

A Theoretical Framework on Juvenile Gang Delinquency: Its Roots and Solutions

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Abstract

Juvenile gangs are a form of antisocial group. This gang or group has become an unwarranted issue consisting of young people for committing criminal activities. The delinquent and criminal behaviour among young people during the transition from childhood to adulthood leads to the commission of crimes. This study explains several theories relating to delinquent conduct and gang formation. It draws some basic norms relating to delinquent behaviour as well as description of several aspects playing a vital role to raise this burning issue. Effective methods and procedures for averting juvenile delinquency are described, with special attention given to the expansion of educational, professional development and public programmes, progresses in family relations and parenting skills, and the value of curative justice for both culprits and victims.

Keywords

Cohen's Theory, Bonger's Theory, Modern Control Theories, Social Control Theories, Roots, Solutions

1. Introduction

A gang is obviously more dangerous, because the potential value of doing harm of a number of persons acting for a common goal together is higher than their capacity to do mischief individually. The delinquent must be dealt with as a member of all the various groups to which he belongs-the family, neighbourhood, school, religion, occupational group and so on, as well as his gang. The members of this gang are mostly found young and they act so aggressively to accomplish their goal. Most of the gang members work without fear having no social norms or behaviour and it leads them to commit any type of heinous

crime affecting the society in a large scale.

As the most significant section of human juveniles need emphasis in all sectors for the fruitful development of upcoming generation. Juveniles are too complex and always present on the pitch of trust and mistrust based on the act of different participants that contribute their exertion on them. If the surroundings become keen to them, they will nurture the whole world with positive acts cultivating their self-image and personality and will be free of abuse and crime related issues. These strongly create trust to their caregivers and their environment. However, if different concerned bodies are devoted to them negatively, they will become victim of malpractice, crime, become addictive to different drugs and etc.

In reality it is unfortunate that juveniles are frequently abused. A number of juveniles' home is street of different cities and towns. Even those who are at home with their families and at school are not handling carefully. Labeling the juveniles is becoming usual activities and is not taken as humiliation currently. Therefore, this article concentrates on the main causes of criminal behaviors and its solution methods.

This topic has very important significance for families because it enables them to grow a delinquency free generation. Apart from this, it will help policy makers to give more attention to issue related to juveniles in all aspects.

2. Explanation of Theories

Several theories have been introduced from time to time to examine the crimes committed by group of juveniles. These theories are so closely connected to our social atmosphere and after the careful analysis of these theories society may go towards a proper solution for the delinquent gangs in a sophisticated manner. The established theories are explained below:

2.1. Theory of Sub-Culture

Albert K. Cohen discerned some sort of peculiar culture among the gang delinquents which he termed as “delinquent sub-culture” (Cohen, 1955). According to Cohen, a delinquent sub-culture may be defined as “a lot of life that has somehow become traditional among certain way groups in American society”. These groups are the boys' gangs that flourish most conspicuously in the “delinquency neighbourhoods of our larger American cities” (Cohen, 1955). The reason why such a culture is developed is given by Cohen by saying that the members of the gang share a number of problems and the sub-culture is a response to find out the solution to the problems.

Regarding the characteristics of the delinquent sub-culture Cohen is of the view that it is non-utilitarian, malicious and negativistic. It is non-utilitarian since the delinquent acts are sometimes committed “for the heck of it” and not because of any gains occurring to them, and the culture is malicious and negativistic in the sense that they enjoy committing the delinquent acts not because

of any comfort derived for themselves but from the discomfort they have caused to others and find cause for pride in reputations they have acquired for “meanness” (Kitsuse & Dietrick, 1959).

John Kitsuse and David Dietrick have pointed out many flaws while evaluating Cohen’s theory of sub-culture (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960). They don’t agree that boys of lower class families care very much about what middle class people think of them. Nor do they agree that delinquent acts are always non-utilitarian or malicious towards respectable persons. They also point out that the theory does not explain clearly as to how the sub-cultures are sustained after being developed once. While trying to answer this question, Kitsuse and Dietrick put an alternative formulation. According to them, the original motives of the gang members are not the same for participating in delinquent activities but later on they develop one thing in common with each other which maintains the sub-culture. The common bond is that they reject their rejectors i.e. the respectable persons and those responsible for correctional programmes for the young who develop hostile reaction to the deeds of the gang members. It has also been argued that it is the economic injustice and not the middle class expectation problem that leads young persons to gang culture. It is our view that many discontented lower class youth do not wish to adopt a middle class group. The solution they seek entails the acquisition of a higher position in terms of lower class rather than middle class criteria (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960).

