

The Perks of Being a Teenager: Exploring the Role of Self-Control in Juvenile Delinquency – A Literature Review

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Abstract: Adolescence is a critical developmental stage marked by emotional volatility and identity exploration. However, not all adolescents navigate this phase successfully many exhibit risky behaviors categorized as juvenile delinquency. This literature review aims to examine the role of self-control in adolescent delinquency by exploring the types of delinquent behaviors associated with low self-control, identifying environmental factors that influence self-control, and analyzing the educational and psychosocial implications of these findings. Using articles published between 2020 and 2025 sourced from Google Scholar, Scopus, and EBSCO, a total of 11 relevant studies were reviewed. The analysis revealed that low self-control significantly contributes to aggressive behavior, substance abuse, cyberbullying, and sexual offenses among youth. Furthermore, external factors such as permissive parenting, deviant peer influence, and punitive school discipline were found to weaken self-control, whereas consistent parental attachment and supportive school environments can strengthen it. This review highlights the need for integrated interventions involving family, schools, and community support systems to enhance adolescents' self-control capacities and reduce delinquent behaviors. These findings support the theoretical framework of self-control theory while emphasizing the interplay between individual psychological traits and environmental contexts.

Keywords: Self-Control, Juvenile Delinquency, Environmental Influences, Psychosocial Intervention

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), adolescents are individuals aged 10–19 years, while the National Population and Family Planning Board of Indonesia (BKKBN) defines adolescents as those aged 10–24 years who are unmarried. Based on data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS), adolescents constitute approximately 25% of the total population, equivalent to around 67,268,900 individuals in 2019. Adolescence is often described as a transitional phase marked by emotional turbulence due to physical and psychological changes. It is a critical period in human development and is often filled with diverse experiences and joy an unforgettable stage in life for most individuals. However, not all adolescents are able to navigate this period successfully. Emotional volatility frequently leads adolescents to encounter various problems, some of which may develop into delinquent behaviors. Juvenile delinquency is a persistent social phenomenon that continues to draw attention globally, particularly in Indonesia. As reported by *Kompasiana*, the National Narcotics Agency (BNN) stated that approximately 2.29 million Indonesian adolescents were involved in drug abuse in 2020, with the trend increasing through 2022 (BNN, 2022). Drug abuse remains one of the primary issues contributing to juvenile delinquency. Furthermore, the Indonesian Child Protection Agency (LPAI) recorded Jakarta as one of the cities with the highest number of student brawls in 2021, with over 150 reported cases in a single year. These phenomena indicate that juvenile delinquency poses a serious challenge.

One of the psychological factors extensively studied for its critical role in regulating negative behaviors is self-control. Defined as an individual's capacity to regulate impulses, delay gratification, and conform to social norms (Tangney, Baumesiter, & Boone, 2004), self-control is especially crucial in children whose cognitive and emotional development is ongoing. Historical research posited that children with low self-control are more susceptible to aggressive, impulsive, and unlawful behaviors (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). However, Burt (2020) argues that self-control is not a fixed trait but instead context-dependent and influenced by specific situations. Given the increasing rates of juvenile delinquency associated with low self-control, it is essential to systematically review scientific findings that examine the relationship between self-control and deviant behavior among adolescents. Therefore, this literature review aims to explore the strategic role of self-control in preventing juvenile delinquency, identify the types of delinquent behavior most strongly associated with low self-control, investigate environmental factors (family, peers, school) that strengthen or weaken adolescent self-control, and analyze the educational and psychosocial intervention implications of these findings.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a literature review method. The articles analyzed were obtained from various database sources, namely Google Scholar, Scopus, and EBSCO, to identify relevant journal publications. The keywords used in the search included: “Role OR Influence AND Self-Control AND Juvenile Delinquency OR Youth Offenders OR Juvenile Offenders OR Juvenile Offending OR Youth Offending AND Exploring OR Analyzing OR Reviewing.” The initial search yielded approximately 19,607 publications within the last five years (2020–2025). Titles and abstracts were then reviewed to exclude publications that were not relevant to the research focus, particularly those that did not include the terms “self-control” and “adolescents” in the title. The remaining articles were subsequently examined in full text and assessed based on the inclusion criteria, namely discussing the relationship between self-control and juvenile delinquency, being either empirical research or review articles, published in peer-reviewed journals. However, after the screening process was conducted, 20 publications were deemed relevant to the topic of this study.

