

OJIBWAY ADOLESCENT TIME SPENT WITH PARENTS/ELDERS AS RELATED TO DELINQUENCY AND COURT ADJUDICATION EXPERIENCES

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Abstract: This study sought to determine whether volume of time spent by adolescents (ages 12-18) with their families (parent/elder present) and the existence of family dysfunctional factors (substance use, domestic abuse, and negative well-being within the family) shared a relationship with adolescent experience in court adjudication and juvenile delinquency behaviors. Results indicated that adolescents experiencing greater volume of family contact tended to have less involvement with both court adjudication and delinquency behaviors ($r = -.16$ to $-.38$). Increased frequency of family dysfunctional factors served as a predictor of adolescent involvement with court adjudication and juvenile delinquency ($r = .24$ to $.59$).

Introduction

Mental health practitioners within an Ojibway community were concerned about the rapid increase in juvenile involvement with the courts, social service agencies, and professionals providing therapy. Within the recent 10 year period, they observed: 1) a 220% increase in adolescents (ages 12-18) being diagnosed with problematic use of alcohol and drugs (including inhalant abuse); 2) a prorated increase of 280% in the number of youths designated in need of court/county protective services; 3) a 235% increase in the number of adolescents coming before the court systems because of their own criminal involvement; and 4) 60% of self-referred patients to mental health services presenting with concerns focused on conflicts between adults and children.

In addition, the community realized a suicide attempt rate of 40 attempts per 100,000 in the 15-19 year-old age groups as compared to the total U.S. population ratio of 12.8 per 100,000 as measured by the Indian Health Service (1988). Other concerns for the community's American Indian adolescent population focused on increases in teenage pregnancy, school drop-outs, and adolescent involvement in satanic activity.

Agency professionals and community elders focused their problem-solving discussions on concern for the adolescents' family and extended family of origin more specifically, the quality and quantity of time adolescents reported spending with their families with an adult/elder present as a role model. A study of family time comparing the reservation adolescents of the 1930s revealed significant reductions in both the quality

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and quantity of family time spent with elders. The 1980s adolescent also reported a substantial increase in family alcohol and drug use, family violence, child abuse, and negative well-being responses (Zitzow, 1990).

Delinquency or adolescent dysfunctional behaviors rooted in family problems is not a new phenomenon. Previous research identified a host of similar causal factors to Indian adolescent suicide such as "instability of family relationships, upheaval in home environment...parental alcohol and substance abuse...and widespread recognition that traditional ways were failing to be maintained over time" (Bechtold, 1989).

Some of the historic observations regarding delinquency still appear to apply today. "Deviant behavior does not necessarily arise from impulses of individuals breaking through social constraints; but it may well come about because of the socially induced deviations--deviations which the culture and social organization conjure to produce" (Merton, 1958). Other summaries regarding the adolescent delinquent in society as a whole suggested "acting out serves as a release valve for unstable, unendurable family tension" (Pollack & Friedman, 1969). Maclver (1966) suggested that delinquents grew up "with a set of expectations and aspirations that are relative both to the indoctrinations and to the situations within which they are bred." James (1969) advised that if we probed beneath the surface behaviors of delinquents, we might find alcoholism, emotional imbalance, violent parents, or other problems. Jesness (1983) measured the correlations between parental neglect and the child's delinquency. Parsons (1968) saw delinquency as a product of "social disorganization--a lack of agreement on what the important social values were, consequently the juvenile found it difficult to incorporate a coherent set of values to serve as a guide for personal conduct."

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine further the issue of Ojibway adolescent (ages 12-18) quality and quantity of time spent with family (parent or elder present) as it relates specifically to adolescent involvement in delinquency and court adjudication. Delinquency behaviors were defined as: smoking cigarettes, ticketed traffic violations, skipping school, running away from home, using alcohol, smoking marijuana, stealing, intentional property damage, and arrest. Court adjudication was defined as any experience of a juvenile in court resulting from the juvenile's own inappropriate behaviors that caused some decision by court officials.

