

# The characteristics of the child dragged into crime among university students

## Üniversite öğrencileri arasında suça sürüklenen çocuk karakteristikleri

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### SUMMARY

**Objective:** Getting involved in crime in children is classified as a risk-taking behaviour. Risk-taking behaviour is defined as a behaviour that creates proportionately the possibility of undesirable consequences. According to many studies, risk-taking behaviour and crime statistics reaches a peak during late adolescence and early adulthood. In our study, we aimed to search the prevalence of the crime behaviour and related factors in young adults dragged into the crime but somehow managed to receive university education.

**Method:** 706 university students from 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades were involved into this study.

**Results:** 15.3% of the participants state that they have committed a crime at least once; moreover, male gender is more frequently observed in children who are dragged into crime. The probability of being abused (physical-emotional-negligence) and self-harming behaviour are more common in children dragged into the crime.

**Conclusions:** The reason why most of the children dragged into crime are male; thus can be explained such factors as taking part of males ones in work and social life more, controlling and protection of females' spending time out of home. The frequency of getting involved into crime by those evaluating their income as inadequate is higher than the other group. Children living in a poor family, environment and privation may cause children to lead criminal and problematic behaviours. Self-harming behaviour is more common in children dragged into crime. Self-harming behaviour in lower-income people and in certain social groups has been observed more commonly; furthermore, it may be thought that what children dragged into crime live is related to the social environment and the levels of their income. As a result, it was found that children dragged into crime are the ones who are often males, belonging to the lower income group, having frequently self-harming behaviour; moreover, they are the children whose families have criminal past and they are the children who experience abuse more frequently. Child abuse, child neglecting and self-harming behaviour should be searched in all children who dragged into the crime.

**Keywords:** Child dragged into crime, child abuse, self-harming

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## ÖZET

**Amaç:** Çocuklarda suça karışma, risk alıcı davranış olarak sınıflandırılır. Risk alıcı davranış, belirli bir oranda istenmeyen sonuçların doğma olasılığını yaratan davranış olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Birçok çalışmaya göre, risk alıcı davranış ile suç istatistikleri, geç adolesan ve erken yetişkinlik dönemlerinde pik yapmaktadır. Bizde çalışmamızda suça sürüklenen ancak üniversite eğitimi almayı başaran genç erişkinlerde, suç davranışı ve ilgili faktörlerin yaygınlığını araştırmayı amaçladık.

**Yöntem:** Bu çalışmaya 1. ve 4. sınıf 706 üniversite öğrencisi dahil edilmiştir.

**Bulgular:** Katılımcılardan % 15,3'ü en az bir kez suç işlediğini belirtmekte ve suça sürüklenen çocuklarda erkek cinsiyet daha sık görülmektedir. Suça sürüklenen çocuklarda istismara (fiziksel-duygusal-ihmal) uğrama olasılığı ve kendine zarar verme davranışı daha yaygındır.

**Sonuç:** Suça sürüklenen çocukların önemli bir kısmının erkek olmasının sebebi; daha fazla iş ve sosyal yaşamın içinde olması, kadınların ev dışında geçirdikleri zamanın aile tarafından daha iyi denetlenmesi ve korunması gibi faktörlerle açıklanabilir. Gelirini yetersiz olarak değerlendirenlerin suça karışma sıklığı, diğer gruba göre yüksektir. Çocukların yoksul bir aile ortamında, yoksul bir çevrede ve mahrumiyet içerisinde yaşamaları; çocukların suç ve problemli davranışlara yönlenebilmelerine neden olabilmektedir. Suça sürüklenen çocuklarda kendine zarar verme davranışı daha yaygındır. Kendine zarar verme davranışının daha düşük gelirli ve belli sosyal gruplarda daha yaygın olduğu gösterilmiş olup suça sürüklenen çocukların yaşadıkları sosyal çevre ve gelir düzeyleriyle ilişkili olduğu düşünülebilir. Sonuç olarak suça sürüklenen çocukların; sıklıkla erkek olduğu, daha düşük gelir grubundan geldiği, kendine zarar verme davranışının daha yaygın olduğu, ailesinde suç geçmişinin daha belirgin olduğu ve çocuk istismarına daha sık uğramış çocuklar olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Suça sürüklenmiş bütün çocuklarda çocuk istismarı ve ihmali ile kendine zarar verme davranışı araştırılmalıdır.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Suça sürüklenen çocuk, çocuk istismarı, kendisine zarar verme

