

## A Theoretical Model of the Causes of Juvenile Fire-setting

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In this study, we constructed a theoretical model of the causes of juvenile fire-setting based on cognitive appraisal and the frequency and strength of trigger events. We suggested that juveniles choose fire-setting as means to commit crime because they view fire-setting positively. The development of a positive fire-setting appraisal is influenced by experiences of contact with fire and observational learning of fire-setting. In addition, the frequency and strength of trigger events moderate the association between appraising fire-setting positively and the practice of setting fires. The frequency and strength of trigger events influence whether juveniles who appraise fire-setting positively are likely to set fires. This study used an anonymous, self-reporting questionnaire to conduct a survey and collect data. Participants included 693 junior and senior high school students from the northern, middle, southern, and eastern Taiwan, and 688 delinquent juveniles from every reform school in Taiwan. In total 1,381 juveniles were involved in the study. The questionnaire included scales developed for this study measuring the positive appraisal of fire-setting, the experiences of contact with fire, observational learning of fire-setting, the frequency and strength of trigger events of fire-setting, and fire-setting behavior. The results showed that experiencing contact with fire and observational learning of fire-setting directly cause juveniles to appraise fire-setting positively, that the positive appraisal of fire-setting directly affects juvenile fire-setting, and that the frequency and strength of trigger events influence the association between the positive appraisal and the practice of juvenile fire-setting. The predictions of the theoretical model were supported. Finally, we addressed the implications of the theoretical model, the practical applications of the results, and the potentials for future study.

**Keywords:** *fire-setting, juvenile, juvenile delinquent, trigger events*