Method

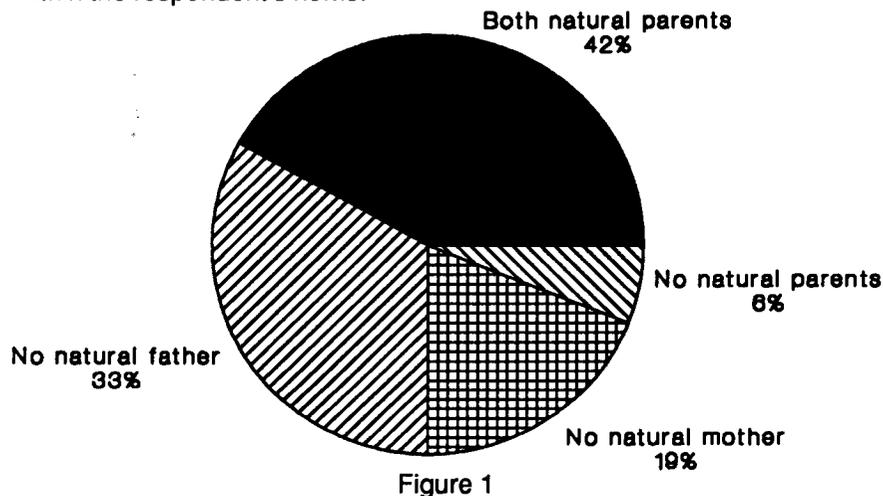
Ninety-four respondents (ages 12-18) were randomly selected from a 1900-square mile rural reservation that included six separate communities (proportionate by court adjudication experience, school drop out, age, and sex). Court adjudication was determined from court records. The final

sample represented nearly 22% of the total population available within this community. A survey was developed and administered within the respondent schools or within their homes for adolescents who were no longer in school. Respondents were asked to calculate the quantity of time spent with family (adult or elder present) and away from family in the following areas: eating, working, recreation, entertainment, and spiritual activities. Additional Likert-format questions assessed the respondent's quality of family time through items that asked about family alcohol and drug use, family abuse, and negative well-being.

The survey was re-administered to a pilot study population of 18 students to determine test-reliability. The responses remained largely consistent and provided Pearson r correlations between test-retest that ranged from .61 to .85. Students off the reservation in boarding schools were not accounted for. The proportion of males and females in the final sample were equivalent. The descriptive characteristics of the sample group closely resembled the general population at large.

Results

Figure 1 provides a summary of the existence of natural parents within the respondent's home.



Thirty-three percent of respondents indicated having no natural father present (4% of the total indicated a step-father present) and 19% indicated no natural mother present (3% of the total indicated a step-mother present). Six percent of respondents reported neither a natural mother nor father present.

Forty-two percent reported both natural parents at home and 45% indicated single-parent families without step-parents present. (This group

may include families with a parent's live-in partner who is not regarded by the respondent as a parent figure.) The Ojibway adolescent with both natural parents in the home appears to be in the minority.

Table 1 summarizes adolescent calculations regarding time with and away from family in selected activity areas.

Table 1
Table of Adolescent Time (Hours per Week)
Spent With and Away from Family
N=94

Activity	Time With Family	Time Away From Family
Eating	4.15	4.50
Working	1.72	6.09
Recreation	2.85	22.75
Entertainment	3.35	20.60
Spiritual Activity	.40	.76
Total of 5 Activities	12.47 hours	54.70 Hours

The average adolescent respondent appears to spend the majority of his/her time eating with family (adult or elder present). This is slightly less than the time spent eating away from family. Working with family was at a rate of 1-3/4 hours per week. Respondents reported more time in spiritual activities away from their family (.76 hr) as compared to with family (.40 hr). This may be due to the availability of Sunday school and other church-sponsored youth activities. The combination of recreation time (2.85 hrs) and entertainment (3.35 hrs) represents nearly half of the total adolescent time with family of 12.4 hours per week. The ratio of time with family to time away from family is 1:4.5. (Much of the adolescent time away included school attendance and school activities.)

