

# Social Control, Delinquency, and Victimization Among Kibbutz Adolescents

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**Abstract:** *An index based on Hirschi's theory designed to measure social control in kibbutz society was applied to a random sample of 440 high school students in the kibbutzim of Northern Israel. The delinquency variable was measured by self-report on the frequency of two illegal behaviors condemned by adult kibbutz society but not excessively stigmatized by the youth: driving without a license and stealing from the kibbutz mini-market. Victimization was measured by self-report on incidents during the past year involving person or property. Seventy percent of the participants in the study reported having committed at least one offense. Approximately 80% reported at least one victimization. At the bivariate level, the social control index generated weak but statistically significant negative correlations with both delinquency and victimization.*

The kibbutz is one of the proudest accomplishments of Israeli society. For some six decades after the first kibbutz was founded at Degania in 1909, these collective settlements, although they rarely encompassed more than about 5% of the Israeli population, symbolized the pioneering spirit of the young Jewish state. The men and women of the kibbutz toiled long and hard to build and maintain their idealistic way of life, engaging in a wide range of physical labors and governing themselves with a unique system of members' committees and rotating executive assignments. The dominant branch of the kibbutz economy was agriculture and the workers were the members of the collective, although some kibbutzim even in the 1950s had developed industrial enterprises and many were employing limited numbers of salaried workers from the nearby towns in agriculture, industry, and services. The kibbutz raised and educated its children in the collective spirit and children lived with their peers in the children's houses until age 18 or 19 when they joined the army and were usually granted independent housing units. The kibbutzim, in most cases, maintained their own educational institutions with schools belonging jointly to several kibbutzim in the same area. During this period, with

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rare exceptions, the image of the kibbutz in Israeli society was untainted by images of corruption, delinquency, or deviance.

The kibbutzim entered into a series of radical changes in the 1960s. Industry and commerce became more important as agriculture became less labor intensive. Virtually all the kibbutzim conducted grand debates on child rearing and then moved the children into the parents' quarters for sleeping. Capitalist economics began to compete with socialist ideals in the workplace, and the Israeli media began to be more critical of kibbutz society, even reporting on such previously unheard-of topics such as alcohol, drugs, and delinquency in the kibbutz. Characteristically, social commentators tended to blame the first manifestations of deviant behavior in the kibbutzim on the young European and American volunteers who came to the kibbutzim after the 1967 Six Day War. Eventually, both the kibbutzim and their many urban supporters began to acknowledge the existence of such social problems as substance abuse and delinquent behavior in the indigenous kibbutz population.

The kibbutzim have a long-standing tradition of handling their problems internally and in many cases still prefer to cope with their own resources. Many kibbutz members considered calling on such outside agencies as the police or welfare authorities embarrassing, disloyal, and an admission of helplessness. In recent times, the kibbutzim have been more forthcoming about the presence of social problems, including delinquency, in their society. Kibbutz supporters have regarded the acknowledging of imperfections as a sign of resilience and as a cause for optimism about the survival of the kibbutz way of life. Today, there is enough openness in the system to allow studies such as the present research even if they do not guarantee complimentary results (Shoham, 1996).

The kibbutz is a self-contained, well-defined social system that has fought against economic inequality and promoted mutual responsibility among its members; even as the kibbutz economy has become more capitalistic in recent years, great effort has been invested in preserving these ideals (Oz, 1997). Similar to any complex social system, however, stratification proceeds along several dimensions, one of which is age. The norms of the older generation are quite different from those of the younger members, and the norms of the kibbutz adolescents are, as expected, considerably different from those of their parents. The adolescents are subject to a wide range of efforts by the adult establishment to reduce nonconformity and to induce the younger people to focus on becoming productive members of the kibbutz. Clearly, these efforts are not wholly successful. Some of the sons and daughters will not become members of the kibbutz at all; they will leave and go to the city. Others will become productive members; still others may become members but with imperfect motivation for productivity. The pressures to conform provide the backdrop for the study of kibbutz delinquency in the present study, which employs a theoretical framework derived from Hirschi's theory of social control (Hirschi, 1969). More than any other theory in criminology, social control theory seeks to understand delinquency as the failure of the social system to generate conformist behavior.

