

# An Exploration of Social Learning Theory in Understanding the Shifting Dynamics of Juvenile Crime and the Legal Approaches to Address These Changes

**\*Khushbu Sharma**

\*Ph.D. Research Scholar at School of Law, UPES, Dehradun, India.  
@khushbusharma0395@gmail.com

**\*\*Dr. Kanchal Gupta**

\*\*Associate Professor at School of Law, UPES, Dehradun, India.

## *Abstract*

Social learning theory has been used to a wide range of criminals and their crimes. This article examines how Social Learning Theory is applied to the dynamic nature of juvenile delinquency. Modern civilization is distinguished by rapid technological advancement, changing social dynamics, and new forms of delinquency, making it necessary to analyze and alter standard criminological theories. The Social Learning Theory, created by Albert Bandura, emphasizes observational learning, modeling, and reinforcement in human behavior. This study analyzes how Social Learning Theory can explain and address juvenile delinquency. The literature study discusses juvenile delinquency's changing traits, including cyberbullying, online harassment, gang affiliation, substance abuse, and other trends. This article investigates Social Learning Theory's adaptability to juvenile offenses. Reexamining the theory helps determine its significance in this domain. Young people develop delinquent behaviors due to peer, media, parental, and educational influences. Case studies highlight specific juvenile delinquent scenarios and explain how the theoretical framework might be utilized to understand their dynamics. The discussion portion of this study critically evaluates the data, highlights the theory's merits, and addresses any practical challenges. The paper emphasizes the importance of implementing modified Social Learning Theory into juvenile delinquent prevention and intervention. The current study adds to criminological theory research. It also provides insights that can improve methods to address complicated issues originating from changing juvenile crime patterns.

**Keywords:** Juvenile Delinquents, Juvenile Crimes, Social Learning Theory, Criminological Theory.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the constantly changing world of juvenile delinquency, which is marked by fast technological progress, it is crucial to conduct a thorough analysis to understand the complex dynamics of modern juvenile offenses. Social learning theory is presently one of the most extensively examined and referred criminological theories in the discipline. Research on this subject has been carried out on many groups, encompassing a wide range of behaviors, from relatively minor deviant acts to serious criminal offenses. Nevertheless, the domain of significant juvenile misbehavior remains largely unexplored in terms of testing the social learning theory. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the presence of delinquent association is often the primary and most influential factor in several criminological models. These observations have raised doubts about the universality of social learning theory. This paper explores the complex realm of juvenile delinquency through the lens of Social Learning Theory, a fundamental idea formulated by the renowned psychologist Albert Bandura. (Bandura, 1969). There have been considerable shifts in the character of juvenile delinquency over the course of the last several decades. Previously, the majority of juvenile delinquency was associated with traditional forms of misconduct. The proliferation of digital technology, changes in family structures, and the rise of new communication platforms have all contributed to the creation of new forms of delinquency. These new forms of delinquency include cyberbullying, online harassment, and substance abuse that are made possible by online platforms. For the purpose of gaining an understanding of these contemporary signs, it is required to conduct an in-depth examination that aligns with the dynamic nature of the society of today. (Cernkovich & Giordano, 2001).

This study is centered around Social Learning Theory, which is an important paradigm that was established by Albert Bandura throughout the middle of the 20th century. The role of observational learning, modeling, and reinforcement in the process of shaping human behavior is emphasized by this theory. In order to provide significant insights that can influence

the creation of more effective preventative and intervention approaches, the purpose of this research is to deliver such insightful findings. During the process of adapting the theoretical framework to suit the changing nature of juvenile criminality, the purpose of this paper is to improve comprehension of the increasing patterns in juvenile delinquency. Understanding how young juveniles learn and continue to engage in delinquent actions by observing and copying others in their social setting is a beneficial viewpoint that may be gained via the application of the Social Learning Theory. (Bandura, 1977).

## **2. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY:**

Albert Bandura, a Canadian psychologist, developed the Social Learning Theory during the mid-20th century. This theory is considered a significant framework in the fields of psychology and criminology. Bandura's research diverged greatly from conventional behaviorist viewpoints by placing emphasis on cognitive processes and the significance of observation in the learning process. This section provides a concise historical overview, charting the development of Social Learning Theory and emphasizing its fundamental assumptions. (Bandura, 1969).

2.1. Early Influences: Albert Bandura, born in 1925, derived inspiration from behaviorist theories but aimed to broaden the comprehension of human learning beyond the limitations of stimulus-response mechanisms. Behaviorists like B.F. Skinner and John B. Watson established the foundation for Bandura's investigation of observational learning. (Zhou, 2015).

2.2 Development of Social Learning Theory: During the 1960s, Bandura's research led to the creation of Social Learning Theory. The theory postulated that humans acquire knowledge not only through firsthand experiences (classical and operant conditioning) but also by observing others and replicating their behaviors. Bandura proposed the notion of modeling, positing that individuals acquire knowledge by seeing the outcomes of others' behaviors. (Maisto, 1999).

2.3 Key Principles: The historical narrative explores the fundamental ideas that characterize Social Learning Theory. Observational learning, in which individuals acquire new behaviors by observing others, emerged as a fundamental principle. Modeling, the act of imitating observed behaviors, and reinforcement, which enhances the probability of behavior recurrence, were crucial elements. Bandura's triadic reciprocal causation model emphasized the dynamic interaction among personal, environmental, and behavioral elements. (Cross, 2009).

2.4 Application to Juvenile Delinquency: The historical overview concludes by emphasizing the earliest utilization of Social Learning Theory in comprehending juvenile criminality. Bandura's theory posited an advanced viewpoint, stating that delinquent behaviors can be acquired by being exposed to deviant role models, whether within the family, peer groups, or media. (Tremblay, 1995).

## **3. ADAPTING SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY TO CHANGING DYNAMICS:**

When it comes to tackling the ever-changing dynamics of juvenile delinquency, the Social Learning Theory has distinguished itself as an exceptionally flexible framework. Patterns of criminal behavior among minors are subject to alter as a result of the progression of both societal institutions and technological advancements. The purpose of this section is to investigate whether Social Learning Theory is capable of embracing and explaining contemporary forms of delinquency, such as cyberbullying, online harassment, gang affiliation, and substance abuse.

3.1 Cyberbullying: Cyberbullying is a prevalent form of current wrongdoing that revolves around the use of internet communication in order to intimidate, harass, or impose dominance over other individuals. The Social Learning Theory can be applied to this situation by recognizing the observational learning that occurs through online interactions. This is the scenario in which the theory is particularly applicable. Through the process of observing and imitating the cyberbullying tactics of others in online spaces, individuals have the potential to adopt hostile behaviors. (Bandura, 2001).

3.2 Online Harassment: Online harassment, which includes a wide variety of types of digital intimidation, stalking, or defamation, is an extra dimension of modern-day criminal behavior. When it comes to understanding how the observation of aggressive actions online, whether they are performed by peers or online role models, leads to the absorption of such behaviors among young individuals, the Social Learning Theory continues to be applicable. (Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski, & Eron, 2003).

3.3 Gang Membership: The composition of what it means to be a member of a gang has shifted over time as societal structures have developed. The Social Learning Theory continues to be relevant because it places a strong focus on the significance of observational learning in the process of the spread of values, standards, and behaviors within the context of gang participation. The main assumptions of the theory are strengthened as a result of the fact that adolescents have the potential to absorb and copy illegal acts from members of gangs. (Akers & Jensen, 2006).

3.4 Substance Abuse: An excellent application of the Social Learning Theory has been made in order to shed light on the involvement of young people in substance addiction. The theory proposes that people learn behaviors connected to substances by seeing and imitating important people. This is the mechanism by which individuals acquire these behaviors. These effects might come from friends, family members, or portrayals in the media; all of these factors contribute to the persistence of substance abuse tendencies among adolescents and young adults. (Bandura, 1977).

#### **4. APPLICATION OF SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY IN SPECIFIC SCENARIOS:**

Through the application of the Social Learning Theory, which has implications for real-world situations, it is possible to gain an understanding of particular instances of juvenile delinquency. The theory is shown to be effective in elucidating the multidimensional nature of delinquent behavior, which is influenced by a variety of factors including peer connections, exposure to the media, the influence of parents, and educational situations. This is illustrated in this section of the article. Through the use of in-depth case studies, this objective can be successfully accomplished.

4.1 Peer Relationships: After forming a tightly knit group of peers, a group of adolescents engages in a variety of illegal activities, including shoplifting, graffiti, and theft, among other illegal activities. According to the Social Learning Theory, these individuals learn and copy these behaviors from their peers. This is because the reward from the group enhances the likelihood that they will engage in such activities. (Dollard & Miller, 2013).

4.2 Media Exposure: Imitating characters from violent video games and movies, a teenager exhibits belligerent behavior and a tendency toward hostility. This is a result of their exposure to the media. Those who are exposed to aggressive models in the media are more likely to acquire and strengthen aggressive tendencies, according to the Social Learning Theory, which proposes that this association occurs. (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963).

4.3 Impact of Parental Influence: The impact of parental influence is demonstrated by the fact that instances of juvenile delinquency are documented in families where parents have permissive attitudes toward activities that are considered to be deviant. From the perspective of the Social Learning Theory, children have the capacity to learn and imitate behaviors by witnessing and being influenced by the actions of their parents, who serve as powerful models and sources of reinforcement. (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994).

4.4 Educational Environments: Students at school find themselves resorting to cheating and academic dishonesty after seeing their classmates achieve academic success via the use of these strategies. In accordance with the Social Learning Theory, these behaviors are learned and maintained through the process of witnessing successful models in the context of the educational environment. (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996).

#### **5. EVALUATING INTERVENTION STRATEGIES BASED ON SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY:**

Within any society, individuals vary in the degree to which they engage with others. This phenomenon is commonly known as differential association. This aspect of social learning theory garners the greatest amount of support. According to numerous previous studies, the primary factor that predicts the start, continuation, or end of criminal behavior, apart from existing deviance, is the association with delinquent or criminal peers. (Huizinga, 1991). Differential reinforcement refers to the equilibrium between anticipated or actual penalties and rewards that result from specific behaviors. If an activity receives more frequent reinforcement and less punishment compared to an alternative action, it is probable that an individual will persist in engaging in the behavior. This is crucial for explaining criminality since it applies to every specific incidence where there are conditions that either abide or violate the law. This section provides a thorough assessment of the results and efficacy of therapies based on Social Learning Theory in addressing juvenile delinquency. By examining real-world examples and case studies, this study aims to offer valuable insights into the significance of the theory when developing strategies for prevention and intervention.

5.1. Study on the Effects of Group Counseling and Peer Mentorship: A group counseling program is being introduced for juveniles who exhibit aggressive habits. The intervention integrates components of Social Learning Theory, placing emphasis on positive role modeling and reinforcement to encourage prosocial behaviors. The evaluation demonstrates a notable decrease in hostile events among the participants, indicating the efficacy of peer mentorship as a means of modifying behavior. (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992).

5.2 Media Literacy Programs: A media literacy program is specifically developed to reduce the influence of violent media exposure on youthful aggression. The intervention is guided by the principles of Social Learning Theory, which aims to improve the critical media consuming abilities of adolescents. The evaluation demonstrates a decline in aggressive behaviors, suggesting that media literacy programs have the potential to be effective in accordance with the concepts of Social Learning Theory. (Huesmann & Taylor, 2006).

5.3 Study on Parenting Skills Training: An intervention entails delivering parenting skills instruction to families of juveniles who are at a higher risk of engaging in delinquent behaviors. The program utilizes Social Learning Theory by highlighting the significance of parents as models and reinforcers of prosocial behaviors. The evaluation findings indicate enhancements in parent-child interactions and a decrease in delinquent behaviors, highlighting the relevance of Social Learning Theory in parenting treatments. (Forgatch & DeGarmo, 1999).

5.4 School-Based Programs: A school-based program incorporates the ideas of Social Learning Theory to tackle bullying tendencies among children. The intervention includes promoting positive peer modeling and reinforcing prosocial actions. An assessment indicates a decrease in occurrences of bullying, indicating that school-based programs based on Social Learning Theory can help establish a favorable social atmosphere. (Olweus, 1993).

## **6. LEGAL RESPONSES TO CHANGING TRENDS ON JUVENILE CRIMES:**

6.1 International Perspective: India, as a party to many international treaties, has pledged to defend the rights and welfare of children, especially those involved in criminal activities. In 1992, India ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which means that it agrees to follow the rules outlined in the convention. One of these rules, as stated in Article 37, is that arrest, custody, or incarceration should only be used as a last option and for the shortest necessary amount of time. The country emphasizes the significance of diversion, non-institutional methods, and protecting the child's best interests in the administration of juvenile justice, following the guidelines set by the Beijing Rules. Moreover, India adheres to the United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (Riyadh Guidelines) and the United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty. These guidelines emphasize the importance of prevention, community engagement, and safeguarding the rights of juveniles in detention. India's commitment to safeguarding children from horrors such as child participation in armed conflict and the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography is evident as it is a party to the Optional Protocols on these matters. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Convention on Regional Arrangements for the Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia is a testament to India's commitment to advancing child welfare in the region. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 in India is influenced by an international framework. This framework focuses on rehabilitation, personalized care, and safeguarding the rights of juveniles. India is committed to fulfilling its obligations under various international conventions such as UNCRC, Beijing Rules, Riyadh Guidelines, UN Rules, Optional Protocols, and SAARC Convention, which are related to juvenile justice and child welfare. (Government of India, 2015).

6.2 Indian Perspective: The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, has significant measures aimed at promoting the well-being and responsibility of juveniles in India. The Act establishes a distinction between juveniles below the age of 18 and provides a new category called "child in conflict with law" for those aged 16 to 18 who are engaged in heinous crimes. The Act requires the establishment of Juvenile Justice Boards in every district, with a focus on rehabilitating and reintegrating young offenders via personalized care plans, education, and skill development initiatives. The establishment of observation homes and special homes within an institutional framework is aimed at providing care and protection for children in need. Child Welfare Committees play a crucial role in selecting the appropriate actions for these children. The Act simplifies adoption procedures, acknowledges foster care, and forbids the use of capital punishment for minors, in accordance with global human rights norms. These modifications embody a comprehensive strategy that

considers both the well-being of children and the need for responsibility, while also conforming to the changing global norms in juvenile justice.

## **7. CHALLENGES AND CRITIQUES:**

This section provides a critical analysis of the limitations and criticisms associated with the application of Social Learning Theory to juvenile delinquency. It also presents a balanced perspective on the practical implications of the theory, taking into account probable problems.

7.1. Excessive focus on environmental factors: Some scientists contend that Social Learning Theory may place excessive emphasis on environmental elements, while overlooking the importance of innate individual attributes. Critics argue that the theory's emphasis on external variables may underestimate the impact of individual qualities and genetic predispositions on the development of delinquent behaviors. (Bandura, 1986).

7.2. Insufficient regard for cultural differences: The applicability of Social Learning Theory in varied cultural situations is being questioned. Critics contend that the theory's focus on observational learning may not sufficiently explain the diversity in cultural norms, values, and socialization processes. This constraint may impede its efficacy in elucidating and tackling juvenile misbehavior in culturally heterogeneous groups. (Ronaldi, 2004).

7.3 Cognitive Processes with Limited Attention: The theory has been criticized for its inadequate consideration of cognitive processes, including as the cognitive patterns and decision-making mechanisms that impact behavior. Akers and Jensen (2006) contend that a narrow emphasis on visible actions may fail to consider the fundamental cognitive mechanisms that lead to delinquency, hence constraining the theory's capacity to explain the phenomenon.

7.4 Challenges in Measuring Observational Learning: The process of quantifying observational learning presents methodological difficulties. Assessing observational learning can be challenging because it is typically deduced from behavioral results, which makes it hard to accurately quantify the degree to which individuals have acquired behaviors through observation. This difficulty prompts inquiries on the dependability of study findings derived from self-report and observational data. (Huesmann, 1997).

7.5 Disregarding Biological Factors: Critics contend that Social Learning Theory may underestimate the significance of biological elements in the occurrence of criminality. The idea often neglects the significance of biological predispositions, such as variations in neurology or genetic factors, in its emphasis on social learning. This constraint prompts queries regarding the thorough comprehension of juvenile misbehavior and the interaction between inherent traits and environmental influences. (Farrington, 2018).

7.6 Lack of Attention to Individual Agency: Several experts argue that Social Learning Theory tends to underestimate individual agency and the ability to self-regulate. The theory may not adequately recognize the active decision-making and self-control processes that individuals possess in selecting whether to engage in delinquent acts, as it primarily attributes behaviors to external influences and modeling. (Wright & Beaver, 2005).

7.7 Temporal Constraints: Critics argue that Social Learning Theory may not sufficiently address the time dimensions of delinquent development. The theory's emphasis on immediate and obvious influences may disregard the long-term consequences of social learning or the cumulative effects of experiences over a period of time. This constraint poses a barrier to the theory's ability to comprehend and explain the continuation or cessation of delinquent activity. (Dodge, Dishion, & Lansford, 2007).

7.8 Gender Sensitivity: The Social Learning Theory has faced criticism due to its inadequate consideration of gender differences. Critics contend that the theory's focus on male-centric research may not comprehensively reflect the particulars of female criminality. This raises questions about the theory's ability to be applied to all genders and emphasizes the importance of conducting research that includes all genders when studying the applicability of Social Learning Theory to juvenile delinquency. (Warr, 2002).

7.9 Legal Critiques: Chapter IX of the JJ Act 2015 deals with various crimes committed against children, including acts of cruelty, trafficking, child labor for begging, providing drugs, and exploitation of juvenile workers. The chapter was

amended in 2015 to include other crimes, such as the trafficking and acquisition of minors, as well as the exploitation of children by militant organizations or people. Notably, these amendments reclassified certain previously cognizable offenses as non-cognizable, including cruelty by Child Care Institution staff, employing children for begging, administering intoxicants, using children for vending substances, exploiting child employees, and the sale and procurement of children. This categorization imposes limitations on the police, preventing them from making arrests without a warrant and conducting investigations without court authorization. As a result, there is a possibility of creating delays that might give those accused an opportunity to tamper with evidence and exert influence over witnesses in each specific case.

#### **8. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION:**

The practical implications derived from interventions based on Social Learning Theory emphasize its capacity to guide specific techniques for avoiding and resolving juvenile delinquency. The efficacy of interventions such as group therapy, media literacy campaigns, parenting skills training, and school-based interventions exemplifies the relevance of Social Learning Theory in various contexts. Policymakers and practitioners can utilize these findings to develop interventions that are grounded in data and align with the social learning mechanisms that impact juvenile behavior. (Graeff, 2002). Although this research enhances our present comprehension of how Social Learning Theory might be applied to juvenile delinquency, there are still areas that can be further investigated in the future. Subsequent investigations may focus on enhancing and broadening the theory to incorporate complex elements like as cultural disparities, personal autonomy, and the interaction of biological determinants. Longitudinal research investigating the continuity or discontinuity of criminal behavior across time could offer useful insights into the temporal aspects of the applicability of Social Learning Theory. (Esbensen, 1994).

#### **9. CONCLUSION**

The intervention strategies that are associated with the behavioral aspects of social learning theory have the objective of reducing the positive rewards that are associated with criminal activity and establishing new incentives for pro-social behavior. Young people are required to voluntarily abandon delinquent behavior and adopt new patterns of positive behavior, which will result in a variety of different sorts of incentives, experiences, and connections, in accordance with the behavioral technique. In the context of interactional learning models, the lowering of a young person's exposure to peers who engage in criminal behavior would be given priority. An interactionist approach would place an emphasis on group education and make certain that young people are presented with constructive ways of satisfying their desires, rather than engaging in activities that are outside the law. Both behaviorists and interactionists believe that "learning by doing" is the mechanism that leads to delinquency, but they also believe that it is the mechanism that has the potential to lead to the cessation of delinquency. Recognizing the influence of observational learning, modeling, and reinforcement can provide practitioners and policymakers with valuable insights into the elements that contribute to delinquent behaviors among young people. These insights can be used to improve intervention strategies. As a result of the incorporation of Social Learning Theory into preventative and intervention programs, which is congruent with evidence-based methods, the effectiveness of efforts to reduce juvenile delinquency is improved. The purpose of this study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of Social Learning Theory and its applicability to the dynamic phenomenon of juvenile delinquency. The findings taken together shed insight on the practical implications of the theory in terms of its ability to influence effective preventative and intervention strategies. By incorporating Social Learning Theory into the range of resources accessible to criminologists, policymakers, and practitioners, there is the possibility of promoting constructive modifications in the behavior of young individuals, ultimately leading to the creation of safer and more resilient communities.

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