

# Relationship between Recovery from Delinquency and Positive Perceptions of the Family System – Focusing on Ideals and Reality in Family Relationships –

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## Introduction

### 1. Delinquency and juvenile delinquents in Japan

Adolescence and early adulthood are periods in which young people explore their identities, move away from psychological dependence on their parents, and begin to search for a new basis for psychological stability in relationships with others (Ochiai & Sato, 1996). As young people form a new sense of self, previous self-concepts and values are susceptible to change; thus, adolescence and early adulthood can also be periods of anxiety, conflict, and confusion (Mizokami, 2001).

As periods of major developmental changes, adolescence and early adulthood present a risk of maladjustment; one significant issue being examined in this context is delinquency and juvenile delinquents (referred to below simply as “delinquency”). Delinquency is defined as follows (Japan Research Institute, 2023):

A) Delinquency refers to acts committed by persons under 20 years of age that violate criminal law.

B) Juvenile delinquents are classified into young offenders, young juvenile delinquents, and pre-delinquent juveniles.

C) Persons under the age of 20 years who are taken into custody by the police for acts such as drinking alcohol, smoking, and running away from home are not considered juvenile delinquents and are instead referred to as “misbehaving youth.”

Among those classified as juvenile delinquents, a young offender is a “juvenile aged 14 years or older and younger than 20 years who has committed a criminal act”; a young juvenile delinquent is a “juvenile aged under 14 years who has committed an act that infringes on criminal law”; and a pre-delinquent juvenile is a “juvenile aged under 20 years who has not violated criminal law but who is considered to be at risk of committing crimes or engaging in acts that infringe on criminal law in the future” (Ministry of Justice, 2021).

### 2. Health of the family system during adolescence and early adulthood

The most significant interpersonal relationships during adolescence and early

adulthood are those between parents and children, which has wide-ranging impacts on human development throughout the life course, including aspects such as social skills, interpersonal relationships, and personality (Toda, 2009).

Hashimoto (2011) investigated university students' attachment relationships with their fathers during early childhood, examining how those relationships are connected with their emotional characteristics and interpersonal adjustment. The study found that students who had a high level of attachment to their fathers were emotionally stable and had a high level of social skills. Further, the role of the father was effective. In contrast, those who had low attachment to their fathers were emotionally unstable, lacked flexibility in interpersonal adjustment, and tended to lack motivation. In particular, the female students with a tendency toward a high degree of attachment showed characteristics such as self-insight, self-control, altruism, empathy, and social skills to a greater extent than female students with a tendency toward a low degree of attachment. Hirayama (2001) focused on the mental health of children and examined how it was related to the extent to which both parents agreed in their assessment of the father's involvement in the family. The study found that, for sons (boys), neuroticism, anger, and uncooperativeness were all correlated with the father's lack of involvement in the family as assessed by mothers, while for daughters (girls), neuroticism was correlated with the father's lack of involvement in the family as assessed by both parents.

As mentioned above, in the past, research on family relationships often focused on the relationship between two or three specific individuals (e.g., the relationship with the father and/or mother) and examined the psychological

aspects of adolescence and early adulthood. However, in real-life family relationships, the family functions as a whole, with each member influencing the other, rather than individual interactions with specific family members. Therefore, more recently, research attempted to examine the family in terms of systems, viewing the family as a single entity.

For example, Motegi (1996) examined how the health of the family system influenced the mental health of university students and found that students with healthier family systems tended to have better mental health. Kosaka and Toda (2009) also found that young people's acquisition of psychological independence was supported by their having a positive perception of their family system.

Moreover, Shirasaki, Murakami, and Suzuki (2013) focused on the discrepancy between the reality of family and the ideal of the image of family as perceived by university students and examined how this impacted their mental health. Using the family image test (FIT) method, participants were asked to create a diagram showing the actual structure of their family (including themselves and their parents) and a diagram showing the ideal structure of their family. The analysis examined the differences between participants' actual families and their ideal families, using as measurement indicators such as the distance between family members (father–mother, father–child, mother–child) and the degree of eye contact (gaze direction) as depicted in the family diagrams of participants. Shirasaki et al. (2013) found that university students who perceived a large discrepancy between their reality and their ideal (i.e., those who were not satisfied with their current family relationships) in terms of the depicted distance between father and child and eye contact between

mother and child (gaze direction) experienced lower levels of mental health.

