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**A QUANTITATIVE UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER DIFFERENTIATED  
DELINQUENT TRENDS AMONG SCHOOL GOING ADOLESCENTS IN  
CHATSWORTH, DURBAN****Nirmala Gopal<sup>1</sup> & Bonita Marimuthu<sup>2</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT**

*According to the World Health Organisation countries in transition have witnessed a dramatic rise in delinquency rates. Given that juvenile offending is a pervasive social problem and many theories about its aetiology have been advanced it is not unusual for researchers to understand delinquent behaviour over periods of time. Against this backdrop this study seeks to understand gendered patterns of offending or delinquent behaviour among seven hundred and fifty (750) school going adolescents in a historically Indian township in Chatsworth, KwaZulu-Natal. Using a non-probability, random, sampling method respondents were chosen from two secondary schools in Chatsworth. Results from the study showed significant correlations between gender (male and female) and modes of punishment; norm violations; regulation violations; and malicious damage to property. For instance gender and norm violations results indicated that sleeping out of home without parental permission is not gendered. Both males and females slept out of home without parental permission; gender and regulation violations such as driving a motor vehicle without a driver's licence indicated that respondents violate regulations regardless of gender and gender and regulation violations such as entering a bar or bottle store being under the prescribed age of 18 years old indicates that respondents irrespective of gender enter a bar or bottle store.*

**Keywords:** *Delinquency in schools, adolescent, gender.*

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**INTRODUCTION**

Explanations of juvenile delinquency have been the interest of criminologists throughout history. Criminologists have devoted their attention to basic questions about the nature of youth crime: for example who commits delinquent acts? How much delinquency occurs each year? Is the rate of delinquent activity increasing or decreasing? How should delinquency be defined? (Siegel and Senna 1988: 9). Jimoh (1984) opined that adolescent is a period of problems caused by the numerous adjustments which the adolescent is being called upon to make as a result of changes taking place in him. Moffitt, Caspi, Rutter and Silva (2001) addressed several general explanations for the 'gender gap' in crime, in particular the 'differential exposure hypothesis' and the 'vulnerability hypothesis'. The differential exposure hypothesis posits that the causes of delinquency are the same for males and females but that males are more exposed than females to risk factors. According to the vulnerability hypothesis, the aetiology of delinquency may differ for males and females. Males may be more vulnerable than females to certain risk factors such as peer group association, lack of parental supervision ; socioeconomic status (Moffitt et al., 2001).

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## **GENDER AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY**

Criminal behaviour, delinquency, or deviant behaviour has been described in literature as male behaviour. This however is far from the truth. Juvenile delinquency is as much a male marvel as it is a female one. Relative to males, female involvement in crime or delinquency is different in nature. Past and present trends show females to be most involved in prostitution and sex-related public order offences such as vagrancy, disorderly conduct, and for juveniles runaways; popular forms of substance abuse, petty thefts and hustles and volumes of arrests for larceny Shelley (1995). Females are far less likely to be involved in serious offences and the monetary value of female thefts, property damage, drugs, and injuries are typically smaller than that for similar offences committed by males. Females are less likely to be solo perpetrators or to be part of a small non-permanent crime groups. Perhaps the most significant gender difference is the overwhelming dominance of males in more organised and highly lucrative crimes, whether based in the wider world or the "upper world."

Galligan (1982) suggests that "male and female differ significantly in their moral development and that female's moral choices are more likely to constrain them from criminal behaviour or delinquency that could be injurious to others." Females are more concerned than males about the needs of others, separation from loved ones, and tendency not to hurt others. Messerschmidt (1986) maintains that: "In contrast to females, males who are conditioned toward status-seeking, yet marginalized from the world of work, are more likely to develop a perception of the world as consisting of givers and takers, with superior status accorded to the takers." Because of their "gentle socialization" by conventional adults rather than delinquent peers, females also are unlikely to perceive delinquency as being "fun," "exciting," or "status enhancing." Giordano; Cernkovich and Pugh, (1986) wrote that "among males, peer groups are a much stronger source of delinquent influence, particularly in the case of male adolescents with weak social bonds or low stakes in conformity."

