

Original Article

Unveiling the Hidden Crisis: Socioeconomic and Behavioral Drivers of Juvenile Delinquency among Teenagers in Bogura Sadar, Bangladesh

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Abstract

Background: Juvenile delinquency is a recognized social dysfunction in Bangladesh, yet a significant portion of teenagers involved in drug abuse, drug trafficking, gang violence, and other criminal activities often remain unnoticed and overlooked. This study seeks to investigate the backgrounds of these marginalized youths, focusing on factors such as their socio-economic status, family dynamics, neglect in upbringing, detachment from education, involvement in illegal activities, and associations with political groups or negative peer influences.

Objective: This study aims to identify the factors associated with juvenile delinquency among teenage drug users in Bogura Sadar, Bangladesh.

Materials and Methods: This cross-sectional study was conducted from June 20, 2024 to November 30, 2024 among the teen ages (13 to 19 years of age) of different sites and socio-economic classes of Bogura Sadar, Bogura. With the assistance of a locally influential figure and Elder Brother (popularly known as Borovai), the researcher identified teenagers already known for unlawful activities such as drug use, gang conflicts, reckless motorcycle riding, irregular school attendance, dropout behavior, and involvement in kishor gang culture. A total of 117 participants were purposively selected, and data were collected on a random basis. Respondents were interviewed individually using a pre-tested open-ended questionnaire, after being assured of their safety, anonymity, and right to withdraw from the study at any time. Data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel.

Conclusion: This study highlights alarming trends of juvenile delinquency in Bogura Sadar, with adolescents as young as 13 involved in drug-related activities. The major associated factors include school dropout, family neglect, and protection by influential individuals. There is an urgent need for comprehensive interventions encompassing educational reform, strengthened parental involvement, targeted anti-drug initiatives, enhanced law enforcement, vocational training opportunities, and active community engagement.

Keywords: Teenage drug abuse, Juvenile delinquency, Adolescence crime, Socioeconomic factors, Behavioral issues, Youth crime

Introduction

Addressing teenage offenses has become a highly rational and urgent issue in our country, as these problems are escalating due to rising drug-related crimes, substance abuse, social unrest, and related challenges. Bangladesh is a rapidly emerging developing nation in South Asia, aiming to achieve developed country status by 2041.¹ However, this transition is being hindered by numerous national and global challenges-economic, climatic, pandemic-related, and political. Among these, the increasing rate of juvenile offenses has taken a dangerous turn in the form of “Kishor Gang” culture, now prevalent across

the country and contributing to serious law and order crises that threaten national progress.² It is essential to emphasize that the future of the country rests in the hands of today’s children, who are the leaders of tomorrow. Therefore, this issue demands serious attention, focused research, and comprehensive intervention strategies. Teen gang culture in Bangladesh, locally called Kishor Gangs, encompasses the presence and activities of organized youth gangs primarily composed of teenagers involved in various criminal undertakings within urban areas of the country.^{2,3} The rising prevalence of juvenile crime and

the normalization of gang culture among teenagers in Bangladesh highlight a critical gap in social governance, law enforcement, and community awareness. The rise of these gangs presents significant challenges to law enforcement agencies and communities in Bangladesh.⁴ As of January 2024, there are around 50 such active teen gangs have been identified in Dhaka alone. Numerous more are based in other parts of the country. These gangs are often backed by a section of ruling party leaders or other local economic and political influential person, who act as influential “elder brothers”.^{5,6}

The Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) initiated targeted crackdowns in early 2023, and by February 2024 had arrested over 600 individuals associated with more than 60 gangs nationwide.^{6,7} These statistics reflect the severity of the issue and the need for localized, evidence-based research. Understanding the underlying factors-such as broken family structures, poverty, educational detachment, and peer influence-will help inform policies and interventions aimed at prevention and rehabilitation. This study is particularly relevant for regions like Bogura Sadar, where the problem remains underexplored but is rapidly expanding. The findings are intended to support policymakers in designing collaborative strategies involving parents, communities, and government agencies to combat teenage delinquency effectively.

This study aims to investigate the socio-demographic profiles of adolescents involved in delinquent behavior in Bogura Sadar, with a specific focus on age, gender, educational background, and socio-economic conditions. By doing so, the study seeks to draw the attention of relevant authorities and stakeholders to this growing concern and advocate for strategic responses.

