Sociological theories of juvenile delinquency: A criminological perspective

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Abstract---The present paper studies Juvenile Delinquency from the perspective of the sociological theories of criminology. Since, Juvenile Delinquency as a concept originates from the societal parameters, and flourishes within the society; it correlates with the societal framework; it's imperative to understand how Delinquency has taken its present shape. Therefore, the paper discusses the sociological theories to understand the relationship between crime to Delinquency. The present paper also tries to research whether one or two theories can suffice the need to understand Juvenile Delinquency or whether all the theories should be studied in correlation with each other in different societal frameworks.

Keywords---juvenile, juvenile delinquency, criminology, theories, behavior, legal aspects.

Introduction

Juvenile Delinquency has become a significant worry in both emerging and developed countries. Every day, almost 430 young people aged 10 to 24 die as a result of interpersonal violence. An estimated 20 to 40 juveniles require hospital treatment for a violence-related injury for every fatality. [WHO, Fact Sheet on Adolescent health, 2015, http://goo.gl/kjKbBT]. Available data show that almost 60 males are made of suspected homicide perpetrators and more than 40% of homicide victims in the Americas. under 30. [UNODC, Report of the Secretary-General: the State of Crime and Criminal Justice Worldwide, 2015, https://goo.gl/rC4e0q]. Every year, around 200 000 killings occur among young people aged 10 to 29, accounting for 43 percent of all homicides worldwide. [WHO, Fact Sheet: Youth Violence, 2015, http://goo.gl/Fgxt7s]. Various causes, including inadequate educational and policing systems, unemployment, and socio-political exclusion, contribute to violence and insecurity perpetrated by and against children and young people. [UNDESA, http://bit.ly/1K9Lhvi].

Many countries have taken numerous steps to understand and curtail the issues related to juvenile Delinquency. Many theories have been researched to understand the behavior of Delinquent Juveniles. Legislations on the international and national levels have been made to safeguard the rights of Juveniles. Numerous studies have been done on Juvenile Delinquency to form a convincing framework for their rehabilitation. But the situation poses a serious threat to nation-building and societal structure. There are many theories on which Juvenile Delinquency can be studied. Since society influences Juveniles the most, the sociological theories are studied more extensively. Durkheim, who is regarded as the father of the sociological school in his book titled "Division of Labor in Society," deals with the law in society. He asserts that law was the standard by which any community could be evaluated since "law reproduces the principal forms of social solidarity."(Boylestad, 1968). He coined the term "anomie," which refers to a societal situation characterized by the collapse or loss of previously shared norms and values. Through his research, he determined that Anomie happens during and after periods of significant and quick changes in society's social, economic, or political institutions. According to Durkheim's view, it is a transition phase wherein the values and norms common during one period are no longer valid, but new ones have not yet evolved to take their place. (https://www.thoughtco.com/anomie-definition-3026052).

People who lived during periods of Anomie feel disconnected from their society because they no longer see the norms and values they hold dear reflected in society itself. Anomie leads to the feeling that one does not belong and is not meaningfully connected to others. For some, this may imply that their identity and function (or roles) are no longer respected by society. As a result, Anomie can develop a sense of purposelessness, engender despondency, and encourage deviance and criminality. (https://www.thoughtco.com/anomie-definition-3026052). In other words, Durkheim believed that if the human thirst for objectives were not restrained and became boundless, Anomie would result, and Anomie would lead to tension. Such stress could present itself in a variety of ways, including aberrant behavior. (https://www2.hawaii.edu/~fm/merton.html) Merton further developed the Durkheim theory of Anomie, which is borrowing but essentially different. It is a more elaborate formulation of an approach that applies to a society like the USA, where people believe in and are committed to pursuing some desirable ends. Anomie is a social response or adaptation caused by a misalignment between socially acceptable means (e.g., education) and culturally acceptable goals (earning a high income). (https://www2.hawaii.edu/~fm/merton.html). Anomie is a pressure put on people to act in ways that are harmful to societal stability. On the other hand, Durkheim believed that if people's desire for objectives were not managed and became infinite, Anomie would result, and from Anomie, the strain would emerge. Such stress could present itself in a variety of ways, including aberrant behavior. (https://www2.hawaii.edu/~fm/merton.html). There are various sociological theories and concepts associated with the deviant behavior of Juveniles. However, the present paper describes the following theories and related concepts:

Developmental theories

Developmental theories focus on the conception of an individual towards right or wrong. This conception of right or evil emerges over some time, especially in childhood. So, childhood forms a strong basis of moral development in individuals. As a result, some Juveniles show respect towards the settled norms of society while others (called deviants) don't. Psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg has asserted that the deviants are those individuals whose moral development was incomplete. Further, he argued that deviants do not reach the same levels of development as those who refrained from criminal activity. Kohlberg identified three distinct levels of moral reasoning, and each level has two sub-stages. (Kohlberg;S, n.d.) Each new stage replaces the reasoning typical of the earlier stage. (Kohlberg;S, n.d.). Each individual doesn't need to achieve all the stages of moral development.

Level 1 - Preconventional morality

Preconventional morality is the first stage of moral development, lasting until about the age of nine. A child's sense of morality is externally regulated at the pre-conventional level. The rules of authority figures such as parents and teachers are accepted and believed by children. (Kohlberg;S, n.d.). Children generally make moral decisions based on the physical consequences of their actions.

- Stage 1: Obedience-and-Punishment Orientation
  Stage 1 focuses on the child's willingness to follow the rules to escape punishment. For example, because the offender is punished, the action is viewed as morally wrong; the harsher the punishment, the more "evil" the act is perceived. (Kohlberg;S, n.d.)
- Stage 2: Instrumental Orientation
  Stage 2 represents the "what's in it for me?" viewpoint, in which appropriate action is determined by what the individual believes is in their best interests. Stage two thinking demonstrates a limited interest in other people's needs, solely to the extent that they may benefit the individual's interests. As a result, concern for others is based on a "you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours" mentality rather than loyalty or genuine regard when a child's parents ask him to undertake a chore. When the child asks, "What's in it for me?" the parents give him an allowance as an incentive. (Kohlberg;S, n.d.)

Level 2: Conventional

A child's concept of morality is linked to personal and societal interactions at the conventional level. Children continue to obey authority figures' norms, but only because they believe it is vital to maintain cordial relationships and social order. During these periods, rules and customs are strictly followed, and the propriety or justice of a rule is rarely questioned. (Kohlberg;S, n.d.).

- Stage 3: Good Boy, Nice Girl Orientation

In stage 3, Children desire other people's praise and will act in ways to avoid condemnation. Excellent behavior and being "kind" to others are emphasized. (Kohlberg;S, n.d.)

- Stage 4: Law-and-Order Orientation
In stage 4, the child blindly accepts rules and conventions because of their importance in maintaining a functioning society. Rules are seen as the same for everyone, and obeying rules by doing what is "supposed" is valuable and essential. In stage four, moral reasoning takes precedence over the demand for individual approval evident in stage three. If one individual breaks the law, likely, everyone else will as well, so upholding laws and norms is both an obligation and a responsibility. Most of society's active individuals are still in stage four, where morality is still primarily governed by an outside power. (Kohlberg;S, n.d.)

Level 3: Post –conventional

A person's sense of morality is defined in more abstract principles and values throughout the post-conventional level. People now believe that some laws are unjust and should be changed or eliminated. A growing realization marks this level that individuals are separate entities from society and may disobey rules inconsistent with their principles. Post-conventional moralists live by their ethical principles—principles that Basic human rights like life, liberty, and justice are commonly included, and norms are viewed as useful but evolving mechanisms rather than absolute prescriptions that must be followed without question. Because post-conventional people value their moral judgment of a situation more than social conventions, their behavior, particularly at stage six, can be mistaken for pre-conventional people. According to some thinkers, many people will never attain this degree of abstract moral reasoning. (Kohlberg;S, n.d.)

