

The Risk Factors for Youth Offending From a Study of the Life Histories of Young Male Offenders in Vietnam

Quang Toan Le

RMIT University, Australia

Abstract

In recent years, instances of youth offending have become more severe with the increase in the violent and serious crimes committed by young people. This paper investigates the risk factors for youth offending in Vietnam. Many previous studies have focused on the risk factors for youth offending. (Farrington & Welsh 2008; Hawkins et al. 2000; Shader 2001; Wasserman et al. 2003). However, research of risk factors for youth offending is less popular in Asian countries (Le, Monfared & Stockdale 2005). Moreover, there is almost no evidence that findings on risk factors associated with youth offending from Western studies can apply to Asian or other cultures (Chen & Astor 2010, p. 1389). Therefore, research on the risk factors for youth offending in Vietnam are still limited, and it is unsure if the identified risk factors for youth offending in previous studies could be applied in the Vietnamese contexts. Based on the literature review of life history research and youth offending, life history interviews were conducted with 30 male prisoners in three prisons in Vietnam, who had committed crimes when they were less than 18 years old. The data was then analysis to identify the most significant risk factors for youth offending. The identified risk factors for youth offending were categorized into five domains, including individual, family, school, peer-related, and community risk factors. The family and individual risk factors seemed to have most significant influences, while school violence, delinquent peers, and game/internet involvement were also outstanding in other domains. The research may help with understanding the risk factors for youth offending in the contexts of Vietnam from a life history approach. Moreover, the understanding these risk factors could help with improving the effectiveness of youth offending prevention in Vietnam.

Keywords: risk factors; youth offending; life history; young offender; Vietnam

1. Introduction

Nowadays, young people around the world are being presented with various individual opportunities in terms of living, studying, and developing, including both beneficial and potentially harmful opportunities. Quite often, the illegal opportunities are taken advantage such as youth committing offences, becoming addicted to drugs and using violence against others (The United Nations, 2004). Among the problems related to the young people, youth offending is one of the most significant. The issue of youth offending has become more common and threatening over time in many countries.

Youth offending, also known as juvenile crime, youth crime or juvenile delinquency, is criminal and other illegal behavior engaged in by minors (Siegel & Welsh 2010) who are younger than the statutory age of majority. The seriousness of youth offending in Western countries has increased dramatically, and youth offending has become a significant threat to public safety. Researchers have concluded that “youth offending and other antisocial behaviours are a great concern in contemporary society” (Heilbrun, Goldstein, & Redding, 2005, p. 3). The problem of youth offending is getting more complicated and global while prevention programs are either non-existent or inadequate in dealing with existing issues (The United Nations, 2004). In Vietnam, instances of youth offending have become more common and alarming. Widespread instances of serious and violent crimes such as murder, robbery, rape have been committed by young offenders in recent years. Worryingly, there was a dramatic increase in the seriousness of youth offending (*Ministry of Public Security*, 2012). Moreover, the alarming rise of instances of youth offending by the offenders of younger age has become a serious concern for the society with an average level of 10,000 youth offending cases and 15,000 young offenders every year (Ngo, 2010).

According to the General Department of Criminal Investigation and Crime Prevention - Ministry of Public Security (2012), there were 49,235 cases of juvenile delinquency during the period from 2006 to 2010, which accounted for 20 percent of the overall criminal cases nationwide. During this time, there were 75,594 juvenile offenders including 72,964 male (96.4 percent) and 2,720 female offenders (3.6 percent). The most common age group of young offenders was from 16 to 18 years old, accounting for 67.1 percent of overall young offenders. Although youth offending has become a serious issue in Vietnam few studies in this area have been made, especially involving focused and detailed research.