Materials and Methods

Study Design

This research adopted a cross-sectional descriptive study design to investigate the factors associated with juvenile delinquency among teenage drug users. The purpose was to explore the social, familial, and behavioral influences that contribute to delinquent behavior in this vulnerable population.

Study Duration

The study was conducted over a five-month period, from June 20, 2024, to November 30, 2024.

Study Site

This study was conducted at different hotspot area of Bogura Sadar Sub-district, under Bogura district in Bangladesh.

Sample Population

The target population comprised adolescents aged 13 to 19 years, representing diverse socio-economic backgrounds and neighborhoods within Bogura Sadar.

Sample Size

A total of 117 participants were selected using a purposive sampling method, applied on a random basis through the snowball technique. This specialized approach was employed due to the sensitive nature of the topic, the potential safety and security risks for the researcher, and the difficulty in accessing suitable respondents. The use of snowball sampling allowed initial contacts to help identify and refer additional participants known to be involved in delinquent or drug-related activities.

Study Tool

A structured and pre-tested questionnaire was developed based on the objectives of the study. It covered multiple domains including: demographic information (age, gender), educational background and current status, socio-economic conditions, family relationships and dynamics, school attendance and educational engagement, technology use (especially smartphone use), drug usage patterns and sources, affiliations with influential or political figures, and future aspirations. The tool was designed to gather a comprehensive understanding of the participants' personal, social, and behavioral contexts.

Data Collection Technique

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews conducted individually to ensure privacy and encourage candid responses. The interviews were supported by a locally influential figure, commonly referred to as Borovai, who assisted in identifying teenagers known for involvement in unlawful activities such as drug use, gang conflicts, reckless

driving, and chronic school absenteeism. Prior to each interview, the study's objectives were explained to the participants, and verbal consent was obtained after assuring them of anonymity and confidentiality. No identifying information was recorded, and interviews were held in a secure and private environment to promote participant comfort and honesty.

Ethical Consideration

This study followed the ethical guidelines by Bangladesh medical research council 2014 and the Helsinki Declaration 2013 (revised) involving human participants in research. The design of the study, data collection procedure, presentation of the data and citation comply with the standard Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) guideline. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants were maintained throughout the research process. Voluntary participation was ensured about their secrecy and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time but due to the nature of the study and subject consents for guardians were not taken even for the dependent age of the sample.

Institutional Review Board Statement

Due to the sensitive nature of this study involving a hidden, high-risk, and hard-to-reach population, formal written ethical clearance was not obtained from the institutional review board. However, the Principal Investigator consulted with the Institutional Ethics Committee of TMSS Medical College regarding the study design, methodology, and target population characteristics. Verbal approval was granted by the committee after thorough discussion of the ethical considerations and safety protocols for both participants and researchers. All data collection procedures adhered to established ethical principles for research involving vulnerable populations, including ensuring participant anonymity, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any time without consequences.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to describe the demographic, educational, socio-economic, and behavioral profiles of the

participants. The analysis aimed to identify common patterns and trends related to delinquency and drug use among teenagers in the study area.

Results

This study found (figure-1) majority 67% study population were 16-19 years old. Among 117 teenage of which majority 105 (90%) were boys.

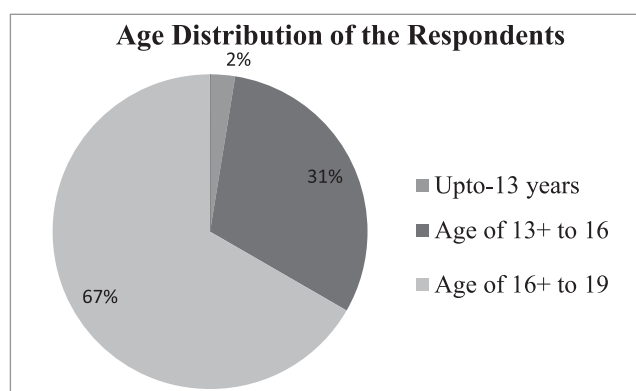


Figure 1 Age Distribution of the Respondents

The girls found almost vagabond and in intimate relation with their boyfriend. Regarding educational status (figure-2) majority 67 (58%) of them were HSC pass, 32 (27%) were SSC pass, 08 (6.5%) were class Eight pass, rest 10 (8.5%) were illiterate (can't write, read & understand Bengali enough) but a significant number (41%) of HSC & SSC pass student dropped out from further study as they did not get the scope of getting admission due to mismatched score and lack of sit capacity, among which 03 (2%) of them dropped out from Madrashah (Islamic Education System).