3. RESULTS

The publications that met the inclusion criteria for this study, spanning the years 2020 to 2025, consisted of 11 journal articles. Of these, 7 employed quantitative methods, 1 utilized meta-analysis, 1 was a literature review, 1 used qualitative methods, and 1 applied a quasi-experimental design.

Table 1: Summary of Studies Included in The Review

No	Authors & Year	Title	Method	Result
1	Pedro Pechorro dkk (2021)	The Role of Low Self-Control as a Mediator between Trauma and Antisociality/Criminality in Youth	Quantitative	Exposure to childhood trauma and psychological responses such as PTSD symptoms are significantly linked to low self-control in adolescent males. Low self-control strongly predicts antisocial behaviors, including delinquency, conduct problems, serious crime, and proactive aggression. Childhood trauma has both direct and indirect effects on antisocial behavior through reduced self-control, while trauma responses influence behavior only indirectly. Thus, self-control serves as a key mediator between early trauma and adolescent criminality.
2	Helmut Hirtenlehner & Heinz Leitgob (2021)	Differential Self-Control Effects: Moral Filtering and the Subsidiary Relevance of Self-Control	Quantitative	This study found that the impact of self-control on criminal behavior depends heavily on individual morality. Using data from 2,030 Dutch adolescents, results showed that self-control had a stronger effect on deviant intentions among those with low morality, while it had little to no effect among highly moral individuals. In essence, morality acts as a primary filter: when moral standards are high, deviant intentions are absent, making self-control less relevant. Conversely, for those with low morality, self-control plays a crucial role in regulating deviant impulses. The study introduces the concept of "moral filtering," suggesting that the influence of self-control on crime is secondary and conditional upon one's moral standards.
3.	Imammul Insan and Tsabita Atiq Zahra (2023)	The Relationship Between Self-Control and Juvenile Delinquency Among Students	Quantitative	This study found a significant negative correlation between self-control and juvenile delinquency among 57 tenth-grade male students at SMKN X in Sumbawa Besar. Using a quantitative correlational approach with a Likert-scale questionnaire, results showed a Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.795 ($p = 0.000$), indicating that higher self-control is associated with lower delinquency, and vice versa. Low self-control was linked to behaviors such as skipping school, defying authority, and fighting, often marked by impulsivity, emotional dominance, and poor

				social judgment. The study highlights the need for parental discipline and supportive cultural and school environments to help students develop better self-control.
4.	Huijsmans, Nivette, Eisner, and Ribeaud (2021)	Social Influences, Peer Delinquency, and Low Self-Control: An Examination of Time-Varying and Reciprocal Effects on Delinquency Over Adolescence	Quantitative	This longitudinal study of 1,197 Swiss adolescents (ages 13, 15, and 17) found a reciprocal relationship between self-control and social influences, such as parental attachment and peer delinquency, which varies across adolescence. Low self-control significantly predicted delinquent behavior during early to mid-adolescence ($\beta = -0.128$, $p < 0.001$), but its effect diminished by late adolescence, where peer influence became more dominant. Peer delinquency had a strong impact at ages 13–15, which weakened by 15–17. Delinquency also reinforced bonds with deviant peers, while parental involvement did not directly reduce delinquency but contributed to the development of self-control. These findings support a dynamic model integrating self-control and social influence theories, challenging the view that self-control is fixed from childhood. The study emphasizes that juvenile delinquency results from the evolving interaction between internal regulation and changing social contexts, highlighting the need for developmentally responsive interventions.
5.	Nadzifah Fiddiana and Aji Bagus Priyambodo (2021)	The Correlation Between Self-Control and Cyberbullying at Private High School X in Bogor	Quantitative	This quantitative study found a significant negative correlation between self-control and cyberbullying behavior among 95 high school students (ages 15–18) at a private school in Bogor. Using validated self-control ($\alpha = 0.853$) and cyberbullying ($\alpha = 0.873$) scales, Pearson correlation analysis showed $r = -0.465$, $p < 0.05$, indicating that higher self-control is associated with lower involvement in cyberbullying. Most students (74.7%) had high self-control, and 85.3% showed low levels of cyberbullying, suggesting they could regulate their behavior on social media. The findings emphasize that self-control plays a crucial internal role in preventing deviant behavior like cyberbullying, often driven by negative emotions, revenge, or lack of empathy. Thus, strengthening self-control is supported as an effective strategy for cyberbullying prevention among adolescents.
6.	Jean-Louis van Gelder, Margit Averdijk, Denis Ribeaud, and Manuel Eisner (2020)	Sanctions, Short-Term Mindsets, and Delinquency: Reverse Causality in a Sample of High School Youth	Quantitative Longitudinal	This longitudinal study of 1,197 Swiss adolescents across three waves (mean ages 13.7, 15.4, and 17.4) found that experiences with sanctions—both from police and school—significantly reduced self-control by increasing impulsivity and risk-taking, key features of a short-term mindset. Path analysis revealed that such sanctions indirectly increased late-adolescent delinquency through their impact on self-control. These findings challenge deterrence theory and the assumption of self-control stability proposed by Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990). Notably, the effects of sanctions on self-control remained significant even after controlling for prior delinquency and self-control levels, indicating a bidirectional relationship: while low self-control leads to delinquency, sanctions can also further erode self-control. The study underscores the long-term psychological impact of punitive interventions, suggesting that rather than preventing misbehavior, sanctions may reinforce a present-focused mindset in youth.
7.	Li et al. (2022)	The Association Between School	Meta-Analysis	This three-level meta-analysis, based on 143 effect sizes from 67 studies involving 56,545 students from preschool

