



## **Criminogenic Families: Influence of Family Offending, Drug Problems, and Mental Health on Juvenile Offenders**

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### **Abstract**

The description of risk factors of justice-involved youths is a target for researchers and public agencies with preventive objectives. This paper analyzes the risk profile of 1.317 youth involved in the criminal justice system from 2012 to 2021. Sex differences and differences related to family risk factors were analyzed. Results showed that family risk factors were related to an increased prevalence of risk factors among juvenile offenders. Family drug problems, family offending, and family mental health problems, in this order, showed higher numbers of differences between the groups. Nevertheless, none of these classifications exhibited differences in the perpetration of violent crimes. Differences related to the presence of violence at home and between the sexes were the less frequent, although violence at home was the only influence on the perpetration of violent crime. Females were more prevalent in the family offending, family mental health problems, and social-services use groups, while males only exhibited more drug use. Family variables are shown to be a differentiating risk factor in the study of juvenile offenders, indicating the need for family-centered intervention and prevention plans.

**Keywords:** *juvenile offenders; family violence; sex differences; recidivism; substance abuse*

## **Introduction**

Various studies have pointed to a decline in youth crime in international jurisdictions, particularly in property-related and violent crime (Fernández-Molina & Bartolomé, 2020; McCarthy, 2021; Svensson & Oberwittler, 2021). Additionally, the gender gap in violent crime has shown to be closing as a result of broadening definitions of violence that are more likely to be perpetrated by girls, increased monitoring of violence at home or school where girls are violent, or less tolerant family and societal attitudes (Estrada et al., 2019; Steffensmeier et al., 2005). For example, data on child-to-parent violence (CPV) is highly prevalent among girls, depending on the sample and type of violence (Del Hoyo-Bilbao & Loinaz, 2021). Consequently, academics have paid particular attention to the risk factors, profiles, and recidivism of juvenile offenders, also putting the spotlight on girls.

Although differences appear even within countries (such as the US) that make it difficult to compare prevalence (Casey & Siennick, 2023), international estimates are that youth crime recidivism is at around 45% (Kalist et al., 2015; McReynolds et al., 2010) and that females are always less likely to reoffend than males (i.e., 37.3% of females vs. 45.2% of males within one year [McReynolds et al., 2010]; or 49.8 % of males and 31.7 % of females [Kalist et al., 2015]). A meta-analysis of studies developed in Spain on juvenile recidivism estimated an average recidivism rate of 34.45% (Ortega-Campos et al., 2014).

In terms of predicting reoffending, Cottle et al.'s (2001) meta-analysis found that the best predictors were variables related to age and previous offending (earlier age of first contact with the law, earlier age of first commitment, more previous arrests, more previous commitments, longer prison sentences, and those who committed more serious offenses). Family and personal history variables (having been physically or sexually abused, growing up in a single-parent home, number of out-of-home placements, or family problems) also increased the risk of reoffending, as did ineffective use of leisure time and delinquent peers in the social domain. Among educational factors, only a history of special education was significantly associated with reoffending. However, the presence of parental pathology and poor school attendance or academic achievement were significant predictors of recidivism. In samples from Spain, association with dissocial peers ( $R^2 = .71$ ), having a criminal record ( $R^2 = .66$ ), and the presence of violence in the index offense ( $R^2 = .40$ ) has been found to be related to higher recidivism (Ortega-Campos et al., 2014). Further, Buil-Legaz et al. (2019) described low academic performance, inadequate parental educational style (poorly normative), externalizing problems (especially impulsivity problems), some mental disorder diagnoses, and drug problems to be relevant variables.