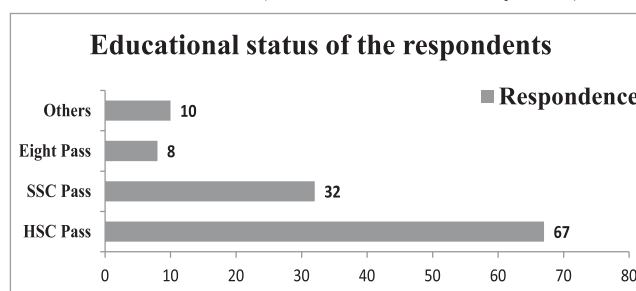


Figure 1 Educational status of the respondents

Regarding economic solvency 52 (44%) were from higher income group (monthly family income 01 lac and above, of which 32 (62%) from incoming both of their parents and 16 of them from broken family).

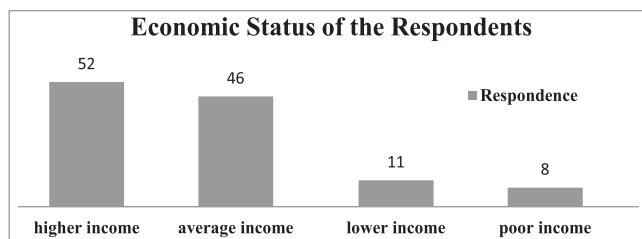


Figure 2 Economic status of the respondents

Almost half of the respondents 46 (39%) were from average income group (monthly family income around 60 thousands to below 01 lac, 11 (9%) were from lower income population (monthly family income 30 thousands or less), 08 (7%) were from poor incoming group among which 03 of them were from permanent incoming parents and they are absconded from home and their age found below 13 years who found in close contact with drug abusers, mostly act as drug carrier. Importantly 90 (77%) of the respondents felt that they were neglected from parents/family love and care. The greater portion 110 (94%) of them were not regular in classes, rather their study was coaching center dependent and these portions were also irregular in staying home for sleeping and taking food with family. Almost all of them use Smart phone. All of the respondents can avail their desired drugs very easily.

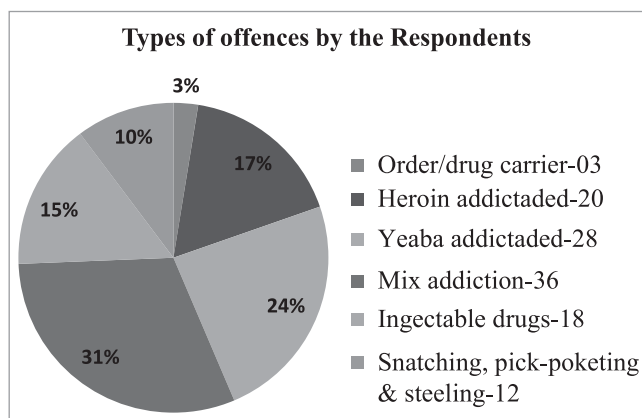


Figure 3 Types of offences by the Respondents

Based on this pie chart (figure 4) showing the distribution of offenses among study respondents, the findings reveal that drug-related crimes constitute the vast majority of offenses. Mixed addiction offenses represent the largest category at 31% of respondents, followed by Yaba addiction at 24% and heroin

addiction at 17%. Injectable drug offenses account for 15% of cases. Property crimes make up a smaller portion, with snatching, pick-pocketing, and stealing representing 10% of offenses, while order/drug carrier offenses comprise only 3% of the sample.

The data demonstrates that substance abuse-related offenses dominate the offense profile, with addiction-related crimes (mixed addiction, Yaba, heroin, and injectable drugs) collectively representing 87% of all reported offenses among the respondents. This suggests a strong correlation between substance dependency and criminal behavior within this study population, while traditional property crimes and drug trafficking offenses appear to be less prevalent.