2. Literature review

Youth offending, described as the criminal behaviour engaged in by minors, has been considered among youth's greatest problems for years (Siegel & Welsh, 2010). Youth offending has become a great concern to society (Heilbrun et al., 2005), which is one of the most critical social problems (*Public Safety Canada, 2009*). Especially, young people involved in multiple repeated serious criminal actions, who are called chronic juvenile offenders, are considered a serious social problem (Siegel & Welsh, 2010). There is an urgent need for better and more efficient intervention and prevention strategies and programs to deal with youth offending (Siegel & Welsh, 2010). Moreover, Patchin (2006) states that it is significant to not only identify the causes of early childhood offending but to create effective intervention programs to discontinue the potential future offending as well.

The situation of youth offending in Vietnam has become a great concern for both the government and the society. The Vietnamese Government has tried to identify the significant causes of youth offending to create more effective prevention programs to control and reduce the youth offending rate. Several researchers have attempted to answer the questions: "what are the causes of youth offending?" and "why very young people commit crimes more seriously and frequently?" (Ngo, 2010; Nguyen, 2013; Nguyen, 2009; Nguyen, 2012; Pham, 2005).

Recently, an approach for medicine and public health, which David P Farrington (2000) calls the "risk factor paradigm", was imported into the juvenile justice to understand the causes of youth offending. Risk factors are broadly defined as external or internal influences or conditions that are related to or predictive of an adverse outcome like youth offending or antisocial behaviour (Heilbrun et al., 2005). Previous studies have found a variety of risk factors, which can be categorized into several domains, including individual, family, peer, school, and community risk factors (see Case & Haines, 2009; David P Farrington & Welsh, 2008; Hawkins et al., 2000; Heilbrun et al., 2005; Shader, 2001; Vien, 2010; Wasserman et al., 2003).

The main purpose of this paradigm, when applied to the research of youth offending is to identify the most significant risk factors for youth offending, and design the appropriate prevention programs to neutralize these risk factors (David P Farrington, 2000). In other words, it is essential to investigate the risk factors, which may increase the likelihood of later offending among youth (Kazdin, Kraemer, Kessler, Kupfer, & Offord, 1997). A better understanding of these factors' impacts on the probability of committing crime among young people may be

useful for reducing their effects on young people and preventing them from committing crimes. The most common risk factors for youth offending in the domains of individual, family, school, peer and community, which have been identified in previous studies, are summarized in the table below.

Summary of Risk Factors for Youth Offending

Individual Domain	Family Domain	School Domain	Peer-related Domain	Community Domain
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low resting heart rate • Anti-social attitudes and beliefs • Low empathy • Restlessness • Concentration difficulty • Risk-taking behaviour • Aggression • Early age of first conviction • Late onset of offending • Neuroticism • Cognitive distortions • Less mature moral reasoning • Intellectual disability • Mental health issues • Substance misuse • Experience of trauma • Poor social skills • General offences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criminal parents and siblings • Poor parent-child relationship • Inconsistent discipline • Poor parental supervision • Low level of parental involvement • Child abuse and neglect • Poor parenting practices • Parental coldness and rejection • Parental substance abuse • Young mother, teenage parents • Single-parent family • Mental health of parents • Disrupted family, broken home • Family conflict • Low family bonding • Witness to domestic violence • Large family size • Grandparent-headed families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic failure • Low bonding to school • Poor school grades • Grade retention • Teacher-rated anxiousness • Truancy and dropping out of school • Frequent school transitions • School violence • Bullying at school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delinquent siblings • Delinquent peers • Gang membership • Isolation from others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty • Lack of social recognition • Neighbourhood disorganization • Immigrant status • Availability of drugs and firearms • Exposure to violence and racial prejudice • Violence games and media and the internet