		Discipline and Self-Control From Preschoolers to High School Students: A Three-Level Meta-Analysis		to high school, found a significant positive association between school discipline and student self-control ($r = 0.141$). Higher-quality and consistent school discipline was linked to higher levels of self-control. The relationship was stronger when discipline was supportive and structured (e.g., clear and consistent rules), rather than punitive or authoritarian. The effect was also more pronounced in elementary students and when self-control was rated by teachers or observers rather than self-reported. The study concludes that a supportive school environment with positive discipline practices plays a critical role in fostering self-control development and recommends education policies that prioritize constructive disciplinary approaches for long-term character building.
8.	Ruixi Sun & Yixuan Wang (2022)	The Influence of Family Factors on Juvenile Delinquency	Literature Review	This study examined the influence of family factors on juvenile delinquency. It found that adolescents from low socioeconomic backgrounds and disadvantaged geographic areas are more prone to criminal behavior. Youth from non-intact families also show higher delinquency rates compared to those from stable, traditional families. Parental characteristics further contribute: low parental self-control, particularly emotional instability, increases the risk of youth offending. Additionally, parental incarceration can cause psychological distress and is linked to higher theft rates among boys. Finally, permissive parenting styles, marked by a lack of supervision and emotional support, are associated with a greater likelihood of juvenile delinquency.
9.	Plabita Patowary and Rejani Thudalikunnil Gopalan (2023)	The Qualitative Analysis of Psychosocial Profile of Juvenile Offenders and Exploration of Their Perception towards Delinquent Behaviors	Qualitative	This qualitative study explored psychosocial factors contributing to juvenile delinquency and examined how young offenders perceive their actions. Using a cross-sectional design, 30 juveniles aged 10–17 were selected through purposive sampling—15 had committed heinous crimes (e.g., rape, murder), and 15 had committed non-heinous offenses (e.g., theft, assault, cybercrime). Analysis revealed key risk factors, including poor anger management, low frustration tolerance, academic struggles, media influence, low socioeconomic status, family illness, and neighborhood crime. Offenders generally lacked awareness, responsibility, and emotional understanding of their actions, often blaming external factors and showing little empathy toward victims. These findings offer insights for developing effective prevention and intervention programs.
10.	Rachel Dowdy (2022)	The Influence of Occupational Therapy on Self-Regulation in Juvenile Offenders	Quasi Experimental	This study examined emotional changes in incarcerated youth following sensory-based occupational therapy. Participants, with an average of 5.91 adverse childhood experiences and multiple mental health diagnoses, showed significant emotional improvement post-treatment. Likert scale ratings indicated reduced negative emotions and fewer negative emotion words used. Youth also reported feeling calmer and valued learning coping strategies. These findings suggest that sensory-based occupational therapy can serve as an effective, trauma-informed approach to enhance self-regulation and daily functioning in incarcerated adolescents.

