

# Family and Community Related Factors

## General Introduction

To ultimately determine those factors of significance which contribute and are conducive to youth offending in South Africa, the researcher consulted various sources to identify the factors highlighted by research findings as quoted in literature. The general introduction serves as an introduction for the two chapters to follow, namely: family and community related factors as influences on youth offending. In chapter one it was mentioned that one of the aims of the research was to determine the factors that play an important role in youth offending. At present South Africa is characterised by poverty, a rising crime rate, a breakdown of the traditional family and general social disorganisation, suffice it to say that the community wherein the South African youth lives does not provide the ideal opportunity for the average youth to live a prosperous, untroubled life. This section gives an outline and analysis of the factors which are conducive to criminal behaviour; these factors are considered precursors. At-risk youth are "*Young people who are extremely vulnerable to the negative consequences of school failure, substance abuse and early sexuality*" (Siegel 2002:4). It must be noted that the presence of the risk factors addressed in this chapter does not necessarily imply that a crime will be committed; however Bartollas (1997:71) is of the opinion that the more risk factors that are present in a youth's life the greater the probability that the youth will be involved in delinquent, problem behaviour.

To expand on risk factors an exposé of "*Risk factors for adolescent behaviours*" developed by Hawkins (in Howell 2003:105) will follow. The researcher wants the reader to gain a brief understanding with regards to what constitutes risk factors. This model gives an indication of the various risk factors internal and external to the youth; they have been categorised into four areas:

- **Family risk factors:** these factors include: family history of problem behaviour, family management problems, family conflict, lack of favourable parental attitudes and involvement in problem behaviour.
- **Community risk factors:** this includes: availability of drugs and firearms and the norms associated with the use thereof,

community disorganisation, economic instability and poor attachment to traditional neighbourhood institutions.

- **School risk factors:** in this category Hawkins includes: academic failure and lack of commitment to school.
- **Individual and peer risk factors:** this involves: rebelliousness, early and persistent antisocial behaviour, friends who engage in problem behaviour, favourable attitudes towards problem behaviour and early initiation of the problem behaviour.

Yoshikawa (in Howitt 2002:78) supports Hawkins' range of risk factors and argues that delinquent and criminal behaviour is due to the interaction of diverse factors which occur in a number of settings. These settings include the home, school and community.

As already mentioned the literature study will be divided into two chapters: family and community related factors. The factors examined in these chapters will follow a sequence similar to that of the questions listed in the interview guide; this is done in order to demonstrate the influence of the literature research on the type of questions posed to the youth offender. The factors that will be discussed are pertinent to this research; as factors that are conducive to a crime being committed and factors that may prove significant once the empirical study is completed. It must be noted that family and community related factors are all inter-linked and interdependent of each other i.e. family factors play a fundamental role in the youth's adjustment to the school and community environment, the family determines how the child will behave at school if for instance he/she experiences learning problems, the child's social abilities are not only moulded by the family; but by his/her interactions at school. Farrington (in Howitt 2002:81) has included low family income, large family size, convicted parents, harsh or erratic discipline, low intelligence and early school leaving as precursors for the development of an anti-social personality disorder.

Bartollas (1997:71) has provided an assessment instrument by which teachers, probation officers and any one else who works with children can determine and predict children who fall under the high-risk category. This assessment instrument uses seven background and personal characteristics to calculate high-risk behaviours:

- **Age:** The younger the child is when he/she enters the system (this system indicates the crime arena/criminal activities), the higher the risk.

- **Psychological variables:** The more the child is rebellious, identifies with non-conformity, and has poor self-esteem, the higher the risk.
- **School performance:** The more the child has problems in school with achievement, behaviour problems, and truancy, the higher the risk.
- **Home adjustment:** The poorer the child's interaction with parents and siblings, the higher the risk. The more a child violates a curfew, fails to respond to discipline and supervision, and runs away from home, the higher the risk.
- **Drug and alcohol use:** The earlier the age of onset, the more frequent the use, and the more serious the drug, the higher the risk. The more the parents have a history of alcohol and drug abuse the higher the risk.
- **Neighbourhood:** The more the neighbourhood in which, a child lives is characterized by disorganisation, poverty, and multiple social problems, the higher the risk.
- **Social adjustment of peers:** The more the child's friends are involved in problem behaviours, including delinquency, drugs, truancy and disruption in school, sexual acting-out, and gangs, the higher the risk.

Patterson (in McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter & McWhirter 1998:167) identified the following factors in a child's life that make delinquency a likely outcome:

- Both parents and grandparents exhibit negative, aggressive, and inconsistent parenting and discipline styles.
- One or both parents are antisocial or have a history of delinquent and violent behaviour; the risk is higher when both have a history of these behaviours.
- The child is subjected to family stressors, such as family violence, alcoholism, drug abuse, marital problems, or divorce.
- The parents are uneducated and work in unskilled occupations, live in a poor neighbourhood, and earn little money.

These factors listed above will be examined and discussed as high-risk factors in relation to youth offending in the two chapters to follow.

## Chapter Two

# Family related risk factors

**“Children learn what they live”**

If a child lives with criticism  
He learns to condemn.  
If a child lives with hostility  
He learns to fight.  
If a child lives with ridicule  
He learns to be shy.  
If a child lives with shame  
He learns to feel guilty.  
If a child lives with tolerance  
He learns to be patient.  
If a child lives with encouragement  
He learns confidence.  
If a child lives with praise  
He learns to appreciate.  
If a child lives with fairness  
He learns justice.  
If a child lives with security  
He learns to have faith.  
If a child lives with approval  
He learns to like himself.  
If a child lives with acceptance and friendship  
He learns to find love in the world

**- Dorothy Law Nolte**

## 2.1 Introduction – The family as the core unit for the child

The family is for any individual an important part of his/her life; the family is the individual's strongest support, biggest fan and the first socialisation agent. This means that through the family the juvenile

learns or acquires socially acceptable behaviour, norms, morals and values. The family is a key factor in determining if the juvenile will exhibit delinquent, problem behaviour. Robert Bierstedt aptly defines the family and its influence on its members, *“Of all the groups that affect the lives of individuals in society none touches them so intimately or so continuously as does the family. From the moment of birth, when young parents gaze with adoration upon their very own creation, to the moment of death, when sons and daughters are summoned to the bedside of a passing patriarch, the family exerts a constant influence. The family is the first social group we encounter in our inchoate experience, and it is the group with which, in one form or another, we shall have the most enduring relationship. Every one of us, with small exceptions, grows up in a family and every one of us, too, with perhaps a few more exceptions, will be a member of a family for the larger part of his life. The family, almost without question, is the most important of any of the groups that human experience offers. Other groups we join for longer or shorter periods of time, for the satisfaction of this interest or that. The family, on the contrary, is with us always. Or rather more precisely, we are with it, an identifiable member of some family and an essential unit in its organization. It is the family, in addition, that gives us our principal identity and even our very name, which is the label of this identity, in the larger society of which we are a part”* (in Yablonsky 2000:302). Reppucci, Fried and Schmidt 2002:7 begin their discussion on family and its impact on aggressive behaviour by stating that the family is the most dominating single influence on the development of aggression and violence. Ajam, Russouw and Makgalemele (2005:1) wrote an article with regards to the sexual abuse of street children in South Africa. The researcher wants to highlight the following extract from this article as it places emphasis on the family, *“...where children find themselves vulnerable to sexual predators because of poverty and the lack of a family unit”*.

To reiterate, the dynamics and mechanics within a family affect and influence every one of its members, this discussion will concentrate on those factors that have an aversive effect on the children. The size of the family and the birth order of the juvenile will be discussed as possible contributory factors; however they are not considered to be high-risk per se. High-risk factors in this section include the type of discipline and child rearing practices used in the family, the family system or structure, evidence of child abuse and a family that is criminogenic in nature.

## 2.2 Family size

The size of the family can have implications in various areas of family life or lifestyle; these implications can lead to problem behaviour by the children. Siegel, Welsh and Senna (2003:202) suggest that the size of the family relates to the control the parent has over the children, usually in a large family time is spread very thin, children do not receive the proper attention and supervision required. This is affirmed in the following statement “... *as the number of children in a family increases, the amount of parental attention decreases*” Farrington (2002:673). Bezuidenhout and Tshiwula (2004:91) propose that a child in a large family will focus more on the needs of the family as a whole than on the child’s personal goals. This appears to occur more frequently as the family size increases and the interaction with an adult declines. Bezuidenhout and Tshiwula (2004:92) explain that this produces poor identification with the parents and as a result the child does not internalise the parents’ values.

Suggestions by Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber (in Bartollas 1997:233) aptly explain high delinquency rates in large families:

- It is more difficult for parents in large families to discipline and monitor their children than parents in smaller families.
- Older siblings in a large family are given the responsibility of rearing their brothers/sisters by themselves and are often not able to do so effectively.
- Often times it is typical of a large family to experience overcrowding and poverty; illegitimacy is characteristic of a large family as well.

Farrington (2002:672) claims that the larger the family the higher the likelihood that the household is overcrowded: this leads to an increase in frustration, irritation and conflict within the family. Researchers (in Farrington 1997:387) concluded after completing an exhaustive review of family factors; that a large family size did indeed contribute to juvenile behavioural problems. Children of large families have more difficulty in learning norms, in forming an identity and the development of a positive self-image - this makes them more vulnerable to delinquency (Angenent & de Man 1996:90). Sociologists (in Siegel et al 2003:202) assume that a large family has, in fact; a direct influence on delinquency – this phenomenon is attributed to the fact that large families have stretched resources and inadequate supervision provided by the parents. In conclusion, Bartol (1999:39) cites authors who indicated that children

from large families, characterised by employment problems, disorganisation and instability, conflict and disharmony as well as poor parent-child relationships, run a higher risk of becoming involved in delinquent and criminal behaviour as opposed to children from families without the aforesaid problems.

## 2.3 Birth order

The ordinal position that a child has in a family can have an effect on the personality of the child as well as determining future delinquent behaviour.

Bezuidenhout and Thsiwula (2004:92) cite research which indicates that the first-born does occupy a certain status in the family. If the father is absent; the position and status of the first-born is strengthened, this serves as a deterrent for delinquent and criminal behaviour as the eldest child is too busy performing the duty of the absent father figure. First-born children usually receive complete attention and affection from the parents (Bartollas 2003:223). The middle child usually suffers as a result of his/her position in the family (taking into account that the family is also large in size), the suffering of the middle child is attributed to the fact that when at home the middle child shares the home with other siblings as well and often economic resources are stretched (Siegel et al 2003:202). Bezuidenhout and Thsiwula (2004:92) allege that the middle child is more prone to delinquency than the eldest or youngest child. The possibility of the youngest child becoming delinquent is low; the “*baby*” of the family receives attention in abundance from the parents and the siblings and is fortunate to benefit from the parents’ experience gained in child rearing (Bartollas 2000:237, Bezuidenhout & Tshiwula 2004:92, Bartollas 2003:223).

Birth order; in part; seems to have some influence on later criminal behaviour.

## 2.4 The family system

The family functions as a whole made up of different parts, a change in one part will affect the family in its entirety. This definition clarifies “*The family is a natural system consisting of connected components (family members) who are organised around various interactional functions. Among these functions are giving and receiving affection, child rearing, and the division of labor*” (Mc Whirter, McWhirter, McWhirter & Mc Whirter 1998:43). Within any system the aim is always to maintain some



form of equilibrium or homeostasis; every family member contributes to this harmony, which is maintained through day-to-day living and interaction with family members.

There are two types of family systems: the open and the closed. The latter is of importance to criminologists as it has been found to produce delinquent children.

The open family system typically interacts easily with the environment, there are few, if any problems with adapting to society; flexibility comes naturally to this system. Adaptation depends on sustaining stability to allow family members to develop rational, separate identities as they make the required accommodations to environmental changes. In contrast, the closed family is isolated from the environment, it does not respond to any change and is not receptive to external stimuli - due to this lack of reaction and impenetrable boundaries this family system displays an increase in disorder (McWhirter et al 1998:43). Children who experience a closed family according to McWhirter et al (1998:43) have a high risk of being involved in problem, delinquent behaviour; it states further that a closed family system contributes a disproportionate share of problem youth to society. Characteristic of the closed family is the detached and enmeshed family.

#### 2.4.1 The detached family

Members of this family function separately and independently. Stress experienced by one family member is met with unresponsiveness; owing to the fact that family members are disjointed from each other; only if there is a high level of individual stress would this type of family show any interest or response towards each other. The problem in this family is that the social and emotional needs of the members are not adequately, if at all, met within the family - family members are inept to meet the needs of others. McWhirter et al (1998:43) feels that it is pointless for this type of family to remain together, however, there are no other alternatives but to do so. Unfortunately, this family according to McWhirter et al (1998:43) results in children who are unable to form stable relationships outside of the family as they have not learned how to develop a good relationship within the family, this places the child at risk for troublesome behaviour.

#### 2.4.2 The enmeshed family

In total contrast to the disengaged family, the enmeshed family is almost over-involved with each other. Due to this over-involvement,

members are unable to form a secure, separate, individual sense of self (McWhirter et al 1998:44)

The ideal family setting or system is the open family, the juveniles from this type of system experience few problems in society. The closed family which is subdivided into the disengaged and enmeshed family is a cause of great concern as children do not learn the necessary skills to cope in society, this may lead to conflict which may lead to delinquency and crime.

## **2.5 Parental discipline or child rearing**

As primary socialisation agents for the child, the parent plays a vital role in the future of the child. The child learns attitudes, morals and values from the parents, and it is through discipline that the child learns these principles of life. Discipline teaches the child respect for others and their possessions, and it helps build the child into a balanced, strong individual who will in the future be resilient to untoward influences (Barlow & Ferdinand 1992:156). Consistent and inconsistent discipline, different child rearing practices, emphasis on the mother and the father are important to consider as contributory factors to the phenomenon of youth crime. In this regard the following excerpt states “*Effective parental socialisation generally requires strongly attached parents who supervise their children, emotionally support them, and consistently and fairly discipline them*” Hope (2003:170). In this regard, Farrington (2002:673) cites authors who claim that low-parental involvement in a child’s activities may be considered a predictor for delinquent behaviour.

### **2.5.1 Consistent vs. Inconsistent discipline**

By being a consistent disciplinarian, the parents ensure that the children are aware of what is expected from them and the reaction the child will receive as a result of the child’s behaviour. Angenent and de Man (1996:107) feel that inconsistent discipline could be the result of a structural or functional inconsistency in the family. Structural inconsistency occurs when the make up of the family changes due to death or divorce, or a change in the socio-economic status for example: unemployment. As discussed in family systems a change in one part of the family affects the whole family, this change leads to conflict and eventual problem behaviour by the child. Functional inconsistency occurs when discipline varies according to different situations or when both parents’ approach to discipline is not the same i.e.: one parent is overly strict while the other parent is extremely lax in correcting the

child. Authors (in Hope 2003:171) claim that delinquency and crime is often as a result of erratic discipline, Farrington (2002:673) warns that erratic discipline is in fact a predictor of delinquency. Bartol (1999:38) confirms the aforesaid by claiming that inconsistent discipline in the home results in delinquency more often than consistent discipline does.

Research undertaken (in Angenent & de Man 1996: 107-108; Farrington 1997:387; Bartollas 2003:225) shows that inconsistent discipline may lead to delinquent behaviour. Authors (in Reppucci, Fried & Schmidt 2002:7) agree; they claim that ineffective discipline is associated with higher levels of aggression amongst children. Consider this scenario: if the child is reprimanded indiscriminately in a certain situation yet shown approval in a similar situation on another occasion, feelings of insecurity and uncertainty may arise. There are conflicting values presented to the child. The child will try to avoid behaviour previously corrected on and associate negative emotions to that behaviour, the approved behaviour will have positive connotations linked to it by the child. The problem arises when the child repeats behaviour, which he/she has identified as positive but is then chastised by the parent. This results in negative and positive emotions becoming intertwined for the child, he/she feels unsure, confused and insecure. *“A sense of “learned helplessness” may develop. As a result, the youngster becomes alienated from the parents and attempts to solve the dilemma by means of escape and avoidance behaviour”* Angenent and de Man (1996:108). The danger here is that the parents’ influence is minimal and the child establishes relationships outside of the family, especially with friends.

