

Offenses Committed by Juveniles in an Urbanized City: Basis for Enhancement of Decorum and Intervention Program

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the perceived contributing factors behind offenses committed by juvenile students in an urbanized city and used the results to formulate an enhanced decorum and intervention program. A descriptive research design was used at San Juan National High School, City of San Juan, Metro Manila. Through purposive sampling, 270 Junior High School students with records of misconduct in the guidance office and 42 teachers answered parallel four-point Likert-scale questionnaires covering five contributing factors: family dysfunction, social pressure, identity and inequity, insufficient literacy, and economic condition. Guidance office records for school year 2017–2018 showed 376 cases of 18 kinds of offenses, led by fighting (36), bullying (34), and truancy

(33). Family dysfunction was the highest-rated contributing factor for both students ($M = 2.91$) and teachers ($M = 3.00$), with a combined mean of 2.96 interpreted as Agree. The lowest-rated factor was social pressure for students ($M = 2.59$) and identity and inequity for teachers ($M = 2.25$). The t-test for independent samples showed no significant difference between the students' and teachers' assessments in any of the five factors at the 0.05 level. A five-area action plan with a total proposed budget of ₱31,000 was formulated and rated suitable ($M = 2.95$), feasible, and acceptable by both groups. The study concludes that student offenses are rooted mainly in problems at home and recommends a preventive program, parenting classes, full implementation of the action plan, partnership with the local government and non-government organizations, and a recalibrated student handbook.

Keywords: *juvenile delinquency, children in conflict with the law, school discipline, social control theory, family dysfunction, intervention program*

INTRODUCTION

Schools are widely expected to turn young people into productive and law-abiding citizens, and good discipline is considered one of the key attributes of an effective school. Indiscipline, on the other hand, is any act that departs from accepted norms and values and violates school rules in a way that disrupts the orderly functioning of the school (Asiyai, 2005). Student misconduct is a concern worldwide. Reid (2000) reported above-average rates of absenteeism, vandalism, and delinquency in parts of the United Kingdom and widespread violence, robbery, extortion, and insolence to staff in high-truancy schools in several American cities. In Ghana, Danso (2010) observed that hardly a day passes without a report of indiscipline among primary and secondary students. Aguba (2009) argued that discipline is needed to produce well-cultivated youths who respect both themselves and others.

In the Philippines, offending by young people is governed by Republic Act No. 9344, the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006, as amended by Republic Act No. 10630. The law defines a child as a person under 18 years of age, a child at risk as one who is vulnerable to committing offenses because of personal, family, and social circumstances, and a child in conflict with the law (CICL) as one alleged, accused, or adjudged to have committed an offense. It adopts a restorative approach built on prevention, diversion, rehabilitation, reintegration, and aftercare rather than punishment. At the school level, the Department of Education's Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012) prohibits maltreatment and violent discipline and requires schools to form child protection committees and to use positive methods of discipline.

The school plays a central role in regulating criminality by socializing students, protecting them from delinquent peers, and instilling social control (Gottfredson, 2001; Hirschi, 1969; Sampson & Laub, 1993). Yet schools have increasingly turned to punitive and exclusionary measures, such as automatic suspension or expulsion for fighting, bullying, weapons, or drugs (Schoonover, 2009). Research suggests that such policies have little deterrent effect and may even increase misconduct (Nichols, 2004; Schoonover, 2009), that they fall disproportionately on vulnerable students (Kupchik, 2009), and that excluded students face a higher risk of later criminal and antisocial behavior (Armstrong, 2018). Sampson and Laub (1993) warned that stigmatizing punishment, whether by the family or the state, tends to backfire. These findings point to the need to understand why students misbehave before deciding how to respond.

San Juan National High School, the locale of this study, is the only public secondary school in the City of San Juan, a highly urbanized city in Metro Manila. It serves graduates from all 21 barangays of the city and from neighboring areas. According to the school registrar, 87% of its students come from low-income families. Its guidance office documented 376 cases of student offenses in school year 2017–2018 alone.

This study therefore assessed the perceived contributing factors behind offenses committed by students of San Juan National High School as a basis for enhancing the school's decorum and intervention program. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions: (1) What are the common offenses committed by juveniles in an urbanized city as documented by the guidance office? (2) To what extent do family dysfunction, social pressure, identity and inequity, insufficient literacy, and economic condition contribute to the commission of offenses by students? (3) Is there a significant difference between the students' and the teachers' assessments of these contributing factors? (4) What action plan may be formulated to enhance the decorum and intervention program of the school? and (5) How suitable, feasible, and acceptable is the proposed program? For each of the five factors, the study tested the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the students' and the teachers' assessments.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored mainly on Travis Hirschi's (1969) social control theory, which holds that delinquency arises when a young person's bonds to conventional society are weak, while tightly bound individuals keep deviant impulses in check. Hirschi identified four elements of the social bond: attachment to prosocial others, commitment to conformity, involvement in conventional activities, and belief in the legitimacy of conventional rules. Later researchers extended the theory to the school, showing that the school can exert its own inhibiting effect on delinquency regardless of family background (Stewart, 2003; Wade & Brannigan, 1998) and that it is an important arena for delinquency prevention programs (Gottfredson, 2001).

Social control theory explains why the family dysfunction factor was expected to matter: a weak attachment to parents loosens the most basic social bond. Research on peer influence (Erdwin & Kornhauser, 2002; Henry & Huizinga, 2007) informs the social pressure factor, while work on the effects of labeling, exclusion, and teacher disrespect (Black, 2016; Sullivan, 2016) informs the identity and inequity factor. Studies linking poor school performance and financial hardship to truancy, cheating, and dropping out (Henry & Huizinga, 2007; Magno, 2012) inform the insufficient literacy and economic

condition factors. Together, these perspectives suggest that school misconduct has several roots and that an effective intervention must work on the home, the peer group, the classroom, academic support, and students' economic needs at the same time.

METHODS

Research Design and Locale

The study used a descriptive research design, which describes the characteristics of a population or phenomenon as it exists (Bhat, 2015), combined with a comparison of two groups of respondents. It was conducted at San Juan National High School – Junior High School in the City of San Juan during the second semester of school year 2018–2019. Permission to conduct the study and to obtain anecdotal reports on student delinquency cases was requested from the school principal in a letter dated October 30, 2018, and was approved.

Respondents and Sampling

Purposive sampling was used. Student respondents were Grade 8, 9, and 10 students with a record of misconduct, misbehavior, or indiscipline in the guidance office for school year 2017–2018, during which 376 cases of varied offenses were recorded. Teacher respondents were teacher-advisers of the Junior High School. A total of 270 questionnaires were given to students and 42 to teachers. Table 1 presents the profile of the respondents.

Table 1. *Profile of the Respondents*

Group and profile	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Students (n = 270)		
Age 13–16	187	69.26
Age 17–20	83	30.74
Male	187	69.26
Female	83	30.74
Teachers (n = 42)		
Age 21–25	8	19.05
Age 26–30	12	28.57
Age 31 and above	22	52.38
Male	8	19.05
Female	34	80.95

Most student respondents were 13 to 16 years old (69.26%) and male (69.26%); the remaining 30.74% were 17 to 20 years old, or over-age for Junior High School. Most teacher respondents were 31 years old or older (52.38%) and female (80.95%).

Research Instrument

The researcher used two parallel closed-ended questionnaires, one for students and one for teachers. Part 1 gathered the respondents' age and sex. Part 2 measured the contributing factors of offending in five domains (family dysfunction, social pressure, identity and inequity, insufficient literacy, and economic condition), each with four or five statements. The student version was written in the first person (for example, "I bully others because I am a victim of abuse myself"), and the teacher version described the same behavior in the third person. A further section presented the intervention measures that formed the basis of the action plan. Responses were given on a four-point Likert scale interpreted as follows: 3.26–

4.00, Strongly Agree; 2.51–3.25, Agree; 1.76–2.50, Disagree; and 1.00–1.75, Strongly Disagree. The same intervals were used to rate the action plan as Very Suitable, Suitable, Less Suitable, or Not Suitable, with corresponding labels for feasibility and acceptability. The draft instrument was submitted to a Graduate School professor for critique, and the suggestions were incorporated before the final version was approved for administration.

Data Gathering and Analysis

The researcher obtained the list of offenses committed by students from the guidance office and administered the questionnaires to the identified respondents at the start of the second semester, and retrieved them in November 2018. Frequency and percentage were used for the respondents' profile and the common offenses. The weighted mean was used to measure the extent of each contributing factor and the ratings of the action plan. The t-test for independent samples was used to compare the students' and teachers' assessments for each factor at the 0.05 level of significance, using the item means of each factor as the unit of analysis. Combined means were computed as the simple average of the students' and teachers' means, so each group carried equal weight regardless of its size.

