

An Analysis of Childhood Delinquency in College Students

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Introduction

The research of delinquent behavior in adolescents has been done in the past (Vitulano, Fite, & Rathert, 2009), but remains a significant topic of study. There is still much more to be learned about adolescent delinquency in high school as the high school years are a time in which influences from family, peers, and social circles are apparent. There is much to be taken into consideration.

There are many perspectives to look at when trying to identify delinquency in adolescents. The researchers chose to look through the lens of **family structure** and **influences** to understand one perspective as to how family plays a role in adolescent behavior. The purpose of the research was to learn the ways in which **family structure, parental involvement, and social influence affect an adolescent's behavior in life as it related to delinquency**. Those influences include parents' substance abuse/alcohol abuse, parents' marital status, and violence in the family.

RQ1: How does family structure affect delinquent behavior in high school aged children?

RQ2: Does family structure and upbringing affect an adolescent's grades and truancy from school?

Research Methods

Data was gathered via a survey. The study consisted of **undergraduate students** at a private liberal arts university in the midwestern United States. All types of family background were included, families that have married parents, parents that have been remarried, single parents, families that come from a rough upbringing, coming from any demographic and racial background are to be included.

The survey asked a series of **open and closed questions** that required detail. Closed questions were utilized in order to get the demographic information. Researchers also used a series of both **likert and semantic** differential indexes.

The study was conducted using a series of structured questions and using Survey Monkey. On the open ended questions, participants answered with as much detail as they were willing to provide. As stated in the consent form prior to starting the survey, this study required detailed information and answers in order for participant responses to be considered.