## INTRODUCTION

According to the first article of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; any person up to the age of eighteen should be considered as a child <sup>1</sup>. In accordance with Article 6/1-b of the Turkish Penal Code No. 5237, a person who has not completed the age of 18 is attributed as a child <sup>2</sup>. According to Child Protection Law No. 5395, protection is the primary priority for children who are dragged into crime <sup>3</sup>. Crime involvement in children is classified as risk-taking behavior and risk-taking behavior is defined as behavior that creates the possibility of a certain amount of undesirable consequences <sup>4</sup>. Some behaviors that can be defined as risk-taking behavior include excessive alcohol consumption, smoking, substance abuse, high-risk sexual behavior, dangerous driving, being extremely aggressive in human relations, absenteeism in school, theft, lying, gambling and crime <sup>4</sup>. According to majority of studies, risk taking behavior and crime statistics peak during late adolescence and early adulthood <sup>5,6</sup>. Being able to perceive potentially risky situations in advance and avoiding high risk is seen as one of the most important skills that people can develop <sup>4</sup>. So far, studies on risk-taking behavior and criminal involvement have generally been carried out in developed countries. However, environmental factors of risk-taking behavior such as wars, natural disasters, poverty, low education, epidemic diseases, migration, terrorism and social violence are more common in developing countries <sup>7</sup>. In our study, we aimed to investigate the prevalence of crime behavior and related factors in

young adults who were dragged into crime but managed to get university education.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study was carried out between Istanbul University and Gaziosmanpaşa University Art and Science Faculty students between 2007-2008. The sample was randomly selected by 1st and 4th year students by using power analysis with stratified sampling method. As the criterion for inclusion to the study, it has been determined to be in the 1st and 4th grades of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. A total of 706 participants were included in the analysis.

Data collection tools: A questionnaire developed by Ögel et al. was used in the research. The questionnaire was filled out by the participants themselves in the classroom. The main topics in the questionnaire form are: socio-demographic information, shelter and family characteristics, health conditions, self-harming behavior, substance use characteristics, friend and environment characteristics, legal and mental conditions and trauma experiences. The questionnaire's inter-interviewer and test-retest reliability were shown previously <sup>8</sup>. Due to the blank answers, 100% values could not be reached in the tables. Informed consent was obtained from each participant.

This research was partly presented previously <sup>9</sup>.

The data were analyzed using the Epi Info 2000 program.

## RESULTS

341 of the participants included in our study were male (48.3%) and 361 female (51.1%). It was

seen that 128 participants were under the age of 18, 140 participants were 19 years old, 426 participants were 20 years old and above.

**Table 1:** The responses of the participants to the questions about whether they commit a crime and the parameters questioned about it

	No	Only once	2-3 times	4-5 times	More than 5
Have you committed any crime?	598 (84,7%)	77 (10,9%)	20 (2,8%)	5 (0,7%)	6 (0,8%)
Have you testified to the legal authorities because of the crime claim?	619 (87,7%)	41 (5,8%)	16 (2,3%)	4 (0,6%)	1 (0,1%)
Have you ever stolen something?	564 (79,9%)	69 (9,8%)	36 (5,1%)	3 (0,4%)	7 (1%)
Have you been in prison or correctional facility?	677 (95,9%)	2 (0,3%)	-	1 (0,1%)	-
Did your mother or father remain in prison?	640 (90,7%)	37 (5,2%)	4 (0,6%)	1 (0,1%)	-
Are there any prisoners staying in close relatives?	426 (60,3%)	160 (22,7%)	83 (11,8%)	4 (0,6%)	7 (1%)

While 598 (84.7%) of the participants stated that they did not take any action that could be considered a crime during their lifetime, 108 (15.3%) stated that they committed a crime at least

once. (Table 1). While 13.8% of the children dragged into crime have a mother or father's criminal history, the same rate is 5% in the other group.

