiest and saddest moments of your childhood? (To understand the individual's feelings about their childhood.)

What do you think led you to your current situation? (To understand the individual's attribution of their criminal behavior and their objectivity in perceiving events.)

What were you thinking when you were last released? (To understand the initial effects of prison rehabilitation on the individual.)

Do you regret reoffending? If you could say something to yourself ten years ago, what would it be? (To understand the individual's current psychological state and their perception of reoffending.)

The interviewees believed that the main reasons for their recidivism were the lack of social acceptance and their inability to integrate well into society after being released. Considering that juvenile recidivists might be more inclined to attribute their reoffending to external environmental factors, the psychology testers discussed and categorized the questionnaire into several aspects of real-world social treatment: employment opportunities, marital opportunities, economic conditions, relationships with family members, and personal performance. The respondents were asked to answer in a yes-or-no format.

The questionnaire included the following items:

I find it difficult to secure employment, and others have negative opinions about me.

My past experiences have affected my chances of finding a partner and getting married.

My family's financial situation is worse than before and cannot meet my basic living needs.

My relationships with family members are strained, and I feel no one cares about me.

Despite my efforts to behave well, I do not receive recognition.

##### 3.2.2. *Questionnaire on self-control factors*

Researchers have two main approaches to measuring self-control: using behavioral indicators or using attitude or personality indicators. In 1993, Grasmick developed a "Low Self-Control Scale" consisting of 24 items divided into six dimensions: impulsivity, preference for simple tasks, risk-seeking, physical activity, self-centeredness, and temper. In 2005, Qu Zhi Yong and others compared the self-control abilities of regular middle school students and juvenile offenders using the Grasmick Self-Control Scale and a self-reported delinquency questionnaire. The subjects included 174 regular middle school students and 290 juvenile offenders. The results indicated that the self-control scale did not fit the original six factors but instead fit three factors: impulsive risk-taking, self-emotion, and preference for simple tasks.

This study refers to the three dimensions of self-emotion, simplification tendency, and impulsive risk-taking in the self-control factors questionnaire. It hypothesizes that the primary influencing factor for adolescents' first offenses is low self-control. To understand whether their self-control improved through supervision and reform, an initial test was conducted on relevant subjects. The items and expressions in the

survey questionnaire were then revised to better suit the subjects of this study. Respondents were asked to answer in a yes-or-no format.

The questionnaire included the following items:

In terms of impulsivity, I am about the same as before (e.g., acting on impulse without carefully considering the consequences).

Compared to before, my temper has not changed much (e.g., when in conflict with someone, I don't want to reason with them; I want to hit them and easily lose my temper).

Compared to before, I am still unwilling to do difficult tasks (e.g., when things get complicated and beyond my ability, I give up).

Risk-taking is just as attractive to me as it was before (e.g., I take risks for fun or to challenge myself without considering safety).

To achieve my goals, I am as determined as before (e.g., whether it causes trouble for others is not important; I insist on achieving my goals).

### 3.2.3. *Questionnaire on family function factors*

Researchers primarily use questionnaires to measure parenting styles within family function factors. These questionnaires can be completed by either the children or the parents, but the children's reports are more commonly used. In China, the most widely used parenting style questionnaire is the one revised in 1993 by Yue Dongmei and others, based on the foreign EMBU scale. In 2010, Jiang Jiang, Lu Zhengrong, and others revised the "Short Form of Parental Bonding Instrument" by Arrindell et al. using college students as subjects. The revised questionnaire includes three dimensions: rejection, emotional warmth, and overprotection, with separate versions for fathers and mothers.

This study selected items from the dimensions of rejection, emotional warmth, and overprotection to develop questionnaire items on parenting styles within family function. These items cover several dimensions, including emotional warmth and understanding, excessive interference and overprotection, rejection and denial, punishment and strictness, and favoritism. Respondents are asked to answer in a yes-or-no format.

The questionnaire includes the following items:

I feel that my parents love and like me as much as before and can understand my behavior.

My parents, like when I was a child, do not allow me to do what I want.

My parents always pay attention to what I do and worry a lot.

When I encounter difficulties, my parents can always give me support.

When I do something wrong, my parents punish me as strictly as before.

### 3.3. **Implementation of the study**

Self-assessment tests were conducted on 49 incarcerated adolescents who had reoffended, using paper-and-pencil responses. A total of 45 valid questionnaires were obtained and analyzed statistically using SPSS 13.0.

## 4. **Research results and analysis of juvenile recidivism**

### 4.1. **Low self-control factors**

The research results show that there is a significant difference in the low self-control factor among adolescents who reoffend. Their low self-control has not changed significantly, and low self-control is a significant influencing factor for juvenile recidivism. As shown in Table 1, among adolescents who reoffend, those with low self-control account for 73% of the total number, which is significantly higher than the proportion of those without low self-control (27%) ( $P < 0.01$ ).

Table 1: Low Self-Control Factors among Juvenile Recidivists

Items of Low Self-Control Factors (Listed in Order)	Number of Respondents (n=45)	
	Yes	No
In terms of impulsivity, I am about the same as before (e.g., acting on impulse without carefully considering the consequences)	30	15
Compared to before, my temper has not changed much (e.g., when in conflict with someone, I prefer to hit them rather than reason with them; quick to lose my temper).	33	12
Compared to before, I am still unwilling to do difficult tasks (e.g., when things get complicated and beyond my ability, I give up).	30	15
Risk-taking is just as attractive to me as it was before (e.g., I take risks for fun or to challenge myself without considering safety).	35	10
To achieve my goals, I am as determined as before (e.g., whether it causes trouble for others is not important; I insist on achieving my goals).	36	9
Total Number of Respondents	164	61
Percentage	73%	27%
Chi-square Value	47.151	
P-value	0.000	

#### 4.2. Family function factors

There is no significant difference in family function factors (parenting styles) among adolescents who reoffend, indicating that parenting styles within family function factors are not a significant influencing factor for reoffending adolescents. As shown in Table 2, there is no significant difference in whether adolescents feel loved and supported by their family members or experience strict supervision and punishment, with percentages of 52.9% and 47.1% respectively ( $P>0.01$ ).

Table 2: Family Function Factors among Juvenile Recidivists

Items of Family Function Factors (Listed in Order)	Number of Respondents (n=45)	
	Yes	No
I feel that my parents love and like me as much as before and can understand my behavior.	20	25
My parents, as when I was a child, do not allow me to do what I want.	22	23
My parents always pay attention to what I do and worry a lot.	30	15
When I encounter difficulties, my parents can always give me support.	23	22
When I do something wrong, my parents punish me as strictly as before.	24	21
Total Number of Respondents	119	106
Percentage	52.9%	47.1%
Chi-square Value	0.751	
P-value	0.386	

#### 4.3. Factors of real-world social treatment

There is a significant difference among reoffending adolescents in terms of real-world social treatment factors, indicating that these factors are a significant influence on juvenile recidivism. As shown in Table 3, 66.2% of adolescents feel that they face prejudice and have poor job or marital opportunities, while 33.8% do not feel socially rejected or prejudiced against. This difference is significant ( $P<0.01$ ).

Table 3: Factors of Real-World Social Treatment among Juvenile Recidivists

Items of Real-World Social Treatment Factors (Listed in Order)	Number of Respondents (n=45)	
	Yes	No
I find it difficult to secure employment, and others have negative opinions about me.	32	13
My past experiences have affected my chances of finding a partner and getting married.	36	9
My family's financial situation is poor and cannot meet my basic living needs.	29	16
My relationships with family members are strained, and I feel no one cares about me.	24	21
Despite my efforts to behave well, I do not receive recognition.	28	17
Total Number of Respondents	149	76
Percentage	66.2%	33.8%
Chi-square Value	23.684	
P-value	0.000	

## 5. Discussion

This study found that low self-control factors and real-world social treatment factors significantly influence juvenile recidivism, consistent with previous research. In contrast, family function factors did not show a significant impact on juvenile recidivism.

### 5.1. Low self-control factors and juvenile recidivism

The impact of low self-control factors on juvenile recidivists is extremely significant ( $P < 0.01$ ). This result indicates that, on the one hand, it confirms the assumption of general crime theory that most offenders have low self-control. On the other hand, it shows that adolescents do not significantly improve their self-control abilities after undergoing supervision and rehabilitation.

Analyzing the reasons for low self-control among juvenile recidivists:

On the one hand, an individual's low self-control is related to their physiological characteristics. According to the non-social reinforcement stimulus theory, juvenile delinquency is due to the neurophysiological pleasure, excitement, and intrinsic rewards that adolescents derive from criminal behavior. Research has found that the greater the interest adolescents have in risk and danger, the more likely they are to engage in violent and illegal activities.

On the other hand, the characteristic of low self-control in adolescents is formed during the early socialization process through family and school education. The traits of risk-taking and impulsivity associated with low self-control are difficult to improve. Supervision and correction also find it challenging to implement effective psychological interventions and methods to enhance adolescents' self-control.

### 5.2. Family function factors and juvenile recidivism

The research findings indicate that among family function factors, the parenting style has no significant impact on adolescents who re-offend ( $P > 0.05$ ). The fact that the parenting style has no significant influence on adolescent recidivism seemingly does not support the previous theoretical hypothesis that family function factors affect adolescent delinquency. Analyzing the reasons, it may be due to the different effects of family function factors when predicting the delinquent behaviors of adolescents in different age groups. In addition, when adolescents reintegrate into society, they are basically adults, and the functions of parent child relationships and parental supervision within the family have limited effects on them. Although some reformed adolescents' families actively assist them, this has no direct correlation with whether the problems they need to solve can be addressed. After reformed adolescents return to society and have free contact with the outside world, whether they can identify with social norms and abide by these norms and

laws cannot be resolved solely through family education. Therefore, among family function factors, the parenting style has no significant impact on adolescent recidivism.

According to the labeling theory, once adolescents are labeled as "juvenile delinquents", the characteristics of juvenile delinquents will be reinforced, and these adolescents will be discriminated against by other teenagers in the community and neighbors. To eliminate the negative impact of the "label", families with a relatively good socioeconomic status can provide more help to reformed adolescents (for example, by moving to an unfamiliar city to live), while families with a poor socioeconomic status find it difficult to do so. Therefore, the author believes that the socioeconomic status in "family factors" has a certain correlation with the "real world social treatment" factors. The family's socioeconomic status may, to some extent, change the situation of "real world social treatment", thus affecting the recidivism of reformed adolescents. However, this study did not conduct further confirmatory investigations and in-depth analyses.

### **5.3. Factors of real-world social treatment and juvenile recidivism**

The study found that real-world social treatment factors have an extremely significant impact on juvenile recidivism ( $P < 0.01$ ), indicating that these factors significantly influence adolescents' reoffending behavior. This result supports the hypothesis that employment, marital opportunities, and economic conditions—real-world factors—significantly affect the likelihood of reoffending among rehabilitated adolescents.

Through surveys, the main reasons for reoffending were identified as compensation or venting for years of rehabilitation, momentary impulsivity, social discrimination, and unresolved economic difficulties through legitimate means. The author believes that human nature is inherently social; most rehabilitated adolescents hope to quickly find employment and integrate into social life upon returning to society. However, these adolescents generally have low levels of education, lack specialized skills, and have criminal records, which limit their employment opportunities. After experiencing employment setbacks, their positive job-seeking attitudes are also affected.

Employment is not only an economic means for sustaining individual life but also a platform for gaining respect and recognition from others and society. Unstable employment further reduces rehabilitated adolescents' opportunities for marriage and relationships. Stable employment and solid emotional lives are crucial pathways for these adolescents to integrate into society. Those who cannot integrate into mainstream social life are more likely to join deviant groups and reoffend.

## **6. Conclusion**

Based on the above analysis, this study concludes the following

First, Recommendations for Adolescents Themselves, Adolescents are characterized by low self-control, which is a significant factor influencing recidivism among them. Although self-control is affected by biological inheritance, family upbringing, and school education, adolescents themselves remain an important internal influencing factor. For adolescents with low self-control, first, they need to have a clear understanding of their low self-control and recognize the need to continuously improve it. Second, they should frequently reflect on their shortcomings rather than always attributing them to external environmental factors. Finally, they should participate in some adventurous sports and outdoor activities, such as rock climbing, skydiving, and bungee jumping. In summary, adolescents should gradually improve their low self-control through conscious reflection and deliberate behavior.