11.	Heng Choon (Oliver) Chan* (2023)	Youth sexual offending in Hong Kong: examining the role of self-control, risky sexual behaviors, and paraphilic interests	Quantitative	This study found that men reported significantly higher levels of sexual assault threats and most types of paraphilic interests compared to women, while women showed a higher interest in transvestic fetishism. Logistic regression analysis revealed that low self-control, along with increased risky sexual behaviors and paraphilic interests, were key predictors of both penetrative and nonpenetrative sexual offenses. These findings highlight the importance of addressing self-control and sexual risk factors in efforts to prevent sexual offending among youth.
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3.1. Self-Control in Explaining Juvenile Delinquency

The self-control theory developed by Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) is one of the most widely used theoretical frameworks to explain deviant behavior, including juvenile delinquency. In this theory, self-control is defined as an individual's ability to resist impulses, delay gratification, and consider the long-term consequences of actions. When individuals, especially adolescents, have low levels of self-control, they become more impulsive, easily influenced, and tend to seek immediate gratification without assessing the risks. The ability to exercise self-control is therefore crucial in avoiding deviant behavior. A number of studies support the strong relationship between low self-control and tendencies toward delinquency. Pechorro et al. (2021) found that low self-control serves as an important mediator between childhood trauma and criminal tendencies in adolescence. This can lead to an increased risk of antisocial behavior and criminality, reinforcing that self-control is a key mediating variable linking early life experiences with deviant behavior. Similarly, Hirtenlehner and Leitgob (2021) emphasized that the influence of self-control becomes particularly significant in individuals with low levels of morality. In this context, morality acts as a primary "filter," and when this filter is weak, the role of self-control becomes more critical in suppressing deviant intentions. In other words, self-control serves as the final barrier when an individual lacks strong moral values to prevent criminal acts. Thus, self-control theory not only explains delinquency directly, but also in its interaction with moral and social factors.

3.2. Types of Juvenile Delinquency Most Strongly Associated with Low Self-Control

Various forms of juvenile delinquency have been found to correlate strongly with low self-control. These include aggressive behavior, fighting, truancy, defiance toward teachers, cyberbullying, substance abuse, theft, and sexual misconduct. Imammul Insan and Zahra (2023) reported that students with low self-control often engage in truancy and physical violence. Meanwhile, Fiddiana et al. (2021) identified a significant negative correlation between self-control and cyberbullying, indicating that adolescents with poor self-control are more prone to engaging in online harassment. Chan (2023) also found that low self-control is closely linked to increased rates of sexual offenses among adolescents. These findings are consistent with the core premise of self-control theory that individuals with low self-control are more likely to act without deliberation, whether in the context of physical or digital aggression. Such behaviors are typically impulsive, risk-indifferent, and driven by short-term gratification all hallmark indicators of weak self-control.

3.3. External Factors Influencing Self-Control in Adolescents

Adolescents' self-control is shaped by various environmental factors that can either strengthen or weaken it. The family environment serves as a fundamental foundation. Ruixi Sun et al. (2022) found that non-intact family structures, permissive parenting styles, and parents with poor emotional regulation or criminal histories tend to reduce self-control in children. Conversely, strong parental attachment and consistent parenting practices enhance adolescents' self-regulation abilities. Another influential factor is peer influence. Huijsmans et al. (2021) demonstrated that interaction with delinquent peers reinforces deviant behavior and lowers self-control through reciprocal mechanisms. Patowary and Gopalan (2023) further observed that peer pressure and association with deviant peer groups reduce adolescents' awareness of social values and personal responsibility. The school environment also plays an essential role. Li et al. (2022) reported that schools with supportive and consistent discipline systems have a positive impact on students' self-control development. In contrast, van Gelder et al. (2020) found that harsh disciplinary practices in schools may increase impulsivity and worsen self-regulation. Therefore, education strategies grounded in constructive discipline, positive teacher-student relationships, and moral reinforcement are vital in nurturing healthy self-control.

3.4. Educational and Psychosocial Intervention Implications

Findings from the literature review highlight several key implications for educational practices and psychosocial interventions. First, character and moral education should be an integral part of the school curriculum from an early age.

Values such as responsibility, emotional regulation, and sound decision-making should be systematically taught. Hirtenlehner and Leitgob (2021) pointed out that individual morality acts as a primary filter against deviant intentions, making moral education a crucial foundation. Second, the role of family in enhancing adolescents' self-control should not be overlooked. Parenting programs that promote positive child-rearing, open communication, and emotional support can create a home environment conducive to the development of self-control. On the other hand, schools should avoid repressive punishment approaches and instead emphasize constructive behavioral guidance. Li et al. (2022) confirmed that a school climate that supports positive discipline significantly contributes to students' character development.

