

**UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA**



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**Applying the Theory of Reasoned Action to the Analysis of  
Juvenile delinquency**

**Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment for the Degree of Bachelor of  
Science in Forensic Science**

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**CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

**“Applying the Theory of Reasoned Action to the Analysis of Juvenile Delinquency”**

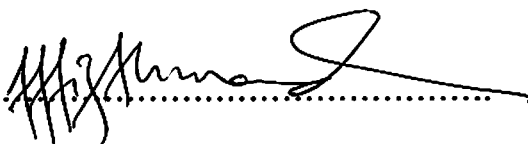
is the bonafide record of research work done by

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During the period January 2007 to April 2007

under my supervision.

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## **ABSTRACT**

In order to enhance our understanding of the heterogeneity in adolescents exhibiting disruptive behaviour problems, this research provides an overview of the analysis of juveniles' delinquent behaviours by applying The Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1980). This study examines the juveniles' attitude towards delinquent acts, peers belief and family belief on juveniles' delinquent acts and the intention of juveniles to be involved in delinquent deeds in conjunction with their delinquent behaviours. Using a sample of 171 female juveniles from Sekolah Tunas Bakti Sungai Lereh Melaka, the current study examined the interaction between the juveniles' attitude towards delinquent acts, peers belief and family belief on juvenile' delinquent acts and the intention of juveniles to be involved in delinquent deeds. The data were coded and analyzed by using SPSS Version 12 involving the usage of two statistical analyses, which are Spearman's Rank Order Correlation ( $\rho$ ) analysis and Mann-Whitney U Test. The result of the analysis shows that the juveniles' attitude towards delinquent acts, peers belief and family belief on juveniles' delinquent acts and the intention of juveniles to be involved in delinquent deeds were associated with delinquent behaviours. There was a significant correlation between the juveniles' attitude towards delinquent acts, peers belief and family belief on juveniles' delinquent acts, the intention of juveniles to be involved in delinquent deeds, and juveniles' delinquent behaviours. There were significant differences in the peers belief and family belief on juveniles' delinquent acts between the age of the juveniles. Findings from the present study indicated that the influence of the peers belief and family belief that influence the juveniles to commit delinquent acts was higher in late adolescence. The results of the study are discussed based on the Theory of Reasoned Action.

## CHAPTER 1

### 1.1. INTRODUCTION

The problem of juvenile delinquency in Malaysia is reported to be on the rise and the actual number of cases is estimated to be much higher than that reported to the authorities (Wahab, 2006). The number of juveniles (includes young prisoners, juvenile detainees and juveniles) in Malaysian prisons from 2000 to 2004 is shown in Table 1. The table shows that there is an increase in the number of juveniles in prison from the year 2002 to 2003.

**Table 1: Statistics of Juveniles at the Prison Department of Malaysia**

Year	Young Prisoners	Juvenile Detainees	Juveniles	Total
2000	1651	121	536	2308
2001	1565	119	533	2217
2002	2020	128	527	2675
2003	2517	125	535	3177
2004	2314	118	532	2964

(Source: Prison Department of Malaysia, 2004)

The nature and magnitude of juvenile delinquency in Malaysia specifically, differs from place to place and the root causes are many and diverse (Teh, 2000). According to Teh (2000), social deviance among juveniles in Malaysia starts at the school age. At the initial stage, this delinquency is in the form of abuse of school rules such as truancy, smoking and vandalism (Malaysian Crime Prevention Foundation, 2006). The absence of effective measures to curb and overcome this problem is a catalyst to more serious criminal misconduct such as bullying, injury to others and theft (Wahab, 2006).



According to Kasmini et al. (2001), there are many factors that correlate the nature and extent of juvenile delinquency. Generally, the factors are the family relationship (Bynum & Thompson, 1992), stage of development of an individual (Siegal, 2002), environment in which they live (Gottfredson, 1991) and the social changes that take place (Blackburn, 1993). The family is the largest major factor in the stability of a juvenile (Calderon, 2006). Some of the key factors in a family that can lead to delinquent acts are poverty (West, 1982), poor nutrition (Blackburn, 1993) and family stress (Patterson, 1982). According to Calderon (2006), juveniles that come from well balanced homes are less likely to commit crimes in their community. It has been repeatedly proven that with a good foundation in the home, a juvenile is less likely to commit crime (Calderon, 2006).