Second, Recommendations for Family Education, Family upbringing is the primary way to influence adolescents' self-control. Parents should recognize the impact of self-control on life and criminal behavior and strengthen the cultivation of adolescents' self-control. For rehabilitated adolescents, family members should first accept them and provide more emotional understanding and support. Second, they should encourage and help them find employment and integrate into society as soon as possible. Third, they should strengthen supervision, preventing rehabilitated adolescents from associating with bad influences and engaging in inappropriate behaviors, correcting them in a timely manner, and helping them interact with normal social groups to prevent recidivism.

Third, Recommendations for Juvenile Offender Supervision and Rehabilitation, Since recidivist adolescents have all experienced supervision and rehabilitation, the following suggestions are made for

juvenile offender supervision and rehabilitation: First, according to the criminal policy of "combining leniency and severity," increase the proportion of non-custodial sentences for minor juvenile offenders to reduce the "labeling" effect of excessive judicial intervention. Second, adjust the detention model by establishing juvenile prisons, focusing on a balance between punishment and growth, as well as persuasion education and disciplinary training. For first-time offenders, care should be taken to avoid cross-contamination with recidivists during centralized detention. For juvenile offenders aged 14-25, focus on scientific and cultural education, criminal psychology correction, and vocational skills training, balancing education and labor reform time to lay a foundation for their reintegration into society. Finally, fully implement the community correction system. Community correction can reduce and avoid the adverse effects of imprisonment, facilitating the reintegration of rehabilitated adolescents into society and preventing recidivism.

Fourth, Recommendations for Social Treatment of Rehabilitated Adolescents, Reasonably formulating social treatment plans for rehabilitated adolescents and systematically and professionally carrying out social treatment work is an important link in preventing recidivism. First, specify relevant responsibilities, rights, and obligations through legal documents, detailing the actual work of social treatment to relevant departments and individuals. Second, establish specialized guidance centers for the social treatment of rehabilitated adolescents, providing employment guidance, training, and transitional employment placement. Offer psychological and employment support to rehabilitated adolescents. Third, build a team of social workers, including full-time staff and volunteers from different communities, to care for, educate, motivate, and assist rehabilitated adolescents, alleviating their pressure to integrate into society and preventing recidivism.

## 7. References

- [1] Kang Shuhua. The Definition and Meaning of Juvenile Delinquency and Juvenile Crime [J]. *Journal of Public Security Studies*, 2000(2): 15-19.
- [2] Zheng Hongli, Luo Dahua. New Progress in the Psychological Research on the Causes of Juvenile Delinquency [J]. *Journal of Nanjing Normal University*, 2008(1): 110-116.
- [3] Liang Dekuo, Xu Dawei. Empirical Study on Juvenile Recidivism in the United States [J]. *Hebei Law Science*, 2013(11): 127-138.
- [4] Zeng Yun. Research on Predicting the Risk of Recidivism among Inmates before Release [J]. *Legal Science Review*, 2011(6): 131-137.
- [5] Kong Yi. Juvenile Recidivism Research—An Empirical Analysis of Recidivism among Rehabilitated Juveniles in Zhejiang Province [J]. *Chinese Journal of Criminal Law*, 2006(4): 95-103.
- [6] Wang Zhiqiang. Empirical Study on Recidivism [J]. *Journal of the People's Public Security University of China*, 2010(5): 38-51.
- [7] Qu Zhiyong, Zou Hong, Zhang Qiuling. Review of Juvenile Delinquency Research Based on Self-Control Theory [J]. *Chinese Journal of Psychological Health*, 2006(10): 21-26.
- [8] Qu Zhiyong. Family Factors, Values, Self-Control, and Juvenile Delinquency [D]. Beijing: Beijing Normal University, 2005.
- [9] Jiang Jiang, Lu Zhengrong, et al. Preliminary Revision of the Brief Parental Child-Rearing Practices Questionnaire in Chinese [J]. *Psychological Development and Education*, 2010(1): 94-99.
- [10] Wu Zongxian. On the Basic Principles of Juvenile Offender Correction [J]. *Juvenile Delinquency Issues*, 2010(1): 63-67.