

# The Quantitative Analysis of Juvenile Delinquency in Contemporary Japan (Part 4)<sup>1)</sup>

OKABE Takeshi

## Chapter 9 Conclusion and Comprehensive Discussion

### Section 1 Findings of this Study

Here, the findings presented from Chapters 2 to 8 are summarized.

In Chapter 2 “Chronological Changes in Delinquency Occurrence—Consideration Based on Official Statistics,” chronological changes in recidivism were examined, calculated from official statistics, based on trends in arrestee ratios by age and crime type. The results showed that BCs after 1965–1966 maintain a certain level of arrestee ratios throughout youth and early adulthood; with the exception of homicide, the arrestee ratio for any crime type falls at 18 to 19 and into the 20s, and that even BCs with relatively high numbers of juvenile delinquencies do not maintain high levels of arrestee ratios into adulthood. Furthermore, some changes observed in the 2000s include a slight reduction in the peak age for brutal offenses, falling to ages 16–17, as well as disappearance of a gradual upward trend for homicide associated with increase in age for individuals aged 10–19. However, such trends do not necessarily hold true for arrestee ratios for each crime type committed by those aged 14–15 and 16–17 in the 1995–96 BC. There was limited evidence of age reduction for violent and theft crimes in the 2000s. Finally, there was absolutely no evidence of increasing brutality.

In Chapter 3 “Popularization of Delinquency and Recidivism—Consideration Based on Longitudinal Delinquency Record Data in Prefecture A,” aspects of the popularization of delinquency and recidivism were examined. A comparison of cumulative actual arrestee ratios for the 1986 BC with the 1978 BC showed no major changes in ratios of males but an increase in ratios of females. Viewed by crime type, the majority of arrestees committed “gateway-type offenses” with 70% to 80% of the total ending their delinquency careers after the first arrest. The average total number of arrests per individual was 1.5 and 1.3 times for males and females, respectively. The number of repeat offenses peaked at the age of 15 for both the genders.

In Chapter 4 “Changes in Types of Crimes Associated with Repeated Delinquency—Consideration Based on Longitudinal Delinquency Record Data in Prefecture A,” changes in crime type associated with recidivism were examined. Results suggested evidence for escalation to more serious crimes associated with repeated delinquency. Overall, there was no strong indication of trends toward specialization in specific crime types associated with recidivism. Furthermore, analysis using DI (diversity indexes) revealed that females were slightly more likely to specialize than males, and there was no relationship between age at initial arrest and

specialization.

In Chapter 5, “Longitudinal Patterns of Delinquency Occurrence—Consideration Based on Longitudinal Delinquency Record Data in Prefecture A,” patterns of recidivism associated with increased age were examined. The results of semi-parametric mixed Poisson regression modeling showed three typical differing groups derived for both the 1978 and 1986 BCs, based on patterns of relationship between age and crime. Evidence of high- and low-level cumulative crime groups demonstrated by several previous overseas studies were not detected. Furthermore, with regard to high-level crime groups, while the value at peak for the 1978 BC was higher than that for the 1986 BC, the 1986 BC value exceeded the 1978 BC from ages 10–12 and 16. Moreover, a comparison of high- and low-level delinquency groups for both BCs showed that delinquency began at an earlier age, and the potential for committing violent delinquent acts was higher for the high-level delinquency group.

In Chapter 6, “Home Environment and Delinquency—Consideration Based on Official Statistics, Questionnaire Surveys of Youth Involved in Delinquency, and Longitudinal Delinquency Record Data,” the relationship between home environment and delinquency was examined based on official statistics, questionnaire surveys targeting juvenile delinquents, and delinquency record data of questionnaire respondents. Results of the analysis showed that juveniles with less desirable home environments were more prone to delinquency. Analysis of official statistics suggests that the home environment’s influence decreases relative to increase in age.

In Chapter 7, “Education Level and Delinquency—Consideration Based on Official Statistics,” the relationship between social level and delinquency was examined utilizing official statistics. The focus was on survey items pertaining to educational history, and among census data, National Police Agency statistics and court statistics to examine the relationship between education level and delinquency by crime type. Results showed that juveniles with lower educational levels have a higher tendency to participate in crime. This tendency is particularly strong for those committing brutal and drug crimes. Moreover, theft crimes, believed to be more transient offenses, were committed more often by juveniles with low education levels. This suggests that the “popularization of delinquency” discourse lacks validity, even with regard to relatively minor offenses.

