

The Impact of Socioeconomic Status on Criminal Behavior: A Cross-Cultural Perspective

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Abstract. Usually, people with low socioeconomic status (SES) are less educated, they do not have a good employment situation, and their income is not good. These people are at a higher risk of suffering from illnesses and do not have money to pay for medical treatment. They are also more likely to occur anti-social behaviours as they mostly live in an underprivileged community. In both youth and adulthood, they are more prone to participate in deviant activities and exhibit less self-control. There's a lot of pressure on them, and their survival is threatened, so crime may become a last resort. Families with high SES usually provide teenagers with adequate learning resources which can support their educational attainment. On the contrary, domestic violence has a negative impact on the growth of youths, making them more likely to conduct criminal behaviors. For drug related crimes, people with high SES can buy high-quality drugs with less harmful consequences. In cross-cultural contexts, countries such as South Africa and Pakistan experience colonial or religious influences, racial discrimination, and low economic performance. In India, which has a special caste system, there are unbalanced distribution of resources and the privileged positions of high castes. In addition, hot weather can directly affect citizens in some large agricultural countries to resort to criminal behaviors in order to survive. Low educational level leads to an increase in unemployment and a decrease in personal income, thus reducing SES and driving criminal behaviors.

Keywords: Socioeconomic Status, Criminal Behavior, Cultural Differences.

1. Introduction

A person's or family's access to financial resources and social standing in relation to others, including income, educational attainment, occupational prestige, and subjective perceptions of social status and class, are all measured by the combined economic and sociological construct known as socioeconomic status (SES). Criminal behavior is the conduct of an offender that leads to the commission of an unlawful act. It usually occurs when a potential criminal has motive, means, and opportunity. As for culture, it refers to the behaviors, systems, and norms of a specific group of people in a certain period of time in human society, as well as the knowledge, beliefs, customs, and habits of individuals in the group. This paper focuses on the relationship between SES and crime and discusses the cross-cultural-related content. In today's society, there is an endless stream of popular topics about crime, including a series of violent and non-violent criminal behaviors against living and non-living entities. Although it is a harmful way in maintaining social balance, the emergence of criminal behaviors in society can also make people realize what needs to change in themselves and society. This paper studies the impacts of SES on criminal behaviors among different countries, hoping to find out the reasons behind the occurrence, while also providing an appropriate and widely accepted way not only to raise public awareness but also to minimize the impacts of criminal behaviors on society.

In order to further explore SES, the relationship between it and adaptive social emotion, two theories were proposed: social causation theory and social selection/drift theory [1]. The former posited that poor people are more likely to suffer from mental disorders. The latter suggested that individuals with mental disorders tend to gradually descend into lower SES. When poor and rich people suffer from the same symptoms, the poor are often more likely to be diagnosed as mentally ill than the rich. According to developmental systems theory, the complexity of human beings made it difficult to accurately predict the development path of human beings. Therefore, it is difficult for children with lower SES to predict what developmental problems they might develop in the future,

but there are usually more challenges for them than children with higher SES. For the social disorganization theory, there is a higher proportion of residents with low SES, which increases the possibility of disrupting the social order. Also, four theories that linked poverty to maladaptive behavior: contagion theories, collective socialization theories, competition theories, and relative deprivation theories supported that adult can act as mediating variables to influence adolescents' behaviors. More specifically, if there are more affluent people in a neighborhood, they will have a positive impact on the behaviors of teenagers, which the two variables are positively correlated as well.

Moreover, according to the general theory, the main structure of self-control was a strong predictor of behaviors such as crime [2]. People with low self-control are more likely to engage in behaviors such as missing and skipping classes, or academic dishonesty during school hours. After reaching adulthood, they are also relatively more likely to engage in deviant activities and have a higher risk of driving dangerously or having sex with an unknown partner as well. However, the connection between self-control and these antisocial deviant (AD) behaviors broadens the scope of the general theory. People with less self-control are more likely to engage in risky activities and pathological gambling. Moreover, people with less self-control are more likely to suffer from dysfunctional impulsivity and therefore more likely to engage in behaviors that lead to negative outcomes, such as crime. Thus, people with strong self-control can voluntarily reduce the risk of antisocial behaviors.

There are three ecological crime theories supporting the correlation between SES and crime: Shaw and McKay's social disorganization theory, Becker's economic theory of crime, and the strain theory by Merton [3]. These theories emphasized the relationship between crime and financial inequality. Becker's economic theory of crime pointed out that income inequality spreads through the market, placing individuals with relatively low incomes and low SES in close proximity to those with higher incomes. In addition to this, the strain theory by Merton found that people with low incomes near those with low incomes tend to experience stress and frustration. The greater the income disparity, the more pressure these individuals feel, which may lead them to engage in criminal behavior. Furthermore, Shaw and McKay's social disorganization theory held that it is precisely the income inequality that leads to a lack of social control. In such a situation, the instability of the family will increase, making it difficult to control crime as well. As for drug crimes, researchers reviewed relevant studies and found that it is primarily poor young people with limited education and low SES who engage in drug use.

When investigating the SES and criminal behaviour, there are social causation and social choice theories, developmental systems theory, the theory of social disintegration and the four theories, the general theory, Becker's economic theory, the strain theory, and McKay's social disorganization theory. Although there are a large number of literature on SES and criminal behaviors, there is still a gap in cross-cultural studies regarding the relationship between these two variables. Therefore, this study aims to further explore SES and criminal behavior from the perspective of cross culture.

2. The Overall Association between SES and Criminal Behavior

2.1. SES, Education, and Violent Behavior

SES of the family is very important for adolescents [4]. Families with high SES can usually provide adequate learning resources for teenagers, such as books and after-school classes. In this study, researchers aimed to investigate whether individual changes within the family influence delinquency, which is defined as minor crime, especially that committed by young people. More specifically, they examined whether there was a causal relationship between SES and delinquency, with lower SES leading to higher crime rates. The researchers selected nearly 500 boys for a longitudinal study. These 503 boys participated in an annual assessment of delinquency and SES over a ten-year period, which included both individual and family factors. Three types of self-reports were used to measure them. Results showed that individual SES has a negative impact on delinquency. The lower a juvenile's SES, the more likely he is to commit a crime. Based on this, researchers divided the types of crime

into three levels: mild, moderate, and severe. Juveniles with low SES are twice as likely to commit misdemeanors, 2.5 times more likely to commit felonies, and even three times as likely to commit felonies as those with high SES. A family's SES is determined by the parents' education level, occupation, and household income. Education and occupation were both measured on scales, while family income could be compared by the amount of money that each family earns per year. Results showed that juvenile delinquency is correlated with family SES. The family SES did not fare particularly well in the early part of the decade compared to the later years. Therefore, in years when parents have a lower SES, youth crime rates are 1.5 times higher than average. The SES of individuals and families affects delinquency, with lower SES correlating to a higher rate of delinquency.

Many criminals in society are not highly educated, they often commit crimes that they believe are justified [3]. In this study, researchers aimed to investigate the effects of SES and school performance on violent crimes. In order to explore student performance and academic achievement in schools, researchers used attendance as a primary screening criterion and selected all 283 elementary schools in Chicago for the study. Academic records of students during their time at the school were gathered from the schools' archives. Data on the economic environment, including education levels, employment rates, and income, were collected from the U.S. Census Bureau. Violent crime data were acquired from the Chicago Police, while SES data were obtained from the National Information Database. The study's findings indicated a relationship between a district's students' academic achievement and their future socioeconomic status. The future SES of students is positively correlated with their school performance. Additionally, children's academic performance in the schools located in high-violence neighbourhoods may also be impacted. Furthermore, individuals with low incomes often come from poor, economically disadvantaged or vulnerable areas. As a result, these individuals tend to have low levels of education and SES, which can lead to violent crimes. On the contrary, the better the academic performance of school students, their future employment and income situations are also relatively outstanding, thus the crime rate is usually lower.

Children who commit violent crimes may have violent behaviors within their families [5]. They may take such behaviors to school, resulting in a reduction in the education they receive or even suspension. In this study, researchers aimed to investigate the long-term impacts of school suspensions on students' antisocial behaviors, specifically 12 years later. The researchers oversampled participants through the national Add Health. There were 9,593 respondents, each of whom took part in the 1995 and 1996 surveys, as well as the third and fourth surveys in 2001 and/or 2008. Researchers asked a series of questions about suspensions and analyzed the data. To control for variables and ensure that suspensions didn't vary depending on race, the researchers analyzed 1,719 Black individuals again. In addition, researchers controlled for 60 potential factors related to suspension and criminal justice outcomes to better understand the relationship between suspension and crime. Both the educational levels of participants and the criminal justice outcomes of their crimes were obtained from the American Association of Pediatrics. The results showed that youth suspensions are associated with future antisocial behaviors or crimes. In the 12 years after a teenager is suspended or expelled from school, they tend to receive progressively less education, resulting in lower educational attainment. Consequently, they have a relatively low SES as well, which increases the risk of antisocial behaviors.

Cocaine is a common, banned drug in the United States [6]. Drug addicts with high SES have the opportunity to buy high-quality cocaine with relatively few side effects. In contrast, drug users with low SES will have high exposure to low-quality drugs. Therefore, they are more likely to become addicted and risk their life and health. In the study, researchers wanted to investigate in the United States whether the use of powdered cocaine and crack is associated with drug addicts' SES. By examining the four most recent cohorts of the national survey, respondents were examined in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Researchers first selected the areas they want to survey within each state, and then gradually narrowed down the range to segments, units, and finally identified the respondents. The characteristics of respondents were diverse, including different genders, races, education levels, employment, and income. During the survey, an interviewer and audio computer-

assisted self-interviewing (ACASI) were arranged to understand respondents' SES, arrests, and drug use. The study found that the root cause of cocaine use may be low SES. Although the risks of multiple or lifetime arrests for powdered cocaine use are much lower than for crack users, and drug addicts who use crack tend to have lower SES, powdered cocaine use is positively associated with SES. However, income was negatively associated with cocaine use, and higher levels of education were protective against cocaine use. Besides, Black people have a higher risk of cocaine use in the United States, and racial differences in the risk of drug use are likely to be caused by SES differences. The higher the level of education, the higher the SES, and these individuals were also less likely to use cocaine. Drug users who use powdered cocaine have a higher SES than those who use crack cocaine.

2.2. The Role of Culture

South Africa is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country [7]. However, compared with the United States, it is a colonial country and a developing country, with an economy that is relatively underdeveloped. Moreover, South Africa, with its white power status and racial discrimination, sexual and drug offences are the two main types of crime within the country. The purpose of this study was to determine whether poverty and drug crime are related in South Africa. Researchers used 20 years of South African crime data from 1995 to 2016, covering a wide range of violent and non-violent crimes, from the South African database. They also collected data on the poverty rate in South Africa from the Quantec database. Researchers then used a model that provides a relationship between both short-term and long-term variables in crime and poverty. Results showed that there is a link between crime and poverty in South Africa. More specifically, according to the model, crime and poverty are positively correlated in both the short and long term. Additionally, poverty and income can directly affect crime, which a family with low income and low SES has a higher risk of violent crimes. For some poor people with lower SES and higher crime costs, it is easier for them to commit crimes than for others as well.

Pakistan's geographical location blends the cultures of many countries in the Middle East and is also heavily influenced by religion [8]. It is an extremely conservative country with a low status for women. Like South Africa, Pakistan is a developing country with a backward economy and a lack of education. In the study, researchers wanted to explore how education, unemployment, and poverty contributed to crime rates in Pakistan over the 39 years from 1972 to 2011. To analyze crime rates in Pakistan, researchers looked at all types of crimes reported by Pakistanis over the past 40 years. 538,048 offences had been committed overall by 2007. However, between 30 and 50 percent of these crimes went undetected. After reviewing some earlier research, the researchers created a model using the jobless rate and GDP per capita data sets that they acquired from World Development Indicators. The study found that the high unemployment rate of a country would reduce personal income and the decline of per capita GDP, which made some poor people with low SES participate in illegal activities to provide them with economic support. In estimating the short-term relationship between the education level and crime rate, statistical cointegration is used to determine the long-term relationship between these two variables. Results showed that there is a significant negative correlation between crime rate and higher education. Higher education reduces crime by 0.094% because it leads to lower unemployment, which directly causes higher personal incomes and less poverty. It also refers to higher SES. A one-unit increase in the poverty rate increases the crime rate by 0.075 units as well. On the contrary, people with low educational level and low SES are more likely to commit crimes. Higher education can reduce unemployment and poverty, increase SES, and thus reduce crime. Similarly, if Pakistan can improve education, it is likely to reduce unemployment and promote SES; therefore, it can decrease crime.

