# CRIMINAL DEVIANCE AND DISORGANIZATION: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT

A social explanation to crime and criminality was first provided by the French criminologist Gabriel Tarde (1843 – 1904). According to Gabriel Tarde, the primary component that lays the seed of criminality in an individual lies in the process of learning in a person's early life. Criminal Behavior is an acquired quality according to Tarde, similar to any vocation, trade or profession, the patterns for which are picked up in a person's childhood. When it comes to the field of crime, the theories coming from a sociological perspective make the assertion that there exist persons in society that do not conform to the set of rules and norms of society and social conduct. It is stated that the true reasons for deviant behavior and delinquency can be found in the fact that the concerned individuals have either experienced and seen firsthand, their parents or other family members committing acts such as stealing, Domestic Violence, etc. or have been experiencing encouragement to engage in criminal and socially deviant activity, anti-social acts by way of peer pressure by seniors, friends, etc. The aim of this research article is to explore the conditions that cause criminal deviance and disorganization and the role social institutions play in their occurrence.

## Introduction

The theories of social learning primarily tend to have their focus and lay emphasis on the role social organization, culture and systems play in the development of a mindset that facilitates the probability and even commission of criminal acts through socially deviant behavior. The social institutions such as school, education, family; when combined with religious and political ideologies, economic conditions, social stigma, work conditions, etc., are primary drivers of a person's overall development. An individual is like clay, constantly getting molded by experiences in life caused by these social forces. Many have cracks, scars and deformities in their mental pottery, being touched by the elements of society in a multitude of ways, thereby knowingly or unknowingly making them susceptible to indulging in deviant, disorganized and antisocial behavior. Criminal Behavior is usually a reflection of the inner demons a person wrestles with and tends to lose to in the bout. The idea of how society creates problems for society is a theme that is touched upon while understanding criminology through the looking glass of sociology.

## Overview

The impact of urbanization, industrialization and modernization in a society that is changing at a rapid pace may result into the creation of social disorganization that may further be the cause of cultural conflicts between differentiating values and beliefs of the various sections and strata of society. Such a difference may be one that is between the new and the old values, traditional, indigenous or imported values and even values that have been enforced by the government.

A lack of affection, care, and the non-fulfilment of the most basic of needs when it comes to children, and the sad and tragic experiences and circumstances they have had in their family often result in their detachment from said family, easily laying their path into the world of criminality.

Any political influence, excessive in nature, in pursuance of their executive functions in the Government tends to weaken social morale, as well as that of the police and other administrative officials, thereby lowering their guard and bringing vulnerability to society thereby experiencing an increased rate of crime. The assassination of the ex-Prime Minister and Iron Lady of India, Smt. Indira Gandhi is an example of peak political crime caused by social meltdown in India. Mass killings in the regions of Kashmir and Punjab are also examples of crime by extremism.

Economic and financial conditions also play a very important role as an influence and inducer of criminality, affecting individuals on a broad spectrum to a considerable extent. Criminal activities such as undue profiteering, hoarding, black-marketing, etc., are the outcomes of changes in the economic conditions. Many other outdoor activities, availability of substances and trying to mimic western culture and fiction, while sheepishly confirming to what is fashionable, have also increased the risk of crimes.

It has been therefore, strongly contended by sociologists that criminal behavior, just like any other kind of social behavior is also the result of particular environmental circumstances and conditions.  It can be inferred that criminals tend to be a product of society.

**Differential Association Theory: Edwin Hardin Sutherland**

As per Sutherland (1883 -1950), here are two main types of group organizations that operate in the community – one against criminal activities, and one for the purposes of criminal activity. As a result of this, groups tend to differ in relation with the importance attached by them and respect for law, and depending on the values of his/her intimate associates, an individual is either drawn towards, or away from crime.  To put it simply, upon coming into contact of criminals intimately, the chances of becoming like them are more probable. The American sociologist Sutherland has drawn out the following conclusions:

1. Criminal behavior is a product of learning and not inheritance.
2. The learning process when it comes to criminal behavior is facilitated through subtle and deep interactions of persons with criminals and their association; whether mutual or not.
3. The intimate personal group is what influences a person in the greatest way, molding his conduct into a multitude of ways.
4. A person develops criminality due to an excess of definitions that are favorable to the violation of law, over those that are unfavorable in nature. When in company of individuals having self-definitions in the favor of law violations, there is a likelihood of becoming more like them.
5. The association of oneself with either criminal or anti-criminal behavior varies in respect of priority, duration and intensity.
6. The roots of crime can be found in social organization and it is usually an expression or reaction to said social organization. A majority of communities tend to be organized

for both criminal and anti-criminal behavior, and in that aspect, crime rate is a product of 'differential group organization'.