In Chapter 8, “Factors Relevant to Recidivism—Consideration Based on Longitudinal Delinquency Record Data in Prefecture B,” recidivism factors for youth having committed at least one offense were examined based on police department longitudinal delinquency record data. The results of using the Cox proportional hazard model showed that problems adapting at school, problems observed with nurturing attitude of parent(s), and the absence of one or both parents increase risk of recidivism. Moreover, risks of recidivism increased with lower ages at initial offense. Problems adapting at school increase risk of recidivism both while attending middle school and after graduation from middle school.

## Section 2 Comprehensive Discussion

This section expands on the findings and offers comprehensive discussion.

The first point in question pertains to evaluating the current state of juvenile delinquency.

As discussed in Chapter 2, even when juvenile delinquency shows a relative increase for some crime types for cohorts born after 1965–66, the arrestee ratios subsequently decreased by their early 20s, at the very latest.

The tendency for rapid reduction in arrestee ratios in the high teens has been previously indicated as a characteristic of youth crime in Japan (Harada 1995). This tendency persists even today. Furthermore, this situation is consistent with findings in Chapter 4 that specialization in crime type does not occur, and with results of trajectory analysis in Chapter 5 that groups adhering to continuous criminal activity into adulthood are not found in Japan. It is well known that, even today, crime rates in Japan are relatively lower than in other major industrialized countries. Perhaps, findings from this study provide insight into the reason for this phenomenon.

Second, further confirmation is needed regarding the small number of individuals who reoffend at a certain point between the ages 10–19. More reoffending juveniles naturally result in a higher number of incidents, even if crimes are not spreading to a larger population. Based on escalation of crime type associated with recidivism (Chapter 4) and higher potential for committing violent delinquent acts (Chapter 5), placing a high priority on combating recidivism should be an essential component of policies against juvenile delinquency. While research into crime and delinquency provides much useful information for implementing such policies, it has to be admitted that Japan is behind other countries in terms of research in this field; thus, further research is essential.

Third, in the context of the risk factor approach in crime and delinquency research in Western countries, the analytical results of Chapters 6–8 indicate the following.

First, similar to previous research in Western countries, inappropriate parent to child relationships, broken homes, and abuse by parents likely increase risk factors for juvenile delinquency in Japan as well (Chapters 6 and 8). Of particular significance are findings using multivariate analysis based on longitudinal delinquency record data (Chapter 8) that show that absence of one or both parents and poor nurturing attitude of parent (s) significantly increase risk of recidivism. If a large number of risk factors related to family are the same in Western industrialized countries as in Japan, then it is probably safe to presume the existence of some common mechanisms that transcend differences in cultures and societies by which family and home environments contribute to occurrence of delinquency. Hence, home environment policies aimed at preventing and reducing delinquency, already implemented and proved effective abroad, might also prove effective in Japan.

On the other hand, this study could not verify whether socioeconomic status of the home or the presence of parents who exhibit antisocial tendencies would constitute risk factors. These are major themes for future research. Certainly, previous research findings in Western countries indicated that low socioeconomic status at home during childhood and the presence of parents who exhibited antisocial tendencies had a relatively large impact on subsequent violent crime (Lipsey and Derzon 1998). Based on the data from questionnaire surveys of middle school students and their guardians, Okabe (2010) observed that cultural level at home was directly related to delinquency through influences such as inappropriate nurturing by parents and inability of the individual to adapt at school. Further accumulation of such research is awaited.

One issue that must be considered regarding home environment is “the hierarchical disparity of available resources that are premise for childcare” (Hayashi 2010: 208). The fact that inappropriate parent–child relationships are a risk factor for delinquency is believed to be linked to the argument that places responsibility for delinquency on attitudes and behaviors of guardians. However, more problematic is the disparity in the amount of resources available to guardians. Rather than the lack of appropriate nurturing itself,

policymakers and practitioners in the field of delinquency should focus on factors that cause the lack of appropriate nurturing.

One more element vital in discussions related to the risk factor approach is factors pertaining to school. While it was indicated in Chapter 1 that poor attitude and grades at school are recognized as risk factors in previous research conducted overseas, current results suggest that these might also be the critical risk factors in Japan (Chapter 8).

Furthermore, the analysis in Chapter 8 suggests that the degree to which problems adapting at school impact delinquency might differ by generation. This finding relates to that period in which the impact of the risk factor occurs. This finding might add a new perspective to crime and delinquency research relying on the risk factor approach.

Although Ottawa (2000) observed that school as a reference group for adolescents has diminished in importance compared with previous times, adaptability at school is still an important element from the perspective of preventing delinquency. This study's results suggest that some approach to increasing adaptability at school would be effective in suppressing juvenile delinquency.