Family members (Edwards, 1996), friends (Kasmini et al., 2001), and peers (Blackburn, 1993) all influence the transition in every development stage of the juvenile (Erikson, 1963). It is also accompanied by a desire for material things, peer pressure and cash (Wickliffe, 2006). According to Glueck (1950), the demands of wants (example; expensive clothes) and needs (example: nutritious food) are intensified by a society that consists of high mobility, social change, and is materialistic. Furthermore, social changes can create anxiety and disillusionment for adolescents and thus they commit delinquent acts (Eysenck, 1967). When a juvenile does something wrong, contrary to the laws of or norms of the society, such as an act of vandalism, theft, drug related activity, arson or other antisocial behavior, he or she is then considered a juvenile delinquent (Wickliffe, 2006).

Erikson (1963) stated that the behavior patterns of juveniles are influenced by the things or actions that happen in their surroundings. All juvenile delinquent behaviors are influenced not only by what goes on in the environment in which they live, but also by what they observe in adults, what they listen to, and what they learn from peer groups, parents, relatives and society at large (Glueck et al., 1950). Hence, juvenile delinquency is not an inherent human condition, but rather is learned through association, imitation, observation, pressure, needs, wants, influence and desires (Wickliffe, 2006). Many factors need to be considered before a juvenile act becomes a delinquent act. One is cultural norms or belief system, traditions that all play a determining role in various aspects of lives (Matza, 1964). The cultural norms allow society to create ideals and expectations for their citizens.

The issues surrounding juvenile delinquency today may well hinge on our understanding of how a teenager who commits crime thinks and behaves. In this research, the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) will be used to investigate the relationship between the juveniles' attitude towards delinquent acts, the subjective norms on juveniles' delinquent acts, the intention of juveniles to be involved in delinquent deeds and the juveniles' delinquent behaviours. According to this theory, the first step toward exploring the causes of committing an act is to identify and measure the behavior of interest. Once the behavior has been clearly defined, it is possible to understand what determines the behavior.

### **1.1.1. Juvenile Delinquency**

According to the World Youth Report (2003), juvenile delinquency, generally, encompasses all public wrongs committed by young people between the ages of 12 and 20.

Theft, purse-snatching, violent behavior, sexual crimes, drug abuse and truancy are among the top delinquency acts (eg, Loeber & Farrington, 2000; Taylor, 2001). As laws and regulations of different countries are shaped according to their own social, cultural and political experiences, the age of criminal responsibility varies in each country (Ozen, 2005). For example, it is 8 years old in Scotland, 10 years old in England, 12 years old in Canada and Turkey, 14 years old in Germany and Japan, 15 years old in Scandinavian countries, 16 years old in Spain, and 18 years old in Belgium (Rutter, Giller, & Hagel, 1998).

In Malaysia, there are various definitions of juveniles depending on their group and age (Wahab, 2006). According to the Prison Act of Malaysia (1995), a juvenile or a young offender is defined as a prisoner who is under the age of 21 years. The Prison Department of Malaysia detains juveniles aged between 14 and 21 years in prison as young prisoners or in Henry Gurney School (approved school) as students. The Child Act of Malaysia (2001) defines a child as a person under the age of 18 years and below and the age of criminal responsibility at the age of ten. The Child Protection Act of Malaysia (1991) defines a child as a person under the age of 18 years and below. The Children and Young Persons Employment Act of Malaysia (1996) defines a child as a person aged between 10 and 14 years, and a young person as one aged between 14 and 16 years. Thus, the definition for juveniles in Malaysia can be concluded as a group of adolescents under the age of 21 years and who have criminal responsibility at the age of 10 years.

According to Kasmini et al (2001), juvenile delinquency can be defined in three categories which are the legal definitions, role definitions and societal response definitions.