The roots of social control theory, according to Kornhauser (1978), can be found in Thrasher's (1927) classic *The Gang*. Thrasher viewed both delinquent behavior and gang membership as results of ineffective social control. Shaw and McKay (1942) stressed the cultural transmission of delinquent norms but they too included the notion of controls in their theoretical formulations.

Additional early proponents of social control theories of delinquency include Reiss (1951), Toby (1957), Nye (1958), and Matza (1964). Reiss (1951) distinguished between personal and social controls and explained delinquency as the result of the failure of both types to direct behavior according to conventional norms. Toby (1957) regarded crime rates as reflecting social disorganization but his explanation of why certain persons in high-crime areas commit crimes (and others do not) referred to the individual's stake in conformity. Nye (1958) identified four different control factors: internalized control, or self-regulation; indirect control, which results from identification with noncriminals; needs satisfaction, which refers to the capacity to cope with the demands of school, work, friends, and so on; and direct control, which is the external system of rewards and punishments. Matza (1964) viewed delinquents as "drifting" between conventional commitments and criminal behavior patterns, with the drift into delinquency usually taking place when the naturally occurring bond between the individual and the moral order is temporarily weakened by the neutralization of conscience in the presence of temptation.

Building on the work of his predecessors, Hirschi (1969) articulated the most comprehensive social control explanation of delinquent behavior. His theory began with the assumption, found also in Nye (1958), that conformist behavior not delinquent behavior was the phenomenon requiring explanation. Hirschi explained conformist behavior as a consequence of the bond between society and individual. He also specified the elements of the social bond: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. *Attachment* has to do with sensitivity to the feelings and opinions of relevant others. *Commitment* refers to a person's investment of time and energy in a way of life. *Involvement* results from commitment; the choice of a way of life determines how an individual becomes involved in a delimited range of actions and relationships. *Belief*, according to Hirschi's theory, is the acceptance of the moral validity of conventional norms. Liska and Reed (1985) developed a nonrecursive version of social control theory, building on the assumption that the social bond not only affects delinquent behavior but is also affected by it. Their findings were consistent with their model of reciprocal influence.

Hirschi's (1969) study of 4,000 urban male junior and senior high school students in California confirmed the hypotheses derived from his theory of social control. Similar findings for rural male and female students in Grades 6 through 12 were presented by Hindelang (1973).

Krohn and Massey (1980) tested the elements of control theory on the self-report data of approximately 3,000 Grade 7 through 12 male and female students in the midwestern United States and found the components of social control theory differentially useful for explaining the delinquent behavior of subsamples of

the participants in their study. Wiatrowski, Griswold, and Roberts (1981) constructed a more complex version of Hirschi's (1969) model and tested it on a large sample of 10th-grade boys from across the United States. Their findings supported control theory, as did those of Wiatrowski and Anderson (1987), who also studied a large national sample of adolescent males. Robbins (1984, 1985) explored the association of social control with delinquent behavior among American Indian youth living on reservations. The findings were somewhat ambiguous, but social control theory proved useful in explaining most of them. Social control variables were associated with all types of delinquent behavior in 12 of 13 countries (the single exception: vandalism in Holland) included in a collection of studies of self-report delinquency (Junger-Tas, Terlouw, & Klein, 1994).

Hirschi's more recent theoretical approach, developed with Gottfredson (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990), represents a shift of emphasis from social explanation of delinquent behavior to explanations based on individual differences. The theory of delinquency underlying the present research is Hirschi's earlier (1969) theory.