Moreover, findings obtained from analysis in Chapter 8 represent some of the most trustworthy evidence pertaining to delinquency domestically. Along with providing value for development and improvement of the juvenile court system in Japan, these findings are also likely to become basic data for international comparative research that includes Japan.

Related to the third point in question, the fourth point is that observations in Chapters 6–8 raise major questions about perceptions of juvenile delinquency with “the popularization of delinquency” and “average child” discourse as premises. Even today, there are uneven distributions of delinquency among children with meager upbringings and children in unfortunate home environments, including the absence of one or more parent.

Careful attention in handling these results is critical because one mistaken step in this type of evidence will certainly amplify discrimination and prejudice. However, using this as an excuse to ignore the facts serves only to maintain this state of uneven distribution of delinquency. Based on Kawabe's (1991: 22) indication that claiming the “popularization of delinquency” discourse “may close the eyes of citizens (to the uneven distribution of delinquency) and serve to further deepen boundaries between classes,” the uneven distribution of delinquency should be even more emphasized.

Why have arguments regarding uneven distribution of delinquency failed to gain steam in Japan? Two points are discussed regarding this issue.

The first point is the possibility that the very fact of referring to “uneven distribution” has been avoided as it was considered to lead to some sort of discrimination. The author believes this is because of the discovery that discussion of uneven distribution of delinquency is structured similarly to discussions in educational sociology of “education and class distinctions.” Kariya (1995: 196) observed that, based on the remark that “tutoring has led to discriminatory education” in a 1961 Japan Teachers Union educational seminar, conditions in education were then “based on the perception of education” in which “the fact that ‘scholastic ability’ was viewed as a problem of class distinction itself was avoided as it was considered as a perception of education that gives feelings of discrimination toward underprivileged children.” If a similar mentality exists about avoiding perceptions of class distinctions in delinquency as problematic, this might be one reason for

reduction in discussions on uneven distribution of delinquency, at least after a certain generation.

Second, this avoidance of “uneven distribution” not only applies to the problem of delinquency but also to youth problems in general, including delinquency. Such tendency points to social circumstances in which it is considered correct for problems to be treated within the framework of clinical psychology and dealt with individually. Amid the popularization of psychological understanding of delinquency, the focus on social structure has been rejected favoring individual background. Based on Young’s (1999), “The Exclusive Society” theory, Makino (2008: 17) stated that this trend in Japan is “‘psychological essentialism’ as one pattern of biological essentialism.”

Regardless, existence of uneven distribution in delinquency was demonstrated consistently throughout all observations in Chapters 6–8. Clear relationships between juvenile delinquency and disadvantageous nurturing and environmental aspects (such as the absence of one or more parents and/or abuse) (Chapters 6 and 8), low educational level (Chapter 7), and problems adapting at school (Chapter 8) were confirmed. This suggests the possibility that problem situations that can be validly described with the concept of “social exclusion” are spreading in Japanese society as well.

According to Iwata (2005), social exclusion indicates not only an economic problem but also problems of a particular population separated from normal opportunities and institutions; it crosses over all aspects of people’s social lives, including political and cultural aspects. To this point in Japan, the concentration of problems into certain social groups and regions has been less visible, and understanding of overall conditions, together with political responses to these problems, has been delayed. There is a high likelihood that a situation best labeled as “social exclusion” has arisen in Japan; it is just that the concentration of problems is not readily visible. The themes discussed in Chapters 6–8 should be understood within the context of social exclusion.

In addition to emphasizing individual responsibility of participants in crime, delinquency, and delinquent behavior, there is increasing pressure within contemporary Japanese society for seeking remorse, sanctions, and exclusion. “Education incorporating the victim’s perspective” has been emphasized in correctional facilities (Midorikawa 2004), and expressions such as “guidance with firm attitude” and “zero tolerance” have recently been emphasized as representative expressions for dealing with such issues in schools as well. However, considering individuals in the context of social exclusion, such treatment further increases pressure of exclusion on them and might even exacerbate the problem.

While accumulation of further research is necessary, findings pertaining to uneven distributions of delinquency clarified in this study could be utilized as critical evidence to help policymakers understand conditions surrounding social exclusion, implement appropriate policies to counteract social exclusion, and transform the general public’s negative perception of delinquent youth.

### **Section 3 Topics for Further Research on Delinquency**

The following are suggestions of topics for future research on delinquency based on discussions in this study.

As mentioned in comprehensive discussion, I would first like to indicate a necessity for further research pertaining to juvenile delinquency careers. While understanding how the spread of crime and delinquency is a major theme of criminal research over the past 20 years or so, domestic research is still in its infancy.