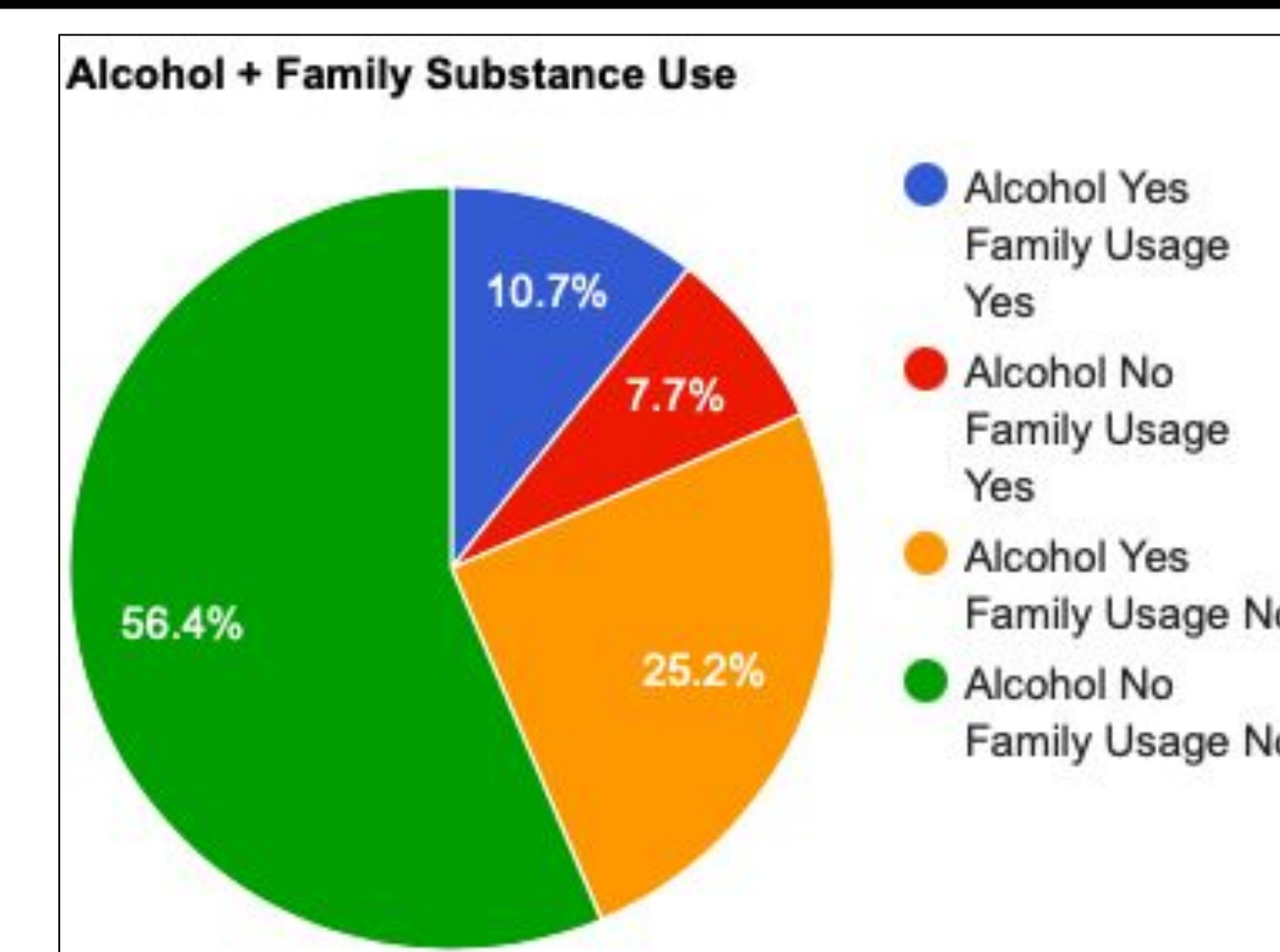
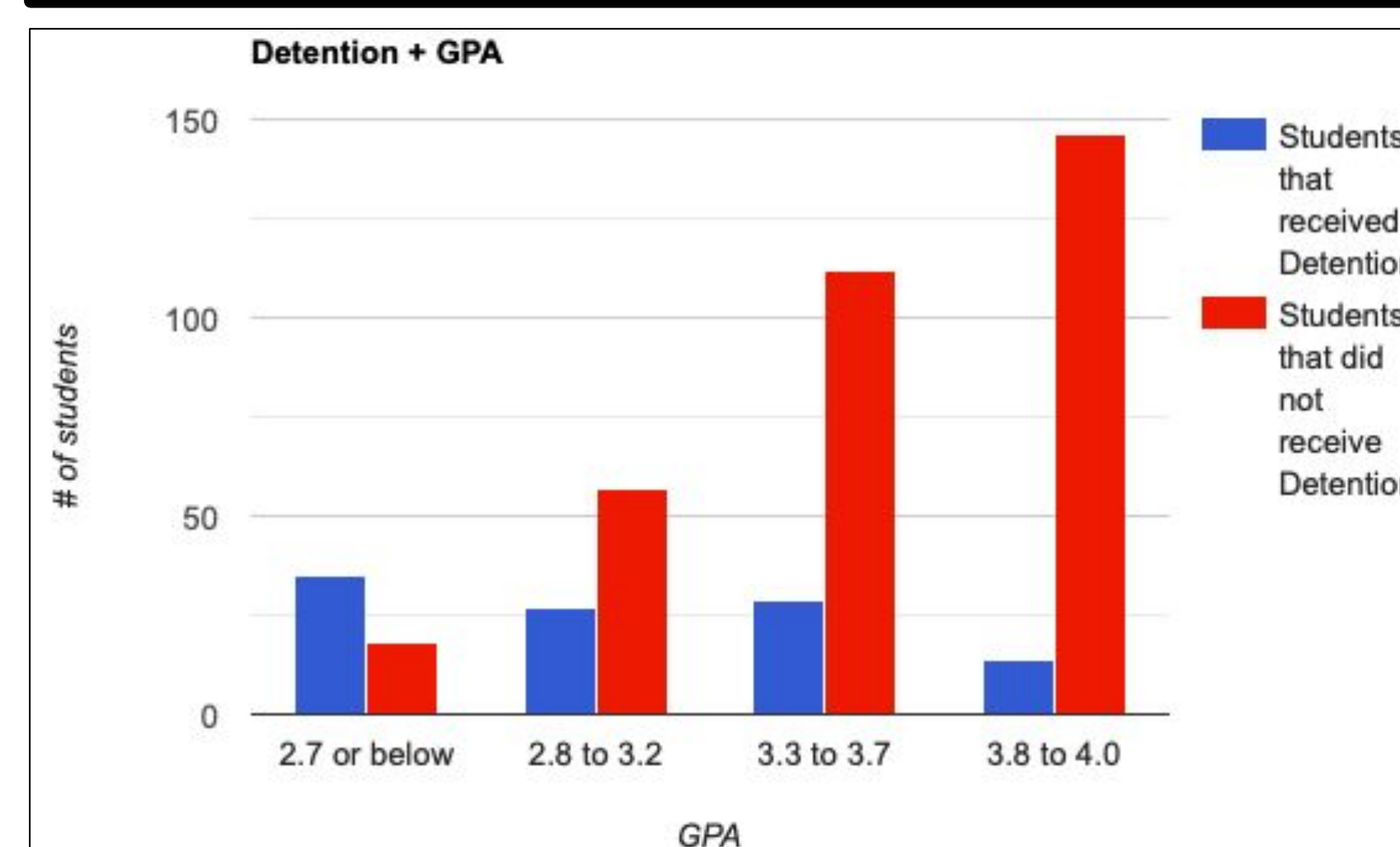
References