A classic tenet in the study of victimology (Hindelang, Gottfredson, & Garofalo, 1978; Lauritsen, Sampson, & Laub, 1991; Schafer, 1968) is the similarity of victim and offender in social status. From this proposition, it follows that if degree of social control predicts delinquent behavior within a given population, it should also be associated with delinquency victimizations within that population. Individuals with weaker ties to the social order should be more vulnerable. Moreover, previous research has found that in juvenile populations, involvement in delinquency is a predictor of victimization (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1991; Jensen & Brownfield, 1986; Thornberry & Figlio, 1974).

The present research is designed to test the utility of Hirschi's theory for understanding delinquent behavior and victimization in a sample of kibbutz adolescents. The hypothesis of this study is that the likelihood of both delinquency and victimization will be greater for those youth for whom the bonds of social control are weaker.

## METHOD

### SAMPLE

The participants in the research were 440 10th-, 11th-, and 12th-grade students drawn by a simple random sampling procedure from the 22 high schools belonging to the secular kibbutz movements and located in Northern Israel (north of Tel-Aviv). The students in these three grades totaled approximately 2,500. The description of the sample is presented in Table 1.

As can be seen from Table 1, boys and girls are represented about equally, most of the participants are in the 16 to 17 age group, and a large majority (81.1%) are pursuing their studies on the academic (college preparatory) track.

**TABLE 1**  
DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE ( $N = 440$ )

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>n</i>
Gender		
Males	49.8	221
Females	50.2	219
Age		
19	1.4	6
18	17.7	78
17	35.7	157
16	30.7	135
15	14.5	64
Grade		
12	31.6	139
11	35.5	156
10	33.0	145
Track		
Academic	81.1	357
Vocational	13.2	58
Other	5.7	25
Kibbutz movement		
United Kibbutz	38.0	167
Kibbutz Artzi	61.1	269
Not identified	0.9	4

## INSTRUMENT

The data were collected by means of an anonymous questionnaire containing 58 closed self-report items. These items were designed to cover the four aspects of social control (attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief) as they apply to kibbutz life, two behavioral indicators for delinquency, and six types of victimization. The social control index conforms to the requirements of content validity in that it includes measures of the four basic ingredients of control theory (Hirschi, 1969).

The 24 items measuring social control were tested for inter-item reliability and yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .72.

The measure of delinquency was a pair of Likert-type items asking whether the respondent had (*never, once, or several times*) driven a vehicle without a license or stolen goods from the kibbutz mini-market. As the problems involved in self-report studies of delinquency have been well-documented over the years (Binder & Geis, 1983; Brown, Esbensen, & Geis, 1991; Gold, 1966; Hood & Sparks, 1970; Sutton, 1978), the authors wished to avoid the pitfalls inherent in the familiar technique of presenting a long checklist of offenses to the respondent. Consequently,

the authors chose the two focal offenses (Sutton, 1978) noted earlier and asked only about them. These two focal offenses each possess two important attributes: They are acts forbidden both by the law and by the informal kibbutz code of behavior but they are prevalent enough to allow for statistical analysis in a small sample (i.e., they are not rare events).

#### DATA COLLECTION

Once permission was granted by the kibbutz movement authorities, the respondents were selected by means of a table of random numbers from the total population of the participating schools. A member of the research team, who is a kibbutz member, contacted the schools and arranged for the students to complete the questionnaire. All the students cooperated and returned usable questionnaires.

### RESULTS

The first item of interest in the analysis is the prevalence of delinquent behavior in the sample. Table 2 displays the percentage of respondents reporting having committed each of the two focal offenses and the percentage reporting having committed either.

Thirty percent (132) of the respondents report never having committed either focal offense. Thus, a great majority (70%, 308) admit to having committed at least one of these offenses at least once. The offense of driving without a license is the more common of the two focal offenses, with 58.6% (258) reporting having done this at least once. Theft from the kibbutz mini-market was admitted by 34.4% (151) of the youth in the study.

