



Intellectual and Theoretical Studies and Trends Explaining Crime and Deviation in Society

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Abstract:

Our research paper aims to analyze the topic of crime and deviation by presenting a set of intellectual and theoretical approaches that explain them from various disciplinary perspectives – biological, psychological, social, economic, and cultural. These approaches attempt to interpret the occurrence of crime, identify its underlying causes, and propose effective means for its treatment and for reducing the danger posed by deviant individuals.

Thus, crime and deviation constitute subjects that have long been the focus of extensive research, scrutiny, and interpretation due to the differences among societies, historical periods, and the changes they undergo in economic, social, cultural, and political fields. In particular, attention has been drawn to highly dangerous negative social phenomena that lead individuals or groups to deviate from the norms and values of society. This has prompted scholars and researchers to study and analyze the phenomenon of crime and deviation for a long time.

Keywords: *crime, deviation, criminal, social defense.*

Études intellectuelles et théoriques et tendances expliquant la criminalité et la déviance dans la société

Résumé :

Notre article de recherche vise à analyser le thème de la criminalité et de la déviance en présentant un ensemble d'approches intellectuelles et théoriques qui les expliquent sous différents angles disciplinaires : biologique, psychologique, social, économique et culturel. Ces approches tentent d'interpréter la survenue de la criminalité, d'identifier ses causes sous-jacentes et de proposer des moyens efficaces pour la traiter et réduire le danger que représentent les individus déviants.

Ainsi, la criminalité et la déviance constituent des sujets qui font depuis longtemps l'objet de recherches, d'examen et d'interprétations approfondis en raison des différences entre les sociétés, les périodes historiques et les changements qu'elles subissent dans les domaines économique, social, culturel et politique. Une attention particulière a été accordée aux phénomènes sociaux négatifs très dangereux qui conduisent des individus ou des groupes à s'écarter des normes et des valeurs de la société. Cela a incité les universitaires et les chercheurs à étudier et à analyser le phénomène de la criminalité et de la déviance depuis longtemps.

Mots clés : *criminalité, déviance, criminel, défense sociale.*



Introduction:

The study of crime and deviation remains one of the major issues addressed in social research due to their growing prevalence in society, along with the continuous increase in the number of deviants across different age and gender groups. This has led many researchers and scholars from various disciplines and theoretical perspectives, across different historical periods, to focus on crime and deviation in order to identify their main causes emphasizing prevention and treatment rather than punitive approaches.

Deviant individuals are often members of families who may sometimes be considered victims or have followed an improper path as a result of multiple interacting conditions that led them toward social deviation, crime, and the threat they pose to the social security of the community.

Since crime and deviation are negative behaviors that violate social norms and threaten the safety and security of individuals when repeated persistently, they require the intervention of security authorities and the enforcement of social sanctions against offenders.

A distinction must be made between the concepts of *crime* and *deviation*: crime represents a specific form of deviation explicitly prohibited by one of the state's official and legitimate institutions, whereas not all deviations are legally defined as crimes.

Behavioral deviations consist in an individual's failure to adhere to socially accepted patterns of conduct and behavior, which may vary according to different societies,

customs, values, and principles, depending on time and place.

It can therefore be said that every crime is a deviation from normal behavior, the severity of which depends on the complexity of the act. However, not every deviation from normal behavior constitutes a crime, since the concept of deviation is broader and more general than the narrower concept of crime as one of its forms.

Through this study of *crime and deviation*, we will explore the various intellectual and theoretical trends that have sought to explain these phenomena from different social and human science disciplines, aiming to analyze and interpret them.

Research Question:

What are the most significant intellectual and theoretical contributions that have sought to study the causes of crime and deviation?

1. Definition of Concepts:

1.1. Deviation:

It is a social attitude in which an individual behaves under the influence of one or more causal factors, which makes this behavior unbalanced. ⁱ

It is defined as the violation of social expectations and norms, where deviant behavior represents a form of misconduct that may even threaten life itself. ⁱⁱ

It is also defined as a set of behaviors that contradict the established standards of conduct or expectations meaning that individuals within society have specific roles expected of them, and when they deviate or stray from these roles, they are considered deviant by society. ⁱⁱⁱ



1.2. Crime:

It is any act that harms the fundamental interests of society, violates the conditions and rules of social coexistence related to its system and security, and threatens the social security of the community thus considered a crime.^{iv}

1.3. Criminal:

Legally, it is the person who violates the criminal law established by the legislative authority. Psychologically, it is the person who suffers from a disorder or deviation in personality or traits,

which serve as the main factors behind their criminal behavior.

