

# Failure to achieve positively valued goals criminology essay



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Criminology is a multidisciplinary field of study, comprising theories from the disciplines of sociology, psychology, law, politics, history and economics to explain crime. In an ever-changing society, theories that assist in explaining criminal behaviour often come to light and subsequently fade away. Theories are essential in a sense that they help us in understanding the manner in which the justice system functions. It highlights how things are and what they should not be.[1]It can also assist in explaining crime that occurs on a large, general scale or on a smaller, individual-based scale.[2]Explanations for criminal behaviour is a focal point in addressing the question as to how crime can be prevented as it is occurring at a rapid pace worldwide. In this paper, we will be considering and reviewing some of these theories and how it can be used for crime prevention purposes if we are able to comprehend these theories with ease.

Essentially, there are 13 types of criminology theory. However, only 3 are considered mainstream and for the purpose of this paper, we will be focussing on these 3. They are: Strain, Learning and Control Theory.

Strain theory is one that has been brushed away however due to recent developments in criminology, it has been given more attention. A new theory was brought to light by Robert Agnew which was called the General Strain theory.[3]

According to the general strain theory there are 2 major types of strain. The failure to achieve positively valued goals and the presentation of negative stimuli.

## **Failure to achieve positively valued goals**

Agnew noted that members of society seek to achieve various goals in their lifetime. Wealth becomes a major cause of strain when individuals who have a lack of it try to obtain through illegitimate and unlawful means. Studies have proven that the desire to obtain wealth was not directly proportional to crime however it does support the fact that juvenile delinquents do yearn for large amounts of money.[4]

Strongly related to the desire for wealth is the desire for status and respect. Generally, people do want to be treated with respect by others, which at the least involves being treated in a just and fair manner. However, some theorists have noted that the fact that many juvenile delinquents aspire to achieve the label of being “manly”. This has been found to be significantly relevant to crime.

However, not everyone views “manliness” in the same light. Most views however emphasise characteristics like independence, dominance, toughness and competitiveness.[5] Many males especially those who are immature, lower-class and belong to minority groups face complications in fulfilling their need to be perceived as one.[6] Hence, they may turn to crime to achieve and fit into this stereotype. In this regard, they may adopt a tough outlook, respond to being mistreated in the tiniest manner with violence and even assault at times.

## **Loss of positive stimuli/Presentation of negative stimuli**

Strain may also arise when something valuable or precious is taken away from someone or when there is a negative stimuli present in their lives.

These negative treatments may cause an individual to be upset or angry and will result in them committing crime to vent such emotions. Studies have found that the more negative events present in ones' life, increases the chances of crime taking place.[7]In particular, it has been associated with child abuse and lack of attention, physical and emotional punishment by their parents and so on.

Having said that, the strain theory is a relatively new theory that encompasses a broad scope in relation to crime and there is not much data to date to refute or support this theory as yet.[8]

## **Learning Theory**

Some theories in criminology believe that criminality is a function and an outcome of individual socialisation, how individuals have been influenced by their past experiences or relationships with family members, peer groups, teachers and other agents of socialisation.[9]It is based on concepts such as modelling and observational learning. People, especially children at a young and impressionable age, learn from their environment and seek acceptance by learning through influential models and eventually follow in their footsteps not being able to deduce right from wrong at such an age.

[10]Differentiation Association is a theory developed by Edward Sutherland proposing that through interaction with others, people learn the principles, attitudes, method and purpose for criminal behaviour.[11]This theory specifically focuses on how people learn to become criminals but does not address the main question of why they become criminals in the first place.

[12]

Despite its generally favourable reception, the theory of differentiation association has not lacked its critics like many other theories. A common criticism, as found in Vold's Theoretical Criminology[13], claims that the theory fails to account for the fact that not everyone who comes into contact with criminality, begins to follow that same path. This theory also states that when the balance of law-breaking and law-abiding is disrupted, an individual will walk down the criminal path.[14]

The relevance of the learning theory has been important in the education policies in the United States. It has used as a basis for mentoring programs to prevent future criminal behaviour[15], which will be discussed later in depth.

## **Control Theory**

In a nutshell, control theory puts forth the idea that people with weak bonds between individuals and the society, has a higher chance of deviating and going astray. Therefore suggesting that individuals with strong bonds between their family and close friends and positive influences in their life are much less likely to deviate and indulge in criminal behaviour.

