Chapter 10
Defining and Understanding the Development of Juvenile Delinquency from an Environmental, Sociological, and Theoretical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This chapter purports that there are sociological environments, interactions and theoretical reasons as to why some juveniles, as they develop and mature in life, transform from being law abiding juveniles into law breaking juvenile delinquents. Information is presented in this chapter regarding the various environments juveniles live through and what they experience from the people functioning within these environments. There is an examination of how the people, who are models working and living in these environments, influence and shape the behavior of the juveniles. Various theories are presented and discussed as well as the relevance of their value in explaining how observation, processing of information, learning of observed behavior and then replication of behavior with positive reinforcement all contribute to the transformation of a juvenile into a juvenile delinquent.

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INTRODUCTION

Being able to understand the origins, process and possible causes of any manifesting behavior, which draws attention of society to it because it is anti-social or illegal, is important when the action has a negative effect on the person performing it and on society. There are many reasons to explain why juveniles become delinquents. This chapter will examine the environments, people, and situations that facilitate the development of juveniles becoming delinquents. This chapter will use sociological and theoretical perspectives to explain how various environments, and people in those environments, actively contribute to the development of a juvenile delinquent.

BACKGROUND

Crime and Juveniles

Overall crime has been declining for the past decade; however, deviant behavior and crime committed by youth is on the rise (BJS, 2013). This activity presents a unique challenge to the members of society in the areas of family, school and the juvenile justice system (Stojkovic, Kalinich & Klofas, 2012). Without people providing proper examples and addressing negative behavior juveniles will continue with malevolent behavior and can eventually commit behavior that will transform them into a delinquent (Gottfredson, 2001; Hawker & Boulton, 2000).

Common Environments Experienced by Juveniles

The three main and common environments where negative observations, processing, and learning begins and progresses into performance are:

- The home with the family and parents;
- The neighborhood with peers, and
- In school with teachers and peers.

However, for some juveniles there is a fourth environment which provides juveniles with a learning experience, and that is the juvenile justice system (Zimring & Tanenhaus, 2014).
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