Summary results of adolescent responses to survey of family drug and alcohol use, domestic abuse, and negative well-being data is reported elsewhere (Zitzow, 1990). Fifty percent of the adolescents reported alcohol use by adults "most or some" of the time in their home with 10% reporting illegal drug use "most or some" of the time. Thirty-two percent reported the experience of having adults in their home using money for alcohol or drugs that should have been used for food or clothing for the children. Twenty-six percent reported being left at a young age unattended by an adult or capable adolescent. Eighty-five percent reported "adults yelling at adults" in their home, while 43% reported "adults hitting adults" within their home. Twenty-two percent reported "adults yelling at children" and 6% reported "adults hitting children" most of the time. Thirty percent reported the experience of "feeling the adults at home didn't care about me" most or some of the time, and 20% reported "feeling afraid to go home" most or some of the time. Forty-nine percent reported "feeling like running away"

most or some of the time, and 34% reported "feeling like hurting myself" most or some of the time.

Table 2 summarizes adolescent admission to delinquency behaviors and court adjudication.

Table 2
Summary of Adolescent Behaviors Participated In
N = 94

Item	Yes	No
Smoked cigarettes	79%	21%
Ticketed traffic violation	8%	92%
Skipped school	64%	36%
Ran away from home	32%	68%
Used alcohol	85%	15%
Smoked marijuana	53%	47%
Stole something	70%	30%
Intentional damage to property	45%	55%
Was arrested	29%	71%
Court adjudicated	29%	66%

Use of alcohol, cigarette smoking, stealing something, and skipping school were the most frequent inappropriate behaviors reported by respondents. Eighty-five percent reported using alcohol; 53% reported smoking marijuana and 29% indicated being arrested by law enforcement personnel. (Court records indicated only 25% were arrested. It is possible that court records were incomplete or that some students exaggerated their court involvement.)

Table 3 summarizes survey items that showed significant relationships to the experience of court adjudication and the summary of delinquency experiences for Ojibway adolescents. Levels of significance are listed along with calculated Pearson r statistics. Quantity indicators of family time constituted ratio data, therefore the F statistic was used to determine levels of significance while quality indicators (using Likert scale responses) and delinquency participation required chi square as the test of significance.

Having a natural mother or father in the respondent's home yielded significant differences with respect to court adjudication and delinquency involvement among the surveyed population. The correlations ranged from (-.20 to -.29), indicating only low predictive value with the tendency of those who lacked natural parents within their homes to show increases in the experience of court adjudication and delinquency.

Family time quantity indicators yielded low to moderate inverse correlations ranging from -.16 to -.37 with the experience of court adjudication, while the same items yielded higher correlations -.20 to -.38 with total delinquency behaviors. An inverse correlation was measured

between the experience of court adjudication or delinquency and the family time spent with mother or father, total eating time, cleaning up after meals, family discussion, recreational fishing, and Christian religious experiences. Respondents indicating greater volume of family time with these items reported less court adjudication and fewer delinquency involvements.

Table 3
Type of Family Time by Court Adjudication and Delinquency
N = 94

Item	Court Adjudicated		Total Delinquent Behaviors	
	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
Mother present in home	.03	-.22	.05	-.20
Father present in home	.03	-.21	.07	-.29
Quantity Indicators				
Help w/cleanup w/family	.01	-.37	.01	-.38
Family discussion after meals	.10	-.17	.26	-.25
Total eating time w/family	.07	-.22	.01	-.32
Help with cleaning house w/family	.10	-.16	.02	-.24
Fun fishing w/family	.01	-.31	.03	-.33
Total recreation w/family	.07	-.16	ns	ns
Partying (drugs or alcohol present)	.01	.30	.10	.23
Listening to the radio alone	.01	.26	.02	.24
Total Christian spiritual exp.	.03	-.23	.08	-.30
Total trad. Indian religion	.01	.29	.08	.23
Quality Indicators				
Adults drinking in home	.02	.29	.05	.27
Adults using drugs in home	.01	.45	.01	.34
Money used for alcohol by adults	.01	.45	.01	.33
Left at home alone at young age	.01	.32	.08	.38
Total substance abuse in family	.01	.54	.05	.43
Adults yelling at adults in home	.01	.40	.03	.38
Adults hitting adults in home	.01	.48	.03	.39
Adults yelling at kids in home	.01	.34	.06	.24
Adults hitting kids in home	.01	.35	.04	.35
Total domestic abuse in home	.01	.45	.02	.39
Felt adults didn't care about me	.01	.26	.01	.43
Felt afraid of going home to family	.01	.36	.02	.36
Felt like running away from home	.01	.41	.01	.54
Total negative well-being factors	.01	.41	.02	.51
Total family dysfunction factor	.01	.59	.06	.59
Felt my parents did a good job raising me	.01	-.34	.01	-.44

Table 3 (Continued)
Type of Family Time by Court Adjudication and Delinquency
N = 94

Item	Court Adjudicated		Total Delinquent Behaviors	
	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
Delinquency Behaviors of Respondents				
Skipping school	.01	.35	.01	.65
Ran away from home	.01	.32	.01	.54
Alcohol use	.05	.24	.01	.43
Marijuana use	.01	.40	.01	.60
Stole something	.01	.27	.01	.61
Damage to property	.01	.35	.01	.59
Arrested	.01	.73	.01	.63

"Partying with drugs or alcohol present," "listening alone to the radio," and "traditional Indian preference for religion" exhibited a positive relationship with court adjudication and delinquency behaviors ranging from .23 to .30. Persons engaging in these behaviors tended toward involvement in adjudication and delinquency. The data regarding traditional Indian religion preference may not be accurate. After further investigation of family history of adolescent respondents, it was found that many adolescents who indicated a preference for traditional Indian religion either participated in no religious experiences or were regarded by others as not practicing true traditional Indian experiences. Of all the items listed, young people who spent more time eating with family and recreational fishing with family tended to be less involved with court adjudication and delinquency. Adolescents who reported less time with their families (parent or elder present) tended to be at higher risk for involvement in court adjudication and delinquency behaviors.

When examining the quality indicators of family time, from substance abuse to family abuse and respondent well-being within the family, moderate correlations were observed ranging from .24 to .59. Court adjudication tended to correlate higher than delinquency with quality indicators of family.

Total substance use within the family correlated with court adjudication at ($r=.54$) and with total delinquency ($r=.39$). The total of negative well-being items also strongly correlated with court adjudication at ($r=.41$) and delinquency at ($r=.51$).

A total family dysfunctional score was calculated combining all of the items assessed within the quality indicator portion of the assessment. Total family dysfunction is associated with both court adjudication and delinquency ($r=.59$). These data suggest that the family quality indicators related to substance use, domestic abuse, and negative adolescent well-being more strongly predict adolescent court adjudication and

delinquency than a simpler index of time adolescents spent with their families.

In their response to the Likert-scaled question, "I feel my parents/elders did a good job raising me," moderate inverse correlations of $-.34$ to $-.44$ were obtained. As adolescents tended to feel negatively about the parenting they received, they also tended to exhibit more court adjudication and delinquency involvement.

Each of the delinquency behaviors assessed correlate with court adjudication and delinquency ($r = .24$ to $.73$).

Conclusions

Quality and quantity of family time Ojibway adolescents spent with their parents or elders were the foci of this study. Data also indicated a substantial number of reservation adolescents experiencing both delinquency and court adjudication.

Spending time with family in activities such as cleaning up, recreational fishing, family discussion, or just eating together appears to reduce the potential for adolescent delinquency. Conversely, the activities that isolate the adolescents or draw them away from family (e.g., listening alone to the radio, partying with drugs or alcohol) appear to be strongly related to court adjudication and delinquency.