### **3. Parent–child relationships and delinquency in adolescence and early adulthood**

The previous section described prior studies that have investigated adolescent mental health and parent–child relationships; other studies have also examined parent–child relationships and delinquency in adolescence and early adulthood.

Takagi (1985) investigated the relationship between family environment and the personality of juvenile delinquents who had been admitted to child guidance centers or juvenile detention centers by comparing them with juveniles in the general population. The results showed that juvenile delinquents tended to seek emotional stability and turn to delinquency in cases where they had a lack of “emotional experiences,” such as being read to by their parents or having a pet in the house, during infancy. This suggests that parents play the role of creating a good living environment for their children through forms of education, including emotional education; this is associated with the prevention of delinquency.

Uchiyama and Amano (1991) investigated how daily lifestyle habits and parent–child relationships influence the formation of normative awareness among elementary and junior high school students who had been taken into protective custody by the police, among general elementary and junior high school students, and among their parents. The study found that in comparison with juvenile delinquents, juveniles in the general population spent more time with their families (e.g., active participation in school events, going out together as a family) and had more interaction (communication) between family members.

Obokata and Muto (2005) investigated the determinants and deterrent factors of delinquent behavior among junior high school students from the perspective of parent–child relationships. A questionnaire survey was administered, asking participants about their past experiences of delinquency and their interactions with their parents. No consistent results were obtained in terms of gender or individual students with regard to the relationship between delinquent behavior and parent–child relationships. The study was thus unable to definitively determine factors that deterred delinquent behavior. Nonetheless, the findings suggested the possibility that a close relationship between parents and children may play a significant role in deterring delinquency.

Obokata and Muto (2006) also conducted a survey on changes in delinquent behavior among junior high school students in the first and second semesters, examining changes after the onset of delinquent behavior from the perspectives of parent–child relationships, friendships, depressive tendencies, self-control, and sense of enjoyment of school. The analysis included a longitudinal survey, in which participants were divided into the following groups relating to participants’ history of delinquent behavior: participants who had engaged in delinquent behavior in the first semester were classified into the “delinquency group”; those who had not engaged in delinquent behavior in the first semester but had done so in the second semester were classified into the “onset group”; and those who had not engaged in delinquency in either semester were classified into the “non-delinquency group.” The results revealed that deviant peer relationships, parent–child relationships with a lack of closeness, low self-control, and maladjustment at school were factors

that contributed to delinquent behavior. Furthermore, a lack of closeness in the parent–child relationship was identified as a common characteristic in both the onset and delinquency groups. This suggests that when participants did not have a close relationship with their parents, their sense of belonging in the family was weakened, which tended to induce them to seek intimacy and connection outside the home, which, in turn, was associated with delinquency.

Thus, prior research has identified a connection between adolescent delinquency and the parent–child relationship; in particular, the extent to which a young person establishes a close relationship with their parents has been identified as a crucial factor that affects motivation to engage in delinquency (increasing interest and concern) and deterring delinquency.

#### **4. Desistance and recovery from delinquency**

Previous research has focused on what motivates young people to engage in delinquency and what can be done to deter them before they start to engage in delinquency; however, it is of equal importance to examine the processes by which young people, once they have started to engage in delinquency, can cease doing so (i.e., desistance) and thereby make a recovery.