Ethical Considerations

Formal permission was secured from the school head before data collection. Written informed consent was obtained from the parents or guardians of respondents under 18 years of age, and the students gave their assent. Because most student respondents were minors with records of misconduct, writing one's name on the questionnaire was optional, and guidance office data were reported only in aggregate form. Participation was voluntary, and the results were used only for academic purposes and for improving the school's programs.

RESULTS

Common Offenses Committed by the Students

The guidance office recorded 376 cases of 18 kinds of offenses in school year 2017–2018 (Figure 1). Fighting was the most frequent offense (36 cases), followed by bullying (34), truancy (33), disrespect to teachers and officials (31), gambling (28), and physical aggression (27). Offenses involving aggression toward others (fighting, bullying, physical aggression, riot, and cyber bullying) together accounted for 140 cases, or 37.2% of the total. The least frequent were indecent acts (6), extortion (5), and possession of a deadly weapon (5).

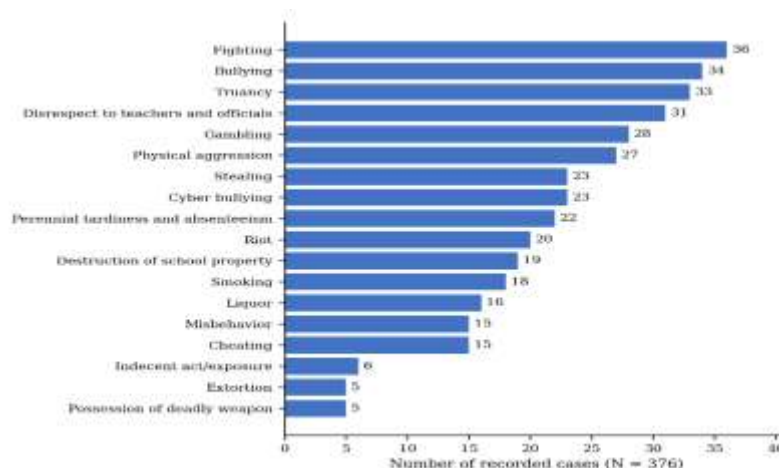


Figure 1. Common offenses committed by the students as documented by the guidance office, SY 2017–2018

Contributing Factors to the Commission of Offenses

Table 2 summarizes the assessment of the five contributing factors. Both groups rated family dysfunction the highest (students, $M = 2.91$; teachers, $M = 3.00$; combined $M = 2.96$, Agree). Students rated all five factors in the Agree range, with social pressure the lowest ($M = 2.59$). Teachers agreed with family dysfunction, social pressure, and insufficient literacy but disagreed with identity and inequity ($M = 2.25$), their lowest, and with economic condition ($M = 2.35$).

Table 2. *Comparative Assessment of the Contributing Factors to the Commission of Offenses*

Contributing factor	Students' mean	Interpretation	Teachers' mean	Interpretation	Combined mean
Family dysfunction	2.91	Agree	3.00	Agree	2.96
Social pressure	2.59	Agree	2.61	Agree	2.60
Identity and inequity	2.65	Agree	2.25	Disagree	2.45
Insufficient literacy	2.64	Agree	2.76	Agree	2.70
Economic condition	2.63	Agree	2.35	Disagree	2.49

Note. Scale: 3.26–4.00 Strongly Agree; 2.51–3.25 Agree; 1.76–2.50 Disagree; 1.00–1.75 Strongly Disagree.

Table 3 shows the item that obtained the highest combined mean within each factor. Under family dysfunction, the strongest item was that students drink alcohol to dismiss hurtful experiences at home (combined $M = 3.31$); teachers rated this item 3.62 (Strongly Agree), the highest teacher rating in the survey. Students themselves gave their highest family rating to using profane language because of verbal abuse at home ($M = 3.14$). Under insufficient literacy, cheating on exams and quizzes due to lack of knowledge also reached a combined mean of 3.31, with teachers again strongly agreeing ($M = 3.52$).

Table 3. *Highest-Rated Item Within Each Contributing Factor*

Factor and item	Students' mean	Teachers' mean	Combined mean
Family dysfunction: Students drink alcohol to dismiss hurtful experiences at home	2.99	3.62	3.31
Social pressure: Students get involved in riots and fist-fights because of the influence of their peers	2.68	3.05	2.87
Identity and inequity: Students destroy school property because they are labeled as delinquent	2.63	2.86	2.75
Insufficient literacy: Students cheat during exams and quizzes due to lack of knowledge	3.10	3.52	3.31
Economic condition: Students tend to be absent due to financial difficulty	2.99	3.24	3.12

At the item level, the two groups differed most sharply on the statement that students argue or talk back to teachers because they do not feel respected: students agreed ($M = 3.03$), while teachers strongly disagreed ($M = 1.40$). Teachers also disagreed that students vandalize school property to win friends' approval ($M = 2.05$) and that students stay absent because they feel they do not matter ($M = 2.07$), items with which students agreed ($M = 2.70$ and 2.84). Conversely, students disagreed that they steal to keep up with trends ($M = 2.23$) and that they gamble and trick classmates for financial gain ($M = 2.24$), while teachers agreed ($M = 2.83$ and 2.86).