It is very significant to note that almost all of them 113 (97%) had potential or influential political and local shelter though none of them had any political ideology or aim, they only act as a “Yes man” to the call of their shelter providing big brother. It is also very threatening that all of the respondents found drug abuser on regular basis and for this purpose they manage the cost anyhow (forcefully from parents or any unlawful activities even snatching).

The findings of this study reveal, almost the entire respondent having no future plan of life, education, spirituality, morality & they don't care about law or law enforcing authority but a good number, 55 (47%) of the respondent were dreaming and trying for going abroad for their establishment.

The findings reveal a concerning pattern where teenagers as young as 13 are engaged in drug-related activities, with key contributing factors including educational disengagement through school dropout and irregular attendance, family neglect and inadequate parental supervision, and protection by locally influential figures that may enable continued delinquent behavior. The study utilized community connections through respected local figures to access this typically hard-to-reach population involved in drug use, gang activities, and other criminal behaviors. The researchers conclude that addressing juvenile delinquency in this context requires a multi-faceted approach involving educational system reforms,

enhanced family engagement strategies, community-based interventions, and coordinated efforts between social services and law enforcement to break the cycle of youth involvement in criminal activities.

Discussion

Following United Nations guidelines on juvenile delinquency, teenage crime in Bangladesh stems from societal rejection and individual law violations by inconsistent youth behavior. Bangladesh's legal framework defines juvenile offenders as those aged 12-16 years, with children under 9 exempted from criminal responsibility (Penal Code 1860, Article 82) and those under 18 considered juveniles (Majority Act 1875).⁸

With 36 million teenagers in Bangladesh (UNICEF), juvenile crime statistics show significant increases from 751 accused in 484 cases (2012) to 1,191 arrests in 821 cases (first half of 2020).⁹ Most arrests involve drug offenses, murder, rape, and theft, with offenders sent to correctional facilities.¹⁰ Among Bangladesh's 40 million children aged 5-17, approximately 1.07 million work in hazardous conditions, with 70% engaging in criminal activities due to poverty, which research consistently identifies as the primary driver of juvenile delinquency.¹⁰ This study's findings support existing literature,¹¹ revealing that 90 respondents (77%) felt neglected by parental and family love and care, demonstrating how family dysfunction compounds socioeconomic factors in contributing to juvenile offending behavior.

In addition to that several study and reports were matched with this study findings. As of January 2024, there are around 50 active teen gangs in just the capital city of Bangladesh, Dhaka.⁵ Numerous more are based in other parts of the country but there is no specific data.⁵ These gangs are often backed by a section of ruling party leaders, who act as influential "elder brothers"¹² According to the Department of Narcotics Control, Bangladesh nearly 550,000 children are addicted to drugs and around 30% of them are involved in criminal activities to fuel their addiction. Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) has drawn a list of

the active teenage criminal gangs in the capital of Bangladesh, Dhaka. As of June 2023, there were 52 gangs on the list with 682 identified members in total, in 33 thanes (police station areas) under eight crime divisions of DMP.¹³ The rise of these gangs presents significant challenges to law enforcement agencies and communities in Bangladesh.¹⁴ Therefore, based on this study and above report it can be said that those who are already addicted to drugs have immense potential for crime.

Teen gangs in Bangladesh are involved in a broad range of criminal activities, encompassing drug trafficking, extortion, theft, robbery, and acts of violence. Street fights with rival gangs are a common occurrence, with these altercations occasionally escalating into severe confrontations resulting in injuries and fatalities. Additionally, these gangs engage in acts of vandalism, which disrupt public order and instill fear in the communities in which they operate.¹⁵

Experts say that most of these teenage delinquents are street children who get initiated into the world of crime through drug abuse. While Bangladesh observes National Child Rights Week 2016 from September 29 to October 05; in Bangladesh, street children are involved in drug peddling around 44%, 35% are engaged in picketing, 12% in mugging, 11% in human trafficking, and 21% in other criminal activities, says the sources at the Ministry of Home Affairs.