In legal definition, an individual is legally classified as juvenile delinquents when his or her actions or behavior violate the norms. The definition implies for any act which would be a crime if committed by an adult, or any act which the juvenile court may deem inappropriate and for which a juvenile can be adjudicated delinquent (Bynum & Thompson, 1992). The dividing line between juvenile and adult crime offenders has been designated in each state legislature. This was based on the assumption that individuals below the age of adulthood are presumed to lack the maturity necessary for full legal responsibility. Thus this has brought to less severe penalties for the cases that are processed through the juvenile court (Kasmini et al., 2001).

The role definition focuses on the role performance of an individual which identified the individual as delinquent (Kasmini et al., 2001). According to the role definition written by Hirschi (1969), only individuals who sustain a pattern of delinquency over a long period of time, and whose life and identity are organized around a pattern of deviant behaviors can be called juvenile delinquent. This definition does not agree with the legal definition which assumes that the casual or occasional experimenter with such behaviors as truancy, vandalism, fighting, and running away from home is a true juvenile delinquent (Kasmini et al., 2001).

The societal response definition involves the members of the social group or society who reacts to the individual's behavior and then determines whether an act of juvenile delinquency has actually been committed (Bynum et al., 1992). Based on the definition, deviant or delinquent behavior depends on how the social group or society of the adolescent

perceives and judges the behavior in question. In this case, the adolescents' behavior is determined by the manner of the significant social members such as parents, teachers, neighbors and police officers who witnesses the act and then makes the initial societal response (Kasmini et al., 2001).

### 1.1.2. The Theory of Reasoned Action

The Theory of Reasoned Action by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) was used in this research to analyze the factors related to juvenile delinquency. The importance of using the Theory of Reasoned Action is to investigate the relationship of the subjective norm and salient belief with the intention of the juveniles to commit delinquent acts, and to further elucidate the relationship of the intention of the juveniles to commit delinquent behaviours.

Figure 1 show the theoretical framework of the Theory of Reasoned Action Model (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975) which is applied in this research.

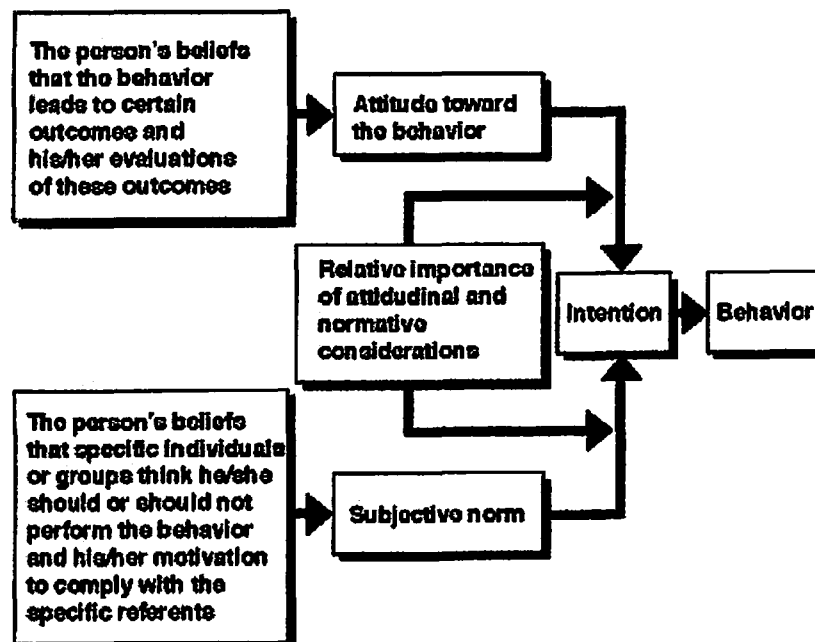


Figure 1: Reasoned Action Model (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975)

The Theory of Reasoned Action proposed the use of attitude to predict behaviour (Ajzen et al., 1980). Attitude can be defined as an index to a degree of what an individual likes or dislikes towards an object, where that object is used to refer to any aspects surrounding the individual (Affizal, 1991). Based on this theory, the definition of the level of the attitude does not depend on the attitude of the object. An individual attitude towards behaviour is the positive or negative judgement towards the behaviour that will be exerted (Ibid, 1991). In other words, an individual's attitude towards other people, institution and an event is based on his or her positive or negative judgement towards the people, institution and the event (Ajzen et al., 1980).