### ***Family risk factors***

Authors such as Eysenk and Hirschi have both identified very similar risk factors for criminal behavior. Both considered intolerance to frustration, unnecessary risk-taking, egocentrism or lack of empathy to be good predictors of antisocial behavior. However, there was an essential difference in how these two researchers reached their conclusions. While for Eysenck (1997) the cause of these risk factors was related to various abnormalities in the central nervous system, for Hirschi (1995) the real reason for criminal behavior was a failed family socialization process during the first ten years of life. Over the past fifty years, many prospective longitudinal studies have been conducted to identify risk factors (and, more recently, protective factors) for delinquency. As a result of this body of research, Farrington et al. (2012) summarized the following family risk factors: poor parental supervision, harsh or punitive discipline, cold/rejecting parents, parental education, teenage mothers, frequent changes in parental figures, child abuse (especially at a young age), intimate partner violence among parents, and family disruption due to parental separation.

The influence of family environment in different forms of juvenile criminal behavior has appeared in criminological theories, such as those of intergenerational transmission or social learning (Contreras et al., 2020; Eichelsheim & van de Weijer, 2018; Hasselle et al., 2020; Holt, 2021; Valgardson & Schwartz, 2019; Wareham et al., 2009). Parental criminality as a risk factor for offspring's offending is one of these variables (Besemer et al., 2011). Meta-analyses of the topic have concluded that parental incarceration is related to higher risk for children's antisocial behavior but not to mental health problems, drug use, or poor educational performance (Murray et al., 2012). Children (pooled OR = 2.4; Besemer et al., 2017) and adolescents (OR = 3.21; Van de Weijer, 2022) with criminal parents are at significantly higher risk of criminal behavior than those without. Parental convictions increase the probability of their children's convictions (Sivertsson et al., 2023), and children with parents in contact with the criminal justice system may have fewer crime-free years (Ting et al., 2022). Parental offending has also been found to be different between clinical and judicial CPV cases, suggesting more involvement with the justice system and more dysfunctional families in the latter group (Loinaz & Ma de Sousa, 2020). Parental criminality may also be an extralegal biasing factor, as described by Diana et al. (2023). A recent review by Saladino et al. (2021) confirmed the relationship between family offending and drug taking, and suggested a relationship between parental involvement in the justice system and imitation of or justification for some deviant behaviors, as well as family tolerance to drugs. Adolescents with

parents involved in criminal behavior and drugs are more likely to be involved in these themselves.

Stronger associations have been described when both parental offending and mental illness are present together (Athanasidou et al., 2023). Further, a review of nineteen studies on the relationship between parental offending and offspring's physical and mental health problems and drug use (Whitten et al., 2019) found a relationship between parental offending and poor physical health and drug use in adolescents, but less consistency for the relationship with mental disorder that may be related to other risk factors, such as victimization. Also, regarding the influence of parental criminality, sex differences have been pointed out, with parental criminality found to have a greater effect on daughters than sons (Ting et al., 2022; Tzoumakis et al., 2020), the description of no significant relationship between mothers' offending and sons' (Jahanshahi et al. 2023), or the opposite with only an effect of parental criminality on boys but not girls (Sivertsson et al., 2023). Therefore, conclusions about family influences are not clear, even though an increased risk has been found when deviant siblings are present (Maneiro et al., 2022).

Victimization, adverse childhood experiences, or trauma are also considered risk factors for juvenile recidivism. Compared to the general population, juvenile offenders have higher prevalence of these types of experiences, especially maltreatment among females (Tisak et al., 2019; Vitopoulos et al., 2019). Adverse childhood experiences have been found to increase recidivism and reduce time between criminal acts in males and females (Wolff et al., 2017). Recently, a study using the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth -SAVRY- (Aguilar Ruiz & Pereda, 2022) found that youths exposed to family violence had more risk factors, although both exposed and not exposed shared predictive variables and a need for intervention. Trauma symptoms are a risk factor for violent behavior and there is a need for specific trauma-informed treatment (Wojciechowski, 2020). Higher levels of some types of traumatic exposure, especially polyvictimization, are related to higher-level mental health needs (Duron et al., 2022). Trauma exposure and symptoms of psychopathological disorders may even be related to cortical features (greater cortical thickness in the right temporal cluster) that differentiate juvenile offenders from controls (Padrón et al., 2022).