Sociologically, it is the person who commits an act criminalized by society, deviating from the laws of social relations and the norms of social control through criminal behavior.^v

1.4. Social Defense:

A set of principles and rules aimed at defending society as a whole and protecting its individuals separately, with the purpose of preventing obstacles to progress and eliminating their causes as much as possible.^{vi}

2. Theories and Approaches that Take an Individual Interpretation of Deviation and Crime:

2.1. The Organic Theory:

Supporters of this theory believe that the phenomenon of crime is linked to the personal characteristics observed in the criminal, such as a large head size, aggressive behavior, and

other features. In this sense, the biological makeup of the individual is seen as the main determinant of aggressive and deviant behavior.

The Italian scholar Della Porta in the 17th century and Lafitte in the 18th century both supported the idea that a person's features and biological structure contribute to their predisposition to criminality. However, their assumptions lacked scientific and methodological rigor.

Later, De Broca continued biological research, and the Anthropological Society was established in Paris in 1865. Their work paved the way for the ideas of the Italian scholar Cesare Lombroso, who argued that the deviant individual is both organically and psychologically abnormal.

Lombroso identified several biological characteristics that, in his view, distinguish criminals: irregular skull shape, narrow forehead, large jaws, prominent cheekbones, elongated or shortened ears, abnormal dental structure, flattened or crooked nose, wrinkled skin, chest deformities, and excessive body hair. After dissecting the body of a "criminal" from southern Italy, he noted a hollow in the back of the forehead and a low sensitivity to pain among criminals, inferred from the abundance of tattoos on their bodies.

Lombroso's theory centered on the idea of biological determinism the notion that biological factors influence the occurrence of crime and deviation. This view contrasts with the classical theory based on free will and utilitarianism. Hence, his theory rejected the idea of social determinism and opposed the notion that criminal behavior is a social phenomenon born from imitation.

Later approaches proposed that crime and deviation might be hereditary phenomena, suggesting a genetic



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predisposition to social maladjustment and lack of harmony. Lombroso and his followers emphasized the connection between deviant individuals, pathological traits, and criminality.

According to proponents of this theory, the increase in the number of addicts and deviants stems from congenital defects and physical deformities, often associated with dangerous tendencies. ^{vii}

Subsequently, a new scientific school emerged the New Lombrosian School which introduced the idea of innate constitution and its link to criminal behavior. Benda defined this innate constitution as encompassing morphological, physiological, and psychological traits transmitted through heredity.

Recent European anthropological studies have also focused on abnormal behaviors of individuals or groups when studying criminal phenomena. Research by Eysenck (Eisenstat) on 1,680 delinquent children found that 1,400 displayed abnormal traits, while 50 of the abnormal cases had parents with signs of degenerative defects. ^{viii}

2.2. The Psychological Theory:

Psychological studies trace social deviation to the individual's psychological structure. The first to focus scientific attention on delinquency from a psychological perspective was William Healy, who studied the differences between normal, neurotic, and delinquent children.

He emphasized the importance of early intervention in treating delinquency, focusing not only on symptoms and behaviors but also on the family history and the combination

of factors influencing the child's development into maladaptive or "deviant" behavior.

In the second decade of the 20th century, other researchers in psychology agreed on fundamental principles asserting that delinquents are not always responsible for their actions—particularly those suffering from mental disorders. Moreover, they considered individual delinquency as partly the responsibility of society, given the influence of negative environmental factors such as bad peers, lack of recreational resources, and poor living conditions, all of which can shape a person's psyche and lead to deviance.

The phenomenon of social deviation is therefore complex and intertwined, influenced by psychological, physical, and social factors. A child who experiences severe frustration, emotional deprivation, or neglect in early life may develop long-term negative effects on mental, emotional, and psychological health.

Healy and Franz Alexander concluded in their joint study that the roots of crime stem from factors such as overcompensation for feelings of inferiority, attempts to relieve guilt, revengeful impulses, and the desire to fully satisfy inner drives.