- Stage 5: Social-Contract Orientation
In stage 5, The world is seen as having varied ideas, rights, and values in stage 5. As each person or community is unique, such viewpoints should be acknowledged. Rather than being inflexible edicts, laws are viewed as social contracts. Those who do not support the general welfare should be replaced as soon as possible to achieve the greatest good for the most considerable number of people. This is accomplished by a combination of majority decisions and unavoidable compromise. Theoretically, democratic government is built on stage five reasoning. (Kohlberg;S, n.d.)
- Stage 6: Universal-Ethical-Principal Orientation
In stage 6, moral reasoning is based on abstract reasoning using universal ethical principles. The principles adopted are intellectual rather than concrete, focusing on concepts like equality, dignity, and respect. Laws are only valid since they are based on justice, and a commitment to justice entails disobedience of unjust laws. People pick the ethical ideals they want to follow, and they feel bad if they break them. Individuals operate in this way because it is morally proper to do so (not because they want to avoid punishment). It's in their best interests; it's customary, legal, or previously agreed upon. Kohlberg insisted that stage six exists, but he said it was rare to find people who regularly operated at that level. (Kohlberg;S, n.d.)

Social Disorganization theory

Social disorganization theory suggests that a person's residential location is more significant than the person's characteristics when predicting criminal activity. The acceptability of the culture within these underprivileged metropolitan districts encourages juveniles to become criminals. According to social disorganization theory, geography matters when it comes to criminality. (Walker & Zawisza, 2014) Clifford Shaw and Henry D. McKay, two criminology scholars from the "Chicago School," developed social disorganization theory through their study in 1942. (Walker & Zawisza, 2014). Social disorganization theory states a person's physical and social environments are primarily responsible for the behavioral choices that a person makes. When it comes to forecasting unlawful action, location is at the heart of social disorganization theory. According to Shaw and McKay, physical decay, poverty, and a higher level of ethnic and cultural mixing are all difficulties in neighborhoods with the highest crime rates. According to Shaw and McKay, Delinquency is caused by the average individual's average response to abnormal circumstances. The hypothesis of social disorder is commonly employed as a predictor of teenage violence and criminality. (Walker & Zawisza, 2014). Shaw and McKay discovered that there were four specific assumptions as an explanation for Delinquency.

- The first assumption is that the collapse of community-based controls and people living in these disadvantaged neighborhoods respond naturally to environmental conditions.
- The second is the rapid growth of immigration in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods.
- The third type of business is positioned near underserved areas and is impacted by the "ecological approach" of competition and dominance.
- The fourth and final premise is that poor urban neighborhoods foster criminal values that supplant established societal standards. (Walker & Zawisza, 2014)

Strain theory

The strain theory proposes that Delinquency occurs when people are unable to fulfil their aims through legal means. In such instances, people may turn to illegal means of achieving their goals or lash out in rage at the source of their dissatisfaction. (Ireland, 2012) This is an appealing idea, and it is not surprising that strain theory has had a significant impact on delinquency research and public policy (Liska,b). All strain theories acknowledge that only a minority of strained individuals turn to crime. Emile Durkheim developed the first modern strain theory of crime and deviance. Nonetheless, during the middle of the twentieth century, Merton's classic strain theory and offshoots dominated criminology. Classic strain theory is concerned with strains surrounding the inability to achieve financial success or the more general objective of a middle-class position. Because findings contradict traditional strain theory in the 1970s and 1980s, it fell out of favor. (Agnew, 1985). However, a recent study has been critical of strain theory or has provided only mixed support. This has led several researchers to call for either the abandonment or revision of strain theory (Elliott et al.; Hirschi, Kornhauser). (Ireland, 2012).

Robert Agnew developed his general strain theory in 1992, and it has since become the leading version of strain theory and one of the major theories of crime. The general strain theory focuses on a broad range of strains, including the inability to achieve various goals, the loss of valued possessions, and adverse treatment by others. (Agnew, 1985). General strain theory has been used to explain gender, race/ethnicity, age, community, and social variances in crime rates, among other things. It's also been used to investigate corporate corruption, police misconduct, bullying, suicide, terrorism, and eating disorders, among other crimes and deviances. (Agnew, 1985).

