

Sociological perspectives and crime

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Abstract:

Sociological theories can be used to explain the causes of crime and criminal behaviors in the society. These theories link the prevailing social structures, social values and peer groups to individual criminality.

Introduction

According to functionalism perspective, there are common societal values which individuals tend to break (Schaefer, 2007). According to Durkheim, there are positive and negative aspects of crime since crime sets the boundaries between actions that are unacceptable by the society and those which are acceptable. Limited amount of crime may enhance social cohesion or change common values (Schaefer, 2007). The society is governed by shared and common values that guide the collective conscience which guide individual actions. During abrupt social changes or stress, the common conscience is weakened thus crime incidents tend to increased (Schaefer, 2007). According to Strain theory by Merton, people participate in crime to escape current bad experiences like financial difficulties. Failure to achieve personal goals such as respect will lead to frustration thus people may engage in criminal behavior to forget the bad experience (Schaefer, 2007). According to conflict perspective of sociological theories, crime is caused by the struggle for power and scarce resources (Schaefer, 2007). According to the perspective, the society has sub-groups which compete for the economic and social resources. Social classes such as the high income class which dominate economic resources, political power and low income class which is characterized by low incomes and power exist in the society (Schaefer, 2007). The oppressed group will perceive inequality and challenge the status

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quo by engaging in crimes such as looting, violent murders and kidnapping the rich. According to this perspective, the social structure creates conflicts in the society which later lead to criminal activities. Crime can be eliminated by reducing inequalities in the social structure and equal distribution of economic resources (Schaefer, 2007).

The third sociological perspective that can be used to explain the causes of crime in the society is the interactionist perspective (Schaefer, 2007).

According to this perspective, the meaning of crime is derived from interactions with other individuals. Human beings communicate through symbols, language and mannerisms thus people attach meaning to those acts. The society will dictate the rules and anybody who contravenes the laws is deviant (Schaefer, 2007). These acts may not be bad but are considered as crimes since they contravene the rules. For instance, refusing to kill the enemy during war will be considered deviant. The perspective asserts that labeling will make certain groups experience undue victimization which leads them to joining criminal groups due to frustrations of labeling. Labeled individuals will have difficulties socializing with other community members and finally develop low self-esteem. These individuals finally join criminal gangs for the sake of conformity with their labeling (Schaefer, 2007).

Conclusion

There are different sociological perspectives that can be used to explain the causes of crime in the society. According to the functionalism perspective, rapid changes in the social values and shared norms will alter collective conscience thus leading the individuals to criminal activities. Conflict perspective asserts that the struggle for limited resources, power and social

status is the main cause of crime. According to interactionist perspective, labeling of people as criminals will make them conform to this concept by committing crimes.

References:

Schaefer, R. T. (2007). *Sociology: A Brief introduction* . Boston. McGraw-Hill.