

Understanding Delinquency as a Sequel of Father–Son Relationship

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'I feel that if more juveniles had father figures, most of us wouldn't be here'

Child offender (Lyons & Collie, 1997)

Abstract

Fathers are indispensable in the lives of children. They are responsible in the nurturing and grooming of children and they enable the children go through a smooth transition into adulthood. They play versatile roles at different stages of their life as role models. As a father, he is invested with a responsibility to bring up the child, inculcating discipline and values by demonstrating love and concern. Unfortunately, many children are not privileged to experience the love of the father in their life either because of his absence or due to the negative traits exhibited by him that make their life traumatising. This study was conducted to understand the impact of such relationship from the child offender's perspective of their father. Adolescent boys, lodged in observation homes in Assam, were interviewed from a constructivist approach using grounded theory methodology to explore what they perceived about their father. Crucial categories emerged from their sharing, ranging from a responsible to an aggressive father whose absence left a void in their lives and whose presence led to an embittered relationship. Effective parenting skills and alternative care programmes to strengthen the relationship between the child and the father, and also creating support systems to ensure that children grow up in the protective environment of the family are emphasized in the study.

Introduction

It is an undisputed fact that families are bestowed with the responsibility of nurturing children. The traditional two parent family, comprising of both the parents living together with the child is a good and healthy environment for the child's developmental process rather than a single parent family (Amato & Keith, 1991). It is seen in the family that fathers make a significant contribution in the upbringing of children, in their overall development and also in equipping them with skills of adaptation in the society (Smith & Walters, 1978). By their deeds and attitudes, fathers can directly influence their children. If the relationship between children and the parent is safe, ensuring support and understanding, then they can adjust better in life. Spending quality time with their children is also significant in taking this relationship forward. When fathers take up this supportive and fostering role and fulfill their primary responsibility towards the family, it has a positive impact on the children (Lamb, 1991). One positive aspect of the father's involvement with children is equipping them with skills of handling their emotions and being sensitive and empathetic towards others Wisdom (Eastin, 2003; Popenoe, 1997).

It is important to understand the multifaceted role of fathers in the family ranging from being the breadwinner, caregiver and playmate, all of which have a great influence in the development of children. Of all the roles played by fathers, being a role model to children has a powerful influence in their lives as there is opportunity for children to learn positive values and attitudes in life. Just being at home during the growing up years offers the kids a sense of security and enables them to build up healthy relationship with others. Moreover, their supervisory role helps in reducing delinquent behaviour in the children (Cobb-Clark & Tekin, 2011). An indispensable and irreplaceable role of the father is noticeable in his absence when children experience a loss emotionally, intellectually and in different ways that no well-thought of or planned intervention programmes can replace (Eastin, 2003). This absence of the father figure in the family is of great concern as the economic, emotional and social security displayed by him may not be available to the children in such families or these roles may not be fulfilled at all (Lamb, 1991).

A gradual change is present in the manner by which fathers pass on their legacy to their children as there is a reduction in the power, wisdom and love that is passed on to them and probably they also become less significant in their children's lives (Pitman, 2016). Moreover, a significant role is also played in the development of child and adolescent psycho-pathology due to their direct involvement with children and through indirect means of creating conflicts or marital stress in the family that has its impact in the psychological make-up of children (Phares & Compas, 1992). The negative impact is mostly seen when they are absent in the lives of their children leading to their involvement in delinquent behaviour, aggressive acts and also early sexual activities (Popenoe, 1997).

Two branches of research on fatherhood are taken up in the field of social sciences, referring to the fertility status of the father and the behaviour and identity of the fathers who bring up children. The second branch of research focussing on 'fatherhood' as the behaviour of fathers and their responsibility towards their children is better recognised in the field of development science (Pleck, 2007). This study therefore dwells on the patterns of relationship which children in detention centres had shared earlier with their fathers. The purpose is to understand their feelings relating to the father's behaviour and his responsibility towards them, and also explore the factors associated with his presence or absence in the child's life that eventually contributed to their delinquent behaviour.

Theoretical Framework

A specific model of father's involvement with children derived by Michael Lamb and his colleagues and the theoretical basis are discussed to understand the conceptual stance taken by the researcher in relation to this study.

A model of paternal involvement in child rearing proposes three types of interactions, viz., *engagement, accessibility and responsibility*. These focus on the different aspects by which fathers can be an essential part of the child's developmental process. *Engagement* or interaction is the actual time spent with the child by being a playmate or fulfilling their basic needs, most often in a one-to-one involvement. Even having a meal

together, spending leisure time in meaningful activities, reading books together account for time well spent with children. Research has proved that fathers spend less time with children compared to the mother, about one fourth less than the time that the mother actually engages with the child. *Accessibility* refers to the father being available both physically and psychologically for the child, even if he is not directly interacting. Here again, fathers are hardly available or accessible to the child as proven by research. *Responsibility* means providing for the child's welfare and executing their role in all ways and by all means. It is an observable fact that fathers hardly take up any responsibility in child rearing (Lamb, 1991; Bonney & Kelley, 1999). A father who is involved with his children is someone who is supportive, friendly, loving, motivating and nurturing, and he develops a strong and secure relationship with them (Allen & Daly, 2007).

Control theory is based on the assumption that an individual gets involved in delinquent behaviour when his bond with the society is snapped off or is not closely knit. Control theory is a theory of abnormal development that emphasises on social control to explain criminal behaviour (Sroufe, *et.al.*, 1999). Travis Hirschi came up with this theory on the assumption that delinquency results when an individual's bond with the society is broken or weakened. The reason for people refraining from crime is based on the bond that an individual develops with the societal structures. Four elements of this bond are suggested by Hirschi, namely, attachment of the individual referred to as internalisation of social norms, commitment to the conventional lines of action, involvement in conventional activities and the belief in societal norms (Voss, 1970). This theory has empirical evidence that if the parent - child attachment is strong, it would enable an adolescent to refrain from peer influences that are detrimental. It can be understood that a delinquent may involve in a delinquent act if any of the above mentioned bonds are weak or broken, and it is also possible that they can return to normal functioning if they make attempts to strengthen them (Wiatrowski, *et.al.*, 1981).

Brief Literature Review

Studies associated with delinquency and family pathology, the influence of parents, and the crucial role of the father in the life of children have been reviewed and significant research work has been done, which is presented to validate the need for the current study.

It was observed in a study that the frequency of the behavioural problems in boys and the psychological problems in girls increased along with the enhancement in their cognitive development due to the involvement of the father (Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid & Bremberg, 2008). The impact of father's absence in the family has been associated with the child's poor academic performance, and risky behaviour, psychosocial adjustment and self-control (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000).

A high risk for involvement in crime and incarceration prevailed for adolescents whose father was not present at home, when compared to other factors such as poverty and teen motherhood (Harper & McLanahan, 2004). Similarly, data analysed in the United States has shown that the absence of the father is a strong predictor of violent behaviour in the young boys rather than poverty; this meant that the presence of a residential and biological father reduces the possibility of their sons acquiring violent behaviour. There is a possibility that young boy's involvement in delinquent behaviour will be doubled if he is brought up without a father (Wardle, n.d) and emotional and psychosocial adjustment was also present among children in father-absent families (Allen & Daly, 2007).

Adolescent boys who never had a father figure in their life were more prone to delinquent behaviour as they had no role model, and lacked the protection needed for children to prevent them from getting involved in delinquent behaviour (Cobb-Clark & Tekin, 2011). Another study also proved that absence of the father had a major contribution to the boy's delinquent behaviour with the greatest influence seen in the use of alcohol, marijuana and sexual activity. However, the data did not reflect the father's role in what kind of role model he was in transmitting values. But it suggests that his presence could actually help in deterring the sons from the deviant behaviour (Stern, Northman & Van-Slyck, 1984). Likewise, a study found that children living with single parents or in step

families were more likely to be using tobacco, alcohol or any illegal drugs in comparison to children who lived with their biological or adoptive parents (Bronte – Tinkew, Moore, Capps & Zaff, 2006).

Father's behaviour and parenting had a contributing role in the development of externalizing behaviour in the boys compared to the role of the mother (Phares & Compas, 1992). A comparative study between two types of delinquents social (subcultural-socialized) and individual delinquent (neurotic-disturbed) with normal adolescent girls revealed that the parents of non-delinquent girls were different from the parents of delinquents as they were consistent in their feelings, showed less rejection and more adjusting. The parents of the social delinquents were more restrictive in the area of control than parents of individual delinquents. Fathers were more restrictive, authoritative and demonstrated less affection towards the children when compared to the mothers (Duncan, 1971).