Despite the relevance of these risk factors, Zettler's (2021) systematic review concluded that "no research to date has examined the effectiveness of these or other trauma-informed programs in reducing youth violence or recidivism in community samples" (p. 127). Comparing those maltreated as children with those without maltreatment, Cho and Lee (2022) found a 65.2%

versus a 61.5% chance of recidivism in first-time juvenile offenders. Further, Craig et al. (2020) were not able to describe a positive relationship between adverse childhood experiences and recidivism, unlike variables related to juvenile justice history such as prior adjudications, length of incarceration, and rate of disciplinary misconduct while incarcerated. Thus, although the influence of negative experiences is theoretically and empirically supported by numerous studies, it is not always confirmed.

### ***Sex differences among juvenile offenders***

Some controversy persists regarding the differences and similarities between delinquent boys and girls. On the one hand, their involvement in different forms of crime has been discussed. For instance, it has been claimed that girls commit less violent crimes, and that relational violence is a prototypical form of violence for them (Coyne & Ostrov, 2018), including damaging interpersonal relationships, social manipulation of the victim or their environment, causing emotional harm (as opposed to physical violence, which mainly focuses on physical harm). It is known that relational violence is a form of violence perpetrated by both sexes, although boys exhibit more physical violence (Ostrov & Perry, 2020). In dating violence, for example, meta-analysis (Wincentak et al., 2017) and review studies (Rubio-Garay et al., 2017) conclude that girls have lower rates of aggression in general and higher rates of victimization. Conversely, it has also been stated that there is no difference in the risk factors but in the exposure to them (Moffitt et al., 2001). Among girls, seeking money to satisfy drug abuse needs, delinquent intimate partners, intimate partners forcing them to commit a crime, or seeking group attention have been described as motivations for starting to commit crime (Barry, 2007).

A study conducted by San Juan and Ocariz (2017) found that although many of the factors that place girls in risky situations are the same for boys, there are some important differences, including the way girls and boys are raised by their families. According to these scholars, families exert more control over many aspects of girls' lives. There are significant differences in how girls and boys spend their leisure time and the types of risks associated with their leisure activities. Boys tend to spend more time in groups without adult supervision, and engage in more risky activities. Through results from a screening system for prosecuted youths, Van der Put et al. (2014) concluded that the main factors linked to recidivism were common in boys and girls but there were more specific factors for girls, such as having delinquent parents, parental drug or alcohol abuse, being victims of abuse, and their own abuse of drugs or alcohol. The presence of different forms of victimization, direct or indirect, seems to be a constant variable between studies but there are discrepancies in whether this is more decisive in boys (Tisak et al., 2019), girls

(Calvete & Orue, 2013), or equal in both genders (Kitzmann et al., 2003; Wolfe et al., 2003). Along with victimization, the risk factors commonly described for female delinquency are drug problems, a higher prevalence of mental disorders (Bright et al., 2011), problematic family relationships, poor school performance, and antisocial relationships (with peers or intimate partners) (Mallicoat, 2015), as well as inappropriate coping strategies, such as drug use, self-harm, or sexual activity and pregnancy in response to external stressors (Sharpe, 2012). For specific forms of violence, such as CPV, more presence of victimization (direct and indirect), more self-esteem problems, violence between parents, family conflicts, parental problems (mental health, drugs, and so on), and more drug problems among girls have been confirmed (Loinaz et al., 2020).

Regarding risk assessment, Scott and Brown's (2018) meta-analysis found evidence for gender neutrality in the risk factors. Variables like antisocial peers, problematic family circumstances, substance abuse, antisocial personality/behavior, and antisocial attitudes appeared equally in both genders. Pusch and Holtfreter (2018) concluded similarly in their meta-analysis with the YLS/CMI, finding same predictive performance on both general recidivism and violent recidivism. The same could be said in the case of the SAVRY, with similar score in all the domains of the tool, same internal structure, and no variation across sex nor in the relationship of scores and professional judgment (Childs et al., 2016).