**Table 2:** Answers of 87 of 108 participants who stated that they committed a crime related to crime parameters

	No	Only once	2-3 times	4-5 times	More than 5	p
Have you testified to the legal authorities because of the crime claim?	56 (64,4%)	17 (19,5%)	11 (12,6%)	2 (2,3%)	1 (1,1%)	0,001
Have you ever stolen something?	54 (62,8%)	17 (19,8%)	10 (11,6%)	2 (2,3%)	3 (3,5%)	0,001
Have you been in prison or correctional facility?	83 (96,5%)	2 (2,3%)	-	1 (1,2%)	-	0,001
Did your mother or father remain in prison?	5 (86,2%)	9 (10,3%)	2 (2,4%)	1 (1,1%)	-	0,001
Are there any prisoners staying in close relatives?	41 (47,1%)	22 (25,4%)	17 (19,5%)	3 (3,4%)	4 (4,6%)	0,001

Considering the responses of 87 of 108 children who stated that they were dragged into crime, 87 of them answered the questions about the crime parameters, 64.4% of them were not questioned by the legal authorities and did not make any statements. The answers to the question of whether you have stolen something are similarly dispersed. There were only 3 participants stayed in the

correction house (Table 2). 5% of those who declare that they have not committed a crime have a parental history of being in prison. Bu oranlar, suç işlediğini ifade edenler için sırasıyla %13,8 ve %52,9'dur (Tablo 2). This rate is 13.8% for those who state that they have committed a crime (Table 2).

**Table 3:** Criminal involvement and comparison of certain demographic data

		Not involved in crime	At least once involved in crime	p
Gender	Male	266 (44,6%)	75 (71,4%)	0,001
	Female	331 (55,4%)	30 (28,6%)	
Place of birth	City	273 (45,9%)	46 (44,2%)	0,78
	District	228 (38,3%)	40 (38,5%)	
	Municipality	19 (3,2%)	2 (1,9%)	
	Village	75 (12,6%)	16 (15,4%)	
Income	Enough	483 (81,1%)	73 (68,3%)	0,001
	Not enough	113 (18,9%)	34 (31,7%)	
Home ownership		498 (83,3%)	87 (81,3%)	0,61

Male gender is significantly more frequent in children dragged into crime (Table 3). The frequency of the group who defined their income as "inadequate" was found to be significantly high in crime ( $p < 0.001$ ).

"If you have committed any crime, how old was this the first time?" 16 of the participants (14.8%) aged 7-9, 18 (16.7%) aged 10-12, 15 (13.9%) aged 13-15 and 23 of them (21.3%) responded as 16 and over. 36 participants did not answer this question.

**Table 4:** Comparison of Crime and Child Abuse and Neglect

	Not involved in crime	At least once involved in crime	P
Physical abuse	194 (34,6%)	41 (56,2%)	0,001
Sexual abuse	102 (18,2%)	17 (23%)	0,32
Emotional abuse	259 (45,4%)	52 (65%)	0,001
Neglect	393 (69,9%)	65 (82,3%)	0,02

The probability of physical and emotional abuse and being neglected was found to be significantly more frequent children who are dragged into crime.

In terms of sexual abuse, no significant difference was found between the child dragged into crime and the group not dragged. (Table 4)

**Table 5:** Comparison of crime involvement and self-harm behavior\*

	Not involved in crime	At least once involved in crime	p
Self-harm behavior	81 (14,5%)	27 (25%)	0,01
Suicidal ideation	66 (11,2%)	14 (15,9%)	0,21
Suicide attempt	39 (6,6%)	7 (7,8%)	0,65

\* Due to the answers left blank, 100% values could not be reached in all titles.

Self-harming behavior can manifest as cutting various parts of the body, extinguishing cigarettes, or amputation in the end organs. In our study, it was found that self-harming behavior was significantly more frequent in children who were dragged into crime (Table 5). On the other hand, no difference was found in terms of suicidal ideation or attempt.

## DISCUSSION

In our study, we aimed to investigate the prevalence of criminal behavior and related factors in young adults who were dragged into crime but managed to receive university education. According to our results, 15.3% of the respondents stated that they committed a crime at least once and

most often they committed this crime when they were over the age of 16.