The greatest hurdle is data accessibility. Due to limitations in raw data, the analysis from Chapters 3 to 5 was conducted using data that covered only a 17 year period following birth. The data in Chapter 8 were also limited to a maximum 19 years and 11 months from birth, with no inclusion of data after adulthood.

While it is always better to use data covering a broader period to increase validity and generalizability of analytical results, the current state of affairs presents a difficult situation even for governmental research organizations conducting analysis, including both juvenile delinquency record data and crime records after adulthood. The current absolute dearth of analysis associating juvenile delinquency records from family courts and police departments with criminal histories after adulthood renders such research technically impossible. This could be an important mid- to long-term research topic.<sup>2)</sup>

Also a mid- to long-term topic, establishing environments that enable access to criminal and delinquency data by researchers outside government offices (while setting strict rules for individual confidentiality as a precondition) is also a critical topic.<sup>3)</sup>

If the data accessibility issue is disregarded for the sake of argument, one of the most critical issues for clarification by future research into delinquency careers is the identification of factors that lead to changes in delinquency occurrence trajectories. Using the “modeling that includes explanatory variables,” which expand analysis of delinquency trajectories conducted in Chapter 5, examination of types of changes that occurred will be made possible by introducing explanatory variables and parameters. It would be meaningful in terms of both policy and practical implications if such methods can be used to concretely elucidate countermeasures against delinquency for juveniles who commit to continuous delinquency.

Various types of variables were examined in Chapters 6–8 as candidates for explanatory variables and parameters for analysis; however, in addition to those, gang affiliation is also an important factor. Gang affiliation as a critical risk factor for violent delinquency has been clarified in previous research conducted overseas. In particular, participation in gangs by juveniles in the low teens indicates significant likelihood of subsequent violent behavior (Office of the Surgeon General 2001). In conducting longitudinal studies, Thornberry et al. (1993) observed that the difficulty is not that individuals with a high frequency of delinquency join gangs, but rather, mere affiliation with the gang itself increases frequency of delinquency by gang members.

One more major issue is examination of the impact delinquent behavior has on life events other than delinquency; criminal and delinquent careers might be related to many events, such as life course selection, employment, and starting a family.

Now, it is useful to remember that delinquency career research is not conducted using public data alone. Rather, reliance on analysis of public data is problematic. For example, while the relationship between delinquency occurrence and age was analyzed in Chapter 5, a certain amount of reservation is required when interpreting results due to the possibility of biased treatment by law enforcement agencies. For example, arresting U-14 young offenders (14 or younger) might be more difficult than arresting 14+ juvenile offenders even though the same crime was committed.

Therefore, promoting longitudinal research with systematic use of self-reported delinquency scales is essential for future research. However, there is no indication that surveys of large-scale samples, such as the National Youth Survey in the United States, will be introduced in Japan any time soon. However, the problems of crime and delinquency will probably continue to be a major societal issue. The author believes that

resolution is not impossible as long as a social consensus is achieved for financial costs and time needed to grasp these issues' reality.<sup>4)</sup>

Lastly, research that can be performed without longitudinal data is addressed. In Chapters 6 and 7, factors relevant to delinquency were examined using existing official statistics and one-time questionnaire surveys (not longitudinal in design). While this type of research should definitely be continued, when doing so, it is essential to conduct analysis by age group to the extent possible. As in Chapter 6, there is considerable interaction between delinquency factors and age. Furthermore, there is considerable significance in implementing policies related to delinquency that, rather than targeting all juveniles, separate groups by ages at certain levels and then seek solutions for each group.

Finally and most significantly, there is currently an overall lack of empirical research on juvenile delinquency in Japan. The author believes that the current state of research leaves much to be desired in a day and age when the importance of policy implementation based on evidence is widely recognized. Regardless, evidence related to aspects and occurrence mechanisms of delinquency included in future research must be linked to policy implementation and practical approaches. The research topics above are proposed as a guideline for advancing delinquency research in these contexts.

## Notes

1 This paper is the English translation of chapter 9 of the author's original book in Japanese published in 2013, whose title is *Gendai Nihon no Shonen Hiko*. The author thanks Crimson Interactive Pvt. Ltd. (Ulatus) – [www.ulatus.jp](http://www.ulatus.jp) for their assistance in manuscript translation and editing. The papers translating chapters 1–8 of that book are Okabe (2016), Okabe (2017a), and Okabe (2017b).

2 While research results based on prosecutors' computerized criminal histories are published (Ministry of Justice Legal Research Institute ed. 2007), there is almost no mention of juvenile delinquency. Because computerized criminal history data covers only those confirmed guilty at criminal trial, the majority of youth arrested are likely to be not included.

