

Information Communication Technology (ICT)-Facilitated Deviance: A Study among the School Children in Chennai City

Gia Coombes Antoniette^{#1}, Agathumariyan Michael^{*2}, Rengasamy Stalin^{*3}, Dr. M. Srinivasan^{*4}

^{1,2,3}Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Criminology, University of Madras, Chennai, India

freemangia@gmail.com

⁴Associate Professor and Head, Department of Criminology, University of Madras, Chennai – 600 005, India

isvconf2007@gmail.com

Abstract— Deviance is defined as any behaviour, belief or condition that violates social norms in society or group (Kendall 2006). However, the term deviance is relative and the nature of deviant activities is also relative which varies across time and space. This study investigates the current trends in deviant behaviour among a sample of high school and higher secondary school students in Chennai city. The study's process involved a self-administered five-point Likert scale questionnaire that was given to 200 high school and higher secondary school students representing different categories of schools in the city. The study has attempted to not only find out the prevalence of traditional forms of deviant behaviour such as truancy, status offences, etc. but to also study more specific forms of deviant behaviour indulged in using modern day technology, particularly using cyberspace as the medium. The preliminary findings of the study show that a considerable percentage of the respondents were found to have indulged in various forms of deviant behaviour including Internet and web-oriented deviance.

Keywords— *Children, Deviant behaviour, Information communication technology*

anti-social or all. Cyberspace and mobile media poses new opportunities for deviance, such as the development of virusware, cyber terrorism, computer hacking, online harassment, and certain self-harm behaviors (Giles, 2006; Joinson, 2005).

Today, young people have the accessibility to a wide range of information and the platform to discuss and share this information. Often, this easy availability and accessibility of information steer children to indulge in unacceptable behaviour and deviant activities such as viewing pornography, sexting, intimidation/harassment using mobile phones and other delinquent activities. The misuse of ICT by children is a growing problem that is likely to persist and perpetuate upwards. The term deviance is not constant, changing over time and allowing no definitive estimates on the frequency and the extent of delinquent behaviour. This study attempts to find out the prevalence of various forms of deviant behaviour among school children and to discover the newer forms of deviance in school children misusing information communication technology

Deviant behavior refers to an individual's behaviour, belief or condition that departs from and violates social conventional norms that include destroying public properties, telling lies, and cheating in examinations (Johnson & Kaplan, 1991; McCord et al., 1994; Kendall 2006).

There is growing evidence to show that age and gender affects different activities and causes different behavioural associations and are likely factors influencing ICT misuse. By virtue of the developmental stage, children in the age group of 13–18 years are more susceptible to deviant and anti-social behaviour. The gender differential plays a vital role, in that, boys are more likely to be influenced by their associative relationships making them more susceptible to deviant behaviour; whereas girls form cohesive relationships and the influence of these relationships tend to be more positive than negative. The control and social bonding theories connote that deviant behaviour increases because of weakened or broken ties in the family and school (Alexander & Lloyd 2003). The *school environment* has an impact on delinquent behaviour of children while in and out of school. Children with unsuccessful experiences

1. Introduction

Information communication technology and the Internet have bridged the communication gap that existed among people from different geographies, efficiently connecting individuals who would have been previously cut-off from each other. Information communication technology (ICT) has revolutionized the way in which information is accessed and facilitates individuals with similar ideals to connect with each other and reinstitute behaviours considered unacceptable. With this advancement, commonly known deviant behaviour such as truancy, fist fighting, stealing, etc., has now evolved into a more anonymous, silent perpetuation of delinquent behaviour. There is a growing sense that the Internet presents some unique opportunities for deviant behavior (Rogers, Smoak, & Liu, 2006, p. 246). Deviant behaviour in cyberspace refers to a range of activities, considered criminal, amoral,

in school are more likely to be involved in delinquent behaviour such as dropping out of school (Voelkel, et al., 1999) and those who have high academic achievement are less likely to engage in deviant behaviour (Elliot and Voss, 1974; Henggeler, 1989). Social learning theory further asserts that the child can learn from his or her *friends' deviant behaviour* (Akers, 1998) through association (Garnier & Stein, 2002) and cohesiveness with friends in school and outside home. This cohesive association leads to learning from friends and is likely to result in the child's own deviant behaviour (Dishion, McCord, and Poulin, 1999). Friends' deviant behaviour refers to that being socially unacceptable, typically including destroying public properties, having a fight with others, and defying parents and teachers. Such associations with deviant friends can provoke the child's substance abuse (Dishion, Capaldi, & Yoerger, 1999), delinquency (Regnerus, 2002), and other anti-social attitudes and behaviours (Maxwell, 2001). Other studies have found that participation in *extra-curricular activities* such as sports improves academic performance and helps to prevent absenteeism and dropping out of school (Coleman, 1961; Hanson and Kraus, 1998).

Despite extensive literature on child deviance and the relative influencing factors, research is conspicuously failing to keep abreast with the advancement of cyberdeviancy (or the misuse/abuse of information communication technology). The need to explore the current trends and forms of deviant behaviour (of school children) specifically using modern day technology is imminent. This study proposes to graze the surface of this fairly limited area of research.

2. Statement of the problem

The study aims to examine the prevalence of the various forms of deviant behaviour in school children and to find out the other forms of deviance indulged in using information communication technology.

3. Objectives

1. To study the socio-demographic factors and economic status of school children
2. To study the prevalence of the existing forms (traditional) of deviant behaviour in school children
3. To study the various forms of deviant behaviour that is facilitated by information communication technology

4. Scope

The study was carried out among school children in the age group of 13–18 years in south Chennai. The study is limited to such influencers (of deviant behaviour in

children) as age, gender, family income and nativity. The study has attempted to ascertain the prevalence of various forms of deviant behaviour such as truancy, status offences, etc. and to also study the more specific forms of deviant behaviour indulged in using information communication technology.

5. Methodology

5.1 Participants

Using purposive sampling, 151 school students aged between 12–19, studying in classes 9–12, from the high school and higher secondary school levels, representing three school types in Chennai city were drawn as the respondents of the study. The five schools that participated in the study were relatively homogenous in size, students per class, characteristics of children and student level performance. The questionnaire was administered to the students with the prior permission of the school management and students' participation was voluntary.

5.2 Instrument

The study's process involved a structured, self-explanatory, self-administered questionnaire that comprised two parts with a total of 55 questions. Part I has 9 items relating to the socio-demographic and economic characteristics of the students, and Part II has 46 items relating to the students' social behaviour and deviant activities. The composite includes: students skipping class, playing truant, cheating in examinations, stealing from classmates, fighting with classmates/schoolmates, defying parents and teachers, taking money from parents without their knowledge, destroying public property, reading pornographic materials, indulging in vandalism at school, indulging in delinquent/criminal acts and participating in risky behaviour such as drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, ganja /marijuana, chewing pan/tobacco and joining in gang fights.

5.3 Scoring

Student deviance was measured using a five-point Likert scale. Each student indicated the frequency of each behavior using a five-point scale, generating scores of 0 for never, 1 for rarely, 2 for sometimes, 3 for often and 4 for very often. High total of scores show more deviant behavior.

6. Results & Discussion

6.1 Socio-demographic and economic factors

- The majority of the students who participated in the study were in the age groups of 14–18, with 41% in the age group of 14–16 and 44% of the ages 16–18.

- The study group was largely dominated by boys (94%) and only 6% girls. Over half the respondent group are studying in class 12 (56%) with others in classes 11 (10%), 10 (19%) and 9 (15%).
- Among the students, 68% lived with their parents in nuclear families and 32% lived in extended or joint families.
- 38% of students reported that the family monthly income was below Rs.10,000. A close to equal percentage of respondents reported that their family monthly income ranged between 10-20,000 and 30-40,000.
- Majority of students were from the city (urban dwellers).
- The occupation of parents ranged from daily wage workers to self-employed, Government, and business employees, with a majority of the fathers being daily wage earners (42%) and mothers being mostly unemployed (64%).
- 40% of the study group represented Chennai schools (Corporation schools) and an equal percentage of students represented the Government-run and Government-aided schools.
- Majority of the students reported good performance in school, scoring average and above average marks. 24% of students reported scoring an average of over 75 marks in their exams followed by 23% who scored an average of 45–55 marks.

6.2 Deviant behaviour

The composite was an average of 37 items: 10 items measured status offences that included playing truancy, driving a two/four-wheeler without license and copying in examinations; 8 items specifically measured deviance facilitated by information communication technology; 4 items measured students committing crimes against property; 7 items measured students indulging in crimes against individual and 8 items measured the student's substance abuse.