2.2. Theory of Economic Structure and Crime

The most notable and stimulating contribution to criminology in understanding the relation of crime and economic structure has been made by William Aldrian Bonger (1876-1940) who sought to elucidate the concept of crime on the through Marxist approach.

Bonger contended that the criminal was a creation of the capitalistic system which, as an alternative of upholding altruistic trends among members of the society, formed self-seeking tendencies. The system built on capitalistic interchange is driven by a profit element. In such a system each member tries to acquire all-out from others in return of the least from his capacity.

Bonger detects many problems favourable to the spread of criminal behaviour in the capitalist system. Child labour according to Bonger is entirely a capitalistic phenomenon which is one of the salient features of juvenile delinquency. Long hours of work by workers have a brutalizing effect on them. Finally, illiteracy among people of lower classes contributes greatly to the commission of crimes.

According to his theory, the crime should have come to an end or at least controlled to a very great range in socialist countries like the U.S.S.R., which is not at all the genuine position. According to the study conducted by the Cavans, juvenile delinquency has become common in all the levels of the Soviet society (Cavan & Cavan, 1968).

There is no doubt, however, that poverty does play an important role in de-

linquency. In Indian sub-continent, criminal statistics evidently reveal that there is a direct tie between poverty and criminal behaviour. The indirect effects of poverty have been noted by Clifford Shaw by focussing attention on his well-known concept of “delinquency area” (Shaw & Mckay, 1942).

These areas are characterised by physical deterioration, high proportion of population or welfare rolls and a high proportion of ethnic and racial minorities. Inadequate housing is one of the most severe complications in such delinquent zones which create strain between members of the family living in overcrowded environment.

2.3. Social Control Theories

Social control theories differ from the earlier theories which explain criminality and delinquency in social, biological and personality factors. Control theories came into trend from the early fifties, Albert J. Reiss, Jackson Toby, Ivan Nye and Walter C. Reckless being the early criminologists to propound such theories. Reiss, first among these, made studies in the framework of possibility of withdrawal of probation orders and concluded that such possibility was sophisticated in case of those who were disorganised having weak ego or superego: the children having lack of “personal controls” to keep away from the violation of social and legal norms. The main weakness of the theory lays in the fact that strength of family and community controls over the juveniles were not taken into account as valid components among the controlling mechanisms.

Jackson Toby based his theory on the premise that temptation to violate the norms is among all the persons but control will depend upon the stakes an individual may have in confirming the norms. School performance for instance, will determine the stakes in conformity, the “basis for school adjustment is laid down in the home and community”. Ivan Nye, another control theorist, came to conclude from his studies that family was the single most-important control group in determining the nature of juvenile behaviour.

Subsequently, Walter C. Reckless came out with his “containment theory”. According to this theory, delinquent behaviour was the result of social pressures and pulls of all the kinds counteracted by containments external and internal with reference to an individual. The restraints are explained and illustrated thus (Vold, 1958):

External restraint consists in effective family living and support groups, and includes such items as consistent moral front, institutional reinforcement, reasonable norms and expectations, cohesiveness, effective supervision and discipline... Inner containment is the product of internalization and consists in self-control, ego strength, super ego, frustration tolerance, sense of responsibility, resistance to diversions, goal orientation, ability to find substitute satisfactions, and so on.

There is nothing different in the theory established by Reckless but he en-

deavoured to fuse together some of the earlier theories in a common framework. The theory has been disapproved in that the crucial terms pressures and pulls have not been defined. Because of the ambiguity there is no definite category of the variables involved in his theory (Vold, 1958).

2.4. Modern Control Theories

The theories described above lead to a couple of more theories known as modern control theories; they have been expounded by David Matza and Travis Hirschi. According to Matza, the theories of criminal causation found the determinants in social, biological and psychological terms i.e. these were the limits which led towards crime and revealed the indispensable and ultimate difference between delinquent and non-delinquent persons. The main thrust of Matza's approach is that the deviant behaviour of the "delinquents" is only a small part and that too only for a limited period of their life. Most of the time and in most of the situations, the "delinquents" behave normally. Even otherwise, most delinquents "age out" of delinquency by the time they reach early adulthood despite the continued existence of the factors supposed to be responsible for their delinquent behaviour. Another significant feature pointed out by Matza is that delinquents do not regard their behaviour as ethically warranted but justify it by reference to a "pervasive sense of injustice".

Hirschi's approach reminiscent of Freudian approach is different from Matza's in the sense that he believes that "we are all animals and thus all naturally capable of committing criminal acts" while the later considered delinquent behaviour as reflecting the delinquent freeing himself from conventional behaviour in spite of conventional moral beliefs. Hirschi proposed his obviously valid social control theory that individuals tightly bonded to social groups such as the family, the school, and peers would be less likely to commit delinquent acts (Hirschi, 2001).

The control theories have been supported by a good number of studies though it has been pointed out that the supportive studies generally covered only relatively trivial offences committed by essentially non-delinquent youths. Vold's valid observation is as given below (Vold, 1958).

Control theory may adequately explain delinquency in boys who spend only a few hours per year engaged in it but whether explains delinquency among the boys that Cohen was talking about is another question entirely. Serious delinquency cannot be adequately explained by control theories.

Control theories appeal to criminologists for several reasons. First, they provide criminologists with very testable theories. Many other criminological theories, in contrast, are much more difficult to test in that their concepts and variables (like "an excess of definitions favourable to law violation) are very difficult to operationalize. Second, control theories have been linked from the outset with a new research technique, the self-report survey... The combination of a testable theory with a research technique that produces supportive results is very attrac-

tive, to say the least (Vold, 1958).

3. Root Causes

It is found that some social factors are solely responsible for the growth of juvenile gang crimes. The established theories discussed above indicate some social, economic, religious etc. causes which have effect on families creating juvenile gangs. The causes are discussed below:

3.1. Social Institutions and Crime Causation

Delinquent and criminal behaviour is shaped within the numerous institutions of society. In other words, one who eventually becomes a delinquent or criminal is the creation of the different socioeconomic institutions. Therefore, some understanding of the social institutions and their impact on human behaviour is imperative.

3.2. Family and Crime Causation

The first and most important social institution which determines the individual's behaviour towards society in general subsequently is the family of the individual. The family not only gives him the first social contact in the world i.e., with other members of the family, but also determines his position vis-a-vis the larger world. The perception of the environment by the child and his attitudes towards it are, therefore, greatly influenced by the family. Lack of affection, either actual or as perceived by the child, is regarded as an important contributory factor in anti-social attitude. It is because the child is dependent on its parents for its physical as well as social needs. The lack of affection may arise due to different reasons, like disharmonious relationship between the parents, broken home e.g. when one or both parents are missing due to death, divorce or desertion.

Parental rejection as a contributory factor in delinquency, was made by Ruth Topping in the New York State Training School. The personality characteristic of the aggressive delinquents comprised desperate aspiration for acceptance and affection, aggressive speech characterized with threats to kill people, and a sense of having a hard life and being faced with imbalanced odds (Gibbons, 1981).

Lack of affection can result from broken homes and many studies have established the obvious relationship between this factor and delinquent behaviour. The process may not however be as simple as it appears on the face of it.

The perception grown by the child that the parents have no time for them, lack of affection creates a great impact on a family though the family may not be a broken one. It may be because of too much involvement in their occupations on the part of the parents but quite often owing to too much preoccupation with so-called social activities. The institution of working mothers is also coming up fast in middle class educated families which has its own strong and weak points, and an endless debate goes on as to whether married women should confine themselves to their homes and children or should they have distinct personalities

in terms of professional career and employment.

Other significant issues in the analysis of a child's behaviour may be the size of the family and the fraternal order in which the child is grown. Cyril Burt made a study in the context of the family size and his finding was that "children from the poorest social classes not only have an intelligence that is nearly two years below that of the children from the better social classes, but are drawn from families that are nearly twice as large (Burt, 1946).

While some studies (Rahav, 1980) have found the order of the birth to be significant i.e. there is excess of criminal behaviour in case of the eldest child or even in the second one, the conclusion of Emanuel Miller is to the contrary. Miller surveyed the English and American literature up to 1944 and found the available information to be "singularly poor and contradictory" and to him none of the many variables involved in juvenile delinquency seemed to be especially related to the birth order.

As regard to the problem of working mothers and delinquent behaviour of the children. The Gluceks reached the following conclusions (Schlesser, 1959):

- 1) A considerably greater proportion of the mothers of the non-delinquents who worked (whether regularly or occasionally) than of those who were housewives neglected to give or provide suitable supervision to their children. Thus, entirely apart from the problem of delinquency, there is a strong hint that working mothers, at least of low-income groups, are not as conscientious about arranging for the supervision of their children as are those who remain at home.
- 2) The supervision of those children who actually became delinquent was far less suitable on the part of working mothers (whether they are employed regularly or occasionally) than on the part of the mothers who were housewives.
- 3) A boy who is carelessly supervised and who has a mother who is of the kind who works occasionally is far more likely to become a delinquent than is the poorly supervised son of a mother who does not go to work.