According to the Theory of Reasoned Action, the attitude has a close relationship that could be used to predict and understand human's behaviour. An individual's behaviour is determined by her intention to do the behaviour and the intention consists of the function of her attitude towards the behaviour and her subjective norms (Miller, 2006). The consideration of the individual attitude towards behaviour and her subjective norms is an important stage in understanding the reason of human behaviour (Affizal, 1991). Ajzen (1980) stated that there is an empirical relationship between intention and behaviour, and the factors that influence intention can be used to explain behaviour. Based on this theory, it is clear that an individual's attitude towards behaviour and her subjective norms are the main factors influencing the generation of intention towards the behaviour.

The study of attitude by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) has brought to the consideration of the belief held by the individual about herself and the environment. The function of the

consideration is to elucidate themselves and the world where they live. Humans use this information to control their environment (Ajzen et al., 1980). Ajzen (1980) further proposed that human attitude towards an object is determined by his belief towards the object. Humans create a belief about an object by stating it in various characteristics, qualities and attribution and the attitude towards an object are specific (Affizal, 1991). An individual will like an object that he believes has a positive characteristic and he will dislikes an object that he believes has a negative characteristic (Taylor, 2001). The salient belief that is caused by the opinion from the individual judgement will support the attitude and the influence of subjective norm will decide the intention and behaviour (Affizal, 1991).

According to the Theory of Reasoned Action, salient belief is the immediate determinant of an individual attitude. The individual will have an attitude towards a certain object because the attitude is matched with his salient belief towards the object (Affizal, 1991). The element of the action, the target at which the action is directed, the context in which it occurs and the time at which it is performed must be considered in the production of salient belief to determine attitude towards behaviour (Ajzen et al., 1980). The changes in any of these elements that portray the behaviour can produce differences in the salient belief set (Affizal, 1991).

Based on this theory, an individual's attitude towards behaviour can be predicted from the evaluation and belief of that particular individual towards the outcome of the behaviour. In order to predict an attitude that is influenced by the belief of an individual, it is necessary to

know how the different salient belief collaborate to determine attitude towards behaviour and how strong the individual belief (Affizal, 1991).

Integral to the Theory of Reasoned Action is the concept of subjective norms. Subjective norm is connected to the influence of social environment towards intention and behaviour (Ajzen et al., 1980). With the subjective norm is the term “normative component”. This refers to the the perception of the individual, of what others around them believe that the individual should do (Wickliffe, 2006). The theory stated that subjective norm refers to the perception of specific behaviour that is attributed to comply with the social agent. According to Affizal (1991), subjective norms refer to the individual perception that puts ahead the intention and desire of other people to perform or not perform certain behaviour.

Another component of the Theory of Reasoned Actionis concerned with the influence of people on subjective behaviour. The greater the influences of other people to an individual to perform a behavior, the greater the likeliness of the individual to perform the behaviour. Generally, subjective norm is also the function of belief, which is normative belief. An individual will think whether she should or should not involve in the behaviour decided by the group and she will use this information by applying it to her subjective norms (Ajzen et al., 1980). Not all the reference of an individual is relevant or important in influencing the subjective norms of the individual (Affizal, 1991). Only the salient reference will influence the subjective norms of an individual (Ajzen et al., 1980).