7. The process of learning criminal behavior includes:

- Rationalization of engaging oneself into criminal activities; providing a justification of one's own deviant and criminal conduct, and

- The techniques and mannerisms to facilitate and commit crimes.

**Criticisms for the Differential Association Theory**

A considerable number of issues arise in the application and study of Sutherland's theory that prompt oneself to pick it apart and discuss the same.

Not all persons who come in contact with deviants and criminals adopt the mantle of criminality themselves. In a world where association would create criminals, all would be plunged into hedonism and anarchy. Sutherland answers this claim by stating that the interaction of an individual also occurs with anti-criminal groups, that act as a counteracting force of influence.

The theory per se, cannot be extended to every crime and thereby is inapplicable to white-collar criminals and rural offenders; perpetrators of personal and individual crimes, situational and occasional offenders, murderers and those committing acts of crime under provocation and emotional stress. Sutherland's theory is more well suited when being applied to persons from lower class areas with traditional delinquency. The strength of the theory is lost when applied to upper class crimes such as embezzlement. It was noted by American Sociologist Donald Cressy, that the majority of people guilty of embezzlement were not in cahoots with anyone who committed such theft in their own business or profession. There also are many circumstances where financially stressed persons who are capable of taking disadvantage of their position do not engage in embezzlement. Sutherland through his theory only provides a partial explanation for white-collared crimes.

Cressy was however, in agreement with Sutherland when it came to situational offenders and offenders who commit criminal acts under emotional stress and provocation, as such criminals cannot warrant a study under criminology as it would be extremely difficult to come up with any conclusive theory as to the same.

The term 'association' talks about contact and interaction, thereby implying that one's physical proximity with a criminal has been given reference. However, physical contact is not always necessary to develop criminality. Identification of oneself i.e., the adoption and imitation of

another's values and attitudes, when in terms of criminal roles can tend to occur, as presented in movies, press releases, TV, fiction and any form of media.

Personality traits and factors in criminal behavior are not properly accounted for in Sutherland's Theory. It has been argued by Sutherland that personality traits merely specify conditions such as feeblemindedness, without being linked between criminality and conditions. A more tangible explanation as to criminal behavior can be seen in social interactions. While aggression is a trait common in criminals, there are also many individuals who do not engage in crime while being aggressive. Sutherland provides and explanation for this in differential association, by stating that aggressive traits when in tandem with anti-criminal group interaction does not result in criminality.

The theory is hyper generalized, providing an explanation for most things, but many of its formulations still remain to be tested. What the theory propounds is a simple and hypothetical tug of war, with the more dominant influence apparently determining and justifying both criminal and non-criminal activity.

**Deviance and its Sub Cultures: The Chicago School of Thought**

The term 'Sub-culture' here, is used in reference to gangs i.e., street corner societies, drug groups, whose norms and values do not conform with society at large and the wider culture. The purposeful subjection of pressure on individuals is a core feature of such a sub-culture.

Groups of these types have more significance during adolescence, tending to be more common and widespread in poverty belts of the socioeconomically lower classes, where deteriorating neighborhoods, high adult crime rate, migrating population, broken homes, etc., are typically seen. A lack of organized activity for adolescents in such stricken areas leads to their dissatisfaction, being further fueled by gangs; providing rationalization and justification to engage in delinquency. On needs not being met at home, a child tends to develop feelings of emotional insecurity, inadequacy and frustration. Such persons seek satisfaction from outside forces, thereby coming into contact with unscrupulous and shady individuals or groups.

Frederic Milton Thrasher while studying the juvenile delinquency in the city of Chicago, found that lower community children often model themselves after the visible and attractive adults that have made their living via illegal engagements. It was noted by Thrasher that when acts are committed in pursuit of adventure and excitement by gang members, group delinquency is developed.

Albert K. Cohen, the popular American criminologist discovered that delinquent sub-culture has now established itself as a way of life and has become traditional in certain social groups. The reason for the same, he states is that gang members have many issues in common and find sub-culture to be a solution. Such shared problems are usually a result of low status, combined with expectations from them of behavior such as ambition, individual talent and responsibility, typical of the middle-class. However, such children do not have the advantage to socialize at the same degree as that of middle-class children, and therefore usually do not have standard conduct. Sub-cultures tend to be negativistic, non-utilitarian and malicious – they only derive pleasure from causing discomfort to others.