Many of the adolescent respondents were frank and critical in their evaluation of their families. Family drug and alcohol use and hitting or yelling (whether at adults or adolescents themselves) predicted court involvement and delinquency for adolescents. Reports of negative well-being related to the family (e.g., feeling like running away, fear of going home, feeling that adults didn't care, or feeling like hurting myself) were moderately associated with court adjudication and delinquency.

Adolescents reporting less time with their families tended to be more involved with both court adjudication and delinquency behaviors ($r = .16$ to $.38$). Quality of time with families, particularly as reflect in dysfunctional factors like family alcohol and drug use, domestic abuse (verbal and physical violence), and negative well-being, tended to be even more strongly related ($r = .24$ to $.59$) to court adjudication and delinquency.

The data reflects support for the myriad of concerns regarding adolescent involvement with their families identified in mental health case consultations, child protection reviews, probation background reports, and even around the kitchen tables of tribal elders. The data for these Ojibway adolescents appear to mirror the adolescent dilemma found in American families generally. Additionally, in times of parent absence or dysfunction, peers, siblings, foster parents, or the state appear to be poor "parental substitutes."

The solutions and recommendations for positive social change are found not in a rejection of the Ojibway family, but with a strength and commitment that once occurred in most families. Attention must be directed

away from the "crisis intervention" mindset that currently exists among mental health practitioners, legal agencies, and to a positive reconstruction of legitimate family support and skill development.

The number of family concerns in a reservation community often, to an exhaustive degree, exceeds the training and resources of helping personnel. For every mental health practitioner within the reservation community, family systems or parenting skill professionals must be available to provide both out-patient and in-home family assistance. Their skill development should focus on:

- 1) Informing parents of the powerful difference they make in the lives of their adolescents (teach specific skills in re-empowerment);
- 2) Persuading parents not to abandon their power to nurture, teach, and affect their children (teach skills in active, not passive or reactive, parenting);
- 3) Interpreting new parenting skills in ways that are meaningful (use behavioral reinforcers that parents already have available);
- 4) Developing prevention strategies for family abuse (teach conflict resolution, anger identification and control, and behavioral-task focusing);
- 5) Making the family environment more attractive in an effort to increase quantity and quality of family time (provide positive family alternatives, e.g., family recreation, work skill development, effective use of leisure time, family history contacts, and family discussions);
- 6) Supporting and teaching values to youth that are legitimate, genuine, and persistent. Parents are often so intent on giving their children the things they did not have themselves as children (e.g., three-wheelers, stylish clothing, or video games) that they forget to give their children some of the wonderful things they may have had in their own childhood (e.g., inner strength, life skills, values, goals, or well-being).

Reservation leaders and helping agency personnel should:

- 1) Develop a pro-family campaign and focus on a philosophy that "Ojibway children are all our children and our investment in the future."

2) Provide more supervised activities to promote socialization skills, effective use of leisure time, and positive adult role-modelling.

3) Develop an "early warning system" (e.g., substance abuse, family abuse, neglect, etc.) before a family gets to "crisis" levels with a follow-up of a legitimate, persistent, and systematic network of parenting intervention, therapy, and monitoring.

4) Erase "turf," legal, or philosophical wedges and unite in promoting non-fragmented support of family effectiveness. (There appears to be more than enough work for everyone.)

5) Confront dysfunctional families, and provide immediate intervention and referral to appropriate resources (e.g., women's shelters, court authorities, psychologists, chemical dependency counseling). Better and healthier reservation family alternatives (foster care personnel or special behavioral management homes) must be developed for families not yet ready for systematic family intervention.

Quality of family time together appears to be a benchmark of family function and success. Quantity of family time appears to be the vehicle by which healthy family function is sustained.

This study was dependent on adolescent self-disclosure and may suffer limitations due to situational reaction of respondents as well as their errors in calculation of time estimates. The sample, both due to its size and lack of representativeness (e.g., in boarding school, treatment or correctional programs) suffers further limitations. The study suggests a willingness of reservation adolescents to offer their frank, albeit critical, perceptions of their families and the adequacy of their interactions with adults. There is value in frank adolescent perception for developing healthier family solutions for reservation communities.

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