



THE 21ST EDITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES

The Socio-Economic Impact on Criminality

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Objectives: This paper aims to analyze the relationship between socio-economic conditions and criminality, emphasizing how poverty, unemployment, social exclusion, inequality and weak institutional trust may influence crime and the perception of public safety. **Prior Work:** The paper builds on classical and contemporary criminological perspectives, especially anomie and strain theory, social disorganization theory, social learning theory, social control theory and the rational choice approach. **Approach:** The research uses a qualitative and analytical approach based on literature review and on the synthesis of a case study concerning perceptions of safety and socio-economic vulnerability. **Results:** The analysis indicates that socio-economic instability may increase the probability of property crimes, opportunistic offences and social tensions, while education, employment, community cohesion and visible institutional presence operate as protective factors. **Implications:** The findings support integrated public policies that combine prevention, education, employment, social assistance, urban planning and institutional transparency. **Value:** The paper contributes to the understanding of criminality as a social and economic phenomenon, not only as a legal problem, and highlights the importance of local prevention strategies.

Keywords: criminality; inequality; unemployment; public safety; social control

JEL Classification: K42; D63; I32

1. Introduction

Criminality is a complex social phenomenon that cannot be understood only through the legal definition of offences. It is also a reflection of economic instability, social inequality, cultural tensions and the degree of institutional effectiveness within a community. The bachelor thesis prepared by Azoitei Florentina, entitled *The Socio-Economic Impact on Criminality*, emphasizes precisely this connection between crime, living conditions and public safety. Starting from this perspective, the present paper summarizes and reformulates the central ideas of the thesis in English, following an academic structure suitable for a scientific paper.

In any society, criminality expresses both individual decisions and structural vulnerabilities. A person may commit an offence as a result of personal motivation, but the probability of such conduct is often influenced by unemployment, poverty, marginalization, family disorganization, lack of education and weak social control. For this reason, criminality should be interpreted as a socio-legal phenomenon. It

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involves the violation of criminal law, but it also reveals the quality of social relations and the capacity of public institutions to prevent risk.

Public safety is not limited to the objective number of recorded crimes. It also includes the subjective perception of security that citizens experience in everyday life. People may feel unsafe because of direct victimization, visible disorder, poor lighting, absence of police patrols, media reports or distrust in institutions. Therefore, a complete analysis of criminality must examine both official data and social perceptions. This dual approach is important because fear of crime can reduce participation in community life even when actual crime rates are not extremely high.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the way in which socio-economic conditions influence criminality and the perception of safety. The paper discusses the main theoretical explanations of criminal behaviour, identifies relevant socio-economic factors, and highlights prevention measures that can reduce the risk of crime. The topic is important because modern public policies cannot rely only on punishment after the offence has already occurred. Sustainable crime reduction requires prevention, social integration and long-term community development.

2. Related Work

Criminological theory provides several explanations for the connection between society and crime. One of the most influential approaches is the theory of anomie, associated with Emile Durkheim. According to this view, social norms lose their regulatory power in periods of rapid change, crisis or instability. When individuals no longer receive clear moral guidance, deviant and criminal behaviours may become more frequent. Robert K. Merton later developed strain theory, arguing that crime may emerge when society promotes goals such as success and material welfare but does not provide equal legitimate means to reach them (Merton, 1997).

The theory of social disorganization explains criminality through the weakening of community bonds. In areas affected by poverty, residential instability, migration and poor infrastructure, informal social control is reduced. Neighbours know each other less, local solidarity becomes fragile, and public spaces may remain unsupervised. Under these conditions, criminal opportunities increase and deviant groups can become more influential. This theory is especially useful for analyzing local communities, urban peripheries and rural areas affected by depopulation.

Another relevant explanation is the theory of differential association and social learning. This approach argues that criminal behaviour is learned through interaction with people who approve or practice illegality. The individual learns techniques, motivations, justifications and attitudes that support the violation of norms. The theory is particularly useful in the analysis of juvenile delinquency, because peer groups and the need for belonging can strongly influence young people. If a social environment normalizes theft, violence or fraud, the probability of imitation increases.