### ***This study***

The aim of this study was to analyze the characteristics of juvenile offenders serving a judicial measure, paying particular attention to sex differences and the influence of the following family risk factors: family offending, family drug problems, family mental health issues, and violence at home. According to previous research, the following results were expected: 1) more criminality or child convictions (Besemer et al., 2017; Murray et al., 2012; Saladino et al., 2021; Sivertsson et al., 2023; Ting et al., 2022; van de Weijer, 2022) and more drug problems (Saladino et al., 2021; Whitten et al., 2019) among those with family offending; 2) among girls, more family offending, family drug problems, and family violence (Loinaz et al., 2020; Ting et al., 2022; Tzoumakis et al., 2020; Vitopoulos et al., 2019) and drug problems in themselves (Bright et al., 2011; Loinaz et al., 2020); 3) more criminal background or recidivism (Cho & Lee, 2022; Wolff et al., 2017) and mental health problems (Duron et al., 2022) among those with history of family violence.

## **Method**

### ***Sample***

The sample consisted of 1,317 juvenile offenders who completed a judicial measure in juvenile justice in the Basque Country (Spain) between 2012 and 2021. They had an average age of 16.9 years (range = 14-22;  $SD = 1.93$ ) at the time of serving the sentence; 19.9% (263) were girls and 20.2% were foreigners. Regarding their criminal activity, 67.5% had committed one offense (without previous judicial measures), 17.8% had reoffended during the execution of the current measure, and 15.9% reoffended after. Most were serving sentence for injury (17.2%) followed by violent robbery (14.7%), family violence (15.6%) theft (12.8%), and robbery with force (10.9%).

### ***Data and procedure***

The cases were compiled in three evaluations of recidivism in the juvenile justice system of the Basque Country in the years 2012–2015, 2015–2018, and 2018–2021. The variables analyzed were those used in the follow-up of this population in different reports related to the personal variables of the youths (including social functioning and relationships) and their family (offending by family members, substance abuse, parental control, physical and mental health problems, and exposure to domestic violence).

### ***Data analysis***

To describe the relationship between different risk factors, bivariate comparisons were performed using chi-square and  $t$  student statistics, calculating the magnitude of the relationship between categorical variables using odds ratios. The software SPSS v27 was used.

## **Results**

### ***Sex differences in risk factors***

There were more foreign boys ( $n = 330$ ; 31.3%) than girls ( $n = 53$ ; 20.2%),  $X^2(1) = 12.704, p < .001$ , but they were of the same age (female  $M = 16.88, SD = 1.29$ ; male  $M = 16.98, SD = 1.29$ ). Previous conviction, recidivism during justice measure, and recidivism after the measure were equally distributed in both groups, although prevalence was slightly higher for males in the two cases of recidivism (Table 1). Regarding the risk factors, among females there were significantly more family implications in offending, family mental health issues, and social services interventions, while among males there were significantly more drug problems.

