

## Chapter 16: Economic marginalization, social exclusion and crime

Taking the proverbs 'The devil makes work for idle hands' and 'Poverty is the mother of crime' the chapter assesses the relationship between economy, poverty and crime. The proverbs are suggestive of the two underlying relationships between economy and crime. The first suggests that gainful employment is important in preventing crime. However, as Hale notes, this ignores the idle rich and so does not provide the whole picture. The second maxim suggests that poverty causes crime so the poor will be more likely to be part of the 'criminal class'. However this is again silent on the crimes committed by the rich and middle classes. A review is therefore undertaken of what other criminologists have to say about the interaction of these factors and goes on to ask "Why might economic conditions affect the level of crime?"

1. *Strain theory* tackles the question of motivation and considers why individuals would want to commit crime in the first place? It argues that people would conform to prevailing norms and laws were it not for stresses and contradictions in their lives. There are two strands to this. Emile Durkheim's concept of *anomie* describes a situation in society where rules are breaking down, or are blurred and confused so that people do not know what to expect of each other. Robert Merton on the other hand states that crime is one possible response to the strains produced by the inequality of opportunity to the achievement of success.
2. *Social disorganisation theory* propounded by the Chicago School focuses on environmental factors and introduces "the zone of transition" within cities, characterised by run-down housing, high residential mobility and high levels of poverty and poor health. Such neighbourhoods are described as socially disorganised and as a consequence are likely to be low in informal methods of social control and high in crime.
3. *Economic theory*: Rational Economic (Wo)man propounds an economic model of crime and posits individuals who choose between crime and legitimate work depending on the opportunities, rewards and costs of each. Individuals in this cost-benefit analysis will choose to work or to commit a crime depending on the chances of getting a job and the wages in the legitimate market compared with opportunities for illegal earnings, the risk of being caught and the probability and severity of punishment if they undertake criminal activity.
4. *Control theory* focuses on individual responsibility. Rather than asking why people do offend it looks at why they constrained not to offend. Individuals and their internalisation of moral rules and codes become a key focus.
5. *Opportunity and routine activity theory* suggests that in order for a crime to occur three things are needed: a motivated offender, a suitable target and a lack of guardianship. Rising unemployment therefore increases the number of motivated offenders and the level of guardianship.

With these theories in mind the chapter goes on to consider whether there is evidence for a relationship between crime and the economy. First correlations between unemployment and crime were the studies of Chiricos (1987) and

Box (1987) which provide the basis for this analysis. Chiricos noted there was a positive correlation but this tended to be most strong in property crime. Other approaches to the relationship between the economy and crime include Field's study that found that consumer expenditure was the best indicator for explaining crime, Hale's study on the effects of the changing labour market and crime and inequality also made an important contribution to the body of work in this area.

The chapter concludes by looking at the emergence in the twentieth century of the underclass and social exclusion and looks at the effects inequalities have on determining whether someone will be a victim of crime.