Sigmund Freud analyzed the stages of the psyche, dividing it into the id, ego, and superego, and explained crime and deviation as a result of an imbalance in the structure and equilibrium of the personality. Crime, according to Freud, may result from the dominance of instinctual drives (id) over moral controls (superego), or from repressed psychological conflicts within the unconscious mind. ix



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Freud's interpretation of criminal behavior is consistent with his explanation of human behavior in general every human act results from either a conscious or unconscious motive. He argued that the unconscious plays a crucial role in explaining criminal behavior, as it contains repressed desires and internal conflicts that may drive the individual to commit crimes.

3. Theories and Approaches that Take a Social Interpretation of Deviation and Crime:

3.1. The Geographical Approach

Researcher Sosukin examined the influence of the geographical environment on individual deviation and interpreted crime as resulting from factors such as climate, temperature, terrain, topography, water distribution, seasonal changes, storms, earthquakes, and others.

Montesquieu, in his book *The Spirit of Laws*, demonstrated that crime rates increase the closer one gets to the poles, whereas Quetelet noted that crimes tend to increase in southern regions during the hot seasons, while property crimes prevail in northern regions during winter.

Similarly, Corey's study revealed that crime and delinquency may be linked to gases present in the atmosphere: one type of delinquent tends to commit suicide when gas concentration is high, while another type becomes inclined to murder.

Thus, geographical scholars have emphasized the impact of climate on individuals especially adverse climates which tend to increase delinquent behavior within specific geographic regions. ^x

3.2. The Ecological Approach

Frederic Thrasher, in his 1926 study in Chicago on gangs, conducted a social-ecological analysis of residential areas, identifying 1,313 youth gangs. He concluded that the environment in which an individual lives is linked to whether he behaves normally or deviantly deteriorated neighborhoods tend to foster juvenile delinquency.

This finding was supported by Clifford R. Shaw and Henry D. McKay, as well as Clinna Redshaw, who showed that delinquency rates differ between neighborhoods, describing certain districts as “delinquency zones,” which are characterized by specific economic, demographic, and social traits. ^{xi}

3.3. The Economic Approach

Many studies have explored the relationship between crime, deviation, and economic factors, particularly during economic crises characterized by unemployment, inflation, and stagnation. Some scholars have linked crime to poverty, although others opposed this view, finding only a weak correlation between poverty and criminal behavior.

The type of occupation also influences crime rates. Bonger’s study in Italy (1891–1895) found that crime was more prevalent among commercial professions, decreasing among agricultural, industrial, and manual workers. Furthermore, there is a clear relationship between crime, unemployment, child labor, and women’s employment.

Gabriel Tarde stated that “work itself is the first enemy of crime, while unemployment encourages addiction.” ^{xii}



Émile Durkheim's Explanation of Crime

Durkheim presented his views in *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893), *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895), and *Suicide* (1897). Through these works, he clarified three main points:

1. **The inevitability of crime as a social phenomenon.**

Crime exists in all societies because it is tied to the organization of collective life. Since it is impossible for all members of a society to possess the same degree of moral consciousness, some will inevitably deviate from the collective conscience, producing crime.

2. **The normative nature of criminal behavior.**

A behavior is not considered criminal based on its intrinsic characteristics, but because society defines it as such when it violates its prevailing moral rules. Thus, crime is a relative concept shaped by collective conscience.

Durkheim rejected biological and psychological explanations of crime, asserting that it must be understood within its social context. He viewed crime as a normal social phenomenon, though not necessarily a desirable one. The key issue lies in the rate of crime, which varies according to time and place.

He proposed two fundamental hypotheses:

- The more similarity there is among members of a group, the stronger their cohesion.
- The stronger the cohesion, the greater the resistance to deviant behavior.

Accordingly, greater social solidarity reduces the likelihood of crime and deviation.

3. **Crime as a functional necessity for social change.**

Durkheim argued that crime is indispensable for social evolution it challenges outdated norms and prompts reform. Without crime, society would stagnate.

He emphasized that the **collective conscience** is the foundation of social solidarity and cohesion.

Durkheim distinguished between two types of solidarity:

- **Mechanical Solidarity:** characteristic of traditional societies, where shared beliefs and strong collective conscience prevail. Legal norms in such societies are repressive, punishing any violation to preserve cohesion.
- **Organic Solidarity:** typical of modern societies based on division of labor, where moral regulation weakens and law becomes more restitutive, focusing on compensating the victim rather than punishing the offender.