**Table 1. Sex differences.**

	Female (n = 263)		Male (n = 1054)		chi	p	OR	C.I.
	N	%	N	%				
Violent crime	155	41.1%	581	55.1%	1.241	.268	0.856	0.65-1.12
Previous conviction	85	32.3%	343	32.5%	0.005	.945	1.010	0.76-1.35
Recidivism during measure	38	14.4%	197	18.7%	2.584	.108	1.361	0.93-1.98
Recidivism	36	13.7%	174	16.5%	1.249	.264	1.247	0.85-1.84
Family offending	47	17.9%	138	13.1%	3.979	.046	0.692	0.48-0.99
Family drugs problems	49	18.6%	150	14.3%	3.132	.077	0.726	0.51-1.04
Family health issues	36	13.7%	124	11.8%	0.730	.393	0.841	0.56-1.25
Family mental health issues	45	17.1%	92	8.7%	15.865	.001	0.463	0.32-0.68
Violence at home	35	13.3%	101	9.6%	3.155	.076	0.690	0.46-1.04
Social Services	188	71.5%	664	63.0%	6.634	.010	0.679	0.51-0.91
Drug problems	63	24.0%	387	36.7%	15.242	.001	1.842	1.35-2.51
Mental health	73	27.8%	293	27.8%	0.000	.989	1.002	0.74-1.36
Peers	107	40.7%	457	43.4%	0.615	.433	1.116	0.85-1.47
Impulsivity	113	43.0%	424	40.2%	0.653	.419	0.893	0.68-1.17
Bad academic performance	138	52.5%	568	53.9%	0.170	.680	1.059	0.81-1.40
Disorganized leisure time	225	85.6%	787	74.7%	14.010	.001	0.498	0.34-0.72

***Family offending***

A comparison of family criminal involvement (Table 2) showed statistically significant differences in all variables except for minors’ own substance problems and family mental health problems, with a higher prevalence of problems in all cases of youths whose families had a history of criminal activity. The strongest influences were for family drug problems (OR = 7.5), violence at home (OR = 6.4), and social service interventions (OR = 5.6). Both groups were of the same age ( $M = 16.9$ ,  $SD = 1.3$ ;  $t = .318$ ,  $p = .750$ ).



**Table 2. Differences according to family offending**

	No (n = 1132)		Yes (n = 185)		chi	p	OR	C.I.
	N	%	N	%				
Violent crime	641	56.6%	95	51.4%	1.794	.180	.809	0.59-1.10
Previous conviction	340	30.00%	88	47.60%	22.281	.000	2.113	1.54-2.90
Recidivism during measure	193	17.00%	42	22.70%	3.467	.006	1.429	.980-2.08
Recidivism	163	14.40%	47	25.40%	14.372	.000	2.025	1.40-2.93
Family drugs problems	114	10.10%	85	45.90%	159.154	.000	7.575	5.35-10.73
Family health issues	119	10.50%	41	22.20%	20.22	.000	2.424	1.63-3.60
Family mental health issues	97	8.60%	40	21.60%	29.067	.000	2.943	1.60-4.42
Violence at home	77	6.80%	59	31.90%	108.096	.000	6.416	4.36-9.44
Social Services	686	60.60%	166	89.70%	59.069	.000	5.680	3.48-9.27
Drug problems	380	33.60%	70	37.80%	1.288	.256	1.205	.873-1.66
Mental health	310	27.40%	56	30.30%	0.66	.417	1.151	.820-1.62
Peers	464	41.00%	100	54.10%	11.085	.001	1.694	1.24-3.31
Impulsivity	445	39.30%	92	49.70%	7.148	.008	1.527	1.12-2.09
Bad academic performance	590	52.1%	116	62.7%	7.160	.007	1.554	1.12-2.13
Disorganized leisure time	856	75.6%	156	84.3%	6.773	.008	1.734	1.14-2.64

***Family drugs problems***

The presence of family drugs problems (Table 3) showed statistically significant differences in all risk factors except leisure time use, increasing the prevalence among juvenile delinquents with families with this problem. The greatest influence was between family delinquency (as previously mentioned), family mental health issues (OR = 4.6), and violence at home (OR = 4.8). There were no statistically significant differences in the age of the two groups (problem  $M = 17.02$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ; no problem  $M = 16.95$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ;  $t = .704$ ,  $p = .648$ ).