Research in Siegel et al (2003:202) supports the view that inconsistent discipline leads to delinquency. It was found that mothers who threaten children with punishment but never carry it out have greater chances of having delinquent children than mothers who are consistent in their discipline. Effective supervision coupled with consistent discipline will not result in delinquent children - children who are aware that their behaviour is closely monitored will not easily deviate. Supervising a child is of utmost importance, so much so, that Mkhondo (2005:12) lists poor parental supervision as a predictor of youth offending. Farrington (2002:673) cites authors who claim that inadequate supervision or monitoring of a child’s behaviour is in fact the strongest predictor of offending.

Reid (2003:135) claims that poor family management is associated with subsequent delinquency and substance abuse. According to Reid, a lack of good family management includes: lack of clear parental expectations, poor supervision and monitoring by the parents, severe and inconsistent discipline.

For a well-balanced, secure child it is necessary to ensure that the child understands at all times which behaviour is acceptable and which behaviour will be met with disapproval.

### 2.5.2 Linking child rearing to youth offending

Parents are fundamental in the development of the personality of the child. The parent provides the child the security and care to become a mature and well-balanced individual in society. Children develop into confident adults as a result of a democratic, warm and friendly upbringing, which also allows for a good relationship with parents. Researchers as quoted in Angenent and de Man (1996:100-104) have found a correlation between youth crime and child rearing; warm and cold, domineering and permissive child rearing will be differentiated and compared in order to aptly demonstrate the relationship between youth offending and child rearing.

Results of the research have shown that few youth offenders have actually experienced warm child rearing. Delinquent youths often perceive their parents as cold and not fulfilling their need for love, which makes them feel rejected. Warm child rearing gives the child a sense of security; this ensures that the child is confident in and with the world around him/her. Family relationships are characteristically harmonious and the children are accepted as individuals with their own opinion, this encourages the child to develop his/her own identity and independence. The child enjoys a close relationship with his/her parents and can count on their consistent support, due to this close relationship the child will internalise the parents' morals, values, and norms and will therefore be more resilient to negative influences Angenent and de Man (1996:101). The opposite is evident in a cold parent-child relationship. The child from a cold family relationship struggles with a poor self-esteem, insecurity and identity problem; the child believes that his/her life is mostly influenced by factors out of his/her control. The child becomes introverted, aggressive and anxious who has problems with showing emotions. Due to a poor parent-child relationship the child is unable to empathise with others and socialise; he/she is suspicious of others and feels threatened by them, this leads to problems with establishing relationships with peers and institutions. Children raised in a cold environment have a poor relationship with parents and sometimes even reject them, this means that the child will not (as is the case in a warm parent-child relationship) internalise the parents' norms and values and will establish his/her own with, the possible help of delinquent friends Farrington (1997:387). Research cited (in Farrington 2002:673) found that cold, rejecting parents tend to have delinquent children. Authors

cited (in Reppucci, Fried & Schmidt 2002:8) corroborate this. They claim that parental indifference and rejection can lead to increased levels of aggression and violence in children. This is affirmed in the following excerpt "...the closer the child's relations with his parents, the more he is attached to and identifies with them, the lower his chances of delinquency" Hirschi (2003:141).

Dominance in child rearing can be seen as a form of preventing problem behaviours, however; too much dominance has the opposite effect. Children from a dominant upbringing adhere to all the rules laid down by the parents; regulations are not questioned but conformed to. Angenent and de Man (1996:103) state that the child then develops feelings of anxiety and inferiority as he/she might feel inadequate, this leads to feelings of insecurity insofar as the child feels that he/she is a failure for the parents and ultimately for themselves (especially if the child is unable to abide by every rigidly enforced rule in the house). What develops then, is a child with a negative self-image and a possible identity crisis.

When one looks at dominant child rearing, criminal behaviour is not considered a foreseeable result: children from a dominant household usually conform, but delinquency does occur and Buikhuisen and Meijs (in Angenent & de Man 1996:103) explain that it usually takes place at a later age - there are problems associated with dominant child rearing. Firstly, a child raised in a dominant environment does not develop his/her own opinion or identity, neither is there an opportunity for the child to behave independently. When required to do so the child finds it difficult and thus tends to follow the majority of the group within which he/she associates, this means that the child has poor, if any, resistance against negative/delinquent influences. One must remember that the child is used to being dominated and therefore will quite easily yield to the authority and influence of others (even if they are delinquent individuals). This is evident when conformist "good" children submit to the leader of a group or gang. Secondly, it often occurs that the child from this type of household will try to escape from this overbearingly strict authority and try to go their own way, independently. This is explained in the next statement "*This frequently causes problems because they have never learned how to be independent. They may experience an identity crisis with as a possible result that they - as a reaction to their child rearing experiences - choose a negative and sometimes criminal identity. In some cases such youngsters become completely lost, unattached, and do not care about anything or anybody*" Angenent and de Man (1996:103). Research cited in Kratcoski & Kratcoski (1996:133) asserts that physical punishment does not enhance a child's behaviour; in fact, it tends to do the opposite. This

same research found that when a parent physically punishes a child, quite often, aggressive behaviour may be the end result. Typically the parent has unrealistic expectations with regards to the child's behaviour and acts that are normal for the child, but are seen as disrespectful and disobedient resulting in punishment by the parent. The constant criticism and rejection by the parent is later manifested in the child's approach towards siblings, peers and adults: the child reacts with physical aggression to moments of frustration.

There is empirical evidence that youth offenders usually come from families where both parents (especially the mother) are permissive in their child rearing approach (Angenent & de Man 1996:103). When the parents are too permissive in their discipline; there is the high risk that the children do not learn to meet any demands or to exert themselves; this may lead to laziness, shallowness and opportunism. Juveniles from this type of household do not have any direction in life and feel anxious; as they do not feel in control of themselves. The main cause of delinquency according to Bandura, Walters and Nye is expressed as follows "... *the problem with permissively raised youngsters is that they have never learned to follow rules and to be considerate of other people*" (in Angenent & de Man 1996:104). In conclusion, family studies cited in Berger (1996:184) have found that inconsistent and both permissive and harsh discipline are related to youth offending, thus evidence suggests that parents greatly influence the behaviour of a child; it is the parent (as the primary caretaker of the child) who determines the future of the child.

### 2.5.3 Fathers and Mothers

Traditionally literature concerning child rearing focussed only on the mother's role, however the role of the father has of late been recognised as having an impact on the behaviour of a child.

With regards to the father, researchers such as Glueck, Hirschi, McCord and McCord (in Angenent & de Man 1996:104) have found evidence that the contact between youth offenders and their fathers is troubled, in fact juvenile delinquents have themselves reported that their relationship with their father is troubled; they feel that their fathers actually failed in proper child rearing Andry, McCord et al; Meddinus & Riege (in Angenent & de Man 1996:104). It has been found by Lamb, Smith and Walters and Weiss (in Angenent & de Man 1996:105) that fathers do play a fundamental role in a child's life: children learn (through having a relationship with their fathers) how to be independent, how to socialise and how to forge contacts outside of the family (Barlow & Ferdinand 1992:156). In this regard, Reid (2003:135) maintains that

having a criminal father increases the likelihood that a youth will commit crime.

Children have for many years perceived the father as the dominant figure and the mother as the warmth figure. Traditionally an absence of maternal deprivation has been seen as a causative factor towards delinquency, however, researchers such as Glueck, Hirschi, Nye and Stagner (in Angenent & de Man 1996:107) have discovered lately that paternal warmth acts as an inhibitor in the development of juvenile delinquency. Paternal warmth is as important as maternal warmth, suggesting that lack of paternal warmth might cause delinquent behaviour is not a surprising statement to make: sons identify with their fathers. They look up to their fathers and aim to emulate them in every way; the father is fundamental in the development of the youth's norms, morals and values. It is easier to identify with a father who is warm than with a father who is cold. In a study with offenders in prison, a researcher found that having a father figure does indeed influence the adolescent's behaviour later in life, in this regard an offender claims "*I think I would not be here if my father was present in my life. He abandoned us, my mother became an alcoholic and I ended up in the streets fending for myself*" Mkhondo (2005:16).