Social control theory shifts attention to the bonds that prevent individuals from committing crimes. Family, school, work, community and moral values operate as mechanisms of restraint. When these bonds are weak, the risk of deviant conduct increases. In a complementary way, rational choice theory interprets criminal behaviour as a calculation between potential benefits and potential risks. If the offender perceives the risk of being caught as low and the expected gain as high, the offence becomes more likely. This idea explains the importance of lighting, surveillance, police visibility and rapid institutional response.

3. Problem Statement

The central problem addressed in this paper is the influence of socio-economic conditions on criminality. Although crime is legally defined as an individual act, its frequency and structure are shaped by broader social factors. Poverty can produce material pressure, unemployment can reduce legitimate opportunities, and inequality can generate frustration and resentment. These conditions do not

automatically create criminals, but they can increase vulnerability and weaken conformity to social norms.

A second problem concerns the difference between recorded criminality and real criminality. Official statistics include only offences that are reported, discovered and registered by institutions. Many acts remain hidden because victims do not report them, because they distrust authorities, or because they consider the damage too small. This hidden segment, often called the dark figure of crime, shows that official data must be interpreted carefully. The perception of safety may therefore differ from institutional records.

A third issue is represented by the local character of criminality. The same socio-economic factor may produce different effects depending on the type of community. In urban areas, anonymity, mobility and commercial density may favour opportunistic thefts and cyber-related frauds. In rural areas, isolation, depopulation and limited access to services may influence property offences, domestic violence or underreporting. Consequently, prevention strategies must be adapted to the concrete territorial context.

The research problem can be summarized through three guiding questions. How do poverty, unemployment and inequality influence criminal behaviour? What role do education, institutional trust and community cohesion play in prevention? How does the subjective perception of insecurity affect social life? These questions show that criminality must be treated as a complex phenomenon situated at the intersection of law, economy and social structure.

4. Concept and Terms

Criminality refers to the totality of offences committed in a specific territory and during a specific period of time. It differs from a single crime because it describes a collective phenomenon that can be measured, compared and interpreted statistically. Criminality includes several dimensions: volume, structure, frequency, territorial distribution, seriousness and evolution over time. It also includes both visible offences and hidden offences that remain unreported.

Socio-economic conditions refer to the material and social environment in which individuals live. These conditions include income, employment, education, housing, access to public services, health, family stability and opportunities for social mobility. When these conditions are poor, individuals may experience exclusion and frustration. When they are stable, they support integration and reduce vulnerability to deviance.

Social control can be formal or informal. Formal control is exercised by institutions such as police, courts, prosecutors and public administration. Informal control is exercised by family, school, neighbours, peer groups and community values. A balanced society needs both forms. If formal control is weak, citizens may lose trust in justice. If informal control is weak, everyday conduct may become less regulated by shared norms.

Public safety is both an objective and a subjective concept. Objectively, it refers to the level of risk generated by crime and disorder. Subjectively, it refers to the way people feel in their neighbourhoods, streets, schools, workplaces or online environments. A community with few recorded crimes may still feel unsafe if there is visible neglect, poor communication from authorities or repeated media coverage of violent incidents.

5. Solution Approach

The approach of this paper is analytical and qualitative. It is based on the synthesis of criminological theories and on the main ideas extracted from the thesis concerning the socio-economic impact on criminality. The paper does not treat criminality as an isolated legal category, but as a phenomenon produced by the interaction between individuals, opportunities, institutions and living conditions.

The first step of the approach is theoretical. Theories such as anomie, strain, social disorganization, social learning, social control and rational choice are used to explain why criminality appears more frequently in some contexts than in others. These theories are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they complement each other because each highlights a different side of the phenomenon.

The second step is socio-economic analysis. Factors such as poverty, unemployment, inequality, low education, migration, poor infrastructure and lack of access to services are examined as possible risk factors. The analysis also considers protective factors, such as stable employment, education, community solidarity, institutional trust and public policies oriented toward prevention.

The third step concerns perception. The case study perspective emphasizes that people evaluate safety not only by looking at statistics but also through everyday experiences. A badly lit street, a poorly maintained public space or the absence of police patrols can influence fear of crime. Therefore, prevention must address both actual offences and the social perception of insecurity.