Durkheim's theory was criticized for overemphasizing the structural aspect of crime and failing to explain how individuals become criminals or why reactions to similar circumstances differ among people within the same social system.

Durkheim's Concept of Suicide

Durkheim defined suicide as "every case of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act of the victim himself, which he knows will produce this result."

Although suicide is a deeply personal act, Durkheim argued it is fundamentally a social phenomenon it results



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from the influence of surrounding social forces rather than purely psychological states.

He explained that contradictions and disorganization within the social structure aggravate suicide rates. The more individuals are integrated into society sharing its traditions, norms, and values the lower the suicide rate.

Thus, suicide rates are higher in complex industrial societies and lower in simple agricultural ones, where social bonds are stronger. Durkheim observed that suicide is more common in cities than in rural areas, higher among the unmarried than the married (especially those with children), higher among Protestants than among Jews and Muslims, and higher among soldiers than civilians.

He classified suicide into three main types:

- **Egoistic suicide** – resulting from social isolation or weak integration.
- **Altruistic suicide** – committed for the sake of others or collective ideals.
- **Anomic suicide** – arising from social disorganization and normlessness. ^{xiii}

3. The Social Approach

The social approach views crime and deviation as *social phenomena* with multiple causal dimensions. According to *Robert Merton*, crime and juvenile delinquency result from the combined influence of the *social system* and the *culture of society*. Merton identified two main elements of culture:

- The goals prescribed by society for its members.
- The social structure that provides legitimate means to achieve these goals.

When imbalance arises between goals and means, society experiences disorder, instability, and strain.

Merton, influenced by *Émile Durkheim*, sought to answer what Durkheim's theory had not clarified – why individuals within the same environment react differently. He argued that social structures have two main characteristics: they set *socially approved goals* and specify *legitimate means* to attain them. Whether an individual's behavior is lawful or criminal depends on their attitude toward both the goals and the means. ^{xiv}

Merton classified deviation into several modes of adaptation: conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion. Among these, *innovation* holds a central place as deviant individuals often "*innovate*" illegitimate means to achieve socially approved goals. Thus, the child who grows up in a deviant environment may adopt such behaviors, leading to delinquency and addiction.

Sutherland believed that social disorganization is the primary cause of criminal behavior. In his book *Principles of Criminology* (1939), he defined social disorganization as the conflict and instability within communities that disrupt functional relationships and weaken social control mechanisms.

Shaw also noted that crime and delinquency are inevitable outcomes of urban expansion, poor housing, unemployment, low living standards, and social conflict – all of which foster deviant and criminal acts. ^{xv}

Elliott defined social disorganization as "the disorder or disintegration of a society," which disturbs its social norms and behavioral systems.

Thorsten Sellin distinguished between primitive/rural and modern societies in terms of crime prevalence. In traditional



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societies, crime rates are low because of cohesion and collective control, as members share a communal life governed by solidarity. Crime usually comes from outsiders. In contrast, modern societies are characterized by individualism, complexity, and constant conflict among groups, producing value clashes.

Sellin introduced the concept of cultural conflict, referring to the opposition between the norms of two cultures – either external (between neighboring nations, often due to migration or colonization) or internal (between groups within one society). Internal cultural conflict arises when one group's norms dominate others, leading individuals to adopt behaviors deemed illegitimate by the wider community.

Sellin concluded that the root cause of crime lies in social disintegration resulting from modern life's complexities and the clash of cultures. ^{xvi}

Sutherland later expanded this idea in his *Differential Association Theory* (1949), explaining that crime is learned through direct interaction with criminals. Through prolonged exposure, individuals internalize criminal values, techniques, and justifications, leading to behavioral imitation.

Bonger contributed through the capitalist system theory, arguing that capitalism fosters *selfishness and unethical competition* among traders, who resort to illegal means to gain profit. For him, "crime is merely an egoistic act aimed at satisfying a personal desire." ^{xvii}

Karl Marx viewed crime and deviation as outcomes of class conflict inherent in capitalist societies between the bourgeoisie (owners of production) and the proletariat

(workers). Thus, from a Marxist perspective, deviance stems from two central conditions:

- Crime's relationship to absolute or relative poverty.
- Crime's link to exploitative capitalist structures and inequalities.