3.3. Religious Control

The connection between religious control and delinquent behaviour has engrossed a great deal of attention from sociologists. The interrelation between religion and delinquency may be observed from two perspectives i.e., religion is considered in its positive sense as a source of positive morality or as a negative tool in terms of its adverse leadership, biased practices and mistreatments due to corruption and "commercialisation". According to sociologists, the power of religion in the first sense plays a significant role in preventing criminal behaviour by moulding the individual personality. In this sense it can also be used as an instrument of reformation of a delinquent. In its negative aspect, religion is not only incapable of serving any useful purposes; it may in fact promote delinquent behaviour among young persons as result of their disillusionment with the structure centred in hypocrisy and dishonesty.

It must, however, be appreciated that the impact of religion on an individual

during the formative years of personality may be only indirect and in a subtle manner. In the words of Thomas M. Gannon (Gannon, 1967):

The efficiency of religion rests on the internalization of ideals during the critical developmental years of childhood and is settled through close identification with parents, household members and other noteworthy primary groups. Much of this control is exercised unconsciously and depends largely upon behavioural examples and religious experience rather than on precept. Only later does it reach the level of practical result and individual commitment.

3.4. Formal Education and Delinquency

Schools play a vital role to develop social attitude among children next to family. Apart from other factors, the key reason is that the child passes a very significant part of his entire time in a day at school. The school may be responsible for the development of delinquency in certain ways or it may be that certain problems come to the surface only after the child's entry into the school. Truancy or running away from school may either be due to certain factors operating within the school structure or due to certain factors already unfavourable to the children which are precipitated due to interaction of factors connected with the school. In any case, truancy may be the first step towards criminal behaviour. Factors such as low socio-economic status of the family, low intelligence, lack of motivation and related poor school performance, emotional instability and personality defects, ineffective adjustment of instruction and subjects to pupil's needs, lack of participation in extracurricular activities, apathy to subjects, indifferent attitude of parents to education are main issues disturbing the outlooks towards school.

There is a general feeling that schools are dominated by middle class values which create problems of adjustment for children coming from lower groups. Unconsciously, the teachers recurrently respond contrarily to children from different social classes. One reason could be that most of the school teachers come from typically middle class families. They abhor manner which is more common among inferior class, such as profanity, offensiveness in language and bodily aggressiveness.

3.5. Economic Factors and Crime

The importance of economic factors in the causation of crime and of economic crimes in general can be pointed out by quoting Hermann Mannheim. According to him, if traffic offences are omitted, the administration of criminal justice all over the world has to devote probably three-quarters of its time and energy to "economic crimes" (Mannheim, 1946). There cannot be any doubt that poverty contributes a great deal both directly and indirectly, to the commission of delinquent and criminal acts. But it is likewise "apparent that traffic crimes are poverty only cannot be made accountable for all the pecuniary crimes committed. It hardly requires any inquiry to say that there are many people who succeed to keep themselves honest and upright even in the most frustrating circum-

stances while there may be others who after making millions would like to make another million by engaging in immoral activities.

3.6. Mass Communication Media and Crime

In today's world, means of mass communication like the cinema, press, radio and television have assumed very great significance. Not only do they serve the various positive purposes but their enormous capacity has created some problems which are of interest to those who have to study human behaviour, including criminologists. The means of mass media have some interesting characteristics. The message through them is of an impersonal nature i.e. directed towards a large body of persons' heterogeneous character, and different effects are produced by the same message on different persons. Another characteristic of the mass media is that there is a whole complex system sending the message, not just one individual, and so some mechanical element is inevitable in such a situation. Finally, the message is to be consumed instantaneously and ordinarily there is no time to think or ponder over the message. These characteristics have made the means of media not only very powerful but have also created danger in the system.

Among the mass communication media, television and cinema have the potential for the maximum impact on the viewers because of the combined audio-visual components in the system. Further, the audio-visual experience does not require much effort on the part of the viewer unlike other media like newspapers which are usually read by adults.

An American study revealed that approximately 60 percent of children watch television during hours when programmes featuring crime and violence are usually presented (Adrian, 1961).

In Bangladesh, though the magnitude and quality of the problem is quite different, young persons are found highly "appreciative" of the films depicting violence shown on the television and in the theatres. The excitement which "fighting scenes" generate in many of them is to be seen to be appreciated; they look almost "participants" in the whole process.

The impact of mass communication media through learning behaviour has undergone three stages:

1) The "imitation" theory was fairly common with the criminologists. It upheld that juvenile delinquency was at times the outcome of what youngsters saw in movies and on television and what they read in comics.

A United States Senate Sub-Committee considered the televised crime programme as a "calculated risk" while some others have referred to it as the "school for violence".