Social learning theory

This theory is based on the idea that we learn from our interactions with others in a social context. (Nabavi, 2016) Social learning theory posits that people learn from one another through

- Observation
- Imitation, and
- Modeling. (Nabavi, 2016)

People assimilate and mimic other people's behavior after witnessing it, especially if their observational experiences are favorable or include rewards related to the observed conduct. 2016 (Nabavi) Imitation, according to Bandura, entails the realistic replication of observed motor movements. (Bandura 1977). Bandura's Imitation and behavior are the second and third stages of social learning, respectively. If a person observes favorable, desired outcomes in the first step, Modeling will ensue. (Nabavi, 2016) Social learning theory is of great importance in understanding Juvenile Delinquency. Children observe their parents, older siblings, relatives, and neighbors and imitate their behaviors towards certain situations. If they are rewarded for their Observation and Imitation, their behavior shows drastic changes according to the external environment.

Labeling theory

Labeling theory is a sociological approach to the development of crime and deviance that focuses on social labeling. The idea suggests that while deviant behavior can arise from various causes and contexts, once people are classified or characterized as deviants, they frequently confront new challenges due to self-and other reactions to negative preconceptions (stigma) associated with the deviant label. (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1967). These issues can make it more likely for deviant and criminal behavior to become steady and chronic. Deviant behavior might become a "method of defense, attack, or adaptation" (p. 17) to the challenges caused by deviant labeling, according to Lemert (1967). As a result, being labeled or classified as a criminal offender by others may initiate processes that reinforce or stabilize participation in crime and deviance, regardless of the behavioral pattern or social and psychological conditions that existed before labeling. (Bernburg, 2015).

During the 1960s, the idea was widely considered a valid solution to crime and deviance, but it lost favor in the 1970s due to criticism. Labeling theory was

ambiguous, simplistic, and ideological, according to opponents (Hirschi, 1980; Mankoff, 1971; Tittle, 1980; Wellford, 1975), and empirical studies had failed to give consistent support for the thesis that labeling fosters deviant conduct. Scholars have since pointed out that this critique resulted in the early extinction of labeling theory. (Bernburg, 2015). According to experts (Palarma, Cullen, & Gersten, 1986; Paternoster & Iovanni, 1989), the detractors of labeling theory inflated and simplified the arguments made by labeling theory. Furthermore, much of the research that contradicted labeling theory was methodologically faulty and did not represent meaningful testing. There have been numerous attempts over the last two decades to improve the scientific rigor of labeling research. Researchers have attempted to overcome methodological shortcomings by clarifying and elaborating how labeling promotes aberrant behavior. (Bernburg, 2015)

Differential Association theory

Sutherland's differential association theory has broadly explained all kinds of criminal activity, from juvenile Delinquency to white-collar crime. (Forsyth & Copes, 2014). Sutherland's theory doesn't account for why an individual becomes a criminal but how it happens. (Forsyth & Copes, 2014)(Forsyth & Copes, 2014). With nine statements, he summed up the ideas of differential association theory:

- Every criminal act is learned.
- Criminal behavior is acquired through contact with others and a communication process.
- The majority of criminal behavior is learned in close personal groups and connections.
- Learning criminal behavior may entail learning strategies for acting and the motivations and rationalizations that would justify illegal behavior, and the attitudes required to orient an individual towards such behavior. The direction of motives and drives towards criminal behavior is learned by interpreting legal codes in one's geographical area as favorable or unfavorable.
- An individual will choose to become a criminal when the number of favorable interpretations that support breaking the law outnumbers the unfavorable interpretations that do not.
- Differential relationships are not all created equal. They can differ in frequency, intensity, priority, and duration, for example.
- The same techniques used to learn about any other behavior are utilized to learn about criminal behaviors through encounters with others.
- While illegal behavior may represent broad needs and values, it does not explain the behavior because non-criminal behavior communicates the same conditions and values. (Forsyth & Copes, 2014)

Differential association is a social psychological theory that attempts to explain how someone becomes a criminal. The hypothesis states that when the definitions that encourage breaking the law outnumber those that do not, an individual will participate in criminal activity. Specific definitions in support of breaking the law could be used. Furthermore, even if a person desires to commit a crime, they must possess the appropriate abilities. These talents could be sophisticated and

challenging to master, such as those involved in computer hacking, or they could be simple and easy to learn, such as stealing things from stores. (Forsyth & Copes, 2014).