Cohen's views were however, criticized by John I. Kituse and David C. Dietrick as they believed that the lower class does not care about the middle-class's perception of them, and delinquency is not always malicious or non-utilitarian. Cohen's perspective failed to explain the development and sustenance of sub cultures. The original motives of members in a gang are usually not the same but later find their confluence into one ideology. Rejection of their rejectors i.e., respectable persons, and people running correctional programs for the young. Young ones are led to gang culture through economic injustice. An acquisition of higher position in lower class itself is sought by them, rather than a complete change in class and culture.

**Theories of Social Disorganization**

The perspective of disorganization in society stems from the assumption that everyone would commit acts of delinquency if there was not constraint on us. Misbehavior happens only when we are free and, in a position, to do so. In a society undergoing rapid changes, the constraints become ineffective and weak. Disorderly social change and social disorganization result from a change happening at an unnatural pace and rate. Social disorganization describes the weakness of institutional structures in city areas populated by heterogenous, highly transitory and economically disadvantaged groups. It precludes the foundation of effective social control and such areas tend to boast the highest delinquency rates.

Social Disorganization primarily refers to a decreased influence of existing social norms and rules i.e., the conventional sense of morality upon individuals. This is a phenomenon distinct from rule violation as that is expected even in a stable social structure. Infirmities can lead to failure in terms of realizing life goals. Personal and Social Disorganizations are not correlated,

but social disorganization can cause personal disorganization. Competitiveness resulting from urbanization and modernization can make persons highly self-centered, selfish and egoistic. The break-up of a joint family, the lack of parental control, divorces, etc., can make children fall prey to delinquency.

In the wake of unnaturally fast paced changes in society, the occurrences of crime in urban areas, especially metropolitan cities have skyrocketed. Rural immigrants migrating in search of jobs, usually find it difficult to the city's impersonal, competitive and materialistic life. Without association, frustration is developed in immigrant groups, as there is a sense of deprivation without any security. Durkheim describes them as small particles in a world of disorganized dust. In urban life, anonymity and heterogeneity prove to be destructive towards earlier congenial social relationships and a social vacuum ends up being created, thereby becoming a fertile field to sow the seeds of criminality. Criminality is the form taken via adjustment that has been a result of existential tensions and pressure, teeming with frustration. Furthermore, migration offers opportunity for considerably minimized chances to detect crime.

The emergence of social disorganization is also through cultural lag i.e., unequal growth of the many cultural components in society, widening the gap between groups. Invention and Industrialization happens at an accelerated rate while cultural components such as behavior and customs do not keep up; resulting in deviance. Rapid urban expansion and industrialization in a capitalistic society will result in a surge in crime if not planned properly.

**Anomie: The perspective of Merton and Durkheim**

Anomie is a state of normlessness. As per Durkheim, unlimited desires are a feature of human beings, with only family and society at large being effective constrains to the same. However, these elements lose their efficacy amidst rapid social change. In an anomie ridden society, homicides and suicides are found to be rampant. Social relationships fail to have any real effect, making the field fertile, as discussed previously to sow the seeds of criminality. Seeds, which really are just weeds to real progress and safety in a society.

It was stated by Merton that norms for conformist behavior usually have a counterproductive effect in relation to criminal behavior. Deviance occurs when desires and needs can no longer be achieved through socially approved methods, and is characteristic of persons from the lower class. This is a result of the straining of cultural values by the social structure, making the achievement of success difficult, if not impossible for the underprivileged.

Merton used the term anomie to describe the weakening of cultural regulation of behavior in society. Sadly, ends are often given more importance than means in society. As a consequence, short cuts to success are now justified, with the everyone is corrupt mentality being the elephant in the room.

Aberrant conduct can be looked at as a dissociation symptom between culturally defined aspirations and goals, and means to achieve them as provided by the social structure. Countermoves and antisocial behavior can be generated by specific aspects of social structure, due to emphasis on regulation and goals. In worst case scenarios, persons may be so vitiated by the emphasis on goals that the behavioral range is limited only by considerations of expediency of the technical nature. In such cases, the only relevant question left is to find which means are most efficient in meeting ends?