The frequency of reported offenses, by gender, is presented in Table 3.

The distribution of offending among the male participants is very different from that of the females. Within the three-category breakdown of Table 3, the largest number of males (81.3%, 178) report having committed more than one offense, whereas the largest group of females (46.6%, 103) are those reporting no offenses. In the single-offense category, there are many more females (23.5%, 52) than males (5.5%, 12).

The first part of the hypothesis of this study predicted an association between social control and delinquency. The Pearson correlation coefficients for the associations between the 24-item index of social control and the number of reported offenses, by offense, and for all offenses, are presented in Table 4.

As seen in Table 4, the correlations of social control with unlicensed driving offenses ( $r = -.18$ ), with mini-market thefts ( $r = -.17$ ), and for total offenses ( $r = -.16$ ), are weak but in the expected direction and statistically significant.

The second part of the study hypothesis predicted an association between social control and victimization. Table 5 displays the six types of victimizations

**TABLE 2**  
OFFENSES REPORTED BY RESPONDENT ( $N = 440$ )

<i>Number of Offenses</i>	<i>Driving Without a License</i>	<i>Theft From Mini-Market</i>	<i>Either Offense</i>
0	41.4% (182)	65.6% (289)	30.0% (132)
1	12.7% (56)	13.9% (61)	14.5% (64)
2+	45.9% (202)	20.5% (90)	35.5% (244)

**TABLE 3**  
OFFENSES REPORTED BY GENDER ( $N = 440$ )

<i>Number of Offenses</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
0	13.2% (29)	46.6% (103)
1	5.5% (12)	23.5% (52)
2+	81.3% (178)	29.9% (66)
Totals	100.0% (219)	100.0% (221)

**TABLE 4**  
CORRELATIONS OF SOCIAL CONTROL WITH DELINQUENCY

<i>Correlation</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Social control index with unlicensed driving offenses	-.18	< .001
Social control index with mini-market theft offenses	-.17	< .001
All offenses	-.16	< .001

investigated, the number of respondents reporting *never*, *once*, or *more than once* having been victimized in the past year, and the mean number of victimizations by type.

As seen in Table 5, the most common type of victimization is property damage ( $M = 2.6$ ,  $SD = 2.6$ ) and the least common is violent sexual abuse ( $M = 0.02$ ,  $SD = 0.3$ ). With the exception of property offenses, the majority of respondents reported no victimizations having occurred in the past year.

The Pearson correlation coefficient for the association between the 24-item index of social control and the number of reported victimizations is in the

**TABLE 5**  
TYPE AND NUMBER OF REPORTED VICTIMIZATIONS

<i>Type of victimization</i>	<i>Number of Victimizations</i>				
	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2+</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Taking of property	133	45	247	2.6	2.6
Damage to property	200	54	173	1.4	1.7
Violent threats	323	40	70	0.7	1.6
Nonviolent sexual harassment/abuse	411	10	10	0.1	0.8
Violent sexual abuse	427	1	3	0.02	0.3

expected direction, of moderate strength ( $r = -.18$ ), and statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ).

To examine the influence of social control on delinquency with other relevant variables controlled, a multiple regression was performed. A series of independent variables likely to reflect social status of adolescents in the kibbutz were entered into the analysis. In addition to age, gender, and grade, these included whether the respondent and each of his or her parents were born in the kibbutz, how many hours per week are spent with friends, and whether the young person acts as a youth leader with younger children. The results of the multiple regression analysis appear in Table 6.

As indicated in Table 6, gender ( $\beta = .50$ ) is the strongest predictor of delinquent behavior; the delinquent acts are more likely to be committed by youth who are male. The contribution of the other independent variables, including social control, to the regression equation did not reach statistical significance. The variance in delinquent behavior explained by the independent variables in Table 6 reached 30%.