Sub-Cultural Theory

At its base, the subcultural theory argues for a direct connection between group membership and personal identity. (Stearn, 2012). The significant points of contention within subcultural theory can be grouped into three areas. First, there is a debate about whether subcultural membership represents a loose or tight connection to the adolescent's identity. Those theorists who believe in loosely structured subcultural identities (e.g., Hagan 1991; Matza 1964; Muggleton 2000; Thornton 1995; etc.) suggest that adolescents drift between several subcultures at various points in time and that membership status is situationally dependent. (Stearn, 2012). The second significant area of contention among subcultural theories concerns Delinquency. In the past few decades, the concept of adolescent subcultures has moved into the realm of sociology. This had led to fascinating studies of group dynamics and the position of adolescents within society (Hebdige 1984; Jenks 2004; Maffesoli 1996; Muggleton 2000; Thornton 1995; and Ueno 2003). (Stearn, 2012). The third significant point of contention within the subcultural theory concerns the role of social class in developing subcultural identities. Some theorists (e.g., Cloward & Ohlin 1960; Cohen 1955; Miller 1958; Whyte 1955; etc.) believe that subcultures are a unique phenomenon within the lower- and working-class, while others (e.g., Muggleton 2000; Redhead 1990; Thornton 1995; etc.) argue that subcultures are a classless social phenomenon. (Stearn, 2012).

Social control theory

From the time we are born, this theory contends that all people are bad apples controlled by laws, rules, and regulations to keep society in check. It maintains that those who have a weak bond to societal controls end up participating in deviant or criminal behavior. (Social Control Theory, n.d.). Hirschi proposed the current hypothesis, claiming that people from four different types of fundamental ties influence whether or not they will engage in criminal activity (Pratt, Gau, and Franklin, 2011). Attachment, Commitment, Involvement, and Belief are the four bonds. "The level of psychological affection one feels for prosocial persons and institutions" is what the Attachment Bond refers to (Pratt, Gau, and Franklin, 2011, p. 58). The importance of the social relationships that people value, which they would not want to jeopardize by conducting criminal or deviant acts, is cited in the Commitment Bond. (Pratt, Gau, and Franklin, 2011, p. 58).   The Involvement Bond relates to "the opportunity costs associated with how people spend their time...idle hands are the devil's workshop" (Pratt, Gau, and Franklin, 2011, p. 58). 4)Lastly, the Belief Bond refers to "the degree to which one adheres to the values associated with behaviors that conform to the law" (Pratt, Gau, and Franklin, 2011, p. 59). This final belief asserts that the more important a person's values are concerning a particular crime (such as using illegal drugs), the less likely they are to commit the said crime (Pratt, Gau, and Franklin, 2011).

Concluding Remarks

A considerable number of criminological theories have been developed through sociological inquiry. These theories have generally asserted that criminal behavior is a normal response of biologically and psychologically normal individuals to particular social circumstances. These social circumstances impact Juveniles the most. Because of their tender age and limited exposure to the societal structure they are part of, they get more easily affected by disturbing factors than adults. Therefore, the adjudication and rehabilitation of juveniles should be based on sociological factors like poverty, abandonment, labeling, deviants, etc. The undeveloped and developing countries are facing juvenile Delinquency majorly because of sociological factors. If our adjudication system is not equipped to understand the present change in the societal deviances faced by young people, the situation might worsen. Juvenile Delinquency should be a subject of concern for policymakers; adequate research and technical training should be given to people working for the Delinquents. Governments should plan ways to handle this alarming situation, and specific laws should be made to protect the rights of these juveniles who are no other but part of our very own society.

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