According to Travis Hirschi, norms are present to prevent deviant behaviour, leading to conformity and groups.[16]Hirschi argued that a person follows norms because they have a bond with society. These social bonds have 4 elements: opportunity, attachment, belief and involvement. When any one of these bonds are broken or weakened, there is a higher chance a person will act in defiance and resort to crime.[17]

While control theory gives an adequate and concise explanation of non-serious forms of youthful delinquency, it fails to explain adult criminal behaviour and serious instances of youth crime. As stated above, children who are properly bonded with their parents would be less involved in crime than those who have weaker parental bonds. Evidently, this theory acts on the assumption that the family is an unsurprisingly law-abiding tradition. The theory's biggest weakness is that it places too much emphasis on the bonds in relation to an individual and society, without taking into consideration other notions like autonomy and recklessness.[18]

## **Crime Prevention**

In considering ways as to how crime can be reduced, we will also be turning our focus to certain theories that tend to exacerbate this issue at hand instead of preventing it from occurring. However, it will be useful to first discuss its definition.

Crime prevention is a term often used and abused by many looking for a cause no one can agree with. Given that the term "crime" comprises of a awfully wide variety of activities, be it smoking cannabis or murdering someone, it is inaccurate to speak of crime in a general manner.[19]Crime, like the symptom of a disease, should be seen as an indicator of how and where society is not functioning in the way that it should. There is abundance to be gained from societies with a higher rate of crime in how and what to avoid and also in societies with lower incidences of crime, on how a society should in reality be.[20]

The major division in approaches to crime prevention is between the social approaches and the situational approaches. The former is concerned with the social issues that crime reflects and attempts to deal with them.[21]The latter is much more concerned with success in reducing a specific crime independent of social and structural issues. The distinction between social and situational crime prevention is similar to Bright's distinction between crime prevention and criminality prevention.

### **5. 1 Situational Crime Prevention (SCP)**

SCP represents a highly realistic and practical application of both theory of criminal offending and empirical analyses of crime patterns. The main advantage is that it focuses on the implications and assumptions of those broader theoretical positions in a way that is useful for crime prevention.

Two major theoretical areas underpin situational prevention: Routine Activity Analysis being the objective indicators of crime incidence and the study of offender decision making. This will be considered in the next section of the paper.

#### **Routine Activity Theory**

The Routine Activity Theory (RAT) provides a simple and insightful detail as to why crimes occur and what causes them. The main idea is that without proper mechanisms in place, delinquents will quarry upon attractive and weak targets. For a crime to take place, a motivated offender must be present at the same location as the attractive target. In the case of property crimes, the target will be the object present. For personal crimes, the target would be a person.[22]In the event that an attractive target is not present at

the same location as the motivated offender, we can clearly deduce that the crime will not take place. Having said that, there are also controllers in whose presence, a crime will not occur. If the controllers are absent or lack power, crime will most likely take place.[23]

In discussing this theory in depth, we will turn our attention to the people who play an important role in the lives of potential offenders. In dealing with juveniles, these people might be family members, close relatives, peer, teachers and so on. In the case of adult offenders, these people may include partners, close friends, relations and sometimes their own children.[24] These people are referred to 'handlers' when dealing with this theory. Crimes will take place when handlers are weak, corrupt or absent.[25]

Next, we consider the target or the victims. Essentially guardians do their utmost best to deter targets from burglary and harm and potential victims from falling prey to an offender. Formal guardians would include the police force, guards and so on. Informal guardians will include neighbours, friends and passerby who so happen to be in the same place as the offender. [26] Clearly, an offender is less likely to strike in the presence of a guardian than one in the absence of a guardian.

Lastly, we consider the place or location where the crime will take place. Place managers who generally own and manage a specific location, is responsible for deterring crimes and keeping a close eye on any criminal activity happening in that specified location.

In considering this theory, the tool used to accomplish the crime is also very vital. Examples of these tools may include spray paint cans, guns, knives, <https://assignbuster.com/failure-to-achieve-positively-valued-goals-criminology-essay/>



cars and so on. Offenders who do not possess such tools will less likely be able to intimidate place managers or handlers and even enter unauthorised locations.[27]It also recommends ways of overcoming such incidences by stepping up on preventive measures. For instance, guardians may possess a pepper spray can or something that might frighten the offender and gain attention from the public, have a security guard or an authoritative figure present in such areas and so on. In addition, gates, fences, barriers, barb wires can be installed to prevent offenders from breaking in.[28]With such preventive measures in place and the use of certain tools, the chances of keeping offenders at bay will definitely be increased and in turn, will lead to a reduction in crime.