An in-depth study of delinquency and paternal influences conducted by Robert G. Andry (in Yablonsky & Haskell 1988:130) had interesting findings; Andry wanted to determine the quality of parental affection and love and its influence on delinquency and non-delinquency. Delinquents and non-delinquents differed as to their feelings on effective parental rearing:

- Offenders tended to feel that their mother loved them most, whereas non-offenders tended to feel loved by both parents – the differentiating feature here was the inadequate love given by the father among offenders.
- This aforesaid statement was reinforced in that the offenders tended to feel that their father should love them more, whereas non-offenders felt that they received adequate love from both their parents.
- Delinquent boys felt that their parents (particularly their fathers) were embarrassed to openly show affection to them, non-delinquents did not feel this.
- There was a tendency for the offenders, in contrast to non-offenders, to experience discomfort when trying to display love

openly to their parents – implying a causal link between the parents’ and child’s inability of overtly showing affection.

- Offenders experienced parental hostility (in terms of nagging), non-offenders did not feel this.
- Offenders expressed that they leaned more to the mothers’ ways than the fathers’, non-offenders felt that they drew equally from both parents’ ways. This indicates that offenders identify less with their fathers than do non-offenders.

The researcher included these findings despite the dated source as it encapsulates the importance of a father figure on a young male’s development. This study did reveal eventually that the presence of a father figure proved to be a significant factor.

The following table provided by Roper (2005:24) shows the small role that fathers played in the lives of offenders in a youth programme. This table looks at the role of the parents before the incarceration of the participants, the roles included economic support, setting family boundaries for behaviour, taking care of the offenders as children and who the offenders could confide in and share hopes and challenges with and go to for emotional support.

**Table 2.1 The role of a father**

	<b>Breadwinner</b>	<b>Disciplinarian</b>	<b>Carer</b>	<b>Confidante</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Mother	7	9	8	8	32
Father	3	5			8

The figures above illustrate how it was in fact the mother who fulfilled the majority of the needs of the offenders, conversely the fathers of the offenders seemed to play a small or non-existent role. Yablonsky (2000:311) mentions that an absent father is a contributory factor in youth offending. Males need their fathers in order to successfully identify with them, develop good norms and establish first-rate social skills.

## **2.6 Single-parent families**

Families where both parents are present are referred to as complete families, incomplete or single-parent families are where only one parent is present (Angenent & de Man 1996:90). For this discussion, the



researcher will refer to single-parent families and broken homes as it was found that some literature refer to these two concepts separately, even though they both define the same situation. These two concepts will be discussed separately in this section, thereafter in subsequent chapters; reference will be made to the single-parent family only. A breakdown in the traditional family structure (where both parents are present) can result in a breeding ground for social problems amongst the children within single parent families; these social problems may lead to delinquent behaviour and activities. Once the discussion has been presented the reader will clearly see the link between single-parent families and their relation to youth offending. A single parent family can be due to a death of a spouse, divorce, desertion, parent in prison or a child out of wedlock. In the literature researched on single-parent families (Rojek & Jensen 1996:192, Angenent & de Man 1996:91, McWhirter et al 1998:25) reference is made of the mother as being the single-parent and sole provider for the children. Therefore for this discussion the focus will fall mainly on the mother as the single parent.

Wright and Wright explain the shortfall of a single-parent "*There is an intuitive appeal to the idea that a single parent, particularly when female, will be less able to effectively supervise, guide, and control a child or adolescent to insulate him or her from criminal delinquent influences*" (in Rojek & Jensen 1996:192). In fact sociologists (in Rojek & Jensen 1996:192) supply explanations as to why a single parent home may produce delinquency: Firstly, it is postulated that single parents are unable to successfully supervise their children as there is only one parent instead of two and consequently they feel that the children from single-parent families are more likely to come into contact with delinquent influences, secondly, specific reference to single mothers suggests that the mother allows the child a greater say in what the child wants to do, this is supported by Binder, Geis & Bruce (2001:64). Low level of parental involvement in a child's activities may precipitate violent and aggressive behaviour (Reid 2003:135). Offenders who participated in a study conducted by Mkhondo (2005:16) claimed that their mothers (as single-parents) seldom nurtured or disciplined them. Researchers in Kratcoski and Kratcoski (1990:119) reiterate earlier information in section 2.5.1 by stating that poor, inconsistent discipline by the single parent may lead to the child's involvement in delinquent activities. Children who come from a single-parent family are forced to grow up at a rapid rate (Siegel & Senna 1991:243) this can cause the child to experience early independence (and desire early independence) as well as the longing to free himself/herself from parental supervision, perhaps some of these children run away from home and become involved with criminal elements. A study conducted by Johann le Roux (1997:18) on street

children in Pretoria, South Africa shows that some of these children are forced onto the streets due to the death of a parent or abandonment by parents, this shows that a lack of parental control forces the child to take life into his/her own hands. According to Maree (2003:59) the single parent household is not uncommon in South Africa, the result being that children run away from home, living on the streets or alternatively become involved in gang activities or crime. Mothers from some homes in South Africa are not present in the house due to their work obligations, in some cases mothers work far from their place of residence and are forced to travel long hours to and from their place of employment. The consequences according to Maree (2000:59) are that the mother leaves for work early in the morning only to return late at night or she lives at or near her place of employment and only returns home one weekend a month. In these conditions grandparents or older brothers and sisters are left to care for the younger children. These children may lack parental love and care and exhibit signs of problem behaviour from an early age.

Another problem with single-parent families is the lack of or stretching of financial resources, this is as mentioned earlier particularly applicable to single mothers. Very often the cause for single mother families is due to failed marriages (McWhirter et al 1998:25) as well as the trend according to Kratcoski and Kratcoski (1996:133) for young, unmarried mothers to keep their babies despite poor economic conditions. Kratcoski and Kratcoski expand on this by stating that children from these families not only grow up in poor economic environments but in an unstructured family life. Very often these unmarried mothers are themselves school drop outs who have therefore a low level of education with dismal prospects for employment. *“The mothers lack the personal resources or commitment to discipline their children adequately. The children become streetwise at an early age and are endangered for involvement in delinquent activity”* Kratcoski and Kratcoski (1996:33). Living in a single-parent home should be considered a risk factor as it results in children *“...who are prone to anxiety-depression symptoms, oppositional behaviour, immaturity and difficult with peers”* Mkhondo (2005:12).

To conclude the discussion on single-parent families Mclanahan and Booth (in Rojek & Jensen 1996:195-196) offer three explanations for single-parent families and delinquency:

- **Economic deprivation:** the single mother is unable to adequately provide for all of the child's financial needs.

- **Socialisation:** due to insufficient supervision by the single mother the child is left to fend for himself /herself. This includes the parent not being in control of whom the child chooses to socialise and interact with.
- **Neighbourhood:** as the mother is the sole earner in the family more often than not the family resides in economically deprived neighbourhoods, the result being that the children either drop out of school or run away from home.

The broken home is according to Siegel (2002:159) where one or both parents are missing due to divorce or separation. The link between the broken home and delinquency is for Siegel obvious as the child (as mentioned earlier) is socialised by the family, the primary socialisation agent in the child's environment. A British psychiatrist John Bowlby emphasises the importance of the mother /child relationship, he stresses the maternal influence by stating "*It is this complex, rich and rewarding relationship with the mother in the early years, varied in countless ways by relations with the father and the siblings, that child psychiatrists and many others now believe to underlie the development of character and of mental health*" (in Yablonsky 2000:317). He further suggests that the absence of a mother for a disproportionate period of time and the substitute care (oftentimes this care is inadequate or missing altogether) given to the child affect the child considerably, in fact, Bowlby feels that maternal deprivation is directly linked to delinquency. In a broken home (as in a single-parent home) the onus or duty falls on the mother to take care of the children financially; this requires the mother to work long hours in order to earn enough for her family. The result is a growing number of "*latchkey*" kids (Yablonsky 2000:325). The term is used to describe a scenario distinctive to broken homes: the child gets home to an empty house; there is no supervision until the mother returns from work. Runaways, teenage suicide and delinquency are the eventual result.

As long ago as 1924 George B. Mangold stated "*The broken home is probably the single most important cause of delinquency*" (Bartollas 2003:222). This is not an outrageous statement to make: it has been found that children from broken homes frequently show problematic behaviour such as hyperactivity and improper conduct as opposed to children from intact/complete families who do not. This is attributed to the collapse of the family, which is often accompanied by aggression, hostility and conflict, children from a divorce are not supervised properly, have weakened attachment and are vulnerable to peer pressure; all of which are contributory factors for delinquent behaviour (Siegel, Welsh & Senna 2003:196). Research cited (in Maree 2003:59)

indicates that youth from a single-parent home are more likely to take part in anti-social behaviour.