Difference Between the Students' and Teachers' Assessments

Table 4 presents the results of the t-test for independent samples. In all five factors, the computed t value was lower than the tabular value at the 0.05 level of significance. The null hypotheses were therefore not rejected: there was no significant difference between the students' and teachers' assessments of any of the contributing factors.

Table 4. *Test of Difference Between the Students' and Teachers' Assessments*

Contributing factor	Computed t	Tabular t (0.05)	df	Decision	Interpretation
Family dysfunction	0.12	2.31	8	Do not reject Ho	Not significant
Social pressure	0.10	2.31	8	Do not reject Ho	Not significant
Identity and inequity	1.40	2.31	8	Do not reject Ho	Not significant
Insufficient literacy	0.37	2.45	6	Do not reject Ho	Not significant
Economic condition	1.50	2.45	6	Do not reject Ho	Not significant

Proposed Decorum and Intervention Action Plan

Based on the findings, the researcher formulated an action plan organized around the five contributing factors (Table 5). Each area names the target outcomes, the strategy, the persons or offices responsible, and a proposed budget, for a total of ₱31,000.

Table 5. *Summary of the Proposed Decorum and Intervention Action Plan*

Area	Main strategy	Persons / offices concerned	Proposed budget
Family dysfunction	Symposium on parent-child relationships with speakers from the guidance office and the City Social Welfare and Development office (CSWD)	Guidance office, CSWD, parents, teachers	₱8,000
Social pressure	Character-building seminar-workshop to boost students' morale, confidence, and self-esteem	Guidance office, Supreme Student Government, students	₱7,000
Identity and inequity	Training for teachers on handling adolescent students	School head, teachers, school administration	₱5,000
Insufficient literacy	Orientation seminar on school policies before the school year; clear guidelines on remediation	School administration, school head, teachers, students	₱4,000
Economic condition	Stronger tie-up with the local government unit for financial aid; policies keeping school projects and canteen prices affordable	LGU, school administration, teachers, parents, students	₱7,000
Total			₱31,000

Suitability, Feasibility, and Acceptability of the Action Plan

Both groups rated all items of the action plan within the Suitable, Feasible, and Acceptable ranges (Table 6). Under suitability, the highest-rated item was that the plan falls in line with the vision and mission of DepEd (M = 3.30), and the lowest was that it will address the key problems (M = 2.78). Under feasibility, the highest was that the chosen partners or offices will be effective in making the plan a success (M = 3.06), and the lowest was that the plan is within the school's financial capability (M = 2.71). Under acceptability,

the highest was that the desired result is beneficial to all parties concerned ($M = 3.15$), and the lowest was that the level of risk is acceptable ($M = 2.54$).

Table 6. *Evaluation of the Proposed Action Plan*

Criterion	Students' mean	Teachers' mean	Overall mean	Interpretation
Suitability	2.88	3.01	2.95	Suitable
Feasibility	2.86	2.96	2.92	Feasible
Acceptability	2.94	2.77	2.86	Acceptable

Note. The suitability means are those reported in the original study; the feasibility and acceptability means were computed from the five item means reported for each criterion.

Teachers rated the plan's suitability and feasibility higher than students did, but its acceptability lower. This difference was driven mainly by the item on risk, which teachers rated 2.21 compared with the students' 2.87.

DISCUSSION

The offense profile shows that most recorded misconduct at San Juan National High School involves aggression toward others and disengagement from school. Fighting, bullying, physical aggression, riot, and cyber bullying make up more than a third of all cases, while truancy, tardiness and absenteeism, and disrespect to teachers form another large group. This pattern matches the concerns raised by Manalo (2016) and the Miriam College Faculty Research Journal (2001), which identified absenteeism, tardiness, and classroom disturbance as the most frequent discipline problems in Philippine schools.