The American sociologist *Edwin Lemert* advanced this approach, explaining deviant behavior as a result of cultural conflict reflected in social organization. Lemert identified three levels of deviation:

1. **Individual deviation:** resulting from internal psychological pressures.
2. **Social deviation:** emerging from organized groups (e.g., gangs) that consider deviant behavior acceptable.
3. **Situational deviation:** triggered by environmental or circumstantial pressures that restrict individual choice.

Lemert argued that deviation develops progressively through several stages:

- The individual commits an initial deviant act to test society's reaction.
- Society responds with punishment or condemnation.
- The individual repeats the act, with greater intensity.
- Society reacts more harshly, reinforcing rejection.
- The deviant responds with resentment and hostility toward society.
- Social institutions formally label the individual as deviant.
- The person internalizes this label, accepts the deviant identity, and adjusts to a marginalized social role.



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At this stage, the deviant becomes fully integrated into the deviant subculture, having been stigmatized and rejected by the wider society. ^{xviii}

4. Integrated Theories and Approaches Explaining Deviation and Crime:

Integrated approaches explain deviation and crime as the result of multiple interacting factors – psychological, biological, environmental, social, and economic – rather than a single cause. These approaches emphasize that criminal and deviant behavior emerges from a dynamic interplay between internal and external conditions.

Among the main integrated theories are:

- **Social Control Theory:**

This theory examines the strength of social bonds and assumes that strong connections to social norms and values reduce the likelihood of deviation. It includes four main elements: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. Conversely, the weakening of these bonds and the presence of social disorganization manifested in conflict and instability within groups lead to loss of coherence and imbalance in social control systems.

- **Differential Association Theory:**

Developed by Sutherland, this theory focuses on social environment and social learning. It posits that deviation and crime are learned behaviors acquired through interaction with others, especially in small groups (delinquent peers). An individual tends to adopt criminal or deviant behavior when exposed more frequently to illegal conduct than to lawful behavior.

This direct learning occurs gradually through continuous interaction, where the individual assimilates the dominant behavior of the group and internalizes criminal values over time.

- **Social Ecological School:**

This approach links crime to environmental conditions in poor urban neighborhoods. It suggests that well-organized and cohesive communities experience lower crime rates, whereas disorganized neighborhoods characterized by poverty, unemployment, and population instability show higher rates of deviation and criminality.

- **Containment Theory:**

Proposed by Walter Reckless, this theory combines individual self-control and societal regulation. Reckless argued that crime occurs when the “inner containment” (an individual’s ability to restrain impulses) and the “outer containment” (society’s ability to enforce norms) both fail. Hence, crime results from the breakdown of both personal discipline and external social order.

In summary, integrated theories bring together all relevant variables individual, social, and environmental showing that deviant and criminal behavior is a product of combined influences, not isolated causes.

Conclusion:

The study of crime and deviation has attracted extensive attention across disciplines—biological, psychological, social, economic, political, geographical, and others. Researchers have approached the phenomenon from



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different perspectives and periods, each providing unique insights and interpretations.

Some scholars focused on individual explanations (such as biological and psychological theories), others on social explanations (including sociological, ecological, and economic approaches), and some adopted integrated interpretations combining multiple dimensions.

These contributions, whether theoretical or empirical, sometimes aligned with the realistic nature of crime and deviation, while at other times diverged from it. Nevertheless, all aimed to understand, diagnose, and mitigate the phenomenon particularly through prevention, awareness, and rehabilitation.

Special attention must be given to juvenile delinquency, as youth represent the foundation of the future. Early deviation, when combined with unfavorable conditions such as unemployment, poor housing, poverty, and peer influence, can escalate into persistent criminality.

Crime rarely occurs suddenly or in isolation; it develops through repeated exposure to deviant behaviors and environments. Although not every deviant youth becomes a criminal, early deviation may serve as an indicator of potential future delinquency—especially in the absence of proper guidance, emotional support, and social inclusion.

Therefore, preventing and treating deviation requires collective responsibility, emphasizing early intervention, community cohesion, and the strengthening of moral and social values to safeguard individuals and ensure social stability.

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Footnotes:

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