Although India is also a developing country compared to South Africa and Pakistan, it has a very special caste system [9]. In India, the distribution of resources is unbalanced, and the upper castes consider the lower castes unworthy of their resources. In the study, researchers aimed to investigate whether differences in relative material standards of living between different castes in India affect the

crime rate. Researchers first collected crime data about 415 districts that make up the 18 large states for 10 years from 2001, which were sourced from the government of India. Researchers mainly focused on two types of reported crimes: violent and non-violent crimes. They then used the control variable method to calculate the per capita monthly consumption. Researchers controlled for regions, using a linear fixed effects regression model to compare material levels between higher and lower castes in the same region. The study found that consumption expenditures of the upper castes in India are higher than those of the lower castes and are positively correlated with the crime rate. In other words, crime is more likely to happen to people from higher castes compared to lower ones, and the lower castes are also afraid of reprisals because of their low SES, or they do not trust the police and feel ashamed to report crimes. In India, people with higher SES are more likely to commit crimes, mainly because of Indian cultural background, especially the caste system, which is absent in South Africa and Pakistan. Indian upper castes often rationalize their criminality, a phenomenon that is rare in the world.

3. Climate Change, SES, and Criminal Behavior

In addition to individual or family SES, education and cultural background, hot climate can also influence crime to some extent [10]. Some countries may mainly develop primary industries, so the natural environment will directly affect their income. If the environment is not good, agricultural products will be unsalable, resulting in citizens not being able to survive, thus resorting to criminal measures. Nevertheless, in this case, researchers wanted to investigate the effects of controlling for the hot climate and other factors, which income disparity also explains intentional homicide. Using data published by the World Bank and the World Development Indicators, a total of 119 countries were analyzed and studied. In order to control for hot climates, researchers used the CLASH model, which posited that with lower temperatures, especially in the event of greater climate change, people should adopt a slower pace of life. Also, people should pay more attention to the future than to the present. Thus, the CLASH model grouped countries by latitude into two categories: tropical and temperate. Countries with tropical climates are mainly between latitude 23.5N and 23.5S and are dominated by summer. However, nations with moderate climates, which were distinguished by four different seasons, are found between latitudes 23.5N and 66.5N and between latitudes 23.5S and 66.5S. Researchers then estimated the effects of income inequality on violent crimes in a multivariate model. Results showed that there is a correlation between the two variables, meaning that intentional homicide can be explained by income inequality. In addition, compared with temperate climate countries, tropical climate countries have less differentiation in SES. Societies with smaller SES differences are less likely to have intentional homicide or violent crime. Conversely, societies with more diverse SES have produced a higher proportion of young people in the process of population growth who feel deprived of personal resources due to poor economic conditions and lower SES themselves. This sense of deprivation makes them feel unable to achieve their ideals, which leads to emotional frustration and diffuse hostility, thus committing a crime. Income inequality leads to great social differences, and some personal resources are deprived, resulting in the decline of SES, which then produces negative emotions and eventually crime.

4. Conclusion

Factors that produce criminal behaviors include education level, cultural background, and income gap, but these factors will eventually relate back to SES. For teenagers, living in poor neighborhoods is likely to bring anti-social behaviors to school. Similar to teenagers from families with lower SES, they will have less education and higher future unemployment, which can lead to a lower income and lower SES. Therefore, they are more likely to commit crimes. Different cultural backgrounds can also lead to different criminal behaviors. South Africa and Pakistan are economically backward developing countries with higher rates of poverty, resulting in generally low educational attainment,

increasing unemployment, lowering the SES of citizens, and thus increasing crimes. In order to maximize the reduction of crime, South Africa and Pakistan can improve the education level of teenagers, reduce the unemployment rate, and thus increase the SES of their citizens. The government can also reduce crime by popularizing relevant legal knowledge and improving the country's legal system to the greatest extent possible. However, compared to these two developing countries, due to Indian special caste system, it is usually people with higher SES who commit crimes against people with lower SES. People of higher castes, on the other hand, often regard such crimes as justifiable crimes. Besides, income inequality will lead to a large social gap. People with lower SES feel deprived of personal resources and are more likely to commit crimes as well.

There is also gender bias among crimes. Previous research reviewed by this paper mainly uses the method of big data analysis, so it lacks individual qualitative data. For example, how low levels of education affect the social and world views of young people of different genders, or their views on different criminal behaviors. Future research could also focus on social needs or emotional changes, which could help analyze the effects of gender differences on criminal behaviors.

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