Nishikawa and Muramatsu (2013) examined both the causes of delinquency and factors that support desistance therefrom, noting that less consideration is given to issues related to desistance than issues related to the causes of delinquency. The study examined autobiographical texts written by 20 people with a history of delinquency, extracting keywords related to the causes of delinquency and factors that supported desistance and analyzing them using text mining. The results suggest that a key factor for individuals' recovery from delinquency was receiving support from others around them

that predated their engagement with delinquency. The study also revealed the possibility that recovery from delinquency is supported by being in an environment in which one is regarded positively and accepted in interactions with others to whom one feels close. Further, Tadano, Okabe, Takeshita, and Inozume (2017) examined factors that supported desistance among individuals who had been released from juvenile detention centers by comparing those who were in the process of desistance (recovery) with those who had reoffended. It was found that those who had desisted from delinquency had better relationships with family and friends than those who had reoffended. This suggests that building good relationships and communication between parent and child are principal factors that support recovery from delinquency.

Okamoto (2023) investigated the relationship between delinquency and perceived competence among university students. Participants were asked whether they had engaged in delinquent acts (e.g., violent offenses, property offenses) during their first year of high school and during their current tenure as university students. Those who answered “never” to all items were categorized as the “general group”; those who had engaged in delinquency during high school but no longer did so were classified as the “desistance group”; and those who had engaged in delinquency both in high school and at university were classified as the “continuing delinquency group.” The study examined participants' perceived competence by through the three groups and found that the results did not support the hypothesis that recovery from delinquency is possible by deriving competence through adaptive behaviors rather than through delinquent behaviors. It was, however, suggested that those with a history of

property offenses tended to derive a sense of competence from committing such offenses while they were at high school, and a decrease in perceived competence in the present was related to recovery. For violent offenders, meanwhile, the study suggested that not deriving a sense of competence through committing such offenses, either in the past or present, was related to recovery.

### 5. Research purpose

Recent research has also indicated the relevance of considering family relationships in terms of a unified family system rather than in terms of individual relationships. It is, therefore, meaningful to examine how parent-child relationships are connected with delinquency within the context of the family system. Furthermore, there is a need to study desistance, given the dearth of research on recovery from delinquency in comparison with research on determinant and deterrent factors. No research has examined the relationship between desistance and positive perceptions of the family system. Moreover, other than Shirasaki et al. (2013), no scholar has conducted research on the perceptions of the family system from the perspective of a discrepancy between reality and the ideal. It is of significance to examine the extent to which the real world lives up to (or fails to live up to) adolescents' ideas of the ideal family, in terms of the extent to which this is related to desistance so as to determine the factors that support desistance.

### 6. Study hypotheses

1. There is no difference between the continuing delinquency group and the desistance group in terms of their perceptions of the ideal family system.
2. The continuing delinquency group has a low level of positive perceptions of real-life family

systems both during junior high school and the present day, while the desistance group has a low level of positive perceptions of real-life family systems during junior high school (like the continuing delinquency group) but a high level of positive perceptions in the present.

3. The continuing delinquency group presents a large discrepancy between the ideal and real perceptions of the family system both during junior high school and the present day (i.e., participants in this group are not satisfied with their real-life family relationships). Meanwhile, although there is a similarly large discrepancy in the desistance group during junior high school, this discrepancy between the ideal and reality is lower in the present day (i.e., participants in this group are satisfied with their real-life family relationships).

### Method

#### Survey participants

The survey participants were 300 university students (215 women, 84 men, and 1 other;  $M = 18.77$ ,  $SD = 2.08$ ).

#### Survey method

The survey was conducted online using Google Forms. Participants were recruited with explanations given during university lectures. The survey was conducted using a group method, in which participants were asked to respond to a questionnaire via a Google Form during class time. Individual surveys were also conducted with those who had given their permission to do so.

#### Measured variables

Survey participants were asked to respond to the following three scales, and their attributes were recorded accordingly.

**History of delinquency scale:** With reference to theory of delinquency levels (Japan Research

Institute, 2023), delinquent behavior as examined in the present study was categorized into the following two levels: “Delinquency Level I (Delinquency observed within the scope of home and school, such as domestic violence, bullying at school, and shoplifting on the way to school)” and “Delinquency Level II (delinquency that extends beyond the realm of school, e.g., shoplifting, motorcycle/bicycle theft, and reckless/gang-related behavior).” Then, based on the 21-item Self-Report Delinquency Scale Based on Item Response Theory created by Okabe (2010), a scale was created independently with reference to the criteria for Delinquency Levels I and II. Specifically, from the list of 21 items, items that were considered to be less relevant to contemporary young people were excluded, and other changes were made, such as combining items that can be classified as the same delinquent behavior regardless of whether it occurs inside or outside the home. These changes were made in consultation with a university lecturer who specializes in clinical psychology and graduate and undergraduate students who were part of psychology seminar groups. The scale that was ultimately produced comprised of 12 items (Appendix). For each item, respondents were asked to respond using a five-item scale (1: *never*, 2: *only once*, 3: *a little*, 4: *sometimes*, 5: *often*) regarding the extent to which they had a history of engaging in each behavior over two educational stages: junior high school and university (present day at the time of the survey). Further, in this study, when a participant responded that “I did not actually engage in this behavior, but I tried to do so (or thought about doing so),” this was taken as indicating that the participant had (or used to have) an intention to engage in delinquency and, therefore, all the questions were phrased in terms of “doing X or attempting to do X.”

**Ideal Family System Scale:** Thirty items classified as “items constituting healthy family variables” were used from the Positive Family Relationship Scale, created by Motegi (1996). Of these items, the top three with the highest factor loadings for each of the four subfactors (i.e., cohesiveness, mutuality/individuality, communication, atmosphere) were used, yielding a total of 12 items (e.g., Cohesiveness: “My family and I have a strong sense of unity”; Mutuality/individuality: “My family and I understand each other”; Communication: “My family and I express our thoughts clearly and find it easy to speak to each other”; Atmosphere: “My family and I get along well with each other”). For each item, participants were asked to respond on a four-point scale (1: *strongly disagree*, 2: *disagree*, 3: *agree*, 4: *strongly agree*) indicating the extent to which they agreed that the relevant item corresponded to their ideal way of interacting with their family. Further, in this study, all the items were phrased in terms of “my family and I,” with the aim of soliciting responses from participants (adolescent students) with a focus on the kind of relationship participants hoped to build with their families.

**Real-Life Family System Scale:** As with the Ideal Family System Scale, the 12-item Positive Family Relationship Scale was used. Participants were asked to respond to each item using a four-point scale (1: *strongly disagree*, 2: *disagree*, 3: *agree*, 4: *strongly agree*) regarding the nature of the day-to-day interactions they engaged in (or used to engage in) with their family over two educational stages: junior high school and university (present day at the time of the survey).

**Participant attributes:** Participants were asked to indicate which year of university they were in (e.g., first year, second year, third year, fourth year); their age (free description); and gender (free description).

**Ethical considerations**

When conducting the survey, it was explained verbally to potential participants that their participation in the survey was voluntary; they would not experience any disadvantage because of declining to participate in the survey; the survey was totally unconnected to the class in which their participation had been solicited; they were free to stop participating at any time during the survey; and the survey would not include any data that could identify individuals. The preceding points were also presented in writing on the first page of the Google Form. If an individual did not wish to participate in the survey, they were asked to select “I do not agree to participate in the survey,” and their participation ended there. If an individual wished to participate in the survey, they were asked to select “I agree to participate in the survey,” after which, they were asked to respond to the survey. By making the above selection and responding to the survey, participants indicated their consent to participate in the survey.

**Results**

**Statistical software**

The analyses in this study were conducted using HAD16.000 (Shimizu, 2016).

**Analysis 1: Mean values and standard deviations for each survey item**

The following analysis was conducted on 297 university students (214 females, 83 males; *M*

= 18.7, *SD* = 1.32), excluding five students who did not indicate their attributes sufficiently.

Descriptive statistics were calculated for each measurement variable (scale) used. The results are shown in Table 1.

**Analysis 2: Classification of history of delinquency (extent of delinquency)**

The results of the self-reported delinquency scale were used to classify participants in terms of their history of delinquent behavior into four types at two educational stages (junior high school and university at the time of the study). The procedure described below was used for classification, with reference to Okamoto’s (2023) classification criteria.

First, participants who responded “1: Never” to the self-reported delinquency scale for all 12 items at both junior high school and university were grouped into the “**no delinquency group**” (total score of 12 points for junior high school and 12 points for university).

Second, those who responded to at least one of the 12 items for junior high school with “2: Only once,” “3: A little,” “4: Sometimes,” or “5: Often” but who responded “1: Never” to all 12 items for university were classified into the “**desistance group**” (total score of 13 points or more for junior high school and 12 points for university).

Third, those who responded to at least one of the 12 items for both junior high school and for university with “2: Only once,” “3: A little,” “4:

Table 1  
Mean and Standard deviation

<i>N</i>		family systems				
		ideal family	real-life		discrepancy	
			junior high school	university	junior high school	university
297	<i>M</i>	3.41	3.08	3.24	0.33	0.16
	<i>SD</i>	0.52	0.67	0.6	0.52	0.44

Table 2  
Mean and Standard deviation

	<i>N</i>	ideal family	real-life		discrepancy		
			junior high school	university	junior high school	university	
desistance group	104	<i>M</i>	3.40	2.98	3.27	0.42	0.13
		<i>SD</i>	0.55	0.70	0.54	0.58	0.38
continuing delinquency group	52	<i>M</i>	3.39	3.04	3.08	0.36	0.31
		<i>SD</i>	0.52	0.63	0.71	0.49	0.62

Sometimes,” or “5: Often” were classified into the “**continuing delinquency group**” (total score of 13 points or more for junior high school and 13 points or more for university).

Fourth, participants who responded with “1: Never” for all 12 items for junior high school but who responded to at least one of the 12 items for university with “2: Only once,” “3: A little,” “4: Sometimes,” or “5: Often” were grouped into the “**delinquency onset group**” (total score of 12 points for junior high school and 13 points or more for university).

Furthermore, since this study’s purpose was to examine desistance from delinquent behavior during junior high school, the participants who were relevant to the study were those with a history of delinquency at junior high school. Therefore, the following analyzes will examine only two of the four groups: the “**desistance group**” ( $N = 104$ ) and the “**continuing delinquency group**” ( $N = 52$ ). Descriptive statistics for each measured variable (scale) were calculated for these two groups; the results are shown in Table 2.

### Analysis 3: Analysis of ideal family systems by group

This analysis was used to examine whether there were differences in participants’ perceptions of the ideal family system between the desistance group and the continuing delinquency group. An unpaired  $t$ -test was conducted using the

groups as the independent variable and the total score on the Ideal Positive Family Relationship Scale as the dependent variable. The results indicated no difference between groups ( $t(107.38) = 0.08, p = .936$ ).

### Analysis 4: Analysis of real-life family relationships by group and educational stage

This analysis was used to examine whether there were any differences in participants’ perceptions of their real-life family systems based on their delinquency status (i.e., the desistance group and the continuing delinquency group) and the developmental time axis between junior high school and university in the present day. A mixed design two-way analysis of variance was performed with group (i.e., desistance group, continuing delinquency group) and educational stage (i.e., junior high school, university) as the independent variables and the total score on the Real-life Positive Family Relationship Scale as the dependent variable. The main effect of educational stage ( $F(1, 154) = 15.28, p = .000$ ) was found to be significant. The interaction between group and educational stage ( $F(1, 154) = 8.42, p = .004$ ) was also found to be significant. The results of the subtest indicated that the simple main effect of educational stage ( $F(1, 154) = 34.79, p = .000$ ) was significant in the desistance group, and scores were higher at the university level than at junior high school level. However, the simple main effect of educational



stage in the continuing delinquency group was not significant ( $F(1, 154) = 0.38, p = .538$ ).

#### **Analysis 5: Analysis of discrepancies between students' ideal and real family relationships by group and educational stage**

The next analysis was used to examine the discrepancy between participants' perceptions of their ideal family systems and of their real-life family systems, based on delinquency status (i.e., the desistance group and the continuing delinquency group) and the developmental time axis between junior high school and university in the present day. The discrepancy was calculated according to the following procedure.