6. Analysis of Results

The analysis confirms that socio-economic vulnerability is closely connected with criminality. Communities affected by unemployment and low income are more exposed to property crimes, especially when individuals lack legitimate means to obtain resources. Theft, fraud or other opportunistic acts may appear as negative adaptations to economic pressure. However, poverty should not be understood as a direct cause in a mechanical sense. Many poor individuals do not commit crimes, which means that economic hardship interacts with other factors such as education, family support, values and control mechanisms.

Education emerges as one of the most important protective factors. A higher level of education improves access to employment, develops civic responsibility and increases the ability to understand legal consequences. Low educational attainment, on the other hand, may limit professional opportunities and increase dependence on unstable income sources. In vulnerable communities, school dropout can become a serious risk factor because it weakens the connection between young people and legitimate social institutions.

Unemployment also influences criminality by reducing social integration. Work offers not only income but also routine, identity, social recognition and discipline. When people lose access to stable employment, they may experience frustration, uncertainty and marginalization. Youth unemployment is particularly important because the transition from school to work is a sensitive stage. If young people do not find stable opportunities, they may become more vulnerable to negative peer influence, informal economies or illegal activities.

Inequality affects crime through relative deprivation. People compare their living conditions with those of others, and visible differences in wealth may create resentment. In communities where luxury and poverty coexist closely, the feeling of exclusion can become intense. This does not justify crime, but it helps explain why social tension may increase. Reducing inequality therefore has not only an economic function but also a preventive role in relation to public safety.

Institutional trust is another key element. When citizens trust the police, courts and local administration, they are more willing to report offences and cooperate with authorities. When trust is low, victims may remain silent, witnesses may avoid involvement, and offenders may perceive impunity. This situation contributes to the dark figure of crime and weakens formal control. Transparency, professionalism and communication are therefore essential for improving public safety.

The physical environment also matters. Poor lighting, abandoned buildings, degraded public spaces and lack of surveillance can create opportunities for crime and increase fear. Situational prevention measures such as public lighting, video surveillance, community policing, safe public transport and maintenance of common spaces can reduce opportunistic offences. These measures do not solve poverty or inequality, but they reduce immediate opportunities and improve citizens' perception of security.

The case study perspective suggests that perception of criminality is shaped by both direct and indirect experiences. A person who has been victimized is more likely to perceive the environment as dangerous. At the same time, people who have not been victims may still feel unsafe because of media reports, rumours or visible disorder. This means that public authorities must communicate clearly and constantly with citizens, presenting realistic information and encouraging participation in prevention.

Overall, the results support an integrated interpretation of criminality. Legal sanctions remain necessary, because society must respond to violations of criminal law. Nevertheless, punishment alone cannot eliminate the social roots of crime. Effective prevention requires education, employment policies, social assistance, family support, urban planning, digital literacy and institutional cooperation. In this sense, criminality reduction is not only a police objective but a broader social policy objective.

7. Conclusions

Criminality is a multifactorial phenomenon influenced by the interaction between individual behaviour and socio-economic context. The analysis shows that poverty, unemployment, inequality, low education and weak institutional trust may increase vulnerability to criminal behaviour and fear of crime. These factors do not determine crime automatically, but they create environments in which deviance can become more probable.

The most important conclusion is that prevention must address the causes of criminality, not only its consequences. A society that invests in education, employment, social inclusion and community development is better prepared to reduce crime in the long term. Public safety depends on the strength of institutions, but also on the quality of everyday life and on the existence of real opportunities for citizens.

Another conclusion is that perception matters. Citizens' fear of crime can affect social participation, trust and community cohesion. Therefore, authorities must respond both to actual criminality and to the factors that create insecurity. Better lighting, visible patrols, accessible reporting mechanisms and transparent communication can improve the feeling of safety.

In conclusion, the socio-economic impact on criminality must be understood through an integrated approach. Criminal law, criminology, sociology, economics and public administration all contribute to the explanation of the phenomenon. Sustainable reduction of criminality requires coherent policies, local adaptation and long-term commitment to social justice and institutional efficiency.

8. Future Work

Future research could develop a larger empirical study based on a representative questionnaire applied in both urban and rural communities. Such research would make it possible to compare the perception of safety across different socio-economic environments and to identify local risk factors more precisely.

Another direction would be the use of official statistical data combined with victimization surveys. This would help reduce the gap between recorded criminality and real criminality. Longitudinal studies would also be useful because they could show how economic crises, migration, inflation or educational changes influence crime over time.

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