The most important finding is that both students and teachers identified family dysfunction as the leading contributor to student offending. This supports Hirschi's (1969) social control theory, in which attachment to parents is the first and most basic social bond. The two items with the highest ratings in this factor, drinking alcohol to escape hurtful experiences at home and using profane language because of verbal abuse at home, suggest that much of the misconduct seen in school is a response to problems that begin at home. The finding also agrees with Erdwin and Kornhauser (2002), who linked youth aggressiveness to turmoil at home, and with Araneta-de Leon (2002), who found that children in conflict with the law had often left disharmonious families and were drawn into crime and drugs once on the streets. It implies that school discipline alone cannot resolve the problem and that parents must be part of any intervention.

Insufficient literacy was the second-highest factor overall, and teachers strongly agreed that students cheat because of a lack of knowledge. Henry and Huizinga (2007) likewise found that school performance is one of the strongest predictors of truancy and that good academic performance weakens the influence of delinquent peers. Remediation and academic support may therefore serve as delinquency prevention as much as instruction.

The t-test showed no significant difference between the two groups in any factor, which suggests that students and teachers broadly share the same view of why students misbehave. Given the few degrees of freedom, however, this result indicates only that no difference was detected, not that the two groups fully agree. This shared view is useful, since an intervention that both groups recognize is more likely to be accepted. The item-level results, however, reveal a meaningful gap on one issue. Students agreed that they talk back to teachers because they do not feel respected, while teachers strongly disagreed. This echoes Sullivan's (2016) finding that many students do not feel cared for at school and that negative teacher-student relationships feed further misbehavior, as well as Black's (2016) warning that punitive school environments make misbehavior more likely. The teachers' disagreement with the identity and inequity factor as a whole suggests that they may not see their own practices as a cause. The planned teacher training on handling adolescents therefore addresses a real blind spot.

Students and teachers also disagreed about the economic motives for misconduct. Students rejected the idea that they steal to keep up with trends or gamble for financial gain, while teachers agreed with both. Both groups, however, agreed that financial difficulty causes absences, which is consistent with Magno's (2012) finding that financial hardship leads students to work rather than study. Given that 87% of the school's students come from low-income families, measures such as fare assistance from the local government and affordable canteen prices and school projects address a genuine need.

The action plan was judged suitable, feasible, and acceptable, with its alignment with DepEd's vision and mission receiving the highest suitability rating. This is consistent with DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 and the restorative approach of Republic Act No. 9344, both of which favor positive discipline and prevention over punishment. The lower ratings for financial capability and level of risk, especially from teachers, indicate that implementation will depend on securing funds and on preparing teachers adequately. The relatively modest total budget of ₱31,000 and the involvement of the local government and the CSWD should help address these concerns.

Limitations

The study was conducted in a single public high school, so its findings may not apply to private schools or to schools outside highly urbanized areas. The respondents were chosen purposively from students with records of misconduct, which means the results describe this group rather than the general student population. The data relied on self-report, which may be affected by students' reluctance to admit the causes of their own behavior. The t-test compared the item means of each factor, which yields few degrees of freedom and limits statistical power. Finally, the action plan was evaluated before implementation, so its actual effect on the number of offenses remains to be measured. The data were also collected in school year 2018–2019. Republic Act No. 9344, as amended, and DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 remain in force, but patterns of student misconduct may have shifted since then, particularly after the extended school closures of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the instrument's content validity rested on review by a single expert.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Adolescence is a period of great difficulty and confusion, and this transition is made harder by the people students encounter, the environment they live in, their sociology-economic status, and the rules that govern them. Among the contributing factors studied, family dysfunction was perceived by both groups as the strongest contributor to student offending. Students and teachers differ on the least influential factor, which is social pressure for students and identity and inequity for teachers. Otherwise, the two groups share the same perception of the causes of student misconduct. The proposed action plan is suitable, feasible, and acceptable to both groups, and the responses show a clear need for a proactive program to reduce students' propensity to commit offenses.

In light of these conclusions, the following are recommended:

1. The school should establish a preventive program that helps students with records of misconduct turn their lives around and raises parents' and teachers' awareness of the developmental phase these students are going through.
2. The school should offer parenting classes, and teachers should conduct home visits, help families solve problems, and encourage parents to take part in school activities and in their children's lives.
3. The administration of San Juan National High School should implement the proposed action plan to reduce, if not eliminate, cases of indiscipline, misconduct, and delinquency.
4. The school should solicit grants from local government units, non-government organizations, and other groups to ease students' financial burdens and fund the action plan.
5. The existing student handbook should be re calibrated to suit present-day student conduct and behavior.

6. The culture of positiveness in school should give way to a more lenient, restorative approach that supports moral recovery.
7. Future researchers may replicate the study in other schools to confirm or refute its findings.

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