## **THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS ON GENDER DIFFERENCES IN JUVENILE DELINQUENCY**

In addition to variables central to feminist theory explanations, variables relevant to traditional criminological theories have also been used to explore gender differences in delinquency. In particular, measures derived from strain theory, social bond theory, and differential association/social learning theory has all been utilised. In the next sections, the empirical status of these investigations will be discussed

### **Strain Theory**

The Strain theory states that social structures within society may pressure citizens to commit crime. Both classic strain theory and general strain theory have been used to explain gender differences in delinquent and criminal activity. Although some of this research has shown that there are differences in the effects of strain across gender, others have found that strain is not important for either males or females. One study has found that strain is differentially related to delinquency across gender.

Simons, Miller, and Aigner's (1980) study revealed that anomie was more highly correlated with males' delinquency. Other research has failed to find a significant relationship between strain and male and female deviance (Smith & Paternoster, 1987).

In addition to these tests of traditional strain theory, other research has explored the utility of general strain theory across gender, with most research finding a gendered effect (Agnew & Brezina, 1997; for exception, see Hoffman & Su, 1997). Thus, Mazerolle (1998) used the National Youth Survey to examine different sources of strain and their effects on male and female delinquency. For females, having noxious relationships with adults was related to delinquent activity.

**Social Bond Theory**

The Social Bond theory was created by Travis Hirschi in 1969 and its focus is on peers and peer groups of individuals. Tests of social bond theory have explored whether attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief operate in the same manner to explain offending across gender. Although some of this work has revealed little gender specificity (Paternoster, Brame, Mazerolle & Piquero, 1998; Smith & Paternoster, 1987), other research indicates that the elements of the social bond may differentially influence male and female delinquency (Alarid, Burton & Cullen, 2000; Covington, 1985; Krohn & Massey, 1980). For example, in Krohn and Massey's (1980) study of adolescents in grades 7 through 12, parental and peer attachment and grade point average was found to be more strongly related to delinquent behaviour for males. By contrast, commitment appears to be a more important inhibitory influence on female delinquency. Other research has shown that commitment to education, as conceptualised by high grades (Agnew & Brezina, 1997) and having educational difficulties (Simourd & Andrews, 1994) is related to both male and female delinquency.

**Differential Association and Social Learning Theory**

Central to differential association and social learning theories is the idea that learning criminal definitions can lead to involvement in delinquency. For youth, this learning typically occurs in peer groups. It is possible that the peer group may be especially important for either males or females in terms of its influence on offending behaviour. Generally, research has provided support for the assertion that learning may have differential effects across gender. One group of studies has tested the effects of multiple theories on delinquency across gender. The results from these tests show that differential association variables are related for both male and female offending, with little difference in their predictive power across gender (Alarid et al., 2000; Simons et al, 1980; Simourd & Andrews, 1994; Smith & Paternoster, 1987). For example, Alarid et al, (2000) test of the generality of social control and differential association theories revealed that three differential association variables were significantly related to males' offending. For females, two differential association theory variables were significant. However, the effects of having criminal friends and others' definition toward crime were similar for both males and females.

**METHODOLOGY****Participants**

The participants were 50.3 percent (N=377) males and 49.7 percent (N=373) females grade eight, nine, ten and eleven learners in two secondary schools in Chatsworth. These participants were recommended by the principals of the respective schools. Every learner from each of the grades was then invited to participate. The 750 learners who were present on the day the questionnaires were administered formed the final sample.

**Instrument**

Questionnaires' were used as an instrument for data-collection. The term "questionnaire" refers to a list of questions to be answered by a survey respondent. The term is restricted to a self-administered instrument as opposed to an interview. Questionnaires are thus forms containing questions to be answered by the respondent himself (Bailey, 1987: 469-470). The researcher used closed and fixed alternative questions which are usually quiet easy to convert to the numerical format required for the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) programme.

**Procedure**

Questionnaire administration followed an identical procedure in each school whereby the Life Orientation teacher handed out the questionnaires during one of the scheduled life Orientation class meetings. It was emphasised that participation was voluntary and that the responses would be confidential. In this regard, it was pointed out that the name of the learner was not requested in the biographical section of the questionnaire.

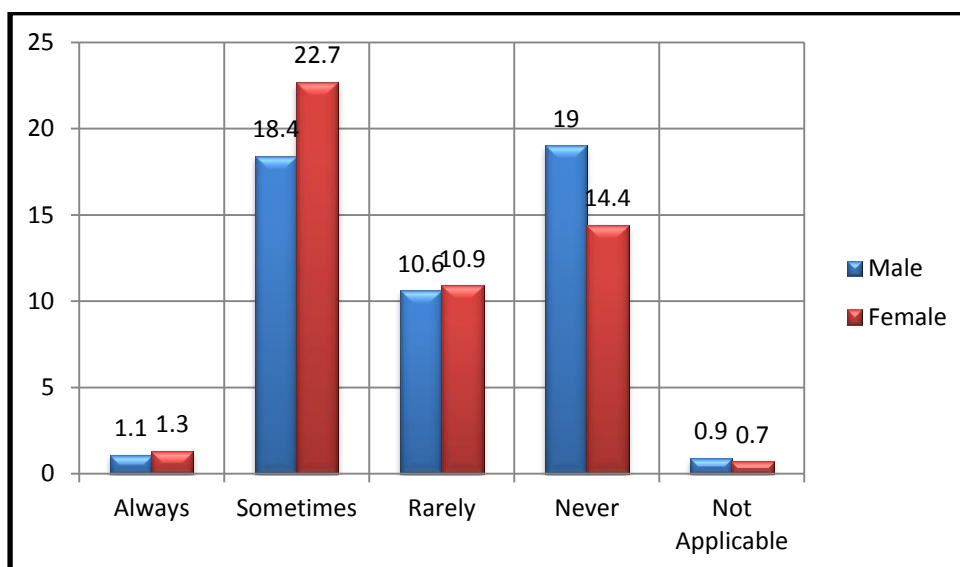
**RESULTS: PARTICIPATION IN DELINQUENCY****Discussions of gender and juvenile delinquency trends:**

For analysis of gender differences Pearson correlations coefficients ( $r$ ) for males ( $N=377$ ) and females ( $N=373$ ) are calculated for all delinquent items as per the research questionnaire administered (See Annexure A). For further clarification on male and female differences on juvenile delinquency bar graphs are presented with the aim of displaying the trends of juvenile delinquent acts among school going adolescents in Chatsworth. Bar graphs are presented for each delinquency item. Presented in tables are correlations for each delinquency item and in some instances the level of significance is  $p<0.05$  or  $p<0.01$

**Gender differences: Modes of discipline****Table 1: Correlation: Gender vs. Frequency of physical punishment**

	<b>Gender</b>
Pearson Correlation	-0.105**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.004
N	744
** $p<0.01$	

Table 1 above displays a small significant negative correlation between gender and frequency of punishment with a stick or any other object by parent or guardian ( $r = -0.105$ ,  $N= 744$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Thus one can conclude that parents/guardians continue using some form of physical punishment towards adolescents, irrespective of the adolescents' gender. However, the negative correlation coefficient ( $r= -0.105$ ) is indicative of an inverse relationship between gender and the frequency of punishment with a stick or any other object by parent or guardian. This means that there is a reduction in the frequency and use of physical punishment by parents/ guardians. One possible reason for this reduction in this mode of discipline could be that parents/guardians are using other forms of punishment, for example, parents withdraw privileges from adolescents' for example, TV viewing deprivations, the use of computers; video games or cell phones, parents restricts their adolescents' movement outside of the home, such as visiting friends or attending parties and parents/guardians may use counselling towards their children. Other reasons could be status of corporal punishment in South Africa, parents are more aware of the child protection instruments such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC).

**Figure 1: Cross tabulation by gender and frequency of physical punishment**

An examination shown in Figure 1 above reveals that more females (1.3%) than males (1.1%) are always punished physically, and (22.7%) females as compared to males (18.4%) who are sometimes punished with a stick or any other object. Aside from the likelihood and frequency of physical punishment experience, research evidence also illustrates gender differences in the types of punishment adolescents' receive. For example, girls are given lighter physical punishment such as smacking, pinching or increased household chores, while boys are hit with an object or beaten with a wooden stick and are more likely to receive severe corporal punishment (Millichamp, Martin & Langley, 2006).

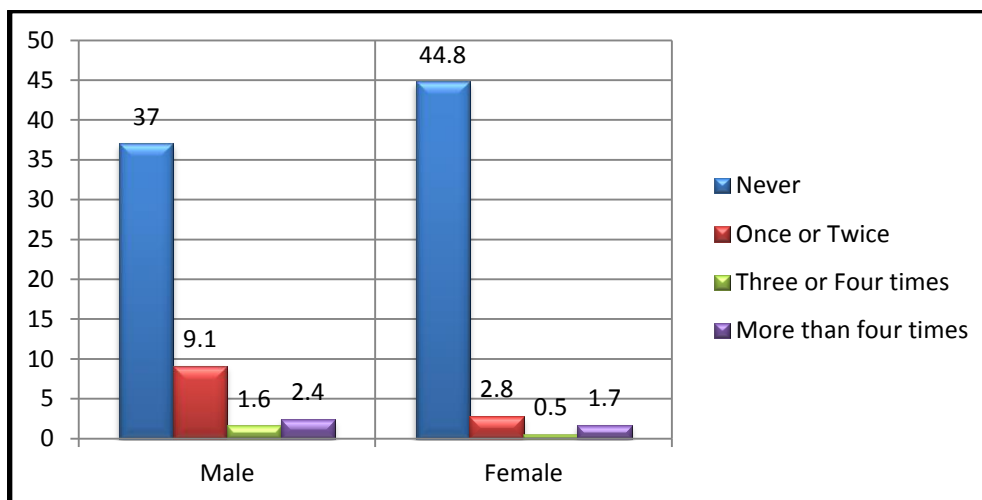
#### Gender differences: Norm violations

**Table 2: Correlation: Gender vs. frequency of sleeping-out of home**

	Gender
Pearson Correlation	-0.147**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001
N	748
** $p < 0.01$	

Table 2 above demonstrates a small ( $r = -0.147$ ,  $N=748$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) significant negative relationship exists between gender and the frequency of violating norms such as sleeping out of home without parental permission. The results also indicate that sleeping out of home without parental permission is not gendered. Both males and females slept out of home without parental permission. Nevertheless, the negative correlation coefficient ( $r = -0.147$ ) is indicative of an inverse relationship between gender and the frequency of sleeping out of home without parental permission. There is a reduction in the frequency of sleeping out of home without parental permission by respondents. This is possibly either because more adolescents are seeking parental permission or adolescents are accepting parents' decisions not to sleep out of home without their permission, instead of rebelling against them. Bennet, (1993) asserts that moral education, or the training of the individual towards the "good", involves a number of things, including rules, that is the dos and don'ts, and the development of good habits.

**Figure 2: Cross tabulation by gender and frequency of sleeping out of home**



According to Figure 2 above more males (9.1%) than females (2.8%) have slept out of home once or twice and more males (2.4%) than females (1.7%) have more than four times slept out of home without parental permission. Even though more males than females have slept out of home without parental permission, results suggest that females too have violated norms by sleeping out of home without parental permission which is usually common among males. Research has shown that females are either treated more strictly or equally to males, but females are not given much freedom by parents while males are given more freedom (Jung, 2013).

**Gender differences: Regulation violations**

**Table 3: Correlation: Gender vs. frequency of unlicensed driving**

	<b>Gender</b>
Pearson Correlation	-0.392**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001
N	741
** $p < 0.01$	

According to Table 3 above there is a moderate ( $r = -0.392$ ,  $N = 741$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) significant negative correlation between gender and the frequency of driving a motor vehicle without a driver’s licence. This indicates that respondents violate regulations such as driving a motor vehicle without a driver’s licence irrespective of gender. However, the negative correlation coefficient ( $r = -0.392$ ) is indicative of an inverse relationship between gender and the frequency of driving a motor vehicle without a driver’s licence. There is a reduction in the frequency of violating regulations such as driving a motor vehicle without a driver’s licence by participants. This could possibly be because parents are stricter with allowing unlicensed adolescents to drive or policing and roadblocks in these areas have become stricter and more vigilant. Parental practices impact both the emotional and social development of adolescents. Studies have shown that parental regulation through house rules, supervision and monitoring can have a positive impact on adolescents’ behaviour (Cohen, Farley, Taylor, Martin & Schuster, 2002; Huebner & Howell, 2003).

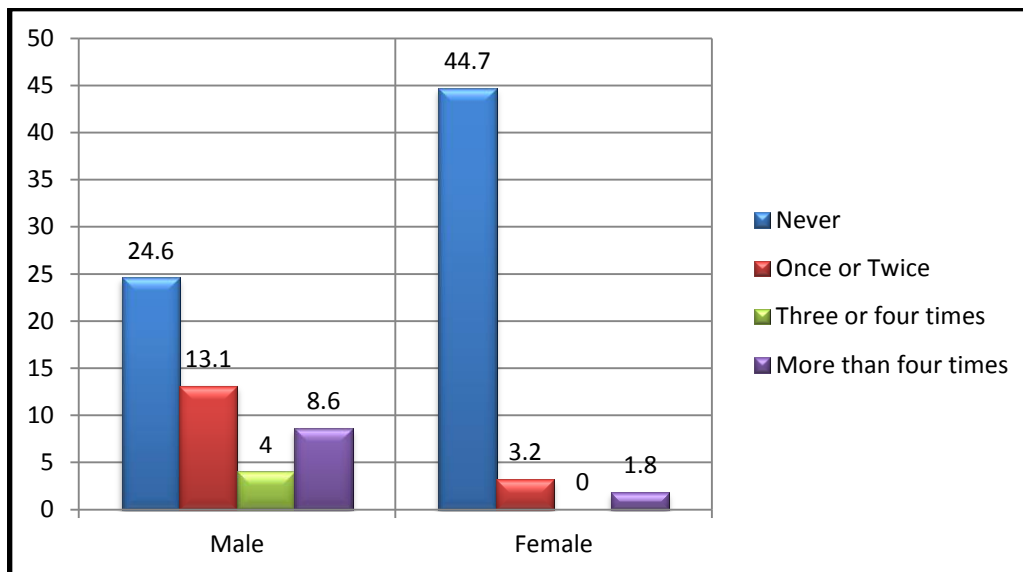
**Figure 3: Cross tabulation by gender and frequency of driving unlicensed**

Figure 3 above shows that more males (13.1%) than females (3.2%) have driven a motor vehicle once or twice without a driver's licence, and more males (8.6%) than females (1.8%) have more than four times driven a motor vehicle without a driver's license. Although more males than females have driven a motor vehicle without a driver's license the results suggest that females too are violating regulations by driving unlicensed which is generally common among males.

#### Gender differences: Regulation violations

**Table 4: Correlation: Gender vs. frequency of entering a bar/bottle store**

	Gender
Pearson Correlation	-0.264**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001
N	744
** $p < 0.01$	

In Table 4 above a small ( $r = -0.264$ ,  $N = 744$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) significant negative relationship exists between gender and the frequency of entering a bar or bottle store or any place where alcohol is being sold being under the prescribed age of 18 years old. This indicates that respondents irrespective of gender enter a bar or bottle store or any other place where alcohol is sold, under the prescribed age of 18 years old. However, the negative correlation coefficient ( $r = -0.264$ ) is indicative of an inverse relationship between gender and the frequency of entering a bar or bottle store. There is a reduction in the frequency of violating regulations by entering a bar or bottle store being under the age of 18 years old by participants. One possible reason is that entrance to these places is more controlled. Another reason is the possibility of adolescents accessing alcohol from taverns or shebeens where access is far less controlled. According to the National Research Council (NRC) and Institute of Medicine's (IOM) report (2004) on underage drinking included environmental interventions intended to reduce commercial and social availability of alcohol and/or reduce

driving while intoxicated. They use a variety of strategies, including server training and compliance checks in places that sell alcohol; deterring adults from purchasing alcohol for minors or providing alcohol to minors; restricting drinking in public places and preventing underage drinking parties; enforcing penalties for the use of false IDs, driving while intoxicated, and violating zero-tolerance laws; and raising public awareness of policies and sanctions (Bonnie & O’Connell, 2004).

**Figure 4: Cross tabulation by gender and frequency of entering a bar or bottle store.**

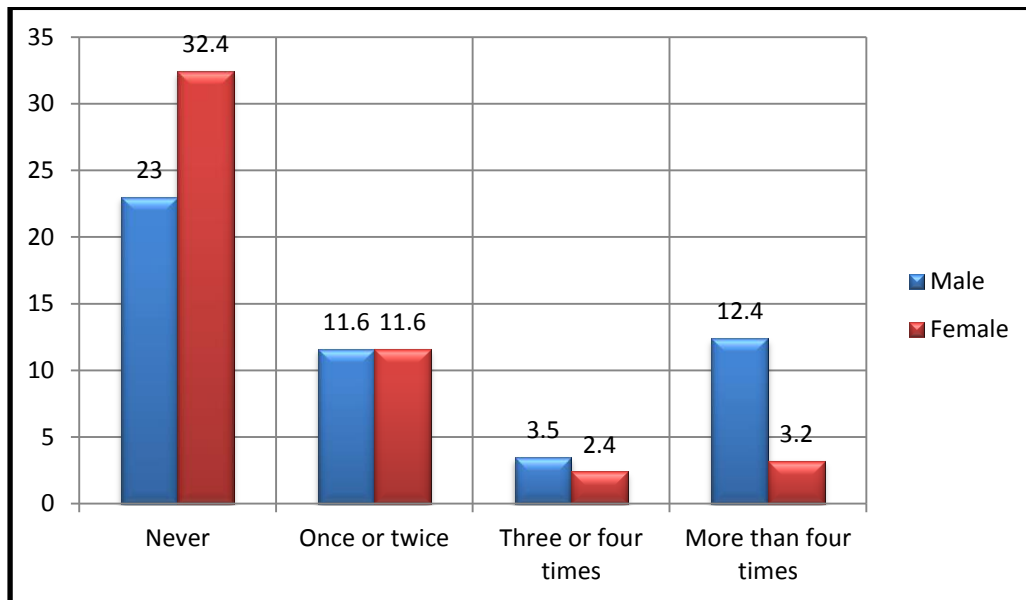


Figure 4 above reveals that both males and females (11.6%) have entered a bar or bottle store once or twice. More males than females have entered the bar or bottle store three or four times (3.5%) and more than four times (12.4%) being under the prescribed age of 18 years old. Overall although more males than females have entered bars or bottle stores the results suggest that females too are entering these places which historically were largely a male practice.

**Gender differences: Regulation violations**

**Table 5: Correlation: Gender vs. frequency of watching a film/video not reserved for children**

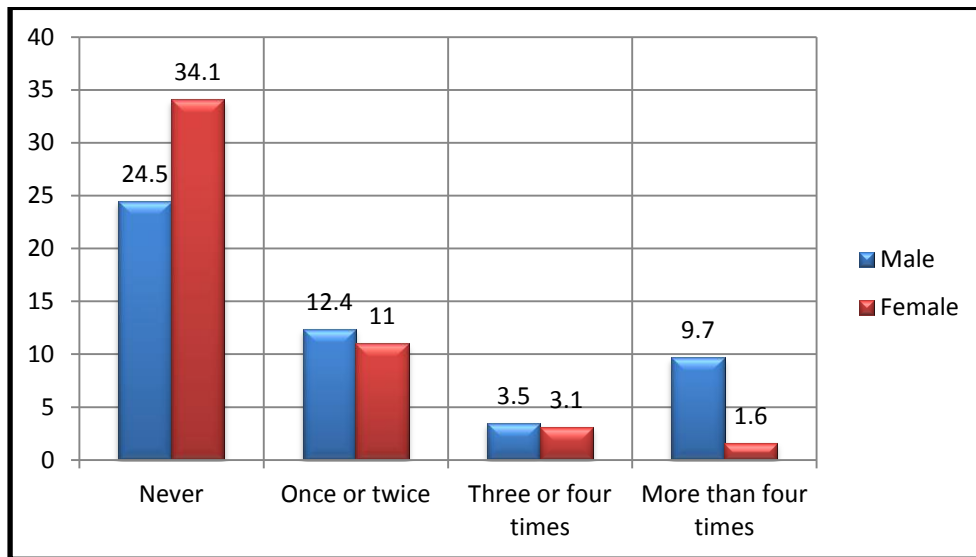
	<b>Gender</b>
Pearson Correlation	-0.261**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001
N	739
** $p < 0.01$	