If delinquency roots are not uprooted soon, then it will take a terrible shape. Teenagers are more likely to become criminals if they continuously see fights and unhealthy social environment in their surroundings. Juveniles frequently fall into miserable companies and develop bad habits due to lack of attention and communication, cultural aggression, neediness, negligence, and weak family bonding. Teenagers are driven by emotion rather than wisdom. The curiosity and energy of juveniles should be channeled in a positive direction.

By update norms and regulations, teenage delinquency needs to be regulated. These delinquency is responsible for: psychological imbalances, poverty, joblessness, mixing up of different culture, weakening

of socio-cultural, spiritual and familial bondage, lack of political and administrative commitment, consumerization, lack of rules of law and good governance, uncontrolled corruption, drug availability and abusing etc. along with disasters, lack of proper counseling, physical disorders, and social disorders, extreme addiction to mobile-internet, lack of playground, the disgrace of social values, the negative impact of social media, urban mechanical life, unplanned industrialization and socialization, deterioration of the relationship between children and parents, and lack of family awareness and pure entertainment also plays a significant role behind the teenage offences.

Recruitment into teen gangs in Bangladesh often takes place through social networks, schools, and disadvantaged neighborhoods. According to experts, vulnerable teenagers, facing social exclusion, neglect, or a lack of positive role models, are more susceptible to gang involvement. The allure of power, protection, and a sense of belonging within the gang contributes to their recruitment. External influences, such as media, movies, and music that glorify gang culture, also play a role in attracting young individuals to join these groups.¹⁶

Limitations

Standard research procedures, including Institutional Review Board (IRB) clearance, could not be followed due to the sensitive nature of this study and security concerns for researchers and participants. The research was conducted under significant resource constraints and logistical challenges that required adaptations to conventional methodological approaches. These limitations affect the generalizability of findings and should be considered when interpreting results.

Conclusion

This study highlights serious concerns about juvenile delinquency in Bogura Sadar, Bangladesh, with teenage as young as 13 engaged in drug-related activities and other delinquent behaviors. Associated factors include educational discontinuation despite relatively high achievement levels, family neglect across socioeconomic strata, easy access to drugs,

protection from influential figures, and lack of constructive future orientations. These findings suggest the need for comprehensive, multi-level interventions addressing:

1. **Educational Reform:** Improve admission processes and address capacity issues in educational institutions to reduce dropout rates among secondary school graduates.
2. **Parental Support Programs:** Develop family counseling and parental education initiatives to strengthen family relationships and reduce adolescent neglect.
3. **Anti-Drug Campaigns:** Implement awareness programs about the dangers of drug abuse and establish accessible rehabilitation services for young people.
4. **Law Enforcement:** Strengthen measures to disrupt drug distribution networks and address the provision of protection to delinquent youth by political figures and local influencers.
5. **Vocational Training:** Introduce skills development programs that provide constructive pathways for youth development and alternatives to migration.
6. **Community Engagement:** Foster mentorship programs and constructive recreational activities that divert adolescents from delinquent peer groups and behaviors.

By addressing these multiple dimensions simultaneously, it may be possible to reduce juvenile delinquency and create more supportive environments for adolescent development in Bogura Sadar and similar regions of Bangladesh.

Recommendation

1. Drug availability chain should be controlled rather destroyed by effective legislative action and punishment.
2. Legislative update/correction regarding kishor/ Teenage offender's age limit for trial.
3. Increasing awareness about home care, schooling and overall educational plan (especially to

overcome the dropout in study).

4. Develop social motivation and participation about teenage care.
5. National and political effective measures regarding this issue.
6. Developing strong family bondage and care.
7. Creation of creative joyful environment for the teenagers such as enough playground & cultural facilities.
8. Improve care and rear of street children's Orphans and neglected child of broken family.

Although this is a small scale of study which done with several limitations and personal risk in a limited group of population but this would definitely discover the hidden alarming scenario of the teenage part of our population but the total fact could be much more vulnerable for the country in future if the condition remains untouched. So, the decision makers and authority will hopefully give the immediate proper interventions to save the future population and thereby country.

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Consent to publication

Not applicable

Availability of data and materials: All the raw de-identified data will be made available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

Competing interests: The authors declare no competing interests.

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