Another method that influences the routine activities to deter from criminal behaviour is the moral beliefs and socialization of the offender. If a person has been socialized to maintain such beliefs, even in the presence of criminal opportunities, offenders would step away from crime and not indulge in such activities. This reinforces the strength of social bonds that RAT aims to promote and to serve as a barrier to counteract the temptation of criminal activities.[29]

However, RAT only considers criminal behaviour and victimisation in a very broad and general sense. It tells us who is more likely to be victimised but does not tackle the issue of who the offender is. Hence, it might be slightly misleading if it is applied in the narrow sense.

## **Labelling Theory**

Labelling theory considers why people committing certain acts come to be defined as deviant whereas other theories do not. It also deals with the effects on individuals who are labelled in a certain manner.

Deviant behaviour is usually behaviour that goes against the norm, that bring about public condemnation and one that is usually faced with disapproval. When someone has been labelled a criminal, the label attached may become the 'master status' which is seen as the main characteristics of the individual. He or she will be viewed as a 'hooligan' or a thief or a murderer rather than a mother, father or friend. These label carries with it descriptions and prejudices and will result in others interpreting the behaviour of the labelled person in a certain way, mainly negative.[30]For example, a person who has had a clean record will undoubtedly be treated differently than someone who has a history of stealing or murdering. This in turn would lead to people having little faith in them and not taking them seriously. For some, once a deviant labelled has been associated with them, it can lead to them getting involved in more criminal induced activities and in turn, provide no assistance to crime prevention. This often happens when people begin behaving in the manner they are stereotyped. Hence, it is vital that in order certain types of crime to be prevented, we should refrain from turning to labelling theory as it will only worsen the situation and promote more crime.

## **Social Crime Prevention**

Social prevention focuses on values and discipline systems that influence whether or not people commit crimes. The term can apply to almost any <https://assignbuster.com/failure-to-achieve-positively-valued-goals-criminology-essay/>

program that tries to affect the socialisation of individuals or groups seen as having potential to offend. This can be divided in four areas and will be subsequently discussed briefly. They are:

Community Development

Diversion Programs

Media and other education campaigns

Development prevention: Early intervention and programs that address risk and protective factors.

Community Development

Crime is seen as a product of “community disorganisation”. Close family, friendship and employment ties and networks, which can discourage and sanction antisocial behaviour, are argued to be much weaker in high crime localities. Where neighbourhood ties and networks are relatively weak, far fewer people will sanction delinquent behaviour.[31]As such, strengthening informal networks will make younger people in particular, less likely to offend. Building local employment opportunities can also assist as it focuses on creating opportunities within communities. Relevant jobs must have potential for upward mobility.[32]

Diversion Programs

The Criminal Justice Diversion Program is aimed at preventing the entry of first time or low risk defendants into the criminal justice system.

Mentoring programs, as briefly discussed earlier, typically aims to reduce offending/reoffending, reduce substance abuse and other risk-taking behaviours, increase young peoples' participation in education and employment and improves self-esteem, social life skills and personal relationships.

Mentoring involves a more experienced person taking on a role of advising a less experienced person, as they will come to respect the more experienced person and follow in their footsteps or heed their advice. Such projects can be used at critical junctions or transition points in children's and young people's lives such as referring a young person to a mentoring programme after their first contact with the criminal justice system.

There is little evidence of the long-term impacts of mentoring programmes. However, the increased popularity of mentoring programmes as a feasible approach to working with youth has resulted in a recent growth in the amount of quality of research into its productivity. Some of these estimation report positive outcomes for projects working with at-risk youth and/or young offenders.[33]

### Media and other education campaigns

Mass media-based and other education has long been used to change values that lead to or assist in justifying problematic behaviour. Public health experience suggests such campaigns can bring about significant shifts such as a reduction in smoking, binge drinking and so on. In crime prevention, they have been used to change attitudes and mindsets about violence. More specifically targeted programs can also be developed. Examples include <https://assignbuster.com/failure-to-achieve-positively-valued-goals-criminology-essay/>

campaigns in primary schools to reduce bullying and in the workplace to reduce harassment.

### Development Prevention

Studies have shown that factors early in life may contribute to the onset of delinquency.[34]Termed “ risk factors”, they can relate both to the individual and to the social environment. Researchers such as Hawkins (1999) and Farrington (2000) claim also to have identified “ protective” factors that buffer exposure to risk and inhibit offending. Protective factors include things such as school environment, social skills and competence, family harmony, a prosocial peer group and community involvement.[35]

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is evident as per that once we can grasp the theories of crime and consider in depth as to why it happens, we can then turn to the different ways to prevent crime. An approach that simply focuses on stopping crimes could be accused of treating the symptoms and not the underlying problem. Hence, it is very vital that to treat the underlying problem, we first have to consider the theories behind it as discussed in the early section of the paper.