**Table 3. Differences according to family drugs problems**

	No (n = 1116)		Yes (n = 199)		chi	p	OR	C.I.
	N	%	N	%				
Violent crime	624	55.9%	112	56.3%	0.009	.923	1.015	0.75-1.38
Previous conviction	339	30.40%	87	43.70%	13.727	.000	1.780	1.31-2.42
Recidivism during measure	174	15.60%	61	30.70%	26.104	.000	2.393	1.70-3.34
Recidivism	164	14.70%	45	22.60%	7.92	.005	1.696	1.70-2.46
Family offending	100	9.00%	85	42.70%	159.154	.000	7.575	5.35-10.73
Family health issues	120	10.80%	40	20.10%	13.809	.000	2.088	1.41-3.10
Family mental health issues	83	7.40%	54	27.10%	70.216	.000	4.635	3.16-6.81
Violence at home	81	7.30%	55	27.60%	75.649	.000	4.880	3.32-7.17
Social Services	682	61.10%	169	84.90%	41.941	.000	3.585	2.39-5.39
Drug problems	354	31.70%	95	47.70%	19.271	.000	1.966	1.44-2.67
Mental health	291	26.10%	74	37.20%	10.397	.001	1.678	1.22-2.30
Peers	448	40.10%	114	57.30%	20.281	.000	2.000	1.47-2.71
Impulsivity	439	39.30%	97	48.70%	6.189	.013	1.467	1.08-1.99
Bad academic performance	576	51.6%	129	64.8%	11.852	.001	1.728	1.26-2.36
Disorganized leisure time	846	75.8%	165	82.9%	4.801	.028	1.549	1.05-2.30

***Family mental health problems***

Family mental health problems were associated with significantly higher prevalence, except in recidivism during measure, recidivism, and drug problems in minors. The effects were smaller than the variables described so far, with the greatest increase in risk for family health issues ( $OR = 4.6$ ) and contact with social services ( $OR = 2.9$ ), and, as previously mentioned, family drug problems ( $OR = 4.6$ ) and family offending ( $OR = 2.9$ ). There were no statistically significant differences in the age of the two groups (problem  $M = 17.08$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ; no problem,  $M = 16.95$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ;  $t = 1.159$ ;  $p = .812$ ).

**Table 4. Differences according to family mental health problems.**

	No (n = 1180)		Yes (n = 137)		chi	p	OR	C.I.
	N	%	N	%				
Violent crime	663	56.2%	73	53.3%	0.419	.517	0.889	0.62-1.27
Previous conviction	363	30,80%	65	47,40%	15.573	.000	2.032	1.42-2.91
Recidivism during measure	204	17.30%	31	22.60%	2.387	.122	1.399	.910-2.15
Recidivism	182	15.40%	28	20.40%	2.303	.129	1.409	.903-2.20
Family offending	145	12.30%	40	29.20%	29.067	.000	2.943	1.96-4.42
Family drugs problems	145	12.30%	54	39.40%	70.216	.000	4.635	3.16-6.81
Family health issues	123	10.40%	37	27.00%	31.629	.000	3.180	2.09-4.84
Violence at home	111	9.40%	25	18.20%	10.362	.001	2.150	1.34-3.46
Social Services	738	62.50%	114	83.20%	22.959	.000	2.969	1.87-4.72
Drug problems	401	34.00%	49	35.80%	0.174	.674	1.082	.750-1.57
Mental health	320	27.10%	46	33.60%	2.551	.011	1.359	.931-1.98
Peers	493	41.80%	71	51.80%	5.059	.025	1.499	1.05-2.14
Impulsivity	467	39.60%	70	51.10%	6.744	.009	1.595	1.12-2.27
Bad academic performance	614	52.0%	92	67.2%	11.283	.001	1.885	1.30-2.74
Disorganized leisure time	896	75.9%	116	84.7%	5.268	.022	1.751	1.08-2.84

***Exposure to family violence***

Finally, the presence of violence at home was related to significantly higher prevalence of social services contact (OR = 3.4), youth drug problems (OR = 1.8), youth mental health problems (OR = 2.2), and impulsivity (OR = 2.2), and, as previously mentioned, in family offending, family drug problems, and family mental health issues. Those who witnessed violence at home were of the same age as those who did not (witness  $M = 17,04$ ,  $SD = 1.29$  and no witness  $M = 16.95$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ;  $t = .740$ ,  $p = .460$ ).