The most important limitation of our study is that its method is cross-sectional. For this reason, the current statements of individuals were taken as basis, but the crimes they committed could not be evaluated impartially. On the other hand, the strengths of the study are the fact that it was collected in a university in two different regions and the use of a valid and reliable data form.

In our study, it was shown that a significant part of the children who were dragged into crime were men. Similar gender distribution was obtained in studies conducted in our country<sup>10,11</sup>. The male dominance is explained by factors such as the fact

that men are in more business and social life, and that the time spent by women outside the home is better controlled and protected by the family <sup>11</sup>.

Family crime history is also an important factor. In our study, it was revealed that there was a crime history of the mother / father at a rate of 13.8% in the group of children dragged into crime. In children who are dragged into crime, the rates of crime history among relatives are even higher. It is known that the increase in the number of individuals held in prisons will have negative effects on the society (and the individual) by causing damage to social relations and long-term changes in life <sup>12</sup>. Again in the studies conducted in our country, attention was drawn to the importance of the criminal history in the family <sup>10</sup>.

In our study, it was observed that those who expressed their income as inadequate had a high frequency of involvement in crime. It has been reported that children living in a poor family environment, in a poor environment and deprivation may cause children to be directed to criminal and problematic behaviors <sup>13</sup>.

In our study, physical and emotional abuse and neglect were common in children who were dragged into crime. In our study, all kinds of abuse among children who are dragged into crime are higher than the studies conducted in our country. For example, in a study conducted in our country in 2005, sexual abuse in childhood was 2.5%, physical and emotional abuse was 8.9% and neglect was 33.9% <sup>14</sup>. In another study conducted in our country, higher values were obtained, neglect 16.5%, emotional abuse 15.9%, physical abuse 13.5% and sexual abuse 10.7% <sup>7</sup>. In fact, it has been shown that there is a relationship between the low income and the reasons that cause child abuse and neglect <sup>15,16</sup>. At this point, it is necessary to investigate the findings of child abuse and neglect in a child dragged into crime. Especially considering that there are more traumatic findings in children who experience different types of abuse together than in children who have a single type of abuse, it becomes even more important <sup>17</sup>.

In a study on children living in the Chinese countryside; It has been determined that the rate of physical abuse is 49.7% in children, 51.6% in people with a family history of migration, and 61% in people with a family history of divorce. In the same study, the rate of being subjected to any sexual abuse was 11%, 13.3% for those with a family history of migration and 24.8% for those with a family history of divorce or living separately <sup>18</sup>. In our study, the rates of exposure to any type of abuse and the history of any person in his family

staying in prison for those involved in crime; we found that it was higher than those who did not commit crime. When we compare the results we obtained with other studies; It is necessary to investigate the history of childhood abuse and familial risk factors in people who are involved in crime.

Another finding in our study is that self-harming behavior is found at a rate of 14.5% in participants without a crime story. Similar rates were also obtained in previous studies in our country <sup>7</sup>. However, self-harming behavior is more common in children who are dragged into crime. Self-harm behavior has been shown to be more common in lower-income people and in certain social groups <sup>19</sup>. Therefore, it can be thought that this data we obtained is related to the social environment and income levels of children who are dragged into crime. Favazza et al. Reported that at least some of the children who came in this situation should not be underestimated by saying personality disorder and treatment may be needed <sup>20</sup>. On the other hand, it was determined that suicidal ideation and suicide attempt did not differ between groups in our study.

As a result, the characteristics of children dragged into crime; often male, had a lower income group, self-harming behavior was more common, family history of crime was more prominent, and experienced child abuse more frequently. Within the scope of Article 31 of the Turkish Penal Code, physicians are asked to evaluate whether the ability of children who have completed the age of twelve and who have not completed the age of fifteen to develop the ability to perceive the legal meaning and consequences of the crime committed and to direct their behavior. Physicians are not asked to evaluate, since those under the age of twelve do not have criminal responsibility. Children who have completed the age of fifteen but have not completed the age of eighteen are subject to a reduced sentence for their sentence, and in cases where there is no mental illness, physicians are not asked for an evaluation <sup>2</sup>. Child abuse and neglect and self-harming behavior should be sought in all children who are involved in crime.

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