The single parent and broken home family consist of various factors (or lacks vital elements) that contribute to the youth's current and adult behaviour. The ideal home environment includes a parent involved in the child's life, where sufficient supervision exists, where a mother/child bond is evident and the child is not neglected. It is unfortunate that in a single-parent family the above said is not the ideal, the mother is the sole provider for the family and is therefore forced to work long hours; while the children are left unattended, in order to provide for the family's basic necessities.

## **2.7 Family criminality: Family members who commit crime**

The importance of the family as the primary socialisation agent for the child has been emphasised throughout this chapter. It is through the family that the child learns norms and values for later life; in fact, the morality of the child is very much shaped and influenced by the family. This section deals with parents, siblings and family members who commit crime and the transference of these deviant values from family members to the child.

Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber (in Barlow & Ferdinand 1992:156; Wu & Kandel 1995:51) claim that if the mother or father has a history of criminal behaviour it is likely that the son will follow in the parent's footsteps. Researchers such as Farrington, Gallagher, Robins and Schwartz (in Wu & Kandel 1995:51) found that the risk for a child to commit an offence increases twofold for males with a father who has committed crimes. The term *intergenerational effect* has been used by Farrington, Loeber and Dishion, Osborn and West and Wilson (in Angenent and de Man 1996: 103-104) to describe the occurrence of children with delinquent/criminal parents committing crime themselves. Data of great significance and magnitude was gathered by Donald J. West and David P. Farrington (in Siegel 2002:164), this study indicated that a noteworthy number of delinquent youths have criminal fathers. This was a longitudinal study that comprised 411 boys born in London, the study made use of self-report data as well as in-depth interviews and psychological testing. The young males were interviewed eight times over a period of 24 years – interviews commenced from age 8 to 32. The following are the results: approximately 8% of the sons with non-criminal fathers became chronic offenders compared to 37% of youths with criminal fathers. The Gluecks (in Bartollas 2003:224) found

that a much higher proportion of delinquents than non-delinquents had criminal parents and delinquent siblings.

In section 2.5.3 the role of the father was recognised as being vitally important in the development of the male youth identity. In this regard the following citation states *“A significant factor in the development of delinquency is the role of the father. Most boys who become delinquent have no positive adult role models. Their fathers, older brothers, and uncles are involved with drugs and gangs, and in too many cases are frequently in and out of prison”* Yablonsky (2000:311). The norms, morals and values that the young male learns in this situation are not high in standard, in fact, the transference of poor norms, morals etc takes place. Determined to illustrate the transference of delinquent values from parent to child Yablonsky (2000:313) conducted a study on criminal fathers and sons. In one case study the father Larry Philips sr. was a career criminal who clashed heavily with police on a regular basis and was in and out of prison several times. His son Larry Phillips jnr. had as a youngster witnessed the fathers’ clashes with the police for example: when the FBI arrived at Larry’s house they were heavily armed and arrested his father while he was watching. Larry jnr. was a criminal and was shot and killed in a shoot-out involving the police after a failed attempt at bank robbery, his father Larry snr says this of his dead son *“ My son is the way he is because of my life-style. Larry was like a clone of me. He was a pretty gifted kid; that’s all I can say. He used his brains. Everything he did was completely thought out. Nothing was overlooked. He was a criminal genius”*. Clearly the father condoned the son’s behaviour; the son’s morals and values were worth praise and not reproach.

Not only are the parents vital in their role of influence over the child but the siblings (particularly the older siblings) as well. It seems that older siblings according to Barlow & Ferdinand (1992:156) portray delinquency for their younger brothers as well as *“guiding them directly into misconduct”*, they further state that relationships and interactions with siblings are unavoidable and thus having delinquent siblings creates a persistent *“criminogenic pressure”* for the younger siblings. If the siblings get along well and share the same friends then it is likely that these siblings oftentimes behave in a similar way (Siegel 2002:164). One must note that siblings grow up in the same social and economic environment and therefore are exposed to the same internal and external elements in their surroundings, siblings can grow closer due to their shared environment and develop the same interests. Siegel (2002:164) states that very often; younger siblings emulate and mimic the behaviour of older siblings.

The quality of family life is fairly poor when parents are involved in criminal activities (Siegel et al 2003:203). Twenty offenders took part in a youth programme in Boksburg Correctional Juvenile centre (Roper 2005:24) each offender was questioned as to criminality in the family, the following are the results:

Thirteen offenders had close family members that were convicted, these are:

- Six mothers
- Three uncles
- Three fathers
- Three brothers and
- Two step-brothers

Mothers, fathers and brothers are conventionally accepted as close family members, thus one can clearly see an association between family criminality and youth offending.

To conclude, the term *intergenerational effect* sums up quite aptly the above discussion. Parents teach their children values, morals and social skills. Criminal parents will teach their offspring *their* morals and values according to *their* criminal frame of reference; children identify with their parents and emulate their behaviour: this implies the transference of parents' morals and values onto the child, the child in turn grows up with these values as accepted forms of behaviour which will be passed on (as the intergenerational effect suggests) to the next generation.

## **2.8 Family violence and conflict**

Violence that takes place between spouses has an influence (a negative one) on the children. Researchers such as Fincham, Grych, Osborn (in McWhirter et al 1998:48) find that even when the violence is not aimed directly at the child, the ramifications for the child are long-term. Exposure to violence may include: parents who verbally abuse each other, throw things and who have no control over their volatile anger. It must be understood that the psychological impact for the child who witnesses or experiences violent behaviour is a negative one. Sebastian van As (Pretoria News, 19 May:2005) presented shocking statistics at the annual conference of the SA Professional Society on the Abuse of Children. Van As reviewed 77 cases of children with a history of non-accidental injury reported to the Red Cross trauma unit in Cape Town between June 1998 and June 2001. Of the 77 cases assessed, 43 showed conscious violence against the child, 30 showed that the

child was injured in “*crossfire*” in a fight between parents and in four cases the child was hit on purpose. Straus (in McWhirter et al 1998:48) maintains that violence in the family in fact, destroys a child’s confidence and self-esteem. Children who have the misfortune to be part of a violent family are at risk of developing stress disorders and psychological problems that do not aid the child in any way for healthy development. The influence of the parents has been emphasised throughout this chapter, the child observes parental behaviour and not only does the child emulate the behaviour of the parents but he/she learns to identify with the behaviour observed; it is thus, then that the child in a violent family will as an adult engage in violent behaviour himself/herself. Contemporary studies cited in Siegel et al (2003:198) show that youngsters who are raised in unstable homes and observe conflict and violence do display emotional disturbance and behavioural problems later in life. Reid (2003:135) contends that exposure to parental conflict may increase the probability of delinquent and criminal behaviour.

An article that deals exclusively with family violence in South Africa; asserts “*It is in the use of violence by men against women in the domestic setting that children frequently first become familiarised with violence as a means for conflict management*” Swarts (1997:98). This article continues to explain how the culture of violence has developed in South Africa (particularly among non-whites). Violence was seen as an acceptable means to air political disapproval to the government, the majority of Africans and Coloureds were and still are poor and violence within the home/family is a mechanism for coping with poverty; this statement needs to be clarified however: overcrowding, malnutrition, single-parent families, broken homes and the abuse of drugs and alcohol are features of poverty, the unfortunate result of which is violence, violence due to frustration with the poor economic situation, poor living conditions and a possible form of escapism (especially when abusing drugs and alcohol) from the poor quality of life. The family in the South African context has evolved into “... *the place where a culture of solving differences by physical violence inside the home (and why should people behave differently outside the home, even if they know how?) is adopted and perpetuated instead of a culture of mutual respect and caring concern, and where patterns of dominance and submission, instead of mutual support, are imprinted on the minds of young people*” Swarts (1997:98). The following two excerpts expand further on this phenomenon: “... *it is within the family that the association between masculinity and violence is first established, and it is within the family that men learn to view violence as a socially sanctioned means of resolving conflict. They learn this in the context of fathers against mothers and children and violence of older brothers against their sisters in their socially approved role of policing or guarding them*” and

*"violence is a socially sanctioned recipe for living. Men tend to use violence not only to reassert their masculinity, but also to solve a broad range of conflicts such as with peers, family and sexual rivals, as well as gambling and drinking rows"* (Swarts 1997:101). Violence then, is not only learnt behaviour by the children but an acceptable form of resolving problems. In a paper, Adolescence and Youth: Challenges in Post-conflict South Africa Lucas cites Professor Dawes who maintains that violence within the home is a contributing factor to a youth expressing violent behaviour *"...where young males grow up under conditions of chronic violence within the home and the neighbourhood, there is a significant risk that they will learn violent approaches to conflict resolution"* (www.hsrc.ac.za). Simons, Lin and Gordon (2003:154) maintain that when a child is exposed to violent interaction between parents he/she learns that aggression forms part of a romantic relationship, this observed behaviour is likely to be repeated by the child in his/her future in the same setting. This is supported by authors (in Ruchkin 2002:109) who maintain given the fact that children learn behaviour, they can copy abusive behaviour by the parents.