3 Systems that enable use of official, statistical raw data for research purposes, such as the Employment Status Survey, have operated since 2009. Data is provided to researchers based on established rules, and it is anonymized to preserve confidentiality. This system does not apply to crime and delinquency data.

4 Attempts at large-scale longitudinal research that include participation by social scientists have begun in recent years. These include a longitudinal research project (also known as the "Suku Suku Cohort") targeting infants primarily undertaken by the Japan Science and Technology Agency as well as longitudinal surveys for newborns and those for adults by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. The author believes that such momentum should be incorporated in principle.

## References

- Harada, Y., 1995, "Adjustment to School, Life Course Transitions, and Changes in Delinquent Behavior in Japan", in Hagan, J. ed., *Delinquency and Disrepute in the Life Course*, JAI Press: 35-60.
- Hayashi, M., 2010, "3-sai Made wa Haha no Te de [The Myth of the First Three Years]", in K. Imazu and D. Hida eds., *Zoku Kyoiku Gensetsu wo Do Yomu ka*, Shin-yosha: 189-213, in Japanese.
- Iwata, M., 2005, "Hinkon Shakaiteki Haijo to Fukushi Shakai [Poverty, Social Exclusion, and Welfare

- Society]”, in M. Iwata and A. Nishizawa eds., *Hinkon to Shakaiteki Haijo*, Minerva Shobo: 1-12, in Japanese.
- Kariya, T., 1995, *Taishu Kyoiku Shakai no Yukue: Gakureki Shugi to Byodo Shinwa no Sengoshi [The Future of the Mass Education Society]*, Chuokoron-sha, in Japanese.
- Kawabe, Y., 1991, “Unsafety in Japan Reflected in the Juvenile Delinquency”, *Japanese Journal of Sociological Criminology*, 16: 17-35, in Japanese.
- Lipsey, M. W. and J. H. Derzon, 1998, “Predictors of Violent or Serious Delinquency in Adolescence and Early Adulthood: A Synthesis of Longitudinal Research”, in R. Loeber and D. P. Farrington eds., *Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders: Risk Factors and Successful Interventions*, Sage: 86-105.
- Makino, T., 2008, “Shonen Hanzai wo Meguru Manazashi no Henyo: Koki Kindai ni Okeru [Transformation of View of Juvenile Crime]”, in I. Habuchi ed., *Dokoka Mondaika Sareru Wakamono Tachi*, Koseisha Koseikaku: 3-24, in Japanese.
- Midorikawa, T., 2004, “Shufukuteki Shiho to Kyosei Kyoiku ni Okeru Higaisha no Shiten [ Restorative Justice and Learning the View of the Victims in Correctional Education]”, *Keisei*, 115(6): 16-24, in Japanese.
- Ministry of Justice Legal Research Institute ed., 2007, *Heisei 19 Nen Ban Hanzai Hakusho: Saihansha no Jittai to Taisaku [White Paper on Crime 2007]*, Saiki Printing, in Japanese.
- Office of the Surgeon General, 2001, *Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- Okabe, T., 2010, “Shakai Kaiso to Shonen Hiko: Kancho Tokei to Shakai Chosa Deta ni Motozuku Ichi Kosatsu [Social Stratum and Juvenile Delinquency in Recent Japan: A Study Based on Official Statistics and Survey Data]”, *Journal of Social Problems (Gendai no Shakai Byori)*, 25: 77-96, in Japanese.
- Okabe, T., 2016, “The Quantitative Analysis of Juvenile Delinquency in Contemporary Japan (Part 1)”, *Journal of the Literary Society of Yamaguchi University*, 66: 121-160.
- Okabe, T., 2017a, “The Quantitative Analysis of Juvenile Delinquency in Contemporary Japan (Part 2)”, *Journal of the Literary Society of Yamaguchi University*, 67: 87-131.
- Okabe, T., 2017b, “The Quantitative Analysis of Juvenile Delinquency in Contemporary Japan (Part 3)”, *Journal of Cross-Cultural Studies*, 11: 37-53.
- Otawa, N., 2000, “Seito Bunka: Gakko Tekio [Student Culture and Adaptation to School]”, in D. Hida, H. Mimizuka, H. Iwaki, and T. Kariya eds., *Kokosei Bunka to Shinro Keisei no Henyo*, Gakuji Shuppan: 185-213, in Japanese.
- Thornberry, T. P., M. D. Krohn, A. J. Lizotte, and D. Chard-Wierschem, 1993, “The Role of Juvenile Gangs in Facilitating Delinquent Behavior”, *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 30: 55-87.
- Young, J., 1999, *The Exclusive Society: Social Exclusion, Crime and Difference in Late Modernity*, Sage.