Third, psychosocial interventions should be designed with sensitivity to the age and developmental stages of adolescents. As Huijsmans et al. (2021) noted, self-control and social influences evolve over time, requiring adaptive and contextually relevant intervention strategies. One effective example is sensory-based occupational therapy, as used in Dowdy's (2022) study, which helps at-risk adolescents manage emotions and increase body awareness. Finally, cross-sector collaboration among schools, families, and communities is essential in creating an environment that supports the development of adolescent self-control. Community-based policies, the involvement of local leaders, and the use of educational media can expand the reach of interventions. Through a comprehensive and sustained approach, the risks of juvenile delinquency can be significantly reduced, and adolescents can be guided toward healthy psychological and social development.

4 DISCUSSIONS

Based on a review of various studies, it can be concluded that self-control is one of the most significant predictors in explaining adolescents' involvement in deviant or delinquent behavior. The self-control theory proposed by Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) serves as the primary theoretical foundation for understanding this dynamic. The theory posits that individuals with low self-control are more likely to engage in impulsive, unplanned, and harmful actions—both to themselves and others. This notion is supported by empirical studies showing that low self-control is closely linked to behaviors such as physical violence, truancy, substance abuse, cyberbullying, and sexual misconduct. However, low self-control is not the sole contributing factor. Rather, it interacts with various external influences such as morality, peer pressure, and the family and school environment. In this context, morality acts as an initial filter in decision-making regarding deviant behavior. When moral values are weak, self-control becomes the last line of defense against engaging in criminal acts—and vice versa, strong morality can reinforce self-control.

The social environment also plays a vital role in shaping the development and function of self-control. Unstable family conditions, permissive parenting, and a lack of parental involvement have been shown to reduce adolescents' ability to regulate their impulses. Conversely, strong family bonds and emotional support help strengthen self-control. Peer influence can further exacerbate deviant behavior, especially when adolescents seek social acceptance within a group. As a formal educational institution, schools also play an essential role. The consistent implementation of supportive and structured disciplinary policies has proven more effective in promoting positive behavior than punitive approaches. Overall, the findings from the literature indicate that self-control is not merely an individual psychological construct, but one that is profoundly shaped by social, cultural, and environmental factors. Therefore, interventions aimed at reducing juvenile delinquency should not only focus on training self-control at the individual level but also incorporate family-based, educational, and community-based approaches that reinforce one another.

Overall, the findings from this literature review indicate that self-control, or the ability to regulate one's behavior, is not merely a personal or psychological issue, but is also strongly influenced by social, cultural, and environmental factors in which adolescents are raised. Therefore, efforts to prevent juvenile delinquency should not focus solely on improving individual self-control, but must also involve the active participation of families, schools, and the wider community. This review has several strengths. First, the studies referenced are from the past five years, providing insights that are relevant to the current conditions faced by adolescents. Second, the theoretical framework used is well-established and has been widely applied in previous research, making it a reliable and solid foundation. Third, the review does not look at a single factor in isolation but considers a range of influences—from individual psychological aspects to broader social factors. Moreover, it offers clear recommendations for interventions or actions that can be taken to ensure more effective and sustainable prevention of delinquent behavior. However, there are some limitations that need to be acknowledged. Most of the studies cited are correlational in nature, meaning they identify relationships between factors but do not establish direct cause-and-effect. Additionally, the studies primarily originate from a limited number of countries, which may limit their applicability in other settings due to cultural and social differences. Therefore, further research is needed, using deeper and more diverse cultural perspectives, to ensure the findings are more representative and broadly applicable.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Self-control plays a crucial role in preventing juvenile delinquency. Individuals with low self-control tend to be more impulsive and are more susceptible to engaging in deviant behaviors such as violence, theft, substance abuse, and other forms of misconduct. However, the role of self-control does not operate in isolation, it is influenced and mediated by personal morality, parenting style, peer influence, and the structure of discipline within schools. Effective interventions to address juvenile delinquency must be comprehensive, emphasizing character education, the strengthening of moral values, the cultivation of healthy family relationships, and the implementation of positive disciplinary approaches in schools. Additionally, community- and psychosocial-based strategies—such as emotional regulation therapy, youth development programs, and family counseling—are essential in enhancing adolescents' psychological resilience. By understanding the complex relationship between self-control and juvenile delinquency, we can design more targeted and sustainable prevention strategies to support adolescents in navigating their transitional phase toward adulthood.

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