A disturbing fact is that only one of the twenty six offenders in a detention centre in Florida had parents who were married. The majority of the children were from single parent families working all through the day with no one to supervise them, as a result of which they got into situations of crime and landed up in the juvenile justice system (Lyons & Collie, 1997). Further shocking statistics relating to juveniles in America states that sixty percent of those involved in rape, seventy two percent in homicide and seventy percent of the long term prison inmates hailed from homes where the father was not present (Popenoe, 1997). In a comparative study of 80 delinquent and non-delinquent boys, the boys involved in delinquency shared that they felt their fathers rejected them whereas their mothers loved them. They, in turn, did not obey their fathers, when compared to the non-delinquent boys who recognised the father as the head of the family and obeyed him (Andry, 1962 cited in Eastin, 2003).

In India, a comparative study among adolescents who have engaged in delinquent behaviour and those who were not delinquent examined the relationship between the adolescents with their parents, adopting the grounded theory approach. The delinquent boys narrated only negative experiences they had with their father who hardly interacted with them and about the indirect influence of family fights, alcoholism and abusive

behaviour. On the other hand, the non-delinquent boys had mutual love and respect for the father. However, the study did not address the behavioural patterns of those children who were apprehended and brought to the juvenile justice system as the respondents in this study were school going children with incidence of delinquency as reported only by the school authorities (Poduthase, 2012).

In spite of varying opinions about father's role, research has summarised seven effective ways by which fathers can play a crucial role in the life of children, viz., having a positive relationship with the children's mother, spending time with children, nurturing them, using appropriate disciplinary solutions, guiding them to the external world around them, being a protector and a provider, and by being a positive role model to the children (Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006).

On the basis of the studies discussed above, it is observed that much research has been done on the impact of the father in the family and his absence leading to behavioural and psycho-social problems in the children. Most of the research work on delinquency and families and the role of parents has been taken up in the West. The studies in India and the Northeast region are predominantly from a positivist approach. Therefore, the need to conduct a study in the context of Assam to understanding the relationship between the father and the child in conflict with law from a constructivist approach was felt by the researcher.

Method

An inductive method of data collection was carried out to elicit the life experiences of the children in conflict with law, lodged in the observation homes in Assam. The participants were male offenders aged between 10 and 18 who were apprehended for offences under the Indian Penal Code and the State and Local Laws. Girls were not part of the study as the observation homes did not have any of them during the period of the study. By means of purposive sampling, the participants were interviewed following the principle of theoretical saturation. Interviews were conducted until properties and dimensions relating to the major categories were saturated. Grounded theory approach was adopted in the study and in depth interviews and focus group discussions

were organised for understanding the father–son relationship from a constructivist’s worldview. The theoretical orientation of the research is grounded on the views or perspectives of the children who participated in the study (Creswell, 2013).

Thematic Analysis

On the basis of line-by-line coding, many themes or categories emerged from their sharing which are presented in this section to get a broad understanding of what the children perceived about their father, his behaviour and involvement towards the family. The relationship shared with the father was explored on the basis of what the child perceived of his father’s contribution to the family and the role he played in their upbringing. It was observed that they had a strong bond with the mother compared to the father except for a few of them who had looked up to their father with respect and admiration.

Profile of the Children and their Fathers

A majority of forty eight percent of the children were above 17 years, thirty four percent belonged to the age group of 14 to 16 years, ten percent were between 11 to 13 years and just seven percent of them were 10 years old. When it came to education, only a handful were still in school, at the high school and higher secondary level, and the majority of seventy six percent of them were dropouts, mostly below primary level of education. As most of them (sixty two percent) were not studying, they were into odd jobs like driving, working as helpers in vehicles and for daily wages. The risky group comprised of those who were not into schools and also not occupied with any work but spent the time going around with friends.

It was observed that eighty three percent of the children were lodged in the observation home for a period of less than six months and seventeen percent of them were staying there for more than six months even more than a year. Majority of seventy six percent were first time offenders and twenty four percent were recidivists who were there for the second or third time. The offence for which most of them were apprehended was theft (fifty eight percent) and thirty four percent were

for allegations of serious offense such as murder, rape, abduction and involvement with armed outfit.