There is a small ( $r = -0.261$ ,  $N = 739$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) significant negative correlation indicated in Table 5 above between gender and the frequency of watching a video or film reserved for “adults only” without permission from parents or guardians. This indicates that respondents violate regulations such as watching a video/film reserved for “adults only” without parental permission irrespective of gender. However, the negative correlation coefficient ( $r = -0.261$ ) is



indicative of an inverse relationship between gender and the frequency of watching a video or film reserved for adults only. There is a reduction in the frequency of violating regulations and by watching a video/film that is reserved for “adults only” without parental permission by respondents. One possibility for this reduction is the increase in access to social media entertainment such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

**Figure 5: Cross tabulation by gender and frequency of watching a video/film not reserved for children**



According to Figure 5 above more males (12.4%) than females (11%) have once or twice watched an “adults” only film without parental permission, followed by (3.5%) males and (3.1%) females has watched an “adults only” film three or four times. Lastly, again more males (9.7%) than (1.6%) females watched a film reserved for “adults only” more than four times. Even though more males than females have watched an “adults only” film without parental permission results suggest that females too violate regulations which are mostly common among male adolescents.

**Gender differences: Malicious damage to property**

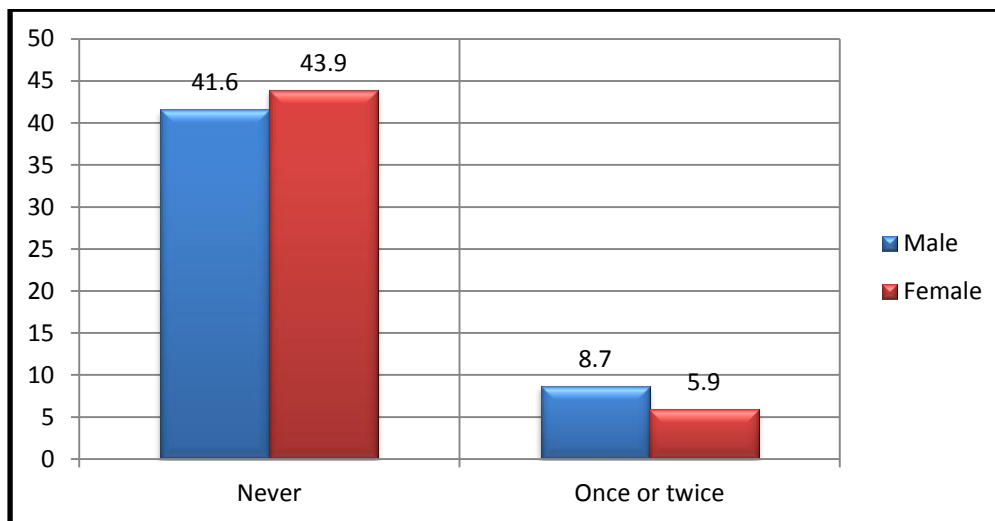
**Table 6: Correlation: Gender vs. frequency of vandalism**

	<b>Gender</b>
Pearson Correlation	-0.077*
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.034
N	750
*p<0.05	

There is a small (r= -0.077, N=750, p<0.05) significant negative correlation shown in Table 6 above between gender and the frequency of vandalising property belonging to the school. This indicates that respondents engage in malicious damage to property such as vandalising school property irrespective of gender. However, the small negative correlation coefficient (r= -0.077) is indicative of an inverse relationship between gender and the frequency of vandalising school property. This means that there is a reduction in the

frequency of engaging in malicious damage. One possible reason could be that teachers are monitoring students and learners are aware of the actions that will be taken if found guilty of vandalising school property. School vandalism is not only a school problem but also a community problem. Factors that are often beyond the control of the school, such as poverty, unemployment, disintegration of family life, inability or unwillingness of government to clamp down on vandals, and availability of drugs and alcohol, are considered the most important causes of vandalism (Douglas & McCart, 1999). The co-operation of education leaders, government, legislators and community leaders is essential in order to combat learner vandalism and to create a safe school environment that promotes teaching and learning. The socio-economic and social upliftment of the community is also essential. Educators must play a leading role in combating learner vandalism, because they not only have access to learners during their important formative years, but are also often the only conservative factor in the lives of the youth who grow up in homes/neighbourhoods in which crime reigns supreme. The modern community often demands that schools accept responsibility for education that belongs mainly in the parental home (Stout, 2002).