The most technically feasible method, irrespective of its legitimacy, is sadly preferred to conduct prescribed by institutions. Thereby, continuance of such a process ensues anomie and social integration becomes tenuous. Implicitly, a premium is set upon the use of technically efficient yet illegitimate means. The emphasis laid on goals has attenuated the satisfactions derived from involvement to such an extent, that satisfactions only equate to successful outcomes. Merton states that the extreme importance given to wealth accumulation as a symbol of social success militates against effective control of institutionally approved modes of making a fortune. Crime, vice, fraud, corruption, violence, all of the proscribed behaviors gain commonality, with a divorce of coordinated emphasis by institutions and success-goal emphasis induced by culture. The stress on success of pecuniary nature and hyper ambition results in exaggerated anxieties, antisocial behavior, hostilities and neuroses.

**The Scale of Anomie: Leo Srole**

The individual's perception of social environment and his own placement in it is highlighted by this scale, consisting of the following items:

1. The belief that leaders of the community are indifferent to your needs.
2. Little to nothing can be accomplished in a society that lacks order and is unpredictable.
3. The goals in one's life are receding instead of being realized.
4. A sense of futility or impending doom and helplessness.
5. Firm belief that personal associates cannot be counted on for psychological and social support.

Indian society tends to fit in this scale of anomie.

**Criticisms against the Social Disorganization Theories**

Not being class based, such theories have their applicability to both low class and middle-class delinquency. The criticism is that disorganization and cultural lag are themes that lack objectivity. Subjective enquiries are needed to classify a society as disorganized or organized. It has also been argued that certain components going ahead of others is also a matter of perspective. Furthermore, the arguments about disorganization shed light solely on the indirect effects as to societal disorganization, crime and delinquency. The sources of strain that weaken initially strong bonds are given little to no attention. Experiences of both positive and negative nature in school settings, family patterns and many other types of experiences result in the strengthening of social bonds.

**The Role of Social Institutions**

*Family*

The most common place for delinquency to take root is home itself. A child's behavior is heavily determined by the quality of life at home. In children, the patterns of personality are built up for good and bad through the emotional relations one has with parents. Delinquency in a child can arise in circumstances where there is a failure to provide an adequate model by the father (i.e., criminality/ criminal tendencies of the father himself) or in the case of broken homes, i.e., divorced parents, or fatherless households. There is therefore, an absence of security, yearning for love and affection, and a lack of parental control, contributing as factors that push juveniles into delinquency. A dissatisfied, neglected and emotionally starved child seeks to derive pleasure and satisfaction from the outside world, thereby potentially coming into contact with unscrupulous individuals that lead him to a state of delinquency. Family pathology tends to victimize children.

A child's family is not just the first point of social contact with the world, but also determines the child's position in society at large. The family greatly influences a child's attitude and perception towards his environment. The lack of actual or perceived affection by a child is a major factor contributing to antisocial attitude, as the child is physically and socially dependent on his parents. A lack of affection can arise due to various factors such as divorces or

disharmonious relationships between parents, or absenteeism of parent due to death or desertion. A home can be either psychologically broken or socially broken; the former reefing to constant bickering between parents. It is actually more probable for a delinquent to come from an unhappy home as compared to a broken home.

With a record increase in separations, working mothers and divorces, many children have been entrusted to single parents, neighbors, day-cares, boarding schools and the idiot box. There have been drastic changes in the methods of child raising. As a result, there are many children who come home to empty houses, awaiting their parent's return. Such children are also called 'Latchkey' children. It has been strongly suggested that such children are growing up without goals and values: their childhood lost in an emotional vacuum. This has resulted in a gross increase in issues such as teenage parenthood, teenage suicides, runaways and juvenile delinquency, etc.

Some parameters in terms of the role of a family / home environment are discussed hereinunder:

*Maternal Deprivation:*

While in an attempt to demonstrate a connection between juvenile delinquency and maternal deprivation, British Psychologist John Bowlby studied a gang of thieves. A significant maternal separation was found among all the thieves. It was noted by Bowlby that there exists a particular connection between prolonged deprivation in the early stages of childhood and the development of an antisocial, affectionless and psychopathic character that has persistently given in to delinquency.

*Defective Parental Discipline / Control:*

It was found in his studies by English Psychologist Cyril Burt that existence of defective parental control among the families of control is five times as prevalent as non-delinquent households. In 1964, Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, the Polish-American Couple of Criminologists found that out of the 500 cases of delinquency they had studied, 95.8% of mothers and 94.3% of fathers were either overstrict, erratic or too lax in their discipline. Only 4.2% of mothers and 5.7% of fathers were in control of their future delinquent children.