2) The theory of imitation, to a great extent, was replaced by the psychological approach of William Healy and Cyril Burt. According to them, violence depicted in films and elsewhere provided "vicarious enjoyment" and as such served as "safety valves" and "healthy outlets" to the potential aggressive tendencies.

3) The belief has subsequently developed that the "safety valve" theory was as much without scientific support as the "imitation" theory.

It is, however, evident that the mass communications media is, as such, neutral and has nothing intrinsically dangerous about it. Much depends upon the use made of it. In the context of combating crime, the mass media can play, and it does play sometimes, a positive role by raising pertinent issues and supplying relevant information about crime to the society.

4. Solutions to Get Rid of Juvenile Gang Delinquency

In any community, a balance of prevention, intervention, and suppression techniques is essential for success. These are discussed below:

4.1. Prevention

To discourage adolescents from joining gangs, no single programs have been adapted; instead, communities must have to use a variety of techniques and services which will prevent juvenile gang delinquency to a large extent. Such as: Identifying and addressing high-risk indicators for gang membership, strengthening families bonding, reducing conflicts among teenagers, Improving youth supervision at the community level, reviewing zero tolerance rules of the schools to reduce suspensions and expulsions from schools, tutoring for pupils who are struggling in school, giving soft skill and awareness training to these adolescent, arranging youth recreation centre and overall giving training to teachers and guardians on how to deal with disobedient and delinquent students/children and mediate conflicts. This method is so much effective as it lessens the rate of joining in gangs of youth or teenagers creating peaceful atmosphere in the society. This method eliminates the evils from the mind of juveniles that results in less happening of crimes in our society.

4.2. Intervention

Younger youth who are actively participating in gangs are subjected to punishments and services as part of intervention programs and techniques aimed at luring them away from gangs. Many initiatives involve law enforcement collaborating with community- or faith-based organisations to provide education, job training, and volunteer opportunities as incentives to leave the gang, while still holding those who receive assistance accountable for further delinquent or criminal behaviour. This method plays a vital role because through education and learning juveniles are settled in income earning activities. Therefore, the gang members may solve their economic crisis and it enables them to lead a healthy life.

4.3. Suppression

Suppression, also known as gang crime enforcement, refers to a wide range of criminal justice actions in which law enforcement, prosecutors, probation officers, and parole officers pool their efforts to limit and ensure accountability for gangs and gang members' criminal conduct. As its tactics suppression may in-

clude:

- Sharing information regarding gangs.
- Identifying and apprehending significant and persistent gang criminals.
- Using gang remedies or civil ordinances to prevent publicised gang members from associating.
- Vertical prosecution, harsher sentences, Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations and conspiracy provisions are all used to prosecute gang members.

This method encourages all the section of society to be aware of juvenile crimes and thus it obstruct the path of criminal gangs to organize themselves.

4.4. Assessment

Conducting an assessment of the situation is a critical first step in making anti-gang strategies successful. An early assessment of a problem aids leaders in gaining a thorough understanding of the issue. The leaders can then concentrate their planning and actions on a strategy that saves time and money in the long run. The evaluation procedure usually consists of three steps:

- Creating a foundation and finding personnel who can manage the entire process and provide guidance for data collection initiatives.
- Data collection, analysis, and interpretation across many domains utilizing a variety of indicators.
- Creating reports, findings, and final reports that describe the nature and scope of the situation in detail.

5. Conclusion

The discussion makes one thing quite clear that it is not possible to lay down the causes of crime which will give full proof answers to all questions of criminal causation in general. As observed by Albert Cohen, a single theory of explanation of crime does not mean a single factor in the causation of crime. Different types of offences like theft, murder, blackmail and rape obviously have different kinds of motivations and all of them cannot be explained by the same theory. Further, the theories are of a general nature and cannot explain particular situations. No one would hold that delinquency is the product or one variable, although many would contend that some large but finite number of factors do combine to produce delinquency. A more fundamental objection regarding the search of causes of crime with reference to the individual criminals is that this approach assumes something wrong with the violator of the criminal law and that the laws and legal system are without any blemish.

The proponents of “critical criminology” point out that the so-called “deviance” found in a criminal law violator need not always be “authentic” and may be independent of any social or personal pathology. A little awareness that the law itself may be problematic is of very recent origin and the solution of the crime problem sought by even liberals has been, by and large, in terms of

changing the law-breaker rather than altering the legal system. It is pointed out that the main concern of the social scientists has been confined to social order and any existing arrangement of norms is good enough to serve as their point of reference (Taylor, Walton, & Young, 1975).

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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