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Results

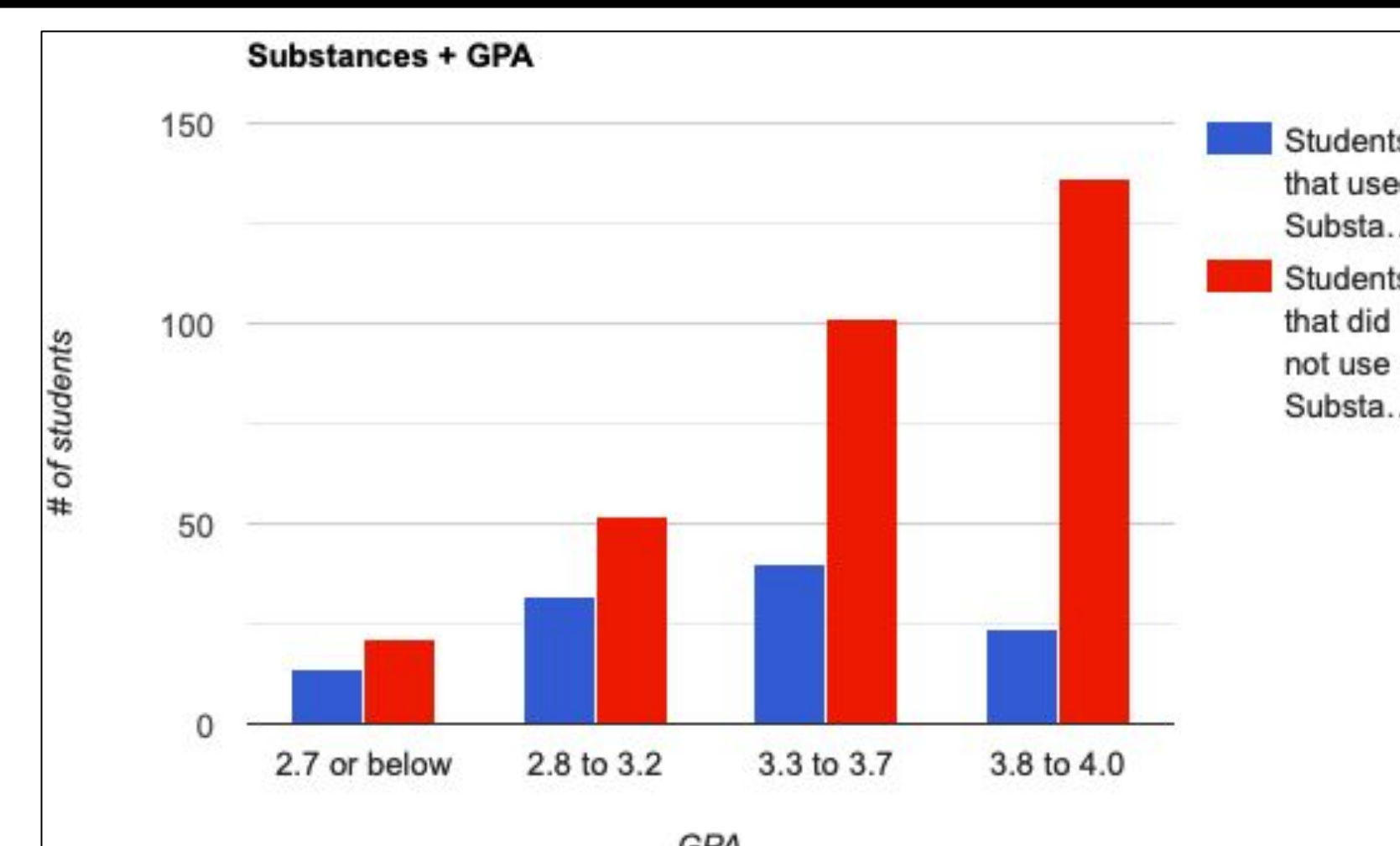
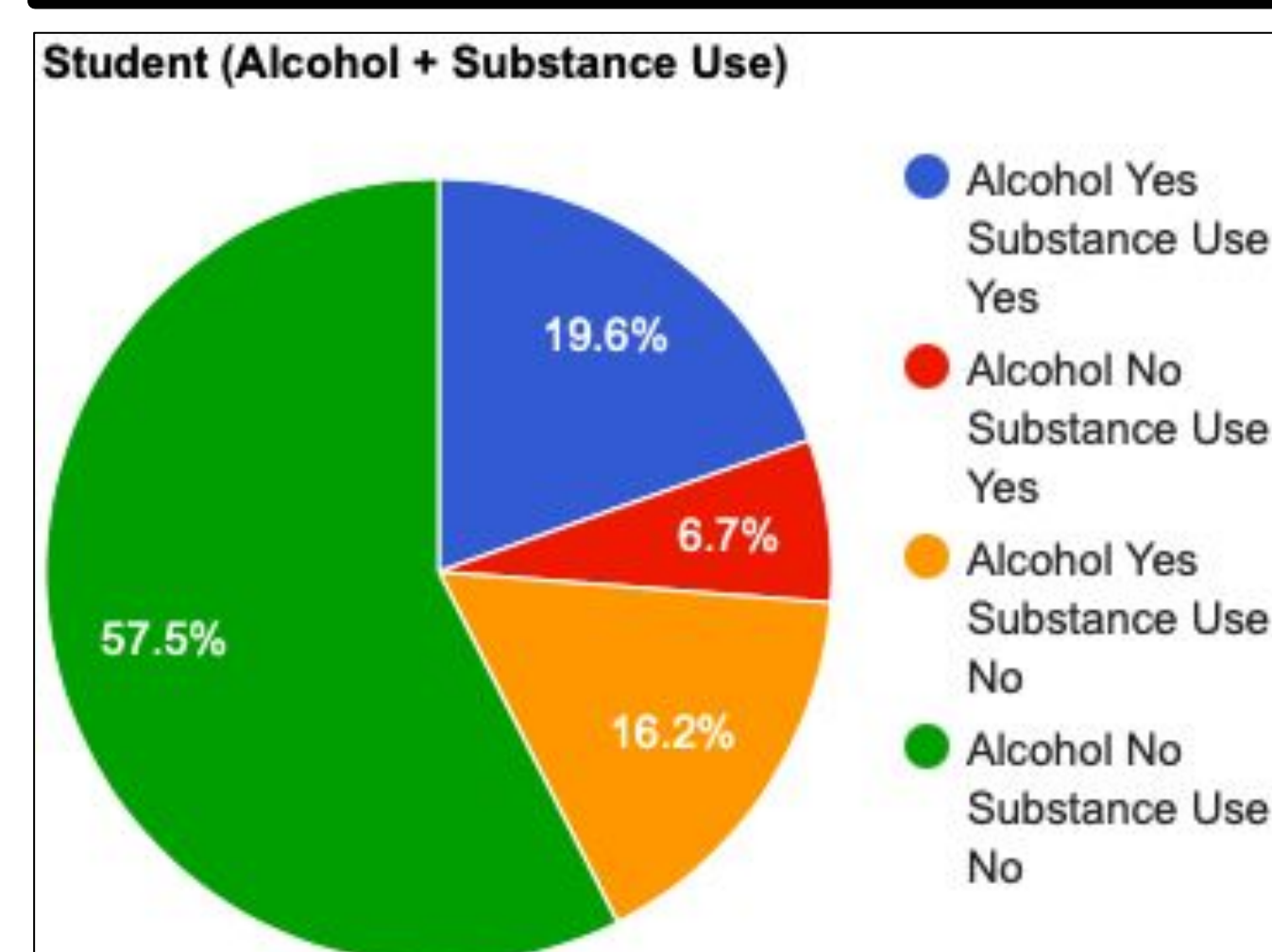
A survey of 17 questions was administered to the entire undergraduate student body of a private faith-based institution in the Midwest of the United States. Of the 420 participants, 276 identified themselves as female, 139 identified themselves as male, and 5 either identified themselves as other or chose not to respond. Researchers defined delinquency as having engaged in one or more of the following behaviors in high school at any point: **receiving detention, consuming alcohol, using substances, skipping class, or being arrested**. Ultimately, detention, consuming alcohol, and using substances were labeled as delinquent behaviors and **skipping class and getting arrested were omitted** because of insufficient data.