The functioning of a family is always enhanced when the internal atmosphere of a family is harmonious in nature. Conflict within the family is characterised by family members not getting along very well, little co-operation, parental attitudes are poor and neglecting. The children in these families often feel uncomfortable in their own home, feel unwanted and may be the target of sexual and physical abuse (Angenent & de Man 1996:94). It has been found by researchers such as Alexander, Hirschi, Nye, Rutter and Wilson (in Angenent & de Man 1996:94) that delinquent youth often grow up in disharmonious homes where conflict between the parents and between parent and child is the norm. Farrington (2002:676) is unwavering in linking parental and inter-parental conflict with anti-social behaviour by a child. In a study conducted with offenders, it was found that many offenders had experienced divorce and that this affected them *"They described their family life as riddled with tensions and conflict and remember feeling unloved"* Mkhondo (2005:12). Clearly, this is not a scenario that promotes a stable upbringing.

The child who grows up in a dysfunctional setting such as a violent and conflict-ridden family is clearly affected directly, indirectly with long lasting repercussions. These repercussions may manifest as problematic, violent behaviour and the committing of delinquent acts, this is due to the unstable environment of the child and the child's need to express his/her insecurity, unhappiness and possible aggression. In this regard the following citation says that *"Serious family problems greatly increase the risk of serious and violent delinquency involvement among adolescents"* in (Howell 2003:113).



## 2.9 Child abuse

Siegel et al (2003:205) defines child abuse as “ *Any physical, emotional, or sexual trauma to a child, including neglecting to give proper care and attention for which no reasonable explanation can be found*”.

It is crucial that child abuse is investigated as a contributory factor towards youth offending; the impact of abuse on a child has lifelong ramifications, which include poor self-image, aggressive behaviour, inadequate socialisation, the failure to maintain close and intimate relationships, distrust of people in general and longstanding insecurities and complexes. The different forms of child abuse will be presented, the extent of child abuse provided, the causes and consequences of this phenomenon will be indicated and the association between child abuse and youth offending discussed.

### 2.9.1 Different types of child abuse

#### a. Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is a relative cultural term used to describe sexual relations and behaviour between two or more parties which are considered criminally and /or morally offensive (en.wikipedia/org).

The following definition is more comprehensive “*Any sexual contact or attempt at sexual contact that occurs between caretaker or responsible adults and a child for the purposes of the caretaker’s sexual gratification or financial benefit*” (Bartollas 2003:229).

#### b. Physical abuse and neglect

Physical neglect is “*Abandonment, expulsion from the home, delay or failure to seek remedial health care, inadequate supervision, disregard for hazards in the home, or inadequate food, clothing, or shelter*” Martin (2005:149). According to the South African Police Service child physical abuse “*is the intentional infliction of an injury on a child*” (www.saps.gov.za).

Neglect is defined as “*passive neglect by a parent or guardian, depriving children of food, shelter, health care, and love*” Siegel et al (2003:205). The South African Police Service (www.saps.gov.za) provides the following behavioural indicators of physical abuse and neglect, according to the SAPS such a child:

- Avoids physical contact with others.
- Is apprehensive when other children cry.
- Wears clothing to purposely conceal injury, such as long sleeves.
- Refuses to undress for sport or for required physical exams at school.
- Gives inconsistent versions about occurrences of injuries
- Seems frightened of parents.
- Is often late/absent from school.
- Comes to school early and seems reluctant to go home afterwards.
- Has difficulty getting along with others.
- Plays aggressively and often hurts peers.
- Complains of pain upon movement or contact.
- Has a history of running away from home.

The children's division of the American Humane Association (Bartollas 2003:231) provides a comprehensive definition of neglect; it is their view that the physical, emotional, and intellectual growth and welfare are jeopardised when a child can be described in the following terms:

- Malnourished, ill-clad, dirty, without proper shelter or sleeping arrangement.
- Without supervision, unattended.
- Ill and lacking essential medical care.
- Denied normal experiences that produce feelings of being loved, wanted, secure and worthy (emotional neglect).
- Failing to attend school regularly.
- Exploited, overworked.
- Emotionally disturbed because of constant friction in the home, marital discord, mentally ill parents.
- Exposed to unwholesome, demoralising circumstances.

Neglect, takes place when the parents of the child fail to provide the child with the basic essentials needed for survival: food, shelter, clothing and love.

### **c. Emotional and Psychological abuse**

Emotional abuse "... *manifested by constant criticism and rejection of the child*" Siegel (2002:167).

This concept is expanded on in the following definition "*Persistent or extreme thwarting of a child's basic emotional needs (such as the need*

*to feel safe and accepted*)” Bartollas (2000:242). Emotional abuse includes a parent who ridicules, rejects, isolates terrorises and ignores a child.

## 2.9.2 Extent of child abuse and neglect in South Africa.

The extent of child abuse in South Africa can unfortunately, not be determined precisely or accurately. This is due to the “*dark figures*” in statistics, dark figures refer to the amount of criminal incidents that occur but which are not reported for various reasons. Nevertheless the statistics which are provided below do paint a gloomy picture of this phenomenon; one case of child abuse is already one too many. The following statistics and ensuing information was obtained from the Department of Child Welfare in South Africa ([www.childwelfare.org.za](http://www.childwelfare.org.za)) from a report titled “*Charting our progress in the prevention and protection of children in South African child protective services*”.

The statistics below cover the period of April 1997 to March 1998 and for the same period 1998/99 and 1999/2000.

**Table 2.2 Extent of child abuse in South Africa**

Category	1997/1998	1998/1999	1999/2000
Child abuse physical, sexual and child prostitution	5 500	8 127	8 044
Child neglect and abandoned children/babies	8 453	15 896	10 690
Child suicide/attempted suicide	337	390	303
Street children	301	361	2 602
Domestic violence/victims of violence and crime	435	547	2 330
National total	15 026	25 321	23 969

The following statistics are from the Crime Information and Analysis Centre of the South African Police Service ([www.saps.org.za](http://www.saps.org.za)). These statistics are of the nature of crime *against* children 0-17 years.

**Table 2.3 Crimes committed against children**

Category	January to December 1999	January to December 2000
Reported cases of rape and attempted rape	21 064	21 438
Cases referred to court	10 557	10 242
Cases found guilty	1 944	1 851
Indecent assault	5 762	6 602

As mentioned earlier, it is almost impossible to correctly estimate the total extent of child abuse. Very often abuse is kept a secret especially if it occurs within the confines of the family, family members are afraid to speak out due to fear or shame (Martin 2005:150). An article in the *Sowetan* (2001) explains how a father had been abusing his daughter who subsequently fell pregnant; after the birth of her child she was subjected to further abuse from her father. Family members were aware of the continuous abuse but did nothing to stop it.

The following excerpt explains why there is an underreporting of child abuse (a trend that occurs across the world) *“Many victims are so young that they have not learned to communicate. Some are too embarrassed or afraid. Many incidents occur behind closed doors and, even when another adult witnesses inappropriate behaviour, the adult may not want to get involved in a family matter”* Siegel et al (2003:206).

Rapcan ([www.rapcan.org.za](http://www.rapcan.org.za)) provides statistics titled *“The realities of a South African childhood”* for the incidence of child abuse and neglect in South Africa, these figures paint a gloomy picture and highlight the severity of abuse in South Africa:

- 25 000 cases of rape were reported in nine months in 2001.
- 1 800 cases of cruelty were reported in the same period.