**Figure 6: Cross tabulation by gender and frequency of vandalism.**



In Figure 6 above, more males (8.7%) than females (5.9%) have once or twice vandalised property belonging to school. Although, with malicious damage to property probably because of its close association with aggression, boys excel, results suggest that females too are vandalising school property which is more often performed by males.

#### **DISCUSSIONS: SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS**

Presently the different rates of delinquent activity for males and females are one of the most thoroughly documented and most widely accepted in the field of juvenile criminology (Hindelang, 1979; Hood-Williams, 2001; Morash, 2005; Walklate, 1995) This view had historically been reinforced by traditional (Burt, 1925; Healy & Bronner, 1926 Thomas; 1923) and classical (Beccaria, 1738; Bentham, 1748; Lombroso 1835 cited in Walklate, 2007) researchers who were satisfied with official statistical data which supported the traditional perception that delinquency rates for males are higher than those of females. Newburn, (2002) contends that when gender is considered as a risk factor, there should be a focus on characteristics associated with the young, such as rebelliousness, impulsiveness and deceitfulness. He adds that although females do not necessarily experience these to a lesser extent, males are more exposed to criminogenic factors than females. In furthering this notion Shaw and Tshiwula (2002) argue that for instance, males generally live in a wider

geographical area than females, spend more time outside the home, have greater freedom of physical movement and engage less in adult role activity compared to young females, and therefore also become engaged in delinquent activities. Young males also tend to act more aggressively than young females, with the result that some become involved in violent crime such as assault, rape and malicious damage to property (Smith, 2002).

In this study statistical data confirms a significant relationship between gender and juvenile delinquency trends among adolescents'. The Pearson Correlations indicate that juvenile delinquency acts reveal a negative or positive relationship between gender and juvenile delinquency.

- With respect to gender and modes of discipline there was a negative correlation coefficient ( $r = -0.105$ ) which is indicative of an inverse relationship between gender and the frequency of punishment with a stick or any other object by parent or guardian.
- Gender and norm violations results indicated that sleeping out of home without parental permission is not gendered. Both males and females slept out of home without parental permission. The negative correlation coefficient ( $r = -0.147$ ) was indicative of an inverse relationship between gender and the frequency of sleeping out of home without parental permission.
- Gender and regulation violations such as driving a motor vehicle without a driver's licence indicated that respondents violate regulations regardless of gender. The negative correlation coefficient ( $r = -0.392$ ) was indicative of an inverse relationship between gender and the frequency of driving a motor vehicle without a driver's licence.
- Gender and regulation violations such as entering a bar or bottle store being under the prescribed age of 18 years old indicate that respondents irrespective of gender enter a bar or bottle store. The negative correlation coefficient ( $r = -0.264$ ) was indicative of an inverse relationship between gender and the frequency of entering a bar or bottle store.
- Gender and regulation violations such as watching a video/film reserved for "adults only" without parental permission indicate that respondents violate regulations irrespective of gender. The negative correlation coefficient ( $r = -0.261$ ) was indicative of an inverse relationship between gender and the frequency of watching a video or film reserved for adults only.
- Gender and malicious damage to property such as vandalising school property indicates that respondents engage in malicious damage to property such as vandalising school property irrespective of gender. The small negative correlation coefficient ( $r = -0.077$ ) was indicative of an inverse relationship between gender and the frequency of vandalising school property.

However, the altering roles of females in society and the differential handling of female juvenile delinquents by the criminal justice system play a part in accounting for the increase in female juvenile delinquency (Blanchette & Brown, 2006).

## **CONCLUSION**

In identifying the causes of juvenile delinquency, it is important to determine which factors contribute to delinquent behaviour and why some adolescents who adopt a delinquent image do not discard that image in the process of becoming an adult. Delinquent identity is quite complex and is, in fact, an overlay of several identities linked to delinquency itself and to a person's ethnicity, race, class and gender. This study revealed that there were significant correlations between gender (male and female) and modes of punishment; norm violations; regulation violations; and malicious damage to property.

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