It was found that the highest level of education of the fathers was up to the higher secondary level and ten of them were illiterate. Even when it came to education, only a small fraction of them were employed in private companies. Most of them were into agriculture or daily wage labourers. The father's educational and employment background reflects largely on children as they lacked sufficient encouragement, motivation and role model in life. As for their deviant patterns, addiction was present among fifty five percent of them, some into problem drinking that even led to separation in the family. Absence of any addiction was observed only in seventeen percent of the fathers and surprisingly the same percentage of children who were interviewed was into addictive behaviour. The father's involvement in crime was also present in some families as they were apprehended for theft, aggression or drunken brawls in the neighbourhood.

It was indeed alarming to observe that 62% of the participants hailed from broken families characterized by the loss of parents, single parents, and abandonment by either of the parents, or having to care for a parent who is incapacitated and bedridden. It turned out that 44.4% of them did not have both the parents living with them and were left with relatives who were callous and insensitive to their needs. Seven of the fathers had expired, three of them had married again and two of them are absconding with their whereabouts not known. One of the absconding fathers was ostracized from the village for his immoral behaviour and another child's father ran away from home fearing a backlash after his mother had committed suicide. However, he had been visiting the children and supporting them financially up to four years earlier and then he abruptly stopped his visits. Being raised by single parents or the absence of parents can have a lasting impact on the child's life, leading to delinquent behaviour. Reports gathered from 23 countries had alarming findings of juvenile delinquency revealing that 85 percent of delinquents lived alone, and 90 percent had no contact with their families or relatives (Themeli, Waller & Wolthuis, 2003).

The coding process revealed both positive and negative attributes of the father. The major themes that emerged are: (1) responsible father, (2) permissive father, (3) strict disciplinarian, (4) father who was morally upright, (5), callous and irresponsible father and (6), aggressive father. Each of these themes is discussed at length to get a clear perspective of the relationship between them.

Responsible Father

One of the positive aspects that stood out relating to the father was his being 'responsible' as shared by twelve of them. Four of them have lost their fathers, but stated that he was a responsible person until his demise. When one of them was asked what he meant by 'responsible', he shared about his father's advice to him to be a good person and not get involved in any bad habits. Further, he elaborated that his father had fulfilled all their needs, sent them to good English medium schools in spite of he being illiterate and never used any physical force against them. Another child shared, that 'there was no situation as such wherein my father has not provided for any of our needs,' which indicates the commitment he had towards the family. Advising and encouraging them to study well, not to mingle with any bad company and being tough on those areas was also considered responsible according to one of them who was studying in the twelfth standard at the time of his apprehension. Providing for the family in the midst of adversities and fulfilling all their wants and desires, and working hard to make both ends meet was also thought of as a responsible behaviour by the father, as shared by another who did not continue schooling in spite of his father's perseverance. Two of them shared on the protective nature of the father who shielded them from being smacked by the mother for any mischievous behaviour. One of them felt that his father was more like a friend who fulfilled all his needs, and showered love on them. He feels bad for letting him down and not living up to his expectations.

Similar findings have been reported where fathers who are engaged in a positive way in the life of their children have a direct impact in their well-being. By being concerned about the mother and establishing a meaningful marital relationship, the father's role in the family can have an indirect influence on the children (Rosenberg and Wilcox, 2006). Initially, they were known and recognised only for their role as the

provider in the family, fulfilling all the financial requirements, but there is a change in this scenario where fathers are expected to support the children as well as the wife emotionally and be available to them (Yeung, *et.al.*, 2001).

Permissive Father

A few of them reflected on the father's permissive nature. They felt the father gave in to all their demands and got them whatever they requested. One of them shared that if anything was good for his development, the father would immediately procure it as he was the only child going to school, and none of his parents or siblings were educated. Hence, his father used to pamper and shower him with all that he demanded. Those who were quite young, like ten or twelve years old, had the habit of taking ten or twenty rupees every day from the father for their snacks and they enjoyed that period of life. One of them (10 years) felt so bad that his father had died as he had no one to support him. This is what he had to say,

My father was very loving, he showed love, and he used to beat my elder brother but never hit me. He gives whatever I ask, my father used to give money, used to give me 10 or 20 rupees whenever I ask, my father used to love me, I...like my father more.....(Personal Interview, 2015).

