

Testing of Social Disorganization Theory

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Abstract

Social disorganization means the loss of social control, or the creation of a legal vacuum, where comes to a state of organizational chaos, the imbalance of social order and disregard for social norms, where the efficiency of institutions is paralyzed or lost, and consequently social disorganization prevails. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the point of views of some authors in the field of sociology and criminology who argue the connections of the social disorganization theory with new theories on one hand, and on the other hand give critiques of this theory. A specific purpose is to compare the findings in the research of these authors to explain the various factors that influence the occurrence of social disorganization. Due to the complexity of the research, several methods are used in this paper such as the method of analysis and synthesis, the methods of induction and deduction, and considering the analysis of the social disorganization theory, also the comparative method is used in this paper. These methods will be used to support each other in overcoming the problem during testing the social disorganization theory. This paper will serve as an aid to sociologists, criminologists, professionals in the field, and those interested in learning more about the social disorganization theory.

Keywords: Disorganization theory, criminality, social problems, social control, informal control

1. Introduction

Social disorganization has to do with cracks in the unity of intentions and it brings an unbalanced state of society. In this case it is a matter of disorientations in cases of changing living conditions and the emergence of unsuitableness in the new conditions, so the life circle takes pathological configuration from groups which are unable to accept the new conditions.

The social disorganization theory is an extremely old theory, and we can follow its history all the way back to the 1800s. This theory began to be famous when Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay did their research in 1929 and continued their research further in 1942. They expanded on the ideas of human ecology to study the relations between urban ecological characteristics and juvenile delinquency. They explained to measure social disorganization with three variables: a. Physical condition, b. Economic situation, and c. State of the population (Shaw and McKay, 1942). Their research work is conducted in Chicago and lasted more than 10 years and has been published and republished many times.

The social disorganization theory is also a very spread theory in the United States, that deals with explaining the causes of criminality. According to this theory, criminality is an expression of a disorganization that reigns in society. As a disorganization, is treated in the social environment where the normal and harmonious functioning of all segments of political, economic, social, family life, etc. are not present. In the conditions of such a social disorganization, an unstable social atmosphere is created, which is also reflected in the behaviors and attitudes of individuals. Often, certain persons can be adapted and get involved in disordered social processes, therefore they remain on the margins of life and in this way, they often engage in anti-social and criminal activities. (Halili, 2000:27)

Numerous analyzes of the social disorganization theory have appeared in the sociological and criminological literature, especially since the revitalization of the theory in the 80s of the 20th centuries. It can be concluded that considerable attention has been dedicated to the social disorganization theory, through a considerable number of research, through which the theory is re-analyzed again, on one hand the

connections of the theory of social disorganization with new theories are argued, while on the other hand are given criticisms of this theory. Taking into consideration of these analyzes, this paper will present some of the research, the research focus of which aims to test the social disorganization theory.

1.1. Research methodology

To test and analyze the social disorganization theory, in this paper is used the method of analysis and synthesis. Those methods will have a special use in researching the theoretical views of different authors who have studied and researched different variables affecting the appearance or non-appearance of social disorganization. Using these methods, social disorganization theory has been tested over the years and by different researchers from different countries and continents. In similar circumstances, induction and deduction methods will also be used. Taking into consideration that a genuine analysis of the social disorganization theory is a complex category that can be analyzed in several aspects, each of which shows their own complexity, in this paper also will be used the comparative method.

2. Literature review

In a previous study, William Thomas, and Florian Znaniecki, in 1918 and 1920, wrote a total of five volumes on the social organization and disorganization of rural families in Poland - in the background of Polish immigration in the United States. Their innovative approach is different from other disciplines and has had an empirical impact on almost every main sociological school in the United States regarding social disorganization. Park and Burgess, in their research on social disorganization, withdraw characteristics of areas to explain high crime levels and to develop the "known theory of concentric circles."

Ruth Shona Cavano (1928) published the book "Suicide", a research of personal disorganization in which she confirmed that the mortality rate was relatively stable, regardless of economic and social conditions. The research results by Clifford R. Shaw and Henry D. McKay (1942) showed that crime levels are distributed differently in the city and are higher in areas where the lower social class lives than in the social middle classes. Shaw and McKay analyzed the social disorganization in endemic

conditions of urban areas, which were the only places where the newly arrived poor could afford their living, they analyzed a high rate of population mobility (residential instability) and mix of the people with different cultural backgrounds (ethnic diversity). The analysis of Shaw and McKay regarding to the rate delinquency to these structural characteristics created key facts about the community of crime and delinquency. Today, their work remains useful as a guide for efforts to address crime and delinquency at the community level.

Cohen (1959) presented his findings in "The Study of Social Disorganization and Deviant Behavior." Cohen does not speak directly about the division of society into rival groups but looks at society as a mosaic of different activities. The concept of social disorganization (social disorganization as an undesirable social condition) was introduced by Elliot Mabel and Francis Merrill (1934). According to them, the state of social disorganization arises as a random and unintentional consequence of wider social processes, regardless of whether these processes are otherwise constructive (e.g., industrialization) or destