

# SOCIAL DISORGANISATION THEORY

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## Social organisation:

- Behaviour is guided by uniform norms and expectations.
- People depend on each other to survive and achieve their goals.
- People develop social organisation to regulate their own behaviour and that of others.
- There is a reciprocal expectation between people as they become dependent on one another.
- Traditions, customs, rules and regulations are developed to guide people in their actions and activities.

## Social disorganisation:

- Ⓢ The inability of a community structure to realise the common values and maintain effective social control.
- Ⓢ Suggests that macro-social forces interact with community level factors to impede social organisation.
- Ⓢ Poverty, residential mobility and racial heterogeneity cause disorganisation.
- Ⓢ Leads to breakdown of informal social control in families and communities.
- Ⓢ Weakens the capacity of the community to protect itself from crime.

## Chicago School of Sociology:

- Focuses on the environment to establish why crime is more prominent in some areas and not others.
- Focused on urban living.
- Crime and crime rates were viewed as social phenomena and could not be explained in terms of the individual's biology or psychology.
- Crime was linked to social disorganisation.
- The social life of areas was seen as the pathological response to social disorganisation.
- Crime was a normal response to an abnormal situation.
- There needs to be government intervention to improve the social organisation in the city's criminal areas.
- Ernest Bures (1928) argued that as cities expand, the development is patterned socially, as they grow in concentric zones.
- The most expensive residential areas were in the outer zones.
- The outward expansion of the business district led to the constant displacement of residents.

- 🌐 Social disorganisation was therefore presented as the primary explanation of criminal behaviour.

### **Social disorganisation theory:**

- Shaw and McKay (1942) statistically tested the assumption that crime was greater in disorganised areas than elsewhere in the city.
- They focused on one zone, the zone in transition, characterised by low rents and deteriorating buildings near the city centre.
- The rapidly changing population led to social disorganisation.
- The absence of stable standards and a breakdown in community institutions resulted in a failure to effectively socialise or control children.
- Delinquency rates were highest in run-down city zones
- Delinquency rates declined progressively the further one moved out into more prosperous suburbs.
- Delinquency, according to Shaw and McKay, was the product of sociological factors within the transition zone rather than individual pathology or any inherent ethnic characteristics.

### **Impact of the Chicago School:**

- ✦ A group of criminologists became interested in theorising the complex human public interactions and relationships associated with living in the city.
- ✦ 4 Broad research areas were defined by Mclaughlin :
  - Identifying the spatial distribution of crime.
  - How and why the risk of crime victimisation is distributed over space and differential risks within different localities and sections of the population.
  - How and why the fear of crime is spatialised. Analysing public perception of where the crime problem is located.
  - Identifying the flow and movement of specific crimes such as drugs and prostitution between different localities and countries.

### **Evaluation:**

- Chicago School's reliance on crime statistics to provide information on the distribution of crime, resulted in a concentrated focus on lower social classes and ignored criminal activity in higher social classes.
- Study of rural crime was neglected.
- Assumptions were made regarding the problem, which included the assertion that stronger social bonds exist in rural areas.
- The school assumes that growth of cities is a natural process, and ignores the role of power and domination.
- The school did have a significant influence on the development of sociological explanations of crime and criminal behaviour.

- ▶ Williams indicates the broad signs of disintegration as being:
  - ✚ A move towards rented and multiple occupancy.
  - ✚ Increase in number of households, creating communities of individuals who are unrelated and unknown to each other.
  - ✚ Increase in turnover of residents
  - ✚ Increase in number of empty properties
  - ✚ More unskilled or unemployed occupants.
- ▶ These broad signs have been linked with visual signs of disorder: broken windows, graffiti, litter, drug and prostitution.

## Conclusion:

- Shaw and McCay confirmed the hypothesis that delinquency flourished in the transition zone and was inversely related to the zone's affluence and corresponding distance from the central business district.
- They were also able to show that as groups moved to other zones, their crime rates decreased commensurately. The conclusion: that the nature of the neighbourhood, not the nature of the individual regulated involvement in crime.
- They emphasises the importance of neighbourhood organisation in preventing juvenile delinquency.
- In transition zones, the youth lacked supervision and institutions of structure such as schools, churches, associations etc.
- They collected data showing that crime was distributed across neighbourhoods in a pattern consistent with social disorganisation theory.
- The Chicago school established a tradition of research into the spatial distribution of offenders.