*Parental Rejection:*

In his study of 500 children in a child guidance clinic in Michigan, one Ruth Topping found that most of the aggressive children in the sample set had experienced or suffered from psychological rejection by their own parents.

### Working Mothers:

The Gluecks in their popular study to unravel juvenile delinquency in 1964 came to the conclusion that working mothers could not provide a suitable amount of time and supervision to their children in comparison to housewives. A carelessly supervised boy of a working mother has far more likelihood of becoming a delinquent than the poorly supervised son of a housewife.

### The School:

The school is only second in terms of its importance in the life of a child after his family. It is an agency of socializing that trains children to accept rules and norms established by strangers and enforced upon them impersonally. Upon the failure of a school to produce a good human being and citizen and being unable to impart quality education, an indirect contribution is made towards delinquency. Running away from school, also known as truancy is often considered to be the first step towards a future of delinquency.

There exist a multitude of failures in the system of schooling that are suggested to contribute to the making of a delinquent. These include but are not limited to:

1. Providing Frustrating Experiences i.e., repeated failures.
2. Failure to maintain interests i.e., no development of curricula that might interest the students.
3. Failure to provide a satisfactory feeling to children i.e., school is a prison for many lower-class children.
4. Failure to provide satisfying personal relationships between children i.e., large classes are too impersonal to develop any warm bonds.
5. The Domination of middle-class value system, making it difficult for lower strata children to adjust.
6. Prejudiced Attitude of staff and teachers.

### The Neighborhood (Peer Group):

Companions tend to strongly affect a child's behavior. There has been a remark that the

responsibility of a criminal career and its further continuance usually lies on companionship of an unwholesome nature. The fact that delinquency is an affair created by companionship cannot be denied and it happens very rarely that n act of delinquency has been committed by a lone juvenile without any company. The neighborhood and locality in which a child resides and the persons he is surrounded by become key factors. A child with solid moral character and good training can however, desist the bad influence of peers.

### The Mass Media:

Nowadays, the channels of mass communication like press, radio, TV and cinema have a tremendous amount of influence and significance by the sheer magnitude of their reach. It has been revealed by many studies that mass media are also a culprit when it comes to delinquency and crime up to a certain extent. Crime is quite constantly promoted by continuous advertisement and exaggeration of the same by imparting the modus operandi of various criminal acts. Ordinarily, an indifference to crime is promoted, along with creating mass hysteria, panic and sensationalism of every single detail of criminal activity. It is maintained by the Imitation Theory that delinquency is many times the result of portrayals seen by juveniles on the TV or in films and even in novels and comics.

The Theory of Escapism maintains that vicarious enjoyment is provided to juveniles through the depiction of violence in films, with such portrayals being said to serve as healthy outlets and safety valves to potentially aggressive tendencies. The theory of imitation has more scientific backing to it than the escapist theory.

A study conducted in the United States revealed that about 60% of children watch TV during the hours when violence and crime is covered. A strong supporter of the idea that comics have a strong influence on delinquency, Author Marjorie Bell listed the objections such as- suggestion of sexually and criminally abnormal ideas, creation of mental conduciveness towards temptation, portrayal of various forms an impulse of delinquency can take and setting off chains of harmful and undesirable thinking patterns in children, etc.

Furthermore, children are prevented from spending their leisure time pursuing healthy activities and hobbies by the idiot box. It is quite evident however, that mass media is intrinsically neutral in nature and not dangerous per se. A lot depends on the method of usage one chooses to employ.

**Conclusion**

We look at the social structure to see how it operates. In a stable society, components run smoothly, whereby social arrangements stay functional. A good society is marked by features such as cooperation, unity and consensus. However, if social components are placed in an order that may potentially be harmful towards society, such arrangements are dysfunctional. As discussed earlier, numerous groups and sub groups make up the society, with each having its own norms and standards. Cultural and traditional values emerge within communities most affected by social disorganization. Behavior or conduct that is considered to be normal in one culture may have a shade of deviance in another. This results in the conformist and non-conformist groups in society, that further, according to the law may turn criminal and anti-criminal in nature respectively, with both the forces constantly vying for influence over every single individual in society, with juveniles being the most vulnerable group. These groups usually come in the form of social institutions and can determine the course of a person's life with a single instance of contact.

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