Of the total participants in the study, **87 participants indicated that they did receive detention in high school, while 333 did not**. In the GPA section 2.7 and below, of those 35 that fell in this category, **48.6% (n=17)** indicated that they received detention, while **51.4% (n=18)** participants stated no to this question. In the GPA section 2.8 to 3.2, 84 participants fell in this region. Of the 84, **32.1% (n=27)** indicated that they had been given detention, while **67.9% (n=57)** said that they had not. For the GPA section 3.8 to 4.0, 160 students fell in this category. Of them, **8.8% (n=14)** had been given detention in high school. **This shows that the percentage of students who received detention decreased with the increase of GPA.**



In the study of participants, **150 said yes to drinking alcohol compared to the 270 that did not consume alcohol**. Out of the total participants surveyed, **18% (n=76)** said yes to parents/siblings abusing alcohol and substances before graduation. For this section of **76 students 57.8% of them responded yes** for themselves in turn using alcohol before they graduated high school. Also in the alcohol section there is a significant association between the use of substances and alcohol consumption. Of the participants surveyed 110 of them said yes to having used substances and 82/110, or 74.5%, said yes to both categories. **This is significant because it shows an increase in the likelihood of someone using alcohol if they have used substances.**

Finally, for substance use responses added up to a total of 110 participants that said yes to substance use next to the 310 that did not use substances. In the category of substance usage the researchers labeled the substances as but not limited to (vape, cigarettes, marijuana, etc.). **The numbers shown in this section show the connection of people who said yes to substance use and the lower end of the GPA scale**. Every section except for 3.8-4.0 is higher for substance use than the projected average (see figure 2.19). For example, 78% of those who said yes to using substances also fell in the bottom three categories for GPA. On the flip side 57% of those who responded no to using substances fell into the 3.8-4.0 slot for GPA. **The p-value is (p=.000146). This shows that kids who used substances were more likely to fall into the lower ranges for GPA.**



Discussion

Interactional View Theory

The Interactional View Theory was developed by Paul Watzlawick in 1967. Sawyer (2010) states that the theory is a family system where it is **“a self-regulating interdependent network of feedback loops guided by member rules; the behavior of each person affects and is affected by the behavior of another.”** To understand the movement of a single person, the entire family communication must be examined. The theory consists of Four Axioms: 1) One cannot NOT communicate. Silence is a form of communication. 2) Communication involves content and the relationship. 3) The nature of the relationship depends on how communication is punctuated. 4) Communication is symmetrical or complementary. The study focused on three sections. 1) Parent Alcohol/Substance Abuse. High School is a time where influence is most present. Although, parents play a role, peer influence is most present. An article written in 1998 it states, “Methodologically, examining substance use is a conservative test of our hypothesis because studies suggest that **peer influence on substance use is four times more potent than parental influence**” (Bogenschneider & Wu, 1973). This suggests that **although alcohol is partially influenced from parental socialization, substance abuse is influenced from outside peers such as friends/classmates**. 2) Parent Marital Status. Just like how communication can affect all, the act of divorce can also communicate and affect the behavior of everyone in the household. Aughinbaugh, Pierret, and Rothstein (2005) state, “There is little doubt that children who grow up in single-parent families have worse outcomes than those who grow up in married-parent families” (Aughinbaugh et al., 448). This quote suggests that **adolescents who grow up in single-parent families have more problems in the household compared to married-parent families** and that **parent marital status can be connected to delinquency in adolescents** in some areas. Similarly, our findings also suggest a relationship between parent marital status and alcohol consumption ($p=.04965$). Lastly, 3) Violence in The Family. There is an indication that violence shown in the family and/or social circles play a role in child delinquency. Heidi Zinzow (2009) and associates state, “Community violence was associated with substance use. Chronic violence, knowing the perpetrator, and violence outside of school were correlated with substance use and delinquency among adolescents who witnessed community violence”. **These findings suggest that delinquency can, in some cases, be tied to exposure to violence within the home and community at large**. Similarly, our findings also suggest a relationship between delinquency, specifically substance use, and exposure to violence ($p=.004171$).

Conclusions

Of the surveys sent, **420 responses were received**. The data suggests an association between the structure and living conditions that a child grew up with and negative behaviors from the child. To give an example, a Chi Square test of association was done between parental alcohol abuse and alcohol consumption as a minor, concluding that the data suggested an association between the two.

Further Research

The researchers perceived that for future research, **delinquent behavior could possibly be correlated with sibling order** as it is a believed general statement that the youngest sibling is the most spoiled, resulting in them getting away with problems and having it easy. Whereas, the eldest sibling is blamed for simply being older. While the research was done based on delinquent behaviors in adolescents, it did not focus on sibling order as a result. Researchers also concluded that for future research, **finding the reason for detention would be helpful in acquiring additional information**, further explaining to researchers the development of delinquent behavior.