Integrated Theory and Crimes of Trust


Peers and Crimes of Trust

Researchers wanted to explore the applicability of theories of crime on “white collar” crime, also known as crimes of trust. Crimes of trust include offenses of fraud (e.g. tax, credit card, check, insurance), workplace theft, embezzlement, and selling falsely valued goods. They are referred to crimes of trust because they rely on contact and rapport as a means of facilitating a criminal act.

The National Youth Survey Family Survey was composed of 12 waves of surveys over a 27 year period. Survey participants were taken from the general US population. The present study utilized data from waves 11 and 12. Original respondents (OR) as well as their adult offspring (AO) were surveyed. They formed two groups aged 38-46 (OR) as well as 18-24 (AO). The survey asked the groups about factors contributing to generalized crime as well as the frequency and prevalence of crimes of trust.

The results of the study found the most significant predictor of crimes of trust is criminality of one’s peers. For OR both prevalence and frequency of crimes of trust were significantly correlated with criminal peers. For AO, only prevalence of crimes of trust was correlated with criminality of one’s peers. For ORs, time spent with family and on work had a significant reduction in the prevalence of crimes of trust. The study notes that the amount of the reduction will differ depending on offense type, as some types of crimes of trust rely on employment. This may also explain why only ORs had a significant reduction in prevalence of crimes of trust. In the OR group, beliefs (anti-social attitude) had the strongest influence on peer criminality. Lastly, no sociodemographic (e.g. age, ethnicity, race) variable was directly correlated with the commission of crimes of trust.

Practical Applications

✓ Ensure your assessments are accurate. While economic crime probationers may seem like a different probationer, focus on the Big Four criminogenic needs (e.g. anti-social behaviors, anti-social personality pattern, anti-social peers, anti-social attitudes) is critical.
✓ Rely on assessments to determine risk. While individuals who commit embezzlement and check fraud look differently, assessments are the best way to accurately predict risk.
✓ Review assessments on economic crime probationers, with particular interest in their peer network composition.
✓ Consider having Economic Crime probationers complete social network maps. When both probation officers and probationers have a clear picture of the peer network composition a richer conversation about peer influences may result.
✓ Actively engage economic crime probationers in recreational activities, interests, and family supports being cautious of potential opportunities for victimization of persons or the community.

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