Many times this permissive nature did not work out well as the children exploited this permissiveness to their advantage and used the money for drugs and splurging with friends. They perceived that their drug taking behaviour was condoned by the father and hence did not pay any attention to their mother's screams and shouts. One of the child's fathers used to travel a lot in work and hardly stayed at home. Therefore, whenever he was at home, he was good to the children and gave in to all their wishes. On the contrary, his wife was perceived as a terror because she insisted on the children being disciplined. The father turned a deaf ear to all this and pleased his children by fulfilling all their desires.

Morally Upright Father

A rare virtue of the father that was shared by a few of the children was about his morality. They perceived him to be morally good, with no

bad habits such as smoking, drinking or gambling and who also tried to inculcate this behaviour in children. One of them said, 'my father... he is good. He does not do any wrong things.' Another child reflected the same thought that his father did not smoke or drink and was religious. He constantly advised them that drinking or smoking is bad and that it was not good for their life and future. Only a few of the fathers did not have any history of addiction which was considered as a yardstick for the children to assess their morality. In addition, not getting involved in any criminal behaviour, not cheating others or not having any extramarital relationship was also depicted being morally good. It was surprising that only three of the fathers fit into this description of living a good life free from any kind of unwanted behaviour.

Extant literature showed that fathers exercise authority by laying limits and disciplining children, monitoring and supervising their daily activities and taking up responsibility for supporting their education amongst other tasks executed by them (Allen & Daly, 2007). A study of 232 boys selected for a delinquency prevention programme revealed that fathers who had a good relationship with their spouse, who treated them with respect, and were not aggressive stand up as models for socialized behaviour. On the other hand, those fathers who demeaned their wives or fought with the members of the family emerged as faulty aggressive models of anti-social behaviour, and the boys tend to learn and adopt both these behaviours from their fathers (McCord, 1991).

Strict Disciplinarian

Parents generally admonish children for their mischief and wrongdoing. But there are some parents who take it to the extreme and overdo it by means of excessive control that has negative repercussions. Some of the fathers were obsessed with discipline and constantly hovered over the children's whereabouts. One of them (18 years) has vivid memories of his father's disciplining that has brought about a big drift between them. Excerpts from his sharing:

Father was very strict. He gets very angry when we stay idle at home and not working. When he is at home, we cannot stay even for one second. He used to beat a lot, chase us and beat us. Like if we are not at home, or go out to play with friends, he used to get very angry and beat us. Sometimes, we get

scared to even come home when we do some mischief or if we do bad things. For two to three days, we don't come home and stay in relative's house. He will search, bring us back home and beat us for going away (Personal Interview, 2015).

Similarly, there were four others who also expressed that their father used to lay a lot of rules, dos and don'ts for them to follow and if violated they would be severely beaten up. One of them shared that his father used to tie him up in the house, lock the doors and go to work so that he did not mingle with deviant peers; but it turned to be futile as his friends would break open the window and take him out. The fathers exercised this strict discipline so that their wards refrain from anti-social behaviour and lead a good life. Though it was all meted out with good intentions, it did not succeed as the children tried to rebel against any disciplinary measure. Now sitting inside the observation home they regret that the efforts taken by the father was for their benefit and hence hold no grievance against him.

Living in families characterized by parents imposing strict discipline and punitive treatment for any misbehaviour, these children seldom stayed at home. Being intimidated by the over controlling father's presence at home, they stayed with relatives or friends. For days together, they never turned up to their houses fearing the consequences. It was an avoidance of the father who was a harsh disciplinarian at home that they feared going home. There were four children who stayed with the father under the same roof but never had any direct conversation with him. One of them was so frustrated with his father's alcoholism and aggressive behaviour that he despises him so much. He even said that he would like to go back home only when his father is dead and gone or if he is released prior to that, he prefers staying elsewhere other than home. He is even more furious that his father had refused to bail him out and instructed the authorities to extend his stay in the observation home for him to learn a lesson. Two others lead their own lives with no accountability to anyone, independent financially and they have almost parted ways from their father, not wanting to have any association with him. Due to this behaviour of avoiding home and staying outside, a lot of possibility arose for them to get involved in unwanted behaviour; smoking and drinking became a regular habit for all of them who disliked their father and avoided his presence.

