

Psychological Methods For Identifying Criminal Behavior In Adolescence

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Abstract: The article examines psychological methods and diagnostic approaches aimed at identifying criminal behavior in adolescents. Particular attention is paid to the role of personal, emotional, and motivational factors that influence the formation of deviant and delinquent tendencies. It is shown that timely psychological assessment makes it possible to determine levels of aggression, anxiety, self-esteem, and adolescents' social adjustment. The paper analyzes the potential of projective techniques, behavioral observation, and psychometric tests for the early detection of a propensity toward unlawful actions. The significance of a comprehensive approach to the prevention and correction of deviant behavior within educational settings and the family environment is emphasized.

Keywords: Adolescence, criminal behavior, assessment, deviance, delinquency, psychological methods, prevention, personality.

Introduction: In Uzbekistan, the trend of adolescent deviance and juvenile offending is acquiring increasing social significance. Given the demographic situation—more than one third of the population are young people—ensuring adolescent safety, early identification of inclinations toward criminal behavior, and risk reduction are becoming priorities of state policy. The problem is exacerbated by the influence of internet-mediated information, peer social pressure, and the shortage of preventive psychological measures in educational institutions.

To ensure the systematic protection of children's rights and prevent juvenile delinquency, key laws and decrees have been adopted in the country. The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On the Prevention of Neglect and Offenses among Minors" of 29 September 2010 No. ZRU-263 establishes measures to identify and eliminate conditions that contribute to neglect and juvenile offenses. The Law "On the Protection of Children from All Forms of Violence," signed on 14 November 2024, introduces the concepts of psychological violence and bullying, including online forms, and provides legal instruments for protection and intervention measures. The Presidential Decree of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Measures to Further Improve the System of Ensuring Guarantees of the

Rights of the Child" of 12 August 2021 is aimed at strengthening legislative and institutional protection of children, fulfilling international obligations, and preventing offenses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of "adolescence" in contemporary scholarly literature is viewed as a transitional stage from childhood to maturity, characterized by accelerated physical, psychological, and social development, and most often covering the age range of approximately 10 to 19 years (in some studies extended to 24 years). During this period, self-awareness, value orientations, and behavioral strategies are formed, which makes adolescents particularly vulnerable to the risk of deviant behavior. (See review materials on adolescent health and psychological well-being.)

The term "criminal behavior" (delinquency) is interpreted as a set of actions that directly violate current legislation and cause harm to an individual and/or society. In psychological literature, delinquency is often viewed as the outcome of social maladjustment arising from the interplay of personality characteristics and adverse environmental conditions. Classical theories emphasize different determinants: biopsychological and personality-related (e.g.,

impulsivity, low frustration tolerance), sociological (e.g., lack of social bonds, strain between goals and legitimate means), and situational (e.g., peer pressure, opportunities to commit offenses). Among widely recognized authors are A.E. Lichko, noted for his typology of accentuations and psychopathy in adolescents, and T. Hirschi, known for the social bond theory.

Classical and empirical psychological research provides a methodological foundation for the psychodiagnostics of delinquency. Lichko's monographs describe in detail types of character accentuations and psychopathy associated with early destructive behavior in adolescence, which is important when selecting individualized diagnostic instruments. Hirschi's social bond theory highlights the strength of family and school attachments as a key protective factor against deviance; this is empirically supported by studies showing that weaker ties to parents and the learning process correlate with a higher risk of offending. In practice, this implies that screening tools should cover not only personality scales (aggression, impulsivity, empathy) but also indicators of the family environment, school adjustment, and the adolescent's social connections.

An analysis of applied research on psychological methods indicates that the most robust results are obtained through combined assessment: standardized questionnaires and scales (to evaluate aggression, anxiety, self-control, and risk propensity), projective techniques (to detect latent motivation and internal conflicts), systematic observation in school and family contexts, and the collection of biographical and criminological data. A multi-level screening model is essential—from large-scale survey-based screening to in-depth individual assessment followed by targeted corrective intervention. Interdisciplinary programs integrating psychological assessment, pedagogical support, social services, and legal mechanisms are described in the literature as the most promising approach for reducing adolescent delinquency.

RESULTS

Table 1. Assessment Table

Indicator (Criterion)	High level (3 points)	Medium level (2 points)	Low level (1 point)
Family structure	Intact family, stable relationships	Single-parent family, but with emotional support	Absence of parents; upbringing by relatives
Emotional climate in the family	Warm, trusting relationships	Periodic conflicts, but respect is maintained	Constant quarrels, emotional alienation

To gain a deeper understanding of the psychological characteristics underlying the formation of adolescents' criminal behavior, a questionnaire survey was conducted with ten students aged 14–17 years. The purpose of the study was to identify social and family factors that may contribute to the development of a propensity for unlawful actions. The questionnaire included items designed to examine parenting conditions, the family emotional climate, interpersonal relationships, and the nature of adolescents' social environment.

The results showed that six adolescents were raised in intact families with both parents present, three adolescents were raised in single-parent families, and one adolescent lived with relatives. Although most respondents reported being brought up in relatively stable conditions, some indicated emotional coldness and a lack of trusting relationships with their parents. These findings suggest that even when the family structure appears stable externally, there may be internal disruption of emotional bonds, which can foster feelings of loneliness and alienation.

The analysis of responses also demonstrated that adolescents from single-parent families more often experience adaptation difficulties, have fewer opportunities for constructive communication with adults, and rely more heavily on peer opinions. This increases the risk of involvement in antisocial peer groups, which is consistent with conclusions in psychological research emphasizing the role of the microsocial environment and the emotional–volitional sphere in the development of delinquent behavior.

Overall, the questionnaire findings confirm that a supportive family atmosphere—grounded in affection, mutual understanding, and moral support—plays a decisive role in preventing adolescent criminal behavior. To improve preventive effectiveness, systematic work by school psychologists with families in risk groups is required, along with the development of social and psychological diagnostic programs.

Parents' involvement in the adolescent's life	Active involvement, shared leisure activities	Occasional involvement	Complete lack of interest
Material and living conditions	Favorable, stable	Average, periodic difficulties	Persistent material difficulties
Presence of a positive social environment	Predominantly constructive environment	Mixed social environment	Asocial, high-risk environment
Tendency toward aggression and impulsivity	Controlled, rare	Episodic	Frequent, uncontrolled

The survey results showed that the majority of adolescents (60%) were raised in intact families where both parents were present. Thirty percent of the participants grew up in single-parent families, and 10% were raised by relatives. However, even among adolescents from intact families, cases of emotional alienation and a lack of mutual understanding were reported.

About half of the respondents indicated that their parents rarely take an interest in their peer circle and personal concerns, which may point to a low level of emotional contact within the family. Nearly one third

of the adolescents reported periodic financial difficulties which, according to specialists, may intensify feelings of insecurity and anxiety and increase the risk of involvement in antisocial forms of behavior. Adolescents from single-parent families more often reported conflicts, insufficient support, and reliance on peer opinions, which frequently becomes a contributing factor to delinquency. Overall, the findings support theoretical assumptions about the leading role of the family, the emotional–volitional sphere, and the immediate social environment in shaping a propensity for unlawful actions.

Table 2.
Summary of questionnaire results (n = 10)

No.	Research indicator	Number of adolescents	Percentage (%)	Brief description
1	Raised in an intact family	6	60%	Generally favorable, but not always warm relationships
2	Raised in a single-parent family	3	30%	Emotional difficulties, conflicts
3	Raised by relatives	1	10%	Lack of consistent parental supervision
4	Parental interest in the adolescent's personal life	5	50%	Moderate, predominantly occasional
5	Financial difficulties in the family	3	30%	Periodic, cause anxiety

6	Conflicts and quarrels in the family	4	40%	Associated with misunderstanding and stress
7	Presence of trusting relationships with parents	6	60%	Support is present, but not for everyone
8	Influence of peers on behavior	4	40%	Increased suggestibility and dependence
9	Positive social environment	5	50%	Mixed tendencies; there is a risk of negative influence
10	Awareness of the importance of family well-being	8	80%	They believe the family influences the prevention of offenses

Overall, the study showed that preventing adolescent criminal behavior requires systematic psychological assessment in schools, active collaboration between educators and parents, and training programs aimed at developing adolescents' self-control, empathy, and responsibility.

CONCLUSION

The conducted study confirmed that adolescents' propensity for criminal behavior largely depends on the socio-psychological conditions of their upbringing. The main determinants include an unfavorable family atmosphere, a low level of parental supervision and emotional support, as well as negative peer influence. Timely psychological diagnostics makes it possible to identify at-risk groups and prevent the development of deviant tendencies. Effective prevention requires close cooperation among the family, the school, and psychological services, focused on fostering adolescents' moral values, responsibility, and resilience to destructive environmental influences.

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