**Table 5. Differences according to the presence of violence at home**

	No violence at home (n = 1181)		Violence at home (n = 136)		chi	p	OR	C.I.
	N	%	N	%				
Violent crime	649	55.0%	87	64.0%	4.022	.045	1.455	1.01-2.10
Previous conviction	378	88.3%	50	11.7%	1.259	.261	1.235	0.85-1.79
Recidivism during measure	213	18.0%	22	16.2%	.288	.592	0.877	0.54-1.42
Recidivism	184	15.6%	26	19.1%	1.139	.286	1.281	0.81-2.02
Family offending	126	10.7%	59	43.4%	108.096	.000	6.416	4.36-9.44
Family drugs problems	144	12.2%	55	40.4%	75.649	.000	4.880	3.32-7.17
Family health issues	138	11.7%	22	16.2%	2.305	.129	1.459	0.89-2.38
Family mental health issues	112	9.5%	25	18.4%	10.362	.001	2.150	1.34-3.46
Social Services	734	62.2%	118	86.8%	32.348	<.001	3.992	2.40-6.65
Drug problems	385	32.6%	65	47.8%	12.518	<.001	1.893	1.32-2.71
Mental health	307	26.0%	59	43.4%	18.373	<.001	2.182	1.52-3.14
Peers	497	42.1%	67	49.3%	2.569	.109	1.336	0.94-1.91
Impulsivity	458	38.8%	79	58.1%	18.826	<.001	2.188	1.53-3.14
Bad academic performance	624	52.8%	82	60.3%	2.727	.099	1.355	0.94-1.95
Disorganized leisure time	903	76.5%	109	80.1%	0.931	.335	1.243	0.80-1.93

## Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to examine the prevalence of different risk factors among a large sample of juvenile offenders serving sentences between 2012 and 2021. The influence of family risk factors (offending, use of violence, mental health issues, and drug issues) on children’s criminality and risk factors was assessed, as well as sex differences. In line with previous research, family offending was expected to influence conviction history and youth drug problems; family violence was expected to influence the youth’s criminal background, recidivism, and mental health problems; and finally, more family offending, family drug problems, family violence, and offender’s drug problems were expected among girls.

In this study, family drug problems and family offending exhibited a higher number of differences between the groups (14 and 13, respectively), followed by family mental health problems (with 12). Nevertheless, none of these classifications showed differences according to the type of crime (violent or not), but family drug problems and family offending showed differences in prior convictions, recidivism during measure, and recidivism after measure. The presence of violence at home and sex differences exhibited less differences between groups (in 8 and 6 risk factors), although the violence at home classification was the only one that showed differences in the perpetration of violent crime (OR = 1.45; more prevalent among those with violence at home). Even if this does not imply causation, the greatest association between risk factors was found between family offending and

family drug problems ( $OR = 7.6$ ) and family offending and violence at home ( $OR = 6.4$ ), which was in line with Saladino et al.'s (2020) review. Odds ratios in the comparison between family offending showed the highest values.

Violence at home perhaps showed less difference than expected, but there was a clear relationship with family offending ( $OR = 6.4$ ) and drug problems in the family ( $OR = 4.9$ ), highlighting criminological theories on intergenerational transmission or social learning (Contreras et al., 2020; Hasselle et al., 2020; Valgardson & Schwartz, 2019; Wareham et al., 2009). Recently, a comparison of generalist and specialist CPV perpetrators (Loinaz et al., 2023) also found that generalist perpetrators (using both CPV and other type of offenses) also had more violence at home, had parents exhibiting more violence, and more cohabitation problems. Therefore, violence at home is an outstanding risk factor in many types of juvenile offending. Indeed, it may be related to reactive violence in CPV cases (Cano-Lozano et al., 2023). The fact that violent crime is more prevalent among those with violence at home may be related to the imitation and justification concept highlighted in previous research (Saladino et al., 2021).