- 2 million children go hungry every day.
- 10 000 children live or work on the streets.

Venter (30 March:2004) relates a horrific case of child abuse (one of the worst in Pretoria). It tells of how a step-mother abused her step-daughter so badly, that she was close to death's door. The step-mother severed the child's private parts, repeatedly hit and burnt her and forced the child to eat her own faeces and drink her own urine. Child abuse is a social phenomenon that needs to be eradicated as a means of not only protecting the children in South Africa, but also to prevent aversive behaviour by these abused children.

### 2.9.3 Nature, causes and characteristics of child abuse

Child abuse is a phenomenon that prevails in a world that is regarded as civilised with causes that are complex and varied. It occurs across countries and cultures and it is impossible to allocate or categorise child abuse to one social group, economic status or race. Why does this gross injustice against children exist and what leads to the occurrence of child abuse in the modern world today?

The one characteristic that seems to stand out is that abusers were once abused themselves (Siegel et al 2003:209). Child abuse appears to occur from one generation to the next: this statement must not lead to the misconception that is an accepted form of behaviour passed on from generation to generation, the statement implies only that parents who have been abused as children tend to abuse their children and they in turn abuse their offspring. "*Evidence suggests that a large number of abused and neglected children grow into adulthood with a tendency to engage in violent behaviour*" Siegel et al (2003:209). The behaviour of abusive parents can often be traced to negative experiences in their own childhood – physical abuse, emotional neglect and incest (Glick 1995:196). These parents become unable to separate their own childhood traumas from the relationships with their children. Elwell (in Kratcoski & Kratcoski 1996:190) found that mothers whose children were being sexually abused by their husbands did nothing to stop the abuse as the mothers themselves had been abused as children.

Parents who abuse drugs and alcohol sometimes lean towards abusing their children. Families where abuse takes place do suffer from stress and it is in these kind of stressed/abusive families that members will turn to abusing drugs or alcohol (Siegel et al 2003:210). Results from studies (Siegel et al 2003:210) have indicated a strong association between child abuse and parental alcoholism. An excerpt from Le Roux

(1997:17) tells of a boy and his sister who decided to leave home because when the mother drank she would become very abusive and shout at them, she would also chase the brother and sister from the house forcing them to find a place to sleep.

Poverty appears to play a role in the occurrence of abuse. By this is meant that children are being subjugated to abuse for monetary or material gains. An article concerning abuse calls this coercion "*commercial sexual exploitation*" Cassiem (1997:83). An example is provided in this article that illustrates how this takes place, to follow is an account by a little girl who was being exploited for sex by her mother and step-father "*After my step-daddy raped me, I heard the door close, but a few minutes later a man came in. He never said anything to me. He just raped me like my step-daddy did. I screamed for Mama but she never came. I was so afraid. Some more men came and did the same thing to me. I don't know how many there were at that time. After they were all gone, my mama took me and washed me down below. She gave us all food and then came to sleep with me on my blanket. I could hear her crying in the night. After that, lots of different men came on different nights and we had plenty of food most days. My mother still looks for a job every day and she has promised me that when she finds a job she will have enough money for all our food and clothes and those men will not hurt me anymore*" Cassiem (1997:83). Raffali (in Glick 1995:196) analysed battered children and found that in 90% of the cases there was evidence of financial difficulties.

The above account also bears light on another cause or characteristic of child abuse. Stepparents tend to abuse their stepchildren far more than biological parents do. Siegel et al (2003:1210) attributes this to less emotional attachment from the stepparents towards the stepchildren.

#### 2.9.4 Consequences of child abuse – linking child abuse to delinquency and crime.

The consequences of this injustice against children (not to mention an injustice of the children's human rights) are long lasting, extremely damaging and complex. The child's frame of reference will forever be distorted; particularly towards adults, men or women (depending on the gender of the abuser), trust issues and intimate relationships. The emotional wounds left by abuse rarely if ever heal; the scars unfortunately are a life-long reminder of the trauma the child experienced. Physical, emotional and sexual abuse, affect the child in an emotional, mental and psychological manner that in turn influences the child's present and future behaviour. This is expanded on in the

following citation "*Abused children are at risk of becoming delinquent because they may have developed ways of coping with the abused or distorted views of life that lead them towards illegal behaviour*" Kratcoski and Kratcoski (1996:196). A young female offender revealed how she had been raped when she was twelve years old and how this experience has led to her failure at school, sexual promiscuity and drug use (Mkhondo 2005:17). In this regard, Reid (2003:135) argues that children who are abused are more likely to partake in delinquent and criminal behaviour.

The following factors will be addressed as consequences of child abuse: truancy, sexual behaviour, runaways, drug and alcohol use and violent behaviour. (Williams 2001:287) cites authors who claim that children who are victimised are not equipped with the necessary life skills for healthy development and social interaction. Troublesome behaviour at school is common for victims of abuse. Bartollas (1997:246) says that children who are abused experience learning difficulties, have problems accepting and dealing with authority and authority figures, are generally more disobedient and have a difficult relationship with peers. The poor relationship with peers can be attributed to the fact that abused children have problems with socialising (Siegel 2002:178) as they are distrustful of everyone around them, this is partly due to the children being betrayed by whoever abused them. Teachers who have worked with abused children reveal the following "*... these children have difficulty in concentrating, are aloof, have little or no confidence, frequently have emotional outbursts, have not internalised rules, and are often disruptive of property*" (Bartollas 2003:240). Lack of education does affect the child's vulnerability to delinquent behaviour (this will be addressed closely in the next chapter).

In section 2.9.3 an example is given of the brother and sister who ran away from home due to the mother being abusive. These siblings fled the home only to later live on the streets. Cockburn indicates clearly why children run away from home "*In extreme circumstances children are neglected, abused and rejected offspring of parents and communities benumbed by the minimal conditions of their lives... 80% of all children we see have a history of abuse - physical, sexual or emotional*" (Le Roux 1997:18). Running away from home is a means for the abused child to express that he/she is taking control of his/her life, of handling a difficult and revolting situation. A sexually abused girl explains, "*I never thought about where I was running to - only what I was running from*" Bartollas (1997:246).

Drug or alcohol abuse is for some victims of abuse the only way to cope with the situation they find themselves in. S.D. Peters (in Bartollas 2003:241) found a correlation between sexual abuse and later alcohol

abuse. Abusing drugs or alcohol for the abused child and later adolescent or adult is seen as a form of escapism, this is how the reality of the abuse is obliterated from the mind. In this regard the following statement claims that “ *Abused children often feel they have nothing to lose by taking drugs; they are concerned only with forgetting their insecurity, anxiety, and lack of confidence*” (Bartollas 2003:241). For some individuals the abuse of drugs and alcohol is a way of escaping from emotionally crippling problems; of which abused victims suffer.

Psychologists contend that abused children tend to be involved in violent behaviour. As a result of the abuse suffered, the child is encouraged to use aggression as a means of solving problems and is unable to show empathy towards others. The abuse actually hinders the child's ability to deal with a stressful situation and the child is at risk of falling prey to any violence present in his/her society/culture (Siegel et al 2003:217). In a study of the psychological effects of imprisonment on children in South Africa, a disquieting discovery was made “*The subjects of this study were, without exception, abused as children. Abused children inherit the perception that they are bad and that people and the world are dangerous. While being abused they felt powerless and they live with the terror of the recurrence of this loss of control. Some abuse survivors deal with the experience of powerlessness by extreme investment in control, mainly through aggression....*” (De Ridder (1997:30). Widom (in Siegel 2002:179) wanted to test the hypothesis that victims of violence during childhood would later in life resort to violence. She discovered that the children in her sample who experienced physical abuse were the most likely to get arrested for violent crimes; their violent crime rate was double that of the control group. Authors (in James 1995:12) assert that a child is more likely to be aggressive if he/she has been ill-treated. In an article relating how a father abused and assaulted his four children, a social worker is quoted as to the consequences of child abuse “*They might feel humiliated and would want to humiliate others. It can lead to criminal behaviour*” (Pretoria News, 19 May:2005).