Analysis of the data collected from the self-administered questionnaires revealed the following:

1. 54% of the student's played truant and cut class without permission from their teachers/parents; 57% of the student's expressed defiance towards their teachers/principals by copying in examinations, being disobedient, using offensive language on the school premises and giving proxy attendance on behalf of their classmates; an alarming 88% of the students self-reported being defiant towards traffic rules, indulging in under-age riding (and without license).
2. Misuse of ICT: 52% of the students self-reported frequently wasting their study time by being preoccupied with their mobile phones and the Internet - talking to their friends into the late hours

and browsing social networking sites; 48% of the students disclosed frequently browsing the Internet to watch violent movies and to view lewd pictures/video clippings of celebrities and cine stars; 22% divulged that they often logged into other people's accounts and read their emails/messages without their knowledge. 37% acknowledged that they sent and received obscene SMS/MMS forwards of messages/pictures/videos from friends that they could not have cannot disclosed to their parents or elders. Family monthly income and type of family of the respondents did not significantly influence the misuse of ICT, specifically in terms of using the bank account details (ATM card, Credit card, Net banking etc.) of parent's/relatives' to shop online or offline without their permission as reported by only 8% of the respondents.

Children are indifferent to their actions and the inevitable outcome of the actions. Offences committed against property and against people is not necessarily viewed by children as criminal behaviour as brought to light by the self-reported data in this study.

3. 34% of the students self-reported defacing school property by writing and drawing objectionable things about their classmates/schoolmates on the school boards, furniture and school bathroom walls; and 27% revealed that they had knowingly taken away and/or intentionally damaged school property – both acts punishable under law under sections 499 IPC (defamation) and 425 IPC (damage to public property/vandalism).
4. A disconcerting 91% of the students admitted to teasing and/or ragging their classmates/schoolmates for enjoyment and fun. 73% of the students revealed that they habitually got into physical fights and scuffles with their classmates and schoolmates; with 27% of the students disclosing that they carried weapons such as knife, blade, wire, cycle chain, etc. to school. A shocking 62% of the students revealed that they indulged in gang fights and frequently joined their friends to intimidate and harass people. 30% of the students reported that they occasionally evaded the law and did not buy a ticket when using public transport – all acts are punishable under law.
5. The data collated from the study revealed and reinforces the fact that children of the 'influential' age group of 13-18 years indulge in substance abuse. Though the data does not suggest significant substance abuse, the influence of friends' deviant behaviour has been found to be pivotal in drawing peers to smoke, drink alcohol, chew pan or tobacco and to experiment with more serious drugs like ganja and marijuana. 40% revealed that they had

smoked or were asked to join their friends when they were smoking. 48% revealed that they indulged in under-age drinking and had consumed alcohol with their friends. 50% of the students revealed that they were sometimes in the habit of chewing pan or tobacco and intermittently got involved with their friends to indulge in this behaviour. With the more serious drug abuse, 27% revealed that they smoked ganja/marijuana, often doing so with their friends.

From this study, deviant behaviour taken in totality was found to exist among school children with a significant 40% of the students reporting some form of deviant behaviour. 33% of the deviant behaviour was found to be influenced by the misuse of information communication technology.

7. Conclusion

It is evident that children display deviant behaviour that it may often border on criminality. The influence of new communication technology and mass media make deviant behaviour inevitable. With our research we have just scratched the surface and brought to light the existence of cyber deviancy that children indulge in. Given the time limitations and the scope of this study, an in-depth study is further required to establish the presence and the

continued upward trend of deviance in children specifically related to the use of information communication technology. The challenges and gaps identified in previous studies on deviance in children specifically newer trends and web-oriented deviance suggest several possible directions for future research within this topic area.

References

- [1] Akers, R. L. (1998). *Social learning and social structure: A general theory of crime and deviance*. Northeastern University Press: Boston
- [2] Alexander, T. V., and Lloyd, E. P. (2003). "The Importance of Family and School Domains in Adolescent Deviance: African American and Caucasian Youth", *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 32:115-128.
- [3] Cheung, Chau-kiu, and Jerf Wai-keung Yeung. (2010). "Gender Differential in Deviant Friends' Influence on Children's Academic Self-esteem", *Children & Youth Services Review* 32:1750-1757.
- [4] Coleman, J. S. (1961). *The adolescent society: the social life of the teenager and its impact on education*. Free Press of Glencoe. Retrieved from http://books.google.co.in/books?id=6_ghAAAA MAAJ
- [5] Dishion, J. T., McCord, J., and Poulin, F. (1999) "When Intervention Harm:Peer Group and Problem Behavior", *American psychologist*" 54(9), 755-767.
- [6] Dishion, T. J., Capaldi, D., Spracklen, K. M., & Li, F. (1995). "Peer ecology of male adolescent drug use", *Development and Psychopathology*, 7, 803-824.
- [7] Elliott, D.S., and H. Voss (1974). *Delinquency and Dropout*, Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath