

Crime as a Social Phenomenon: A Criminological Analysis of Social Factors and Crime Prevention Strategies in Indonesia

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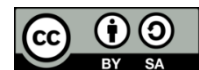
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ABSTRACT

Crime cannot be understood merely as a violation of criminal law norms but also as a social phenomenon that emerges, develops, and transforms alongside changes in society. Changes in social structures, economic inequality, social disorganization, weak social control, peer influence, technological development, and social labeling may contribute to criminal behavior. This article aims to examine crime from a social perspective and analyze social factors contributing to criminal behavior as well as crime prevention strategies in Indonesia. This research employs normative juridical methods using conceptual, statutory, and criminological approaches through library research. The findings indicate that crime is a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be effectively addressed solely through repressive measures. A sociological perspective demonstrates that social environments, unequal opportunities, weak social integration, and ineffective social control mechanisms may create conditions conducive to criminal behavior. Therefore, crime prevention policies should integrate penal and non-penal approaches through strengthening families, education, economic empowerment, community development, public trust in legal institutions, rehabilitation, and social reintegration of offenders. Crime control policies that focus exclusively on punishment risk failing to address the underlying social roots of criminality.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Crime is a social problem that is constantly present in the development of society. No society is completely free from crime. Changes in the structure of society are often accompanied by changes in the forms, methods, perpetrators, victims, and motives of crime [1]. The development of digital technology, urbanization, changing patterns of social relations, economic inequality, and shifting values and norms have given rise to new and increasingly complex forms of crime.

From a criminal law perspective, crime is generally understood as an act prohibited by law and punishable by punishment [2]. This understanding is important for determining the limits of actions that can be criminally accounted for. However, a legal approach alone cannot always explain why individuals commit crimes, why certain crimes develop in certain environments, and why society reacts differently to perpetrators. Criminology views crime as a phenomenon closely related

to the individual and society. Crime is not only related to the perpetrator's actions but also to the social conditions surrounding them. Studies of criminological theories show that the phenomenon of crime can be explained through various perspectives, including environmental factors, socioeconomic conditions, social interactions, social control, and the learning process of criminal behaviour [1], [3].

Thus, questions about crime should not simply focus on "what rules were violated?" but should also be expanded to include "why did the crime occur?", "how does the social environment influence the perpetrator's behavior?", "why are certain communities more vulnerable to crime?", and "how can society prevent crime before it becomes a legal problem?" These issues are becoming increasingly important in the Indonesian context [1]. Crime prevention efforts have often placed law enforcement and criminal justice as the primary instruments. Such an approach is necessary to provide legal certainty and protection to victims. However, if criminal policy focuses solely on punishment, the social roots of crime can potentially be overlooked [4].

Studies on juvenile delinquency, for example, show that family factors, social environment, socio-economic conditions, education, and social environment can be factors related to the emergence of deviant behavior. This phenomenon demonstrates that crime does not arise in a social vacuum. Criminals interact with family, peers, neighborhoods, educational institutions, the job market, the media, and various other social institutions[5], [6].

A social perspective becomes increasingly relevant as society experiences rapid change. Urbanization and social change can create conditions of social disorganization that weaken community ties. On the other hand, technological developments create new social spaces that enable the emergence of cybercrime [7]. Research on cybercrime victims in Indonesia shows that technological developments can give rise to various forms of cybercrime and raise new challenges in victim protection [7], [8].

Based on this background, this study addresses three main questions. First, how can crime be understood as a social phenomenon? Second, what social factors influence the emergence of crime? Third, what crime prevention strategies are oriented towards the social conditions of Indonesian society?

This article is expected to contribute to the development of criminology and criminal law studies by positioning crime not solely as a matter of legal violations, but as a social problem that requires a multidimensional approach.

2. METHODS

This research uses a normative juridical method with a conceptual approach, a statute approach, and a criminological approach. A statutory approach is used to examine the Indonesian criminal law framework as it relates to crime prevention. A conceptual approach is used to analyze the concepts of crime, social control, social disorganization, and criminal policy. Meanwhile, a criminological approach is used to understand crime as a social phenomenon [3], [4].

The research data was obtained through a literature review using primary and secondary legal materials. Primary legal materials include laws and regulations related to criminal law and crime prevention policies. Secondary legal materials consist of books, scientific journal articles, research findings, and relevant criminology literature. The analysis was conducted qualitatively by connecting criminological concepts with the social conditions of Indonesian society. The research was not aimed at calculating specific crime rates, but rather at developing a conceptual analysis of the relationship between crime and social structure [2].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Crime as a Social Phenomenon

Crime is often understood simply as the actions of individuals who violate the law. This understanding is not entirely wrong, but it is limited by ignoring the social context in

which the crime occurs. From a social perspective, crime is a phenomenon that arises in the relationship between individuals and society. This means that criminal behavior is influenced not only by the perpetrator's personal characteristics but also by the social environment that shapes the choices, opportunities, norms, and controls that affect individuals. Crime also changes with changes in society. Advances in civilization and technology, for example, have led to changes in the forms of crime. While previously crimes were mostly committed conventionally, technological advancements have given rise to cybercrime, digital fraud, data theft, and various other forms of technology-based crime [9], [10].

This shows that crime is dynamic. As society changes, the forms of crime and how society responds to crime also change. From Émile Durkheim's perspective, crime is a phenomenon that cannot be completely eliminated from society. Crime is related to the existence of social norms and boundaries. An act is considered deviant because society has norms regarding what is considered acceptable and unacceptable behavior. This perspective provides an important understanding that crime is not simply an individual problem. Society plays a role in determining what is considered deviant, how perpetrators are labeled, and how social reactions to perpetrators are shaped. Thus, the study of crime must pay attention to three main elements: the perpetrator, society, and the normative system [1], [7].

3.2 Social Inequality and Crime

One social factor often associated with crime is socioeconomic inequality. Inequality does not automatically cause someone to become a criminal. However, inequality can create social conditions that increase the risk of crime when combined with limited access to education, employment, social mobility, and economic opportunities. Robert K. Merton, through strain theory, explains that society can put pressure on individuals to achieve certain goals, while not all individuals have the same access to legitimate means to achieve these

goals. Under such conditions, some individuals may experience stress or strain. When highly valued social goals are not balanced by fair opportunities to achieve them through legitimate means, some individuals may seek deviant alternatives [3], [4].

This perspective is relevant to modern society, which often values economic success and social status as measures of achievement. When someone experiences a gap between aspirations and opportunities, social pressure can develop into frustration. However, the relationship between poverty and crime must be understood critically. Not all poor people commit crimes, and not all crimes are committed by poor people. Economic crimes, corruption, money laundering, corporate crimes, and crimes of official standing demonstrate that crime can also be committed by individuals of high social and economic status. Therefore, explaining crime solely through poverty is an inadequate simplification. It is more appropriate to look at how the structure of opportunity, distribution of power, inequality, and weak social control influence the likelihood of crime occurring [8].

3.3 Social Environment and the Formation of Criminal Behavior

The social environment is an important factor in the formation of individual behavior. Edwin H. Sutherland, using his Differential Association theory, explains that criminal behavior can be learned through interactions with others. A person can learn the techniques for committing crimes, motives, rationalizations, and justifications for criminal behavior through their social environment. This theory suggests that criminality is not simply a matter of an individual's biological or psychological tendencies. Criminal behavior can also be the result of social interactions [2], [10].

In the context of everyday life, the social environment has a significant influence on individuals, especially children and adolescents. When someone grows up in an environment that views violence, drug abuse, gambling, or criminal behavior as normal, the

line between deviant behavior and what is considered normal can become increasingly blurred [10]. Studies on juvenile delinquency show a link between criminal behavior and the family and social environment, economic conditions, education levels, and other environmental factors. Therefore, crime prevention strategies cannot simply be directed at individual potential perpetrators. The environment in which individuals grow up must also be considered.

3.4 Social Disorganization and Weak Community Control

Crime can also develop when social control mechanisms in society weaken. Social control is a mechanism that encourages individuals to comply with prevailing norms. This control can come from families, schools, communities, social organizations, religions, and even state institutions. Travis Hirschi's Social Control Theory emphasizes the importance of social bonds in preventing deviance. Individuals with strong ties to family, school, work, and community tend to have stronger social reasons to comply with norms [1], [6].

Conversely, when social ties weaken, prevention mechanisms against deviant behavior may also decline. In urban societies, rapid social change can reduce closeness between members. Social relationships become more individualistic, and communities can experience difficulties in exercising informal oversight. These issues can increase vulnerability to various forms of crime [11]. Therefore, community development should not only be oriented towards physical and economic development, but also social capital development. Trust between citizens, solidarity, concern for the environment, the existence of community organizations, and the community's ability to resolve conflicts peacefully are part of the crime prevention mechanism.

3.5 Labeling and Stigmatization of Criminals

The social perspective on crime can also be analyzed through labeling theory. This theory emphasizes that a person can

experience the process of social labeling as a "criminal" or "deviant." This label can affect a person's identity and social relationships. Problems arise when society places a very strong stigma on someone who has committed a crime. A person who has served a sentence should have the opportunity to reintegrate into society. However, if society continues to label them negatively, former inmates can have difficulty finding employment, building social relationships, and leading a normal life.

Under certain conditions, stigma can actually increase the risk of repeat crime. Thus, the criminal justice system is not sufficient only to impose punishment. It must also create mechanisms for rehabilitation and social reintegration. This rehabilitative approach is in line with developments in criminal law thinking that place recovery and reintegration as an important part of modern criminal policy [7], [9]. Studies on juvenile delinquency also show the importance of a protective and rehabilitation approach in addition to law enforcement.

3.6 Crime, Distrust of the Law, and Vigilance

One social issue that is no less important is the relationship between crime and public trust in law enforcement agencies. When society perceives that the law is unable to provide justice quickly, transparently and fairly, a tendency may arise to resolve problems through informal mechanisms or even take the law into their own hands. Sociologically, vigilantism can be understood as a form of social reaction to crime. However, the problem arises when society takes over the function of law enforcement [9], [11].

This phenomenon is dangerous because it can create a new cycle of violence. Research on vigilante action shows that public distrust of law enforcement officers is one of the sociological factors that can encourage the emergence of such actions. Therefore, crime eradication must also be carried out by building public trust in legal institutions. Transparent, accountable, professional and non-discriminatory law enforcement is part of a crime prevention strategy.

3.7 Crime in the Digital Age

Digital transformation has transformed social relations. Social interactions no longer take place solely in physical spaces, but also in digital ones. These changes bring significant benefits, but they also create new opportunities for crime. Cybercrime is one example of how technological advancements can create new forms of crime. Online fraud, identity theft, illegal access to electronic systems, the dissemination of personal data, and various forms of digital crime demonstrate that the concept of crime must continually adapt to technological developments [1], [2].

Studies on cybercrime in Indonesia show that cybercrime is not only related to the perpetrators, but also to the protection of victims and the state's responsibility in providing legal protection. In this context, a social approach is crucial because the digital space is a space for social interaction. Cybercrime prevention cannot rely solely on criminalization. The public also needs digital literacy, cybersecurity awareness, the ability to recognize fraud, personal data protection, and easily accessible reporting mechanisms.

3.8 Crime Combat Strategy in Social Perspective

Crime prevention can essentially be achieved through penal and non-penal approaches. The penal approach uses criminal law as its primary instrument. This approach encompasses investigation, prosecution, trial, sentencing, and the implementation of the sentence. A penal approach is necessary because the state has an obligation to provide protection to society and victims. However, the penal approach has limitations. If crime is seen as a social phenomenon, then its solution must also take into account the social conditions that cause or facilitate crime. Therefore, the non-penal approach must be strengthened [5].

First, strengthening the family.

The family is an individual's first social environment. Values education,

supervision, communication, and family attention can act as mechanisms of social control.

Second, strengthening education.

Education not only serves to provide academic knowledge, but also builds character, critical thinking skills, legal awareness, and the ability to resolve conflicts without violence.

Third, economic empowerment.

Economic policies that expand access to jobs and economic opportunities can reduce structural pressures that potentially encourage deviant behavior.

Fourth, community development.

Communities with strong solidarity and social networks have a greater capacity to carry out informal crime prevention.

Fifth, increasing trust in law enforcement officers.

Law enforcement must be carried out professionally, transparently and fairly.

Sixth, rehabilitation and reintegration.

Offenders who have served their sentences should be given the opportunity to reintegrate into society. The goal is not to eliminate criminal responsibility, but rather to prevent recurrence of criminal offenses.

Seventh, digital literacy.

Technological developments require people to have the ability to recognize the risks of digital crime.

Thus, the ideal criminal policy is one that combines law enforcement, social prevention, community empowerment, and rehabilitation.

3.9 Critical Analysis

A major problem with crime prevention policy in Indonesia is the tendency to measure the success of law enforcement by the number of perpetrators arrested or convicted. These metrics are important, but insufficient. If the number of perpetrators

convicted increases while the social factors that cause crime remain unchanged, then the success of law enforcement is partial. From a criminological perspective, the success of criminal policy should also be seen from the ability of the state and society to reduce the opportunities for crime to occur, reduce victims, prevent recidivism, and strengthen the social resilience of society. In other words, the success of crime prevention should not only be measured by how many people are punished, but also by how effectively the state prevents people from becoming victims and prevents individuals from committing crimes [6], [8].

This perspective is important because crime has a structural dimension. For example, when a child commits a crime, the questions that must be asked are not only "what punishment is appropriate?", but also "what is the condition of the child's family?", "what is his social environment like?", "how is his access to education?", and "are there any social mechanisms that have failed to protect him?"

This approach does not mean justifying crime. On the contrary, understanding the social roots of crime is necessary so that criminal responsibility can be placed more rationally and preventive policies can be implemented more effectively. The same applies to crimes committed by adults. States must distinguish between individual responsibility and the structural conditions that allow crime to flourish. In this context, criminal law is one instrument, not the only instrument for solving crime problems [10].

3.10 Relevance Of Social Perspective In Indonesian Criminal Law Reform

The reform of Indonesian criminal law shows the increasingly important relationship between criminal law and social conditions in society. Law Number 1 of 2023 concerning the Criminal Code is part of the national criminal law reform. One of the important developments in criminal law reform is attention to the values that exist in society [12].

Contemporary studies on living law in the new Criminal Code show that recognition of local community norms simultaneously presents issues regarding the relationship between state law, legal pluralism, and the autonomy of indigenous communities. This demonstrates that criminal law cannot be completely separated from social reality [11], [12]. Criminal law must possess social legitimacy while still providing legal certainty and protecting human rights.

In the context of Indonesia's pluralistic society, criminal policy must take into account social, cultural, economic and geographical diversity. A uniform approach to all forms of crime and all groups of people does not necessarily result in substantive justice. Therefore, criminal law reform needs to go hand in hand with social policy reform [4].

4. CONCLUSION

Crime is a social phenomenon that cannot be understood solely as a violation of criminal law norms. Crime arises within the context of social relations and is influenced by various factors, such as socioeconomic inequality, social environment, social disorganization, weak social control, technological developments, and the process of labeling perpetrators.

A social perspective demonstrates that criminals do not act in isolation. Criminal behavior is influenced by the environment and opportunity structures within society. Therefore, crime prevention cannot rely solely on punishment.

Indonesia's criminal policy needs to integrate penal and non-penal approaches. This approach can be implemented through family strengthening, education, economic empowerment, community development, increasing trust in legal institutions, offender rehabilitation, social reintegration, and improving digital literacy.

Critically, the success of crime prevention should not be measured solely by the number of perpetrators apprehended and punished. A more substantive measure is the ability of the state and society to prevent

crime, reduce victimization, reduce reoffending, and create a social environment that inhibits the development of criminal behavior.

Thus, criminal law needs to be positioned as part of broader social policy.

Effective crime prevention involves more than just punishing perpetrators, but also building a society capable of preventing crime and providing space for social reintegration.

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