In Rojek and Jensen (1996:198) the relationship between abuse and delinquency has been described as the “*cycle of violence*” as it is believed that violence begets violence. Curtis asserts that neglected and abused children “*become tomorrow's murderers and perpetrators of other crimes of violence*” (Rojek & Jensen 1996:198). Exposure to abuse early in life serves as a base for violent and antisocial behaviour. It is through delinquent acts that the child communicates his/her hostility towards the parent; in some cases the child joins a gang where he/she feels wanted and approved of, subsequently the child develops a sense of belonging; it is especially in the gang setting that the child is able to express aggressive behaviour where it is not frowned upon but



encouraged and accepted. A study undertaken by Fleisher examines the correlation between abuse and delinquency by interviewing members (some on the streets and others in prisons) of two well-known gangs in America, the Crips and the Bloods. Fleisher states, "*these boys grow up in dangerous family environments*" (Rojek & Jensen 1996:198). Youngsters leave home and join gangs to flee the violence or drift away because they are abandoned and neglected by their parents and there is a lack of as Fleisher points out "*comfort, protection, security, or emotional warmth in the home*" (Rojek & Jensen 1996:198). According to Fleisher, these men developed a "*defensive worldview*" which is characterised by the following attributes:

- a feeling of vulnerability and a need to protect oneself.
- a belief that no one can be trusted.
- a need to maintain social distance.
- a willingness to use violence and intimidation to repel others.
- an attraction to similarly defensive people.
- an expectation that no one will come to their aid.

Moore confirms that children who are abused are likely candidates for delinquency, reason being that abused children learn to cope with their mistreatment in ways that result in delinquency, according to Moore "*...these include aggressive behaviour as a way of displacing the anger they feel towards their victimiser, alienation from peers because they feel ashamed or fear that others will find out that they have been sexually abused, distrust of adults and authority figures brought on by a sense of betrayal by adults, self-blame, created by feelings that they somehow brought about or encouraged the abuse, substance abuse, used to escape feelings of hurt, anger, fear, or running away, which may remove the youth from the scene of the abuse, but put him or her in jeopardy of committing offenses to survive on the street*" (Kratcoski & Kratcoski 1996:196). Research cited (in Mkhondo 2005:13) shows that of the twenty five male prisoners interviewed, 68 percent had in fact experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse in their childhood, the offenders themselves made an association between their experiences in childhood and their subsequent offending.

Yablonsky (2000:138) concludes the discussion on child abuse and delinquency:

- Being a victim of child abuse produces humiliation, low self-esteem and rage in a youth.

- The abused delinquent develops a low threshold for violence, low impulse control, and is apt to “*go off*” violently when even slightly provoked. In many cases abused children attempt to create situations where he/she can act out or displace an inner, often unconscious, violent rage.
- Most violent youths do not attack the child-abusing creators or provocateurs of their rage, because they fear the wrath of these offenders, many of whom are alcoholics or substance abusers.

As a consequence of their fear of being “*hit back*” by the person who has abused them, they displace their rage and act out against victims who are weaker targets.

Abuse in any form, leaves the victim full of trepidation for everything around him/her. The victim is lost, powerless, hurt, ashamed, guilty and importantly, very, very angry. These factors are displayed, expressed and or manifested through negative, violent behaviour – simply because the victim does not know how else to express his/her fury as a result of not only the abusive situation per se; but the fact that the victim has to deal with many and varied emotional and psychological problems and insecurities for the rest of his/her life.

## 2.10 Summary

This chapter dealt exclusively with the family, the family as not only the primary caretaker of the child but the primary socialisation agent as well. It is from the family that the child learns to respect others especially older people and persons of authority, where the child learns high quality values, morals and norms which once internalised, allows the child for a successful and peaceful association with society as a whole, it is from the family that the child learns coping mechanisms or resiliency skills in order to avoid unsavoury characters and their negative influence altogether. Given the aforesaid information it stands to reason that the family then; can also play a negative influential role in the child’s life, the family determines what type of an adult the child will be; if the family transfers negative attitudes to the child, fails in the proper care and discipline towards the child the end result may lead to a child unable to function in his/her society.

Various factors were addressed in this chapter. The size of the family was the first point of discussion, it was established that the size of the family does influence the behaviour/disposition of a child. A large family was found to be a contributory factor towards disruptive behaviour; parents from large families are unable to adequately supervise their

children and suffer from financial restrictions, this means that the children do not have the required discipline or the basic necessities needed for a successful integration into society. Similarly, birth order was found to contribute towards delinquency in the same way: first born children receive a lot of attention from the parents as opposed to the second born children, the parents' time is spread thin and very often it is left to the first born to look after subsequent children, a job a child is not equipped to do; this leads to inadequate discipline and supervision which may lead to a naughty, disruptive child. The family system was concentrated on; the two types of family systems were analysed as conducive towards youth offending; particularly as the two systems discussed did not include a democratic, balanced and happy environment for the child. Parental discipline proved fundamental in the development of the child throughout life. Different forms of discipline were discussed as to their success in rearing a well-balanced child, for example: cold, autocratic child rearing versus democratic and warm rearing; of which the former prevents the child from developing into a stable adult. The influence of the mother and father was analysed; with special emphasis on the father and son relationship – sons identify with their fathers and abusive, distant fathers do not present the ideal role model for the son.

Single parents and broken homes were looked at in conjunction. Both factors determined the behaviour of the child in the future to a large extent. Insufficient supervision, poor financial resources and inconsistent discipline were the common denominator in the single parent and broken home, all three of which were found to lead to youth offending. The criminogenic family was established to be a definite cause of delinquent behaviour, based on the fact that children learn values and morals from parents and siblings. Family members who indulge in criminal activities create the impression that committing crime is an accepted form of behaviour. Violence in the family leaves the child with the imprint that violence towards spouses and children is normal; this together with family conflict was examined as a negative influence on the child's future behaviour.

Child abuse was examined as the direct pathway to delinquency and crime. The different forms of abuse were presented, the nature of abuse was provided i.e. parents who abuse, have been abused as children, economically related reasons and substance abuse by the parents. The extent of this phenomenon in South Africa was supplied in order to highlight the severe problem child abuse has become, it was shown that 60% of child abusers are known to the victim. The consequences of child abuse and its association to delinquency was given: self esteem, truancy, running away from home, sexual behaviour, substance abuse and violent behaviour were discussed. Abused children have a very low

self-image and self-esteem, they fare poorly at school, running away from home is the only way to take control of an otherwise appalling and unpleasant situation, victims of abuse are promiscuous sexually and often turn to prostitution (only reinforcing what they believe to be true: they are useful only in the sexual context); drug and alcohol abuse is the ultimate form of escapism and the child's inner turmoil and torment is manifested through violent behaviour.

The abovementioned factors were found to be significant factors that contribute in their own way towards youth offending. These factors are predisposing factors in that they are a part of the child's life from an early age and prejudice the child in favour of a particular type of behaviour, in this case criminal behaviour.

## **2.11 Conclusion**

Children learn how to behave by observing their parents' behaviour; in many cases the child will imitate this behaviour. Children always look up to their parents as the possessors of knowledge, this knowledge includes high morals and values and the correct form of conduct. If the parents do not promote good values and act as responsible adults then the child through observation and imitation will follow in the parents' footsteps. Bartollas (2000:239) has made the following observation concerning the relationship between the family and delinquency; these observations represent the findings in this chapter:

- Family conflict and poor marital adjustment are more likely to lead to delinquency than is the structural break-up of the family.
- Children who are intermediate in birth order and who are part of large families appear to be involved more frequently in delinquent behaviour, but this is probably related more to parents' inability to provide for the emotional and financial needs of their children than to birth position and family size.
- Children who have delinquent siblings or criminal parents may be more prone to delinquent behaviour than those who do not.
- Rejected children are more prone to delinquent behaviour than those who have not been rejected.
- Consistency of discipline within the family seems to be important in deterring delinquent behaviour.

- The rate of delinquency appears to increase with the number of unfavourable factors in the home.

The key to a well-balanced child and healthy development could be therefore: strong attachment to parents, good communication with parents, proper and adequate parental supervision and discipline and a family environment with no conflict, neglect or abuse. Having said this, the researcher is well aware that these desirable factors are not necessarily present in South African families: in other words the aforementioned information merely suggests the necessary conditions for a well-developed child but is not a realistic picture of the current situation in South Africa. The next chapter will focus on community related risk factors.