

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES OF CRIME

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The study of crimes is important to sociology and criminology, but it can be a frustrating experience for students many of whom find theory not only difficult to begin with but further complicated by the lack of agreement among scholars in the field.

Today there are many sociological theories and their researches deserve attention and critique. Traditional sociological theories proposed that crime is a result of anomie (normlessness) in society. The term normlessness was made popular by a noted French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917). Originally he used this term to explain the notion *suicide* in «Suicide» published in 1997. Later sociologists used this term to describe the association of the individual with the collective conscience.

Scientists and sociologists divide popular sociological theories into three types: social structural theories (social disorganization theory and social strain theory), social conflict theory and social process theory.

Disorganization sociological theory was developed by Chicago school. It holds that high unemployment, low income levels and large number of single parent households contribute to crimes. Other sociological theory – **strain theory** - claims that crime is a conflict between people's goals and means they can use to obtain them legally. Usually money, power, prestige and material property are goals that people try to achieve.

Conflict sociological theory states that crime is responsible for political and economical conditions and considers crime as a rebellion of the lower class.

To understand the nature of crime, criminologists and sociologists most often use **social learning theory** (social process theory). According to this theory, people commit crime because of their association with other criminals. So there are three mechanisms with the help of which an individual learns to commit crime: differential reinforcement, beliefs and modeling.

Differential reinforcement of crime means that individuals can teach others to commit crimes by reinforcing and punishing certain behaviors. The researches show that individuals who are reinforced for their crime are more likely to commit subsequent crime, especially when they are in situations similar to those previously reinforced.

Beliefs favorable for crime. On top of reinforcing criminal behavior, other individuals can also teach a person beliefs that are favorable to crime. Beliefs are divided into three categories. First is the approval of certain minor forms of crime, such as gambling, “soft” drug use, alcohol use and curfew violation. Second is the approval of certain forms of crime justification, including some serious crimes. These people believe that crime is generally wrong, but that some criminal acts are justifiable or even desirable in certain situations. For example, many people consider fighting to be wrong, however, it is justified if the individual has been insulted or provoked. Third, some people hold certain general values that are more conducive to crime and make crime appear as a more attractive alternative to other behaviors.

The imitation of criminal models. Behavior is not just a product of beliefs and reinforcements or punishments that individuals receive. It is also a product of behavior of people around us. Individuals often model or imitate the behavior of others, especially if it is someone whom individual looks up to or admires. For example, if individuals being witnesses of somebody they respect, commits a crime and then is reinforced for that crime, are more likely they commit a crime themselves.

Thus, sociological theories are used for explaining of criminal behavior and causes of committing crimes. They are also used by Ukrainian sociologists considering that society “constructs” criminality itself.

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