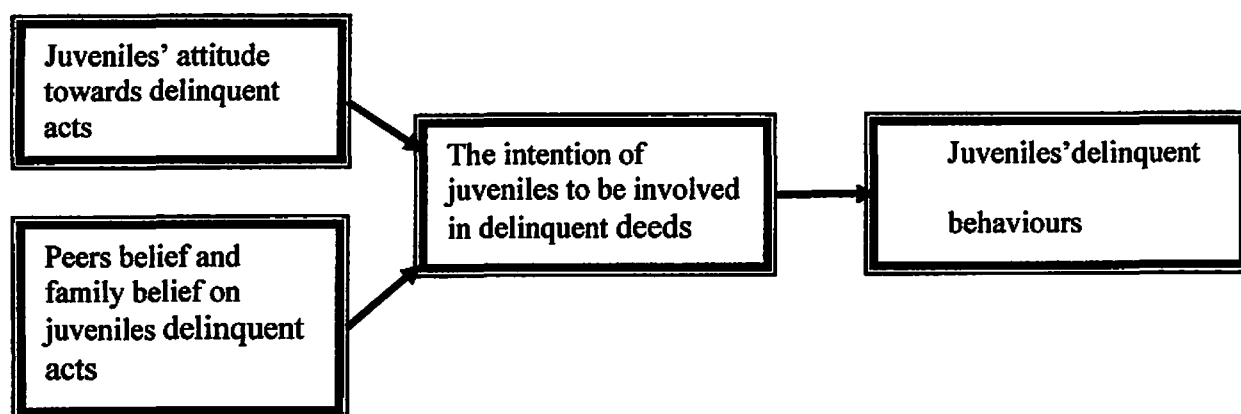


Ajzen (1980) stated that subjective norm is based on a group of salient belief that is weighted by the motivation to comply. This means that the relationship between normative belief and subjective norms do not have to exist unless a reliable motivation to comply is present (Ajzen et al., 1980). Ajzen and his colleague (1980) further stated that to measure an individual attitude towards behaviour, it is important to evaluate her subjective norms in order to predict and understand her intention. The measurement of subjective norms must have a relationship to the intention in the element of action, context, target and time (Ajzen et al., 1980). With the intention of understanding the behaviour of an individual, it is necessary to understand the factors that determine the behaviour (Affizal, 1991). The behaviour can be predicted based on the intention (Ajzen et al., 1980).

The Theory of Reasoned Action elucidate that an individual's intention to perform behaviour is an immediate determinant of the behaviour. Based on this logic, the factors that determined the behaviour should be tested. According to the theory, there are two main components that determine behaviour intention. First is the individual's attitudes towards a behaviour and the second is subjective norms. In this theory, both components have their own weight as the determinant of intention to perform behaviour. Each of the components has similar or different weight in determining intention and behaviour (Budd, 1986). This relative weight can change depending on the type of behaviour and the individual (Ajzen et al., 1980). The component with a higher weight is used to predict the individual intention and the intention that is already present in the individual can lead to the formation of the behaviour (Affizal, 1991).

Based on the theoretical framework of the Theory of Reasoned Action, an operational framework as shown in Figure 2 was created. In the current study, two subjective norms of the juveniles were investigated. The subjective norms include the peers belief and family belief on juveniles' delinquent acts. These subjective norms were chosen as the juveniles spend more time both with their family and friends. The recent study examined which of the subjective norms will have greater influence towards delinquency. The attitude and intention being investigated in the current study was the juveniles' attitude towards delinquent acts and the intention of juveniles to be involved in delinquent deeds. Examples of juveniles' delinquent behaviour analyzed were stealing, gang fighting, runaway from home, illegal motor racing, involvement in sexual violence, robbing with or without weapon and others.

**Figure 2: The operational framework of the Theory of Reasoned Action.**



## **1.2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The sources of the literature on the factors related to juvenile delinquency were obtained from the Western publication and journals. According to Prasad (1998), a few researchers (Edwards, 1996; Elliot & Menard, 1990) have worked at identifying the behavioural characteristics that distinguish delinquents from non-delinquents in understanding the cause of delinquency. Empirical literature strongly supports a social–ecological conceptualization (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) of juvenile offending, which suggests that delinquency is multi-determined by the reciprocal and dynamic interplay of individual characteristics (Borduin, 1999) and key social systems of these youths such as their families (Henggeler, 1996), peer groups (Loeber, 1993), schools (Moffitt, 1993), and communities (Tolan & Guerra, 1994). According to Borduin (1999) and Henggeler (1996), the most robust and reliable risk factors for and predictors of juvenile criminal activity involve traits, characteristics, and behaviors within individual, family, peer, school, neighborhood, and community systems.