An additional multiple regression analysis, with the same independent variables and with number of victimizations as the dependent variable, explained only 7% of the variance and is not presented here.

## DISCUSSION

The hypothesis of this study predicted that delinquent behavior and victimization among kibbutz youth would prove to be associated with social control as measured by the index developed here. The bivariate tests of the hypothesis yielded results that are, at best, ambiguous. The correlations of social control with each type of delinquency and with both in combination are in the expected direction and are statistically significant but they are too weak ( $< .20$ ) to regard as confirmation of the hypothesis even at the bivariate level. The results of the multiple regression analyses lend no support to the hypothesis; only gender makes a statis-

**TABLE 6**  
MULTIPLE REGRESSION ON TOTAL OFFENSES

<i>Independent Variable</i>	B	SE of B	<i>beta</i>
Gender	-2.57	.22	-.50*
Age	0.24	.17	.09
Time spent with friends	0.08	.05	.06
Social control	-0.34	.22	-.06
Works as youth leader (0 = no, 1 = yes)	-0.27	.24	-.05
Born in kibbutz (0 = no, 1 = yes)	-0.02	.03	.02
Age moved into children's house	-0.05	.07	-.03
Mother born in kibbutz (0 = no, 1 = yes)	-0.12	.22	-.02
Father born in kibbutz (0 = no, 1 = yes)	0.13	.22	.03
Grade	-0.02	.21	-.10

NOTE:  $R^2(\text{adj.}) = .30$ .

\* $p < .001$ .

tically significant contribution to predicting delinquent behavior, social control does not. The association with gender is expected and virtually universal; boys reported more offenses than girls in all 13 countries included in a group of studies of self-reported delinquency (Junger-Tas et al., 1994). According to Heimer (1996), much research on the relationship of gender to delinquency attributes males' higher rates of offending to the weaker social controls usually exercised on boys. The present study, too, found the familiar pattern of higher delinquency rates for boys and also found a slightly higher degree of social control for girls ( $M = 4.4$ ,  $SD = 0.5$ ) than for boys ( $M = 4.1$ ,  $SD = 0.5$ ) in the kibbutz.

If social control was measured in a manner both valid and relevant to the social setting, and the authors believe it was, the results of this research indicate that the distribution of delinquent behaviors among kibbutz adolescents is consistent with but not strongly supportive of social control theory. One possible reason for this may be that with the influence of the peer group in the kibbutz so powerful, the social bonds to adult society have less direct impact on adolescent behavior.

The experience of adolescence in the kibbutz, even with the extensive changes the kibbutzim are undergoing in recent years (Oz, 1997), is quite different from adolescent experience in the urban settings of North America that have served as the test sites for the dominant theories of delinquency over the years. The patterns of relationships between different age groups in the kibbutz also differ significantly from those of urban families in Israel, as do the development of gender identities, and the residents of Israel are aware of the differences. A recent study, for example, found that urban Israeli adolescents perceived their male kibbutz counterparts as more masculine (Lobel & Bar, 1997). For kibbutz adolescents, the vast majority of whom grow to maturity in the very same communities where they were born, their daily routine and physical environment are safe, structured, and familiar. Within the community structure, they usually enjoy greater access to

opportunities for academic, vocational, recreational, social, and sexual experimentation than their urban cousins. The disjointedness of contemporary adolescent lifestyles in the United States, as described by Felson (1998), and the delinquent career trajectories of the rural adolescents who participated in the recent study by Myner, Santman, Cappelletty, and Perlmutter (1998) are far removed from kibbutz life. Thus, these findings should be seen as evidence from a different culture as to the relevance of control theory. Multicultural evidence can enhance criminological understanding, but generalizing across cultures requires great caution.

If opportunities can be created for additional studies in the future, the authors would suggest building multiple theoretical models whose explanatory powers can be evaluated comparatively, and adding a sample of urban youth to explore the ways in which kibbutz youth differ from their urban counterparts.

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