Boys and girls were very similar in their risk factors, as described elsewhere (Willison & Lutter, 2009). In this research, girls only stood out in family offending (Loinaz et al., 2020; Van der Put et al., 2014), family mental health problems (Loinaz et al., 2020), and use of social services. Boys only exhibited significantly more drug use, in contrast to some previous research (Bright et al., 2011; Loinaz et al., 2020; Van der Put et al., 2014). Victimization, which has been highlighted in previous research, was slightly higher among girls (13% versus 9.6%) but did not show statistical differences according to Kitzmann et al. (2003) or Wolfe et al. (2003), for instance. The results support the gender neutrality in risk prediction (Childs et al., 2016; Pusch & Holtfreter, 2018; Scott & Brown, 2018).

### ***Limitations***

The main limitation of the current research was the data available for each case. The project was derived from official juvenile justice reports developed by the research team over the last several years, and thus responded to institutionally collected indicators of interest. There was no assessment tool, nor some risk factors used in previous research (as can be number of prior arrests, empathy, or social support). Thus, discussion or comparison of the results is somewhat limited. The samples were assessed in periods of three years according to the subjects' participation in a judicial measure. Therefore, this is not a longitudinal study conducted over 10 years but rather a cross-sectional snapshot of participants in judicial measures in

different three-year periods (2012–2015, 2015–2018, and 2018–2021). To some extent, this affects the possible analyses of follow-up, recidivism research, and analysis of the temporal evolution of offender profiles, or the presence of risk factors among them. A follow-up until the participants reach the adult criminal justice system would be of interest and would allow us to better know the influence of these variables, especially the family variables, in the development of criminal careers in adult life.

### ***Practical implications***

The study of risk factors for juvenile delinquency has a long history in the social and criminological sciences. It is clear that since the beginning of West and Farrington's (1973) pioneering study, no substantial progress has been made to identify new risk factors. This can be good if it means that the proposals have been confirmed. At this point, the real challenge is to improve our understanding of how genetics, personality, familial, environmental, and social risk factors interact. As Saladino et al. (2021) stated, the relationship between some family risk factors and adolescents' risky behavior may be co-constructed by parents and adolescents, as a circular system. It is also important to better understand the relationship between the combination of these factors and the different offending typologies and antisocial behaviors of juvenile offenders, as well as possible gender differences, as is being done in the case of CPV (Cano-Lozano et al., 2023; Loinaz et al., 2023; Navas-Martínez & Cano-Lozano, 2022; Sheed et al., 2023). Further studies in this area are essential if we want to design prevention programs that are adapted to the circumstances of each profile of juvenile offender. This study has contributed to this line of research.

In the juvenile justice system in the Basque Country, as in other European justice systems, the judicial measures imposed on juvenile offenders must be of an educational nature. This is a fundamental difference from the adult justice system, which, despite an apparent rehabilitative philosophy, plays a sanctioning, punitive, and dissuasive role. In this context, the measures imposed on juvenile offenders are not based on the offense committed but on the personal circumstances of the juvenile. The result is an individualized educational program with a primary aim of preventing recidivism. This work shows that the psychosocial teams responsible for designing individualized educational programs must involve the offender's families. More specifically, the parents. Only in this way, especially in the context of criminogenic families, can these educational programs be truly effective. As pointed out by Orlando and Farrington (2021) a growing body of evidence supports the use

of treatments applied in a family context that are effective in reducing recidivism.

The relevance of family factors calls for multi-systemic preventive approaches that address family problems. These familial interventions should work with parental discipline strategies (Jiménez-Granado et al., 2023) and include parent training to improve relationships (e.g., with positive communication, active listening, reduction of violence, and criminogenic context) and decrease the risk factors associated with the dysfunctional family system (Saladino et al., 2021). Therefore, desistance from crime may be promoted to improve the family environment, beyond the benefits of working with juvenile offenders.

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