In this research, the Theory of Reasoned Action by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) is used to explain the individual characteristics of the juveniles as the theory is intended both to explain and to predict human behaviors by means of beliefs, attitudes and intentions (Tuck & Riley, 2004). Ajzen's (1991) suggested that the subjective norms of parents, siblings, peers, community, and society, as well as a teenager's own attitudes about and control regarding an issue, contribute to the resulting behavior of the teenager. Ajzen (1980) postulated that as a general rule, the more favorable the attitude and subjective norm with respect to a behavior (delinquent acts), and the greater the perceived behavioral control, the stronger should be an

individual's intention to perform the behavior (delinquent acts) under consideration. As an example, adolescents who associate stealing with positive outcomes such as relaxation or improved social attitude and receive approval from friends and family, will be more likely to participate in this behavior in the future. The same can be said for abstinence from stealing or engaging in other risky behaviors (example: drug abuse).

### **Literature on the Attitudes**

LaPiere (1934) had conducted a research to study the linkage between attitudes and behaviour. This study called attention to a wide discrepancy between the merchants' self reported attitudes about serving Asians in general and their actual behaviour when confronted with a particular Asian couple (Sabini, 1995). LaPiere (1934) concluded that attitudes and behaviour were unrelated. His study also suggests that there is a real need for theory and research that explores the mechanism by which attitudes affect behaviour insofar as they do (Sabini, 1995). LaPiere findings were supported by the review of the existing research done by Wicker (1969). The review showed that there is little evidence to support the existence of stable, underlying attitudes within the individual which influence both his verbal expressions and his actions (Feldman, 1998). Wicker (1969) concluded that only a minimal link exists between attitudes and behaviour.

In a study done by Jaccard, King and Pomazal (1977), subjects were asked their attitudes toward religion, church and attending church. The correlation between their attitudes toward religion and their actually attending church was low (0.18). However, the correlation between going to church and their attitude toward attending church was 0.65

(Jaccard et al., 1977). The results of this study suggested that attitudes can be predictive of behaviour, but only when the attitudes solicited and the behaviours predicted are at similar levels of generality (Katz, 1982). In sum, holding a particular attitude is no guarantee that the attitude will determine behaviour in a given situation (Roche & Ramsey, 1993; Barker, 1994). The insignificance about the lack of relation between attitudes and behaviour may have been premature (Sabini, 1995).

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) argued that for attitudes to predict behaviour, a person's attitude toward a specific behaviour must be measured. The idea that there is a specific attitude accompanying specific behaviour severely undercuts the utility of the attitude concept (Rokeach, 1960). The concept of attitude was invoked in the first place because investigators believed that although there were an infinite variety of behaviours that a person could engage in, there was also a rather limited set of attitudes that could be used to predict those behaviours (Sabini, 1995).

According to Doll & Ajzen (1992) and Kraus (1995), several factors must be taken into account for the determination of the link between behaviour and attitude. The factors include the relevance of attitude to behaviour, the strength and stability of the attitude and factors relating to the specifics of the situation (Lord, Lepper & Mackie, 1984). Obviously, the stronger and more important the attitude, the more likely it will influence behaviour (Feldman, 1998). Furthermore, attitudes that are relatively stable and enduring are more likely to affect behaviour than those that are relatively recent in origin (Doll et al., 1992; Kraus, 1995). As stated by Feldman (1998), several attributes of a situation may conspire to

prevent people from demonstrating behaviour consistent with the attitude they hold. As an example, the presence of authority such as the police prevents a thief from stealing (Feldman, 1998). Exhibiting behaviour consistent with an attitude may entail certain costs such as effort, time and material (Bassili, 1995). The absence of any one or a combination of these may produce a discrepancy between attitude and behaviour (Feldman, 1998).

