

The Causes of Delinquency

In this chapter, we will use research on the causes of delinquency for our examples. More specifically, our data will be a subset of a much larger study of a sample of approximately 1,200 high school students selected from the metropolitan and suburban high schools of a city in South Carolina. These students, all of whom were in the 10th grade, completed a questionnaire that asked about such things as how they spent their spare time; how they got along with their parents, teachers, and friends; their attitudes about delinquency; whether their friends committed delinquent acts; and their own involvement in delinquency. The original research study was designed to test specific hypotheses about the factors that influence delinquency. It was predicted that delinquent behavior would be affected by such things as the level of supervision provided by parents, the students' own moral beliefs about delinquency, their involvement in conventional activities such as studying and watching TV, their fear of getting caught, their friends' involvement in crime, and whether these friends provided verbal support for delinquent acts. All these hypotheses were derived from extant criminological theory, theories we have referred to throughout this book. One specific hypothesis, derived from deterrence theory, predicts that youths who believe they are likely to get caught by the police for committing delinquent acts are less likely to commit delinquency than others. This hypothesis is shown in Exhibit F.1. The variables from this study that we will use in our chapter examples are displayed in Exhibit F.2.

Exhibit F.1

Hypothesis for Perceived Fear of Being Caught and Delinquency

Youth Who
Perceive They
Are More Likely
to Get Caught

Will Be Less
Likely to Engage
in Delinquency