Extant literature states that the biological fathers get into arguments with their children on trivial matters relating to daily chores, cleanliness and completion of homework, and they criticize their behaviour due to their involvement and concern for the children. This was very much applicable in the lives of these children who were interviewed. One study indicated that the father's negativity had contributed more to the adolescent's behaviour than the monitoring aspect (Kim, Hetherington & Reiss, 1999).

Callous and Irresponsible Father

The children could distinctly differentiate between the responsible and irresponsible behaviour of their fathers and they were able to clearly spell it out. Nine of them considered the father to be *irresponsible*, shirking off all commitments towards the family and was never concerned about the welfare and future of the children. One of the children (15 years) shared about his father as mentioned below:

He (father) does nothing. He does not get involved at all. He is drinking no (sic). He does not stay at home and does not give any money (Personal Interview, 2015).

Some of them do not go to work and expect the wife to shoulder the burden of the family, whereas there are others who went to work but used most of their earnings to support their drinking and never bothered about the family. The wife had to repeatedly plead and take money to provide the children with basic needs. For many of them, addictive behaviour proved to be the reason for their irresponsibility. Sheer negligence was seen when one of the child's father dumped him with his mother after separation and continued on with his life. He angrily shared, 'he left me with my mother and he is married again. He used to hit me a lot when I ask him for money. I don't like staying with him (Personal Interview, 2015).'

Imprudent and callous attitude was evident where one of them shirked off all responsibilities towards his two children after the death of the mother during childbirth and left them with his aging parents. He (17 years) narrated his experience in a sombre way. Excerpts from his sharing:

We did not stay much with my father.....my father did not look after us....he did not come at all....he did not take us home.....never came to see us also... he never used to give any money.... he used to visit occasionally (Personal Interview, 2015).

He had therefore given up all hopes on his father who has married again after his mother's demise. When he was asked in the court whether he had any guardians, he denied his father's existence. He feels so let down in life that in spite of having a father, he serves no purpose to him. Another child burst out in anger in the group and never wanted to go back to his house nor see his father's face. He is not in talking terms as his father was a chronic alcoholic who splurged a lot of money on his drinks and treated everyone at home in an aggressive manner. Apart from drinking, another reason cited by them for their father's carelessness was abandoning them when they were very young. As mentioned in the beginning, two of the fathers had abandoned their children and ran away. One of them was a little responsible in hideout and continued to support them financially when they were staying with his brother's family but there has been no contact with him for the last four years after which they are pushed to the extreme state of suffering. Being abandoned and neglected by their own fathers made them feel unwanted and insecure, thus leading to a very low self-image and self-esteem.

Aggressive Father

An explicitly shared aspect of the father was his aggressive and violent temperament. Seven of them found their fathers to be of that nature and remember vividly the violent episodes in their life that had a long lasting impact in their young minds. One of them (17 years) shared an incident that was still fresh in his memory,

One day I did not go to school and was playing carom with friends in the town. My mother asked my father to go and search for me in school as I did not go home for lunch. So he went and looked in school, I was not there, he then kept searching for me and found me playing carom. He got angry, was also drunk, so he tied me with a rope in the market place, beat me and asked me to kneel down and stretch my hands. He

tried to cut my hands with a knife. When he brought the knife to cut, I moved away my hands, so there was a cut in my fingers...I still can't forget that (Personal Interview, 2015).

His father was known in the neighbourhood for his violent nature and no one tried opposing when they saw him attempting to cut off his son's fingers. People were petrified of him and hence he continued to proudly walk around shouting and screaming in a drunken state. One of the fathers was mentally ill and he often indulged in bizarre behaviour. He once tried to kill the mother and siblings by hanging them but later released the rope and brought them down. He later drank the blood from the mother's neck. Each day, his behaviour was unpredictable and all of them lived in fear. In this scenario, the young child (13 years) felt relieved that his father was no more and said the family environment is better now without him.

Now it is good only, before when he (father) was there it was bad. There were frequent fights at home, now it is peaceful after his death. It is better at home now, my mother could not eat her food also, he used to trouble her so much, he used to hit her and ask for money (Personal Interview, 2015).

Some of the fathers had been too restricting and never displayed any concern or affection during the childhood days. Literature reviewed also shows that parental rejection and neglect has contributed to delinquency (Weatherburn & Lind, 1997; Duncan, 1971; Diane, 2006; Loeber & Stouthamer – Loeber, 1986). In some of the cases, there had been mutual rejection between the father and the child. Fathers had been less affectionate and rejecting the child (Al – Matalka & Hussainat, 2012; Glueck, 1960). Having experienced punitive punishment and aggressive handling frequently, it led to a disturbed relationship between them; this is also evident from other studies (Hamid, 1972; Parent, *et.al*, 2011; Poduthase, 2012; Scott, 1998). Further, it paved the way for truant behaviour and situations of spending more time with peers. A home with frequent fights was more disturbing and influenced delinquent behaviour more than when the parents lived separated.

Discussion

It is the responsibilities of parents to provide their children a protective and healthy environment. But it is unfortunate to find many of them who are deprived of such support systems for no fault of theirs. Many of the children who were interviewed hailed from broken homes. Seven of the boys lost one of their parents (three their father and four lost their mother). In the absence of the father, the child at least stayed with the mother who fulfilled their needs and to some extent cared for them. But in situations where the mother had expired, the father has not stood up as a supportive or caring person. Among the four children who lost their mother, two of the fathers had remarried and one of them absconded. The other child is not in talking terms with his father after his mother's demise. Men interact with children less sensitively than the mothers; as a result of which children form closer attachments to their mothers than their fathers (Lewis & Lamb, 2003). The boys described their father as responsible but never used the word 'loving' which was reserved more for the mother. This is observed across cultures where mother is usually associated with 'mother love,' denoting warmth and care whereas father or fathering refers to someone who is strong and emotionally cold (Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). A warm and supportive relationship between the father and the child without any problems was observed only in three families which denote that majority of the children did not share an understanding relationship with the father. Though some of the fathers were good, they could not play an influential role in the child's life due to their early demise.

Living a difficult life battling all odds to survive has been their experience. Losing the father due to death as a result of natural cause is to some extent acceptable to these young minds and they are able to overcome in due process of time; but for those who have lost their fathers due to desertion, it becomes difficult to come to terms with the loss. No amount of time or efforts can console or comfort them. A sense of loss or a hungry search for the father who is missing in their life to offer them the love, protection and a role model is seen in many children. The nurturing role of the father earns them a better place in the children's heart than just being a mere provider (Pitman, 2016). One aspect that was common in all their lives was the resolve to find companionship among friends to substitute the family. All of them with

single parents preferred to spend time with friends, most of whom were deviant, as a result of which they got entangled in anti-social behaviour. The pathological environment at home comprising of father's absence, his aggression, punitive disciplining and callous attitude led to the child going astray from the protective environs of the home and easily getting trapped in situations of conflict with the law. Studies have shown that the absence of father, rather than poverty, is seen as a strong force or predictor of delinquency. (Al – Matalka & Hussainat, 2012; Popenoe, 1997; Sullenger, 1934; Wardle, n.d; Wright & Wright, 1994).

Conclusion

A father's love can have a positive influence in the development of children right from birth to becoming a young adult. Children are able to derive happiness during the growing up years, become competent in life, better equipped to adjust in life, do well in academics and inculcate the values and beliefs passed on to them (Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). Their love and acceptance serve as a buffer against all issues confronting children. Fathers become role models to their children, especially their sons, and it is also said that they generally plan for the long term development of children differing from mothers who focus mostly on the immediate needs of the child. They also serve as an excellent source of protection to the children though there is no assurance that his presence could actually help in dissuading or preventing children from offending (Popenoe, 1997). The presence of even one caring parent serves as a protective factor against delinquency even if the other parent turns out to be rejecting and less caring (Brian, 1988). In order to address the issues children face in families, the factors that segregate fathers from their children needs attention and it is very essential that all fathers need to be oriented about their primary role in child rearing. Focussing on the child's psychological well-being is more crucial than mere fulfilment of basic needs. Constantly reassuring children of their presence and never-failing love and attention goes a long way in not only protecting children but also in preventing their involvement in delinquent behaviour (Popenoe, 1997). The Government and non-profit organisations working in the field of child welfare and protection need to identify at risk families and equip parents, most importantly the father with skills essential in handling children to realise their prime responsibility of

protecting and preventing children's involvement in anti-social behaviour.

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