### **Literature on the Peers Influence**

Adolescents live in two separate worlds; one for the family and the other for friends (Berndt, 1979). Adolescents, especially those in the middle class, often seek advice from family in matters of finance and education, but in making decisions about their social lives such as dress, drinking and recreational activities, adolescents overwhelmingly want to be attuned to the opinions of their peers (Warr, 1991). As noted by Berndt (1992), friends may exert either a positive or negative influence depending on their characteristics. For example, although non delinquent friends appear to prevent youth from engaging in antisocial behaviour (Brown, Lohr & McClenahan, 1986), the association with delinquent friends is related to the development of externalizing behaviour such as vandalism (French & Patterson, 1995; Agnew, 1991; Farrington, 1991), and of internalizing problems such as identity conflicts, in adolescence (Brendgen, Vitaro & Bukowski, 2000; Ho, Leung, Hung, Lee & Tang, 2000).

There is a long history of research that examines the effect of peers on adolescents' engagement in delinquent deeds (Seydlitz & Jenkins, 1998). Studies by Erickson & Jensen (1977) have shown that delinquent acts are often committed by adolescents in group and that

delinquents are more peer oriented than other adolescents. In addition, Agnew & Huguley (1989) claimed that association with delinquent peers is the best predictor of delinquency. In fact, when incarcerated delinquents were asked what they thought caused delinquency, the second most frequently mentioned cause was peers (Goldstein, 1990).

According to Conger (1976) and Richards (1979), youth behave in the same manner as their friends; if their friends are delinquent, they tend to be delinquent. Not surprisingly, adolescents, particularly males, with more delinquent friends are more likely to commit delinquency (Patterson & Dishion, 1985; Messner & Krohn, 1990). The effect of delinquent friends on commission of delinquency is enhanced if adolescents are attached to these friends, spend much time with these friends, feel that these friends approve of delinquency, and perceive pressure from these friends to engage in delinquent deeds (Agnew, 1991).

According to Johnson (1979), Matsueda and Heimer (1987), Warr and Stafford, (1991), delinquent friends' attitudes or behaviour encourages delinquency. However, Matsueda et al. (1987) and, Warr and Stafford (1991) further proposed that friends' behaviour is more important than attitudes particularly when friends commit delinquent acts but at the same time, believe that such behaviour is wrong (Warr et al., 1991). A research by Simons, Miller and Aigner (1980) found that in self-reports juvenile delinquency was accounted for by the fact that the youth had friends that support delinquent behaviour.

However, Hirschi (1969) posited that attachment to peers would reduce delinquency because delinquents would not care about their friends as strongly or in the same manner as

non-delinquents do. This is because attachment to peers has been found to increase delinquency (Agnew, 1991), to weakly decrease it (Colvin & Pauly, 1983), and to be unrelated to delinquency (Matsueda, 1982). According to Dinges and Oetting (1993), substance abuse shows the most consistent and strongest effects of peer association. Adolescents who are more peers oriented and have drug using friends are more likely to use drugs themselves (Aseltine, 1995; Kandal & Davies, 1991). Nevertheless, research has shown that openness with a close friend and peer pressure are not related to substance abuse (Kafka & London, 1991), whereas belief about friends' use is positively correlated with adolescents' use (Hundleby & Mercer, 1987; Kafka et al., 1991). Yet peer influence on drug use is more immediate and short-lived than are parent influences (Kandel, 1980).

According to Hirschi (1969), the strength of the social bond elements which comprises attachment, commitment, involvement and beliefs, determine the degree to which behavioral conformity is achieved. In essence, individuals who care what their peers and parents think of them, feel that deviant behaviour is a risk to future success, spend their time engaged in conventional activities, and believe that rules against deviance are justifiable will be less likely to engage in delinquency (Akers, 1997). Contrary to Hirschi's theory, attachment to peers lead to conformity only if peers are conforming themselves (Conger, 1976; Elliot, 1985).

Importantly, recent research (Warr & Stafford, 1991; Warr, 2002) provides an alternative explanation for the relationship between peers and delinquency that has implications for understanding the effect of peers on the delinquency of the adolescents. Warr and Stafford (1991) found that although delinquency is influenced by peers' attitude favorable