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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CRIME AND SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

This research report explores the intricate, reciprocal, and dynamic relationship between society and crime. Rather than treating crime merely as an individual moral failing, this analysis adopts a sociological perspective, arguing that crime is an inherent, socially constructed phenomenon shaped by social structures, cultural norms, and economic conditions. The report investigates how societal inequalities (poverty, unemployment, discrimination) create environments conducive to criminal behaviour, while simultaneously examining how society defines, reacts to, and is impacted by crime. Key findings highlight that crime acts as a social mechanism for defining boundaries, yet disproportionately affects marginalized communities. The analysis concludes that effective crime prevention requires holistic, social-policy-based approaches rather than solely punitive measures.

INTRODUCTION

Crime is not an autonomous entity; it is as old as human society itself and remains an integral part of social structure. The relationship between society and crime is double-edged: society dictates what acts are considered criminal, while criminal acts shape the social, political, and economic landscape.

The definition of crime is not static; it is constantly evolving as societies shift, adapt to new technologies, and experience cultural changes. For instance, actions deemed acceptable in one era, such as certain business practices, may be labeled "white-collar crime" in another due to changing social awareness and legislation.

This report aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how social factors contribute to criminal behaviour, and conversely, how crime impacts the functioning of society. It will discuss:

- **Society's role in defining crime** (legal-consensus vs. conflict theories).

- **Social causes of crime** (poverty, disorganization, strain).
- **The reciprocal impact** of crime on society (economic costs, social fear).

THE RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP: HOW SOCIETY SHAPES CRIME

Sociological criminology posits that external social factors not merely individual motivations are the primary drivers of crime. Crime is basically defined through the eyes of society. Acts become criminalized when they offend the group sentiments of the dominant society, often leading to the creation of laws to prevent them.

STRUCTURAL INEQUALITY AND STRAIN THEORY

According to Robert Merton's strain theory, crime occurs when there is a disconnect between culturally approved goals (e.g., wealth) and the legitimate means to achieve them (e.g., education, jobs). In communities with limited opportunities, individuals may turn to "innovation," which often takes the form of theft, fraud, or drug trafficking.

- **Poverty:** High rates of poverty and unemployment directly correlate with higher crime rates.
- **Relative Deprivation:** Left Realism argues that crime is a response to feeling deprived compared to others, driving crime, particularly in disadvantaged communities. Neighbourhoods with high residential turnover, population density, and low socioeconomic status often suffer from weak social institutions (family, school, community centres'). This "social disorganization" breaks down informal social controls, making it easier for crime to thrive. Criminal behaviour is often learned through social interaction. Sutherland's theory suggests that people adopt attitudes favorable to breaking the law when they are surrounded by peers who engage in or justify such behaviours.

THE IMPACT OF CRIME ON SOCIETY

Crime has significant negative impacts on the structural, economic, and political facets of society.

- **Economic Costs:** Crime hampers development by compelling governments to invest heavily in police, courts, and prisons instead of productive sectors like education or infrastructure.
- **Destruction of Property, Life, and Erosion of Trust:** Crimes cause significant property damage (vandalism) and directly or indirectly lead to loss of life, increasing the cost of living and fear in the community. High crime rates shake public confidence, resulting in a loss of tourism and reduced retail sales.

CRIME ALSO HAS POSITIVE IMPACT ON THE SOCIETY:

According to Emile Durkheim, a foundational figure in sociology, proposed that crime is a normal and essential component of the society, asserting that it plays a functional role in social dynamics. He argued that the presence of crime is indicative of the diverse values and beliefs that exist across different communities, suggesting that what is deemed deviant varies greatly depending on cultural context. According to Durkheim, societies inherently seek out deviance, even in environments perceived as perfect, as it provides opportunities for social evolution and the reinforcement of collective norms. His concept of anomie describes a state of societal disorganization that can contribute to increased crime, highlighting the need for structured social frameworks to guide behaviour. Building on Durkheim ideas, later theorists like Robert Merton expanded the discussion through strain theory, which emphasizes the gap between societal goals and the means available to achieve them, often leading individuals to resort to criminality. Durkheim's views challenge conventional beliefs about morality, suggesting that crime can catalyse social cohesion by promoting communities to unite against wrongdoing. This perspective invites a re-evaluation of deviance, encouraging a broader understanding of its role in shaping societal norms and values.

SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CRIME

Sociological theories of crime explain criminal behaviour as a product of social and environmental factors, rather than individual failings, focusing on how societal structures, inequality and interactions shape people to commit crimes with key theories including Social Disorganization (weak communities), Strain Theory (unmet goals) and Social Learning (Learned Behaviour) and Labelling Theory (stigmatization).

CONCLUSION

The relationship between society and crime is complex, necessitating that crime be understood as a social product rather than just an individual choice. While crime is inevitable in any society, it is the social structure—its levels of inequality, cohesion, and institutional support—that determines the *rate* and *severity* of crime.

Effective crime prevention cannot rely solely on increased policing. It must tackle the underlying root causes: reducing social and economic inequality, strengthening community bonds, and providing legitimate opportunities for all members of society. By addressing the social context that fosters crime, society can create a more secure and just environment.