The values obtained by subtracting the total scores on the Real-Life Family System Scale from the total scores on the Ideal Family System Scale items for junior high school students were defined as the "discrepancy among junior high school students" and the values obtained in the same way for university students were defined as the "discrepancy among university students." Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for each group in terms of this discrepancy.

A mixed design two-factor analysis of variance was conducted using group (desistance group, continuing delinquency group) and educational stage (junior high school students, university students) as independent variables and the difference between the total scores on the ideal and real-life versions of the Positive Family Relationship Scale as the dependent variable. The main effect of educational stage ( $F(1, 154) = 15.28, p = .000$ ) was found to be significant. The interaction between group and educational stage ( $F(1, 154) = 8.42, p = .004$ ) was also identified as significant. The subtest indicated that the simple main effect of educational stage ( $F(1, 154) = 34.79, p = .000$ ) was significant in the desistance group, and the scores were higher for junior high school

than for university, indicating a larger discrepancy. However, the simple main effect of educational stage in the continuing delinquency group was not significant ( $F(1, 154) = 0.38, p = .538$ ).

#### **Discussion**

This study's purpose was to examine the relationship between recovery from delinquency (i.e., desistance) and positive perceptions of the family system among university students during adolescence and early adulthood. A longitudinal survey was conducted to determine whether or not participants had a history of engaging in delinquent behavior when they were junior high school students and as university students in the present, examining whether they were currently engaging in delinquency. Another longitudinal survey was conducted on positive perceptions held by participants regarding their family system in reality, focusing on the discrepancy from their ideal family system, examining any connection between this and a history of delinquency. The results highlighted the following:

1. With regard to participants' images of the ideal family system, no difference was identified between those who had a history of delinquency in junior high school but not in university (desistance group) and those who had engaged in delinquency continuously since junior high school (continuing delinquency group).
2. The continuing delinquent group did not show any difference in the level of positive perception of their actual family system between junior high school and college age, but the discontinued delinquent group tended to perceive their family system more positively at university than at junior high school.
3. With regard to the discrepancy between

participants' perceptions of their ideal and the reality of their family situation at junior high school and at university, a large discrepancy was identified in the continuing delinquency group both during junior high school and the present day (i.e., participants in this group were not satisfied with their real-life family relationships). Meanwhile, in the desistance group, while the discrepancy was similarly large for the continuing delinquency group during junior high school, the discrepancy had lessened in the present day (i.e., participants in this group had become satisfied with their real-life family relationships).

The following paragraphs will discuss these findings in light of the hypotheses stated previously.

First, the ideal family image held by adolescents was examined in relation to their history of delinquency: no differences were found in perceptions of the ideal family system between the continuing delinquency and the desistance groups. This result supports Hypothesis 1, namely, that there is no difference in adolescents' perceptions of their ideal family system, regardless of their history of delinquency. While studies have found that problems in parent-child relationships are a cause of delinquent behavior (e.g. Matsui, 2002), the present study found that both those who continue to engage in delinquency and those who have stopped doing so in the time between junior high school and the present day at university had similarly positive perceptions regarding their image of the ideal family (i.e., the kind of family they would like to have). The present study focused on the family system with a survey including items such as "I spend time with my family" and "We understand each other." In other words, adolescents in the continuing

delinquency group also appear to have a desire for the ideal kind of relationship and involvement with their families as described in the items. Yoshioka (2001) describes an ideal as "the optimal state of being that we envision and desire in our minds—something that serves as the purpose of our actions and gives meaning to reality." It is of significance when considering family relationships that the present study found that adolescents, both those who had desisted from and those continuing to engage in delinquency, have similar ideal positive perceptions of their families (how they wish things could be). The question we must then ask is what the difference is in terms of the family system between young people who no longer engage in delinquent behavior and those who continue to engage in delinquent behavior. Therefore, the study then examined participants' perceptions of their real-life family systems.

Participants' perceptions of their real-life family relationships at different developmental stages were examined, focusing on their time at junior high school and at university in the present day. In relation to their history of delinquency, it was found that all participants who had engaged in delinquency during junior high school had a low level of positive perception of their family system at that time and that while this low level persisted into the present day for participants in the continuing delinquency group, those in the desistance group showed a more positive perception of their families in the present day. This result supports Hypothesis 2, namely, that adolescents who are no longer engaging in delinquent behavior have a more positive perception of their real-life family system than they did at junior high school. Matsui (2002) identifies problems in parent-child relationships as a cause of juvenile delinquency in Japan.

Matsui (2002) examined the connection

between young people's perceptions of their parents and delinquent behavior, targeting junior high school students and their parents, and identified a causal relationship between the quality of parent-child relationships and delinquent behavior. Based on this, Matsui (2002) argues that problems in parent-child relationships can be a factor that promotes delinquent behavior. The present study's results found low levels of positive perception of participants' real-life family systems during junior high school both in the continuing delinquency and the desistance groups. This supports the findings of previous studies indicating that the parent-child relationship is a factor in delinquent behavior. Notably, those in the desistance group showed an increase in positive perceptions of their real-life family system in the present day, in which they were not engaging in delinquency. Participants who indicated that they had engaged in delinquent behavior during junior high school but no longer did so as university students were classified into the desistance group. In other words, this group was comprised of individuals who had engaged in delinquent behavior in the past but because of changes associated with developmental processes were no longer engaged in this behavior or in any new such behavior. Participants' perceptions of their family relationships were then examined, and it was found that adolescents in the desistance group had a low positive perception of their family system during junior high school, similar to those in the continuing delinquency group. Further, positive perceptions increased in the present at university. This can be described as resulting from participants perceiving the environment of their family system more positively, at least compared to the past.

Uchiyama and Amano (1991) compared

the family relationships of ordinary juveniles who had no history of delinquency with those of juvenile delinquents and found that ordinary juveniles were more likely to spend time with their families (e.g., active participation in school events, going out together as a family, etc.) and to have more interaction (communication) between family members than juvenile delinquents did. The Positive Family Relationship Scale used in the present study examined participants' positive perceptions of their family system by focusing on the relationship between participants and their families, by including items such as "My family and I make an effort to spend time together," "My family and I are free to express our opinions to each other, and we accept each other's opinions," and "My family and I get along well with each other." The present study found that adolescents in the desistance group perceived their relationship with their families more positively in the present day (in which they were not engaged in delinquent behavior) than when they did during junior high school, a finding which is consistent with previous research.

A significant finding of this study, therefore, is that there is a possibility of a connection between delinquent behavior and the extent to which adolescents regard their family environment positively. It is, therefore, of significance to ask how close an adolescent's past and current family systems are to the ideal family system they envision and to ask whether the size of any discrepancy in this regard is related to their delinquent behavior. In this regard, this study examined the discrepancy between participants' perceptions of their ideal family system and their positive perceptions of their real-life family systems.

The discrepancy between participants' perceptions of their ideal situation and the reality

of their family relationships were examined at two educational stages (junior high school and the present day at university) in relation to their history of delinquency. No difference in the size of this discrepancy was identified between junior high school and the present day for participants in the continuing delinquency group, whereas this discrepancy had decreased for those in the desistance group. This result supports Hypothesis 3, which posits that among adolescents who are not currently engaging in delinquency, there is no difference between their perception of their ideal family system and the reality of their family system.

Shirasaki et al. (2013) used the FIT method to examine the effects of there being a discrepancy between ideal and actual family situations on university students' mental health. The results indicated that university students who perceived a large discrepancy between their ideal and the reality (i.e., they are not satisfied with their current family relationships) in terms of father-child distance and degree of parent-child eye contact (gaze matching) were likely to experience worse mental health. In other words, Shirasaki et al. (2013) identified that the stability of young people's internal development was significantly influenced by the extent to which their ideal relationships with their families and family environments were manifested in the real world.

The present study focused on desistance from delinquency and the discrepancy between students' ideal and real family situations and found that this discrepancy was greatly reduced in the present day when participants were not engaged in delinquent behavior. This means that university students who are not engaging in delinquency perceive their current relationships with their families and home environment as

being close to their ideal situation and that they are more satisfied with their home environment than when they were in junior high school. Although this study focused on delinquent behavior, the finding that young people's development is related to the size of the discrepancy between students' ideal and real family situations is consistent with previous research showing that this discrepancy affects young people's mental health. Kondo, Okamoto, Shirai, Tochio, Kono, Kashio and Kodama (2008) found that parent-child communication is a significant factor that supports young people in desisting from delinquency. Therefore, it is important to ask young people questions such as "What kind of relationship do you want to have with your parents?" and "What kind of place do you want your home to be?" with the understanding that parent-child communication is both a deterrent and rehabilitative factor with regard to delinquent behavior in young people. In so doing, we can understand the ideal image that a young person has of their home environment and understand what is needed to make that a reality.

### **Research significance**

This study made the following findings. Both adolescents who continue to engage in delinquent behavior and those who no longer engage in delinquent behavior have the same ideal image of family relationships. Young people in contemporary society who have desisted from delinquency have a positive perception of their real-life family situation. Young people in contemporary society who have desisted from delinquency have little discrepancy between their ideal and actual family situation (i.e., they are satisfied with their family system). Previous research focused on recovery from delinquency but did not consider family relationships as a

system and examine young people's perceptions of the family system. Furthermore, no study so far has examined the discrepancy between young people's ideal and actual family situations. This study revealed that having positive perceptions of the family system and a low level of discrepancy between ideal and real family situations are related to desistance. Hence, this study was significant in that it was able to demonstrate the importance of family relationships (how young people perceive their family environment) as a deterrent supporting desistance.

#### **Limitations and future prospects of this research**

This study clarifies the relationship between desistance and positive perceptions of the family system, especially in terms of the discrepancy between ideal and real situations. However, it does not consider specific methods and measures for making these ideal conceptions of family into reality. There has also been insufficient examination of the causes and processes by which there is a shift to positive perceptions of the family among young people with a history of delinquency during junior high school but who no longer engage in delinquency while at university. Identifying developmental changes that lead to a positive perception of the family system and how these developmental processes are related to desistance will need to be examined in greater detail using methods such as interviews, going beyond what can be achieved with questionnaire surveys.

In addition, in order to obtain a broader understanding of adolescents' involvement in delinquent behavior (including cognition), this study examined not only those who had actually engaged in delinquent behavior, but also those who merely had the intention to engage in delinquent behavior. However, when examining recovery from delinquency, it will be necessary to

focus only on cases where a person has actually committed a delinquent act. Therefore, in the future, it will be necessary to focus only on cases in which delinquent behavior has actually occurred and examine the relationship with positive perceptions of the family system.

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#### Note

This study is based on the graduation thesis submitted by the first author to the Faculty

of Education at Ehime University in 2023. The affiliation of the first author at the time he was a student at the university is listed.

Appendix

History of delinquency scale

- 
- 1 entering or attempting to enter a place or building that you are not allowed to enter

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  - 2 deliberately damaging or attempting to damage the belongings or vehicle of a family member or other person

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  - 3 engaging or attempting to engage in dangerous behavior on roads with a group of people driving cars or motorcycles

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  - 4 making or attempting to make noise in a group in a public place such as a square

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  - 5 stealing or attempting to steal someone else's belongings or vehicle

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  - 6 deliberately broke or attempted to break public property (e.g., toilet) or your home (e.g., walls)

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  - 7 taking or attempting to take something from school without permission

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  - 8 engaging or attempting to engage in violence (including abusive language) toward a family member or other person

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  - 9 taking or attempting to take money or items from your home without permission

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  - 10 taking or attempting to take money or things from others by deceiving

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  - 11 sneaking or attempting to sneak merchandise out of the store

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  - 12 riding a car or motorcycle in a group and doing or attempting to do something dangerous on the road
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