However, it appears that most of the studies about risk factors for youth offending were conducted in Western countries (see Arthur, 2006; Arthur, 2009; Barry, 2006; Case & Haines, 2009; David P Farrington, 2011; Henggeler & Sheidow, 2012; Junger-Tas et al., 2011; Shoemaker, 2008; Siegel & Welsh, 2010, 2011; Vien, 2010). Whereas, studies of risk factors for youth offending have been proven to be less popular in Asian countries (Le, Monfared, & Stockdale, 2005), and large-scale representative data on risk factors in Asia is still limited (Chen & Astor, 2010, p. 1389). A considerable body of research has been conducted to explore the impacts of risk factors on delinquency, but relatively little research has included Chinese and Southeast Asian youth. It, therefore, is unclear if similar findings would generalize to other ethnic and racial groups such as Asians (Le et al., 2005). Moreover, empirical evidence has shown that there are significant differences between East and West in beliefs, perceptions, and worldviews (Nisbett, 2004). Chen and Astor (2010, p. 1389) also argue that there is almost no evidence that findings on risk factors associated with Western studies can apply to Asian or other cultures.

Moreover, there are limited studies on the risk factors for youth offending in Vietnam as well. The traditional cultural, demographic, historical and social contexts of Vietnam are different from other countries, and it is unsure if the identified risk factors for youth offending in previous studies could be applied in the Vietnamese contexts. Therefore, the study of the risk factors facing youth in Vietnam is significant for understanding the Vietnamese contexts of youth offending.

3. Research method

Cole and Knowles (2001) argue that to understand a human being's life it is significant to insight the context in which his/her life is situated. Moreover, the events in one's life are joined as there is a desire to establish the unity and form that exists in each individual, and "this cohesiveness is made manifest through the narrated story of an individual's life" (Green, 2002, p. 96).

Life-history research is among the qualitative research approaches under the larger category of narrative studies. This category includes several approaches such as life-story research, oral history, biography, personal experience methods, and narrative inquiry (Hatch & Newsom, 2010, p. 431). There is an agreement that life history research is based on the

fundamental assumption about the relationship of the general to the particular, and that the general can be best understood through an analysis of the particular (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Hatch & Newsom, 2010).

Life history research refers to an approach that collects and interprets personal histories or oral testimonies through an interview process. The aim of this process is to understand “the changing experiences and outlooks of individuals in their daily lives, what they see as important, and how to provide interpretations of the accounts they give of their past, present and future” (Roberts, 2002). It is a model of qualitative research which focuses on perceiving, understanding, and rendering individual life stories in the connection with their personal, social, economic, political, and historical contexts (Hatch & Newsom, 2010).

Therefore, to understand the risk factors for youth offending from the views of the young offenders, life history approach was employed in this research. In order to explore the risk factors for youth offending and their impacts on youth committing offence from young offenders’ life histories, fifteen young offenders had been selected for in-depth interviews, as in-depth interviews are optimal to collect data on personal histories, perspectives, and experiences, particularly when sensitive topics are being explored (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). To conduct the interviews with participants in prison, the researcher had sought for the ethic approval from the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee as well as Ministry of Public Security of Vietnam. Three prisons in the North of Vietnam were chosen as the sites for this research including Phu Son 4 prison in Thai Nguyen province, Suoi Hai prison, located in Ba Vi district; and Thanh Xuan prison, located in Thanh Oai district of Hanoi.

A purposive sampling (Bryman, 2012) was employed for selecting participants for the interviews. The aims of the purposive sampling often are mostly “to include as much information as possible” and “to generate the information upon which the emergent design and grounded theory can be based” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Green, 2002, p. 11). In each prison, the researcher had contacted the managers and the prisoner’s profiles management officers to search for the prisoners, who were matched with the listed criteria, including:

- They have committed any crime (the types of crime committed were not the criteria for the participants selection)
- They must be males (all female prisoners were excluded from the research);
- They must be in prison at the time of sampling and conducting interviews (those

- released from prison were excluded from the sample);
- They committed offences the first time when they were less than 18 years old (but were over 14 at that time because those who are less than 14 are not responsible for any crime according to the Vietnamese Penal Code). All other offenders, who committed offence for the first time when they were more than 18 years old, were excluded from the sample;
 - They must be more than 18 years old at the date of sampling and conducting interviews.

By employing these criteria for the purposive sampling, over one hundred of the prisoners had been identified in the three prisons. However, because of the limitation of time for the research only 15 prisoners were selected among the matching sample for recruitment. These prisoners were sorted by crimes they had committed to find out the incidence of the crimes. The results showed that murder, robbery, intentionally inflicting injury on other persons and drug-related offences were among the most common crime committed by the participants in these prisons. Therefore, the selection of the participants was mainly based on the incidence of the crime committed, which led to the domination of participants who was involved in specific violent crime, including murder, robbery, and intentionally inflicting injury on other persons. The researcher had explained that the purpose of collecting their personal documents is only for better understanding of their life histories and no private information would be used in the research so that they would not be recognised by others. In fact, after having been explained about the purpose of the research and the process of using personal information in the research to ensure the anonymity.

After conducting in-depth interviews with the prisoners, the data was analysed and grouped into themes, including in the domains of individual, family, peers, school, and community factors. The analysis of the data collected showed several significant factors in each domain, which might increase the likelihood of youth involvement in youth offending.

5. Findings

Individual risk factors

There is an assumption that individuals are different in criminal potential, which has been accepted for a long time and in many countries (David P Farrington & Welsh, 2008, p. 37). Therefore, it is significant to investigate the individual risk factors and its effects on the

likelihood of youth offending. Through the data from the interviews, several risk factors in the domain of individual have been identified.

- *Legal awareness*

In term of the awareness of their activities, in most of the cases, the offender clearly understood that they were committing crimes. In other words, most of the offenders knew about the danger of their activities and the negative consequences (though many of them did not know much about the sentences they might face because of their crime). Only one of them admitted that he committed crime because of lack of knowledge when he helped a man to traffic a small bag of heroin without knowing what was inside (Co). This was in agreement with D. M. Nguyen (2014) when he argues that while 89.5% of the juvenile delinquents understood that their activities were illegal, they still committed offence anyway, and this raises an alarming problem which the authority need to care about when dealing with youth offending (p.162 - 163). In several other cases, the offenders knew that they were committing illegal activities but they did not know about the seriousness of their crime. It showed that the young offenders did not care much about the consequences of the crime before they convicted. This is in the agreement with the characteristics of the young people, who are in the process of physical and mental development. They do not usually think thoroughly about their activities and consequences. Moreover, they are easily affected by the situation and environment factors (Dang, 2007; Do, 2000; D. M. Nguyen, 2014).

- *Risk-taking behaviour*

Risk-taking behavior has been identified as a risk factor for youth offending in previous studies. (Dang, 2007; Do, 2000; David P Farrington, 2007; Hawkins et al., 2000; Shader, 2001). It was also found that having a risk-taking personality was a stronger risk factor that predicts youth offending than other significant childhood risk factors (David P Farrington, 2007). At this age, juveniles usually misunderstand and misinterpret between the appearance and the nature of things. Many young offenders thought that risk-taking behaviours were the manifestation of bravery and capacity, and they, therefore, convict because of that belief (Dang, 2007, p. 59). Moreover, the characters of juveniles are impulsive, superficial, risk-taking and adventurous, which have unyielding effects on their behaviours (Do, 2000).

In this study, risk taking seemed to be a dominant risk factor when it appeared in ten out of fifteen cases. In most of these cases, the offenders committed violent crimes, such as

murder, robbery, intentionally inflicting injury on others and causing public disorder. This might show the strong relationship between risk-taking and violent crimes. Although only some of them admitted that they were risk-taking, others might not themselves realize their risk-taking behaviours.

"I never considered the consequences before fighting. I was injured several times when fighting, but I did not care about that. I do not think that I am risk-taking as many others acted like me. Nevertheless, all the people who knew me always said that I was extremely daring."(Trong)

- *Violent and aggressive*

Most of those who presented risk-taking behaviours also had problems with violent and aggressive behaviours. Not only those who committed violent crime but also those who committed other kinds of crime had problems with violence, especially school violence. Most of the participants admitted that they were involved in violent activities. Some of them were interested in bullying others, and they felt the pleasure of "being respected" by the victims whom they bullied. Many others were victimized before they became aggressive and violent, with the intention of revenge. They joined groups of delinquents and fought against those who used to bully them. They then, in turn victimized other people.

Some of them admitted that they became violent and aggressive because of the harsh punishment their parents applied to them and the violence in their family. Those who were corporally punished by their parents more likely became familiar and resistant to this punishment. They then did not scare of being beaten. They became violent and risk-taking, and some of them even admitted that they had resisted when being beaten by their parents. The children from the family with domestic violence, in which the parents fought against each other, also tended to be aggressive as they witnessed the violence regularly.

Those who were highly involved with the violent games and media, as well as violence in the real life also presented a high level of risk-taking and violent behaviours.

- *Lack of self-control*

As impulsiveness is a character of the young people, most of the participant had problems with controlling themselves, especially in the cases murder, intentionally inflicting other persons or resisting persons in the performance of their official duties. They usually reacted in a very negative way when being affected by the conditions, which led to their conviction. For instance, Giang used a shot-gun and shot to threaten a group of young people after being attacked by them, which resulted in his incarceration for the crime of causing public

disorder and illegally stockpiling and using military weapons.

The lack of self-control was increased when it was combined with other risk factors, such as substance abuse or impulsiveness like the Case of Hai. He was stopped because of riding motorbike without a helmet, which was only a traffic infringement. However, he then was arrested because of attacking and shouting at the police as he tried to escape. He admitted that he could not control himself as he had drunk a large amount of alcohol. Moreover, he was going with a female friend and he wanted to prove his bravery by resisting the police. However, the consequence was much severer than he had thought. In other cases such as murder, theft, burglary or drug trafficking, the lack of self-control also presented a significant role when the offenders committed offences to satisfy their needs.

- *Substance abuse*

At least six of the participants admitted that they were involved with drug using though none of them committed offences under the immediate influence of using drugs. Moreover, most of them (11/15) smoked before they convicted, and many of them admitted that they were nicotine addicted. There was no evidence from the interviews that nicotine abuse directly affected the participants' involvement in crime, but it did create pressure on them, as they needed money to smoke while most of them did not have a stable job.

Besides, several participants were involved with alcohol early, and at least four of them committed crimes under the influences of alcohol. In general, substance abuse might strongly affect the attitude and behaviours of the juveniles, especially the abuse of drugs and alcohol. Most of them admitted that they became extremely risk-taking and violent under the effects of drugs and alcohol. They usually lacked self-control after that, and it was a significant factor for their conviction.

"You will fear of nothing (extremely daring) after using cannabis. However, when you use ice (Methamphetamine), you will see that it is much stronger than cannabis. You will not be able to control yourself. You will become extremely adventurous and risk-taking, and you can attack others immediately if you are told to do that. You might even kill others people easily because of illusion, but you could only realize it after the effect of ice disappears". (Phuong)

This suggested a strong relationship between substance abuse and other individual risk factors, including risk-taking, aggressive, and violent behaviours as well as lack of self-control.

Family risk factors

Family factors had been identified to have the most significant influence on youth

development (Heilbrun et al., 2005) and academic studies in different countries confirm the importance of family factors as predictors of offending (Boshier, 2011; Dang, 2008, 2011; David P Farrington, 2011; David P. Farrington, Coid, & Murray, 2009; David P Farrington & Welsh, 2008; Ionuț, 2012; Junger-Tas, 2012; Patchin, 2006; Public Safety Canada, 2009).

Moreover, the family risk factors may influence other risk factors for youth offending, as many risk factors existing in the domains of individual, peer, and school can be linked to the root as problems within the family. Therefore, Steinberg (1999, quoted in Mendel, 2002, p. 14) states that "There is no single cause of youth violence, but when there is a common factor that cuts across different causes, it is usually some kind of family dysfunction".

Similarly, in most of the cases in this study, family risk factors seemed to play a significant role in the involvement of young people in offending. The family factors appeared in most of the cases, no matter what type of crime committed. This is in agreement with many previous studies (Dang, 2007, 2008, 2011; Ho, 2002; T. M. N. Nguyen, 2010; Pham, 2005), which stressed the risk factors in the domain of family in contributing to youth offending.

- *Poor parents-child relationship*

Many of the participants admitted that they were in poor relationships with their parents. They might have conflicts with their parents so they could not talk to others. Besides, their parents might be too busy working, so they did not have time to take care of them. In the other cases, the conflicts and violence in the family or the abuse of alcohol also increased the distance between parents and children. However, it seemed that the most important factor was the difference in their characters, given that there were many changes when the participants reached their puberty. The poor parents-child relationship also led to other risk factors such as low bonding to family and low parents involvement as well as running away from home. At least eight of the participants admitted that they had run away from home and the main reason was they got bored with the life in the family.

"My mother used to care about me very much, but when my puberty started, I felt very uncomfortable when my mother always cared too much about him. I was not a child anymore, and I wanted to live on my own. However, in my mom's eyes I was only a small boy. Therefore, I did not want to be close to my family. I wanted to show them that I had grown up and I can live my life independently. Moreover, as I was involved with a group of friends at school, I usually spent much time with them rather than staying at home. I also ran away from home several times, ranging from some days to a month". (Hai)

These risk factors even increased dramatically when the participants lived in a broken home, especially after a divorce or being separated from their parents.

- *Inconsistent discipline and lack of supervision*

The problems related to discipline in the family were found in almost every case in this study. In several cases, the discipline in the family was lack, and the participants were spoiled by their parents. In these cases, the parental supervision was also low, as the parents seemed to give the children more freedom and independence. Therefore, they had chances to be involved in antisocial behaviours and delinquency without being supervised and prevented.

The lax parental discipline had also been seen in most of the cases, in which the participants were the only sons in the family (they might be the only child in the family or they did not have any brother). According to the Vietnamese culture, it is very important to have a son in the family (Bélanger, 2002; Haughton & Haughton, 1998; UNFPA, 2011). It has been found that the high preference of son in Viet Nam is mainly based on the patrilineal kinship system, in which a strong normative pressure of having at least one son is placed on people. "Sons, people hold, are essential to their parents because they carry on family lines and names; perform ancestor worship; and take care of parents in their old age" (UNFPA, 2011, p. 23). Therefore, parents tend to spoil sons rather than daughters, especially when they are only sons in the family. In this research, two participants were the only child in the family while five others were the only sons (they had sisters but did not have any brother). Therefore, the status of being the only sons in the family might have significant influences on their behaviours and attitude. In many other cases, harsh discipline was applied in the family. Harsh and corporal punishments are common in Vietnam and parents seem to believe in the power of corporal punishment in forcing the children to obey them. However, in these cases, it was shown that harsh punishment did not work in controlling the children although some of them admitted that they were afraid of being beaten by their parents. The use of harsh punishment regularly also led to the resistance of the children to their parents and increased their involvement in violence and delinquency.

- *Disrupted family*

Disrupted family, whether because of divorce or death, had been identified as a risk factor for youth offending (Dang, 2007, 2011; David P Farrington & Welsh, 2008; Ngo, 2010; Pham, 2005). Though it is concluded that children from the broken home because of death were less affected than those from divorced family, all the cases of disrupted family in this study were

because of divorce. There were five cases, in which the participants' parents divorced when they were small. Whether living with a parent or being separated from both of the parents after the divorce, most of the children were strongly affected, and they presented a lower tie to the family after that.

Moreover, the stepparents seemed to have strong effects on the involvement in offending no matter how they treated the children. In the case of Long, the conflicts between him and his stepmother were the main reason for his running away from home, and engaging in drug using and trading after that. However, in other cases of divorce and remarriage, the stepparents treated the children very well but it did not help the children with staying out of offending. The stepparents did not have strong influences on the children, and they did not have close relationship. Moreover, in these cases the stepfathers and stepmothers seemed to use very lax discipline to the children, as they did not want to be in conflicts with them. Therefore, the children were under a lack of supervision, which might increase their likelihood of offending. Therefore, broken home and remarriage appeared to have significant effects on youth offending.

- *Parental conflicts*

This factor appears in not only the cases of broken home but also in many other cases. Only several participants admitted that their parents only had minor conflicts, while others said that there were strong conflicts in their family. In some of these cases, parental conflicts had turned into domestic violence when the parents fought against each other. The conflicts in the family might influence the children in not only their behaviours but also their bonding to the families. Most of them felt very unhappy when witnessing the conflicts between their parents, and they, therefore, did not want to stay at home.

"Both of my parents were so conservative that they always believed that they were right. My mother used to get angry easily, while my father was very patriarchal. Although my father's behaviour was much better, the conflicts between them could not be solved, as they never shared the same view in any problem. Their discussion about anything always ended up with an argument. I was very disappointed about them but they did not understand what I thought. After I was incarcerated, they even sometimes argued with each other when visiting me in the prison. Therefore, I felt very lonely in my family and I did not want to be at home". (Long)

When running away from home, they faced other risks of poor supervision, low ties to family and school, and being involved with delinquent peers. This might significantly increase

the likelihood of their conviction as well.

School risk factors

- *Academic failure and low school bonding*

Among all of the cases, no participant presented good result when studied at school. Most of them showed very poor academic achievement. The participants also displayed a very low bonding to school, which also contributed to their academic failure. Most of them regularly truanted , given that they were involved with delinquent friends, internet and games. Therefore, they could not focus on the study while they were more likely to be involved in antisocial and illegal activities.

- *Dropping out of school and school expulsion*

School dropouts have been identified as a risk factor for youth offending, which increases the likelihood of their involvement in offending while reducing the positive effects of school on them. In this research, only two participants had reached grade 12 before being arrested. Five of them were arrested after committing crimes while they were still going to school although they were not bonding to school. Eight participants dropped out of or expelled were from school because of the problems related to their behaviours at school or academic achievement. The youngest age of leaving school was ten years old (grade 5) while the oldest age of that were sixteen (grade 11). The reason for leaving school usually related to the desire of study, game involvement, the attitude at school and the bad result of the study.

Among them, two participants were retained in the previous class because of their academic achievement as well as their attitude at school. This also suggested the relationship between grade retention and youth offending; especially there was a strong relationship between grade retention and dropout of school.

- *School violence and victimization at school*

This might be the most common risk factors in the domain of school when school violence was mentioned by all the participants though its seriousness varied from case to case. Several participants were involved in school violence and victimization early. Others were victimized at school before they were involved with groups and bullied others. In other cases, school violence was also reported although the participant might not involve in school violence.

Moreover, the situation of school violence seemed to be serious. In several cases,

fighting in school was common with dangerous weapons like swords, knives, and water pipes. Some students dropped out of school permanently, and they did not dare to return to school after getting into conflicts with others, as they were afraid of being attacked.

- *The school discipline and management of students*

The education and handling of students at the school were not effective. Most of the schools only focused on teaching compulsory subjects but not social skills and legal training. The handling of students was also inappropriate. Nguyen (2014) states that it was quite common that schools required students to sign an agreement of not involving in illegal activities and breaking the school regulations, but it was rather said than done. The main measure of handling students who violated the school regulations was forcing them to leave school. This, in turn, led to the absence of educational environment and, then, the involvement with social evils and delinquent activities (D. M. Nguyen, 2014, p. 149). Moreover, the connection between school and family was very weak. For instance, in several cases, the participants had left school for a long period before their parent noticed about that. Even if when the teachers required the students to invite their parents to discuss their problems at school there was also solutions.

"I never let my parents know my troubles at school. Therefore, when I made mistakes at school, my teacher usually asked me to handle paper with my parents' signatures. I then asked a kiosk owner or a staff of the internet agency I usually played to sign the document with my parents' names. That was the reason I was allowed to come back to class the next day while my parents never knew about my issues".

Peer-related factors

- *Involving with delinquent peers*

Results from the interviews also showed significant effects of peers on youth offending. Many of the offenders were involved with delinquent friends or group of delinquents. Most of them admitted that they were influenced by their peers and groups of peers in their behaviours. Moreover, many of the young offenders committed offences in the cooperation with other people. Eight out of the 15 participants admitted that they committed crimes with at least one other offender. Those who were involved in the crimes like murder, robbery, theft and intentionally inflicting other people's health seemed to be more likely to commit co-offending. In most of the cases of co-offending the offenders were almost at the same age groups. However, in some others, the juvenile offenders were incited to commit crimes with other adult offenders,

especially when they joined groups.

- *Joining gangs*

It was common that the participants joined groups at their school and fought against others. All of the participants admitted that groups existed in their school though not all of them joined groups. Those who were involved in groups at school usually presented a higher level of violence, risk-taking and antisocial behaviours. Besides, several participants also joined groups outside of their school with the older members, especially after they had left school. These groups seemed to have significant effects on them in their antisocial behaviours and offending. This raises the alarming issues of juvenile offenders joining gangs or delinquent groups, learning from other members of the groups and well preparing before committing crimes.

Community risk factors

- *The influence of online games and Internet*

A strong effect of the internet, online games and social media on the involvement in crime among the young people had been identified. Many offenders are engaged and affected by the online games and internet, especially those who committed violent or sexual crimes. Moreover, at least three of the participants admitted that they were addicted to online games, and they could spend days or even weeks in the internet agencies. One of them even admitted that he had experienced the illusion of seeing and killing his enemies when he had left the internet agency after several continuous days playing games (Tung).

The reason for committing crimes may be different, but the linkages between internet, online games and social media and crime can be clearly seen. For instance, murder and other violent crimes could be traced back to the involvement with violent games and videos on the internet; or rape may have strong relationship with sexual materials from the internet, online games or other sources. On the other hand, high engagement in games and internet was the direct reason for several participants to committed offences, as they need money for paying for the internet fee.

- *Neighbourhood disorder*

The neighbourhood disorder was also a significant community risk factor when most of the participants were living in the areas with neighbourhood problems before committing crimes. The most common issues related to the neighbourhood were the social disorder in the

community such as violence, gangs, drugs and the availability of weapons and firearms. Several participants admitted that they witnessed fighting every day in their area, including fighting between gangs. Others, especially those who committed drug crimes, stated that drug-related issues were serious in their places, in which many people were addicted or arrested because of drug involvement. In the cases of violent crimes, there was a strong connection between the availability of weapons and the offending when the offenders used knives, swords or guns for solving problems or committing crimes.

6. Theoretical and practitioner implications

As the issue of youth offending has become a significant problem, while the research on risk factors for youth offending in Vietnam is still limited, this research is a new approach to the understanding the cause of youth crime in Vietnam. More importantly, it helps with understanding the risk factors for youth offending in the contexts of Vietnam from a life history approach; given that no research about the life histories of the young offenders had been conducted in Vietnam before. Therefore, the findings from this research may provide new understanding of the causes of youth offending in Vietnam from a life history approach. Moreover, the understanding these risk factors could help with designing and implementing new programs and strategies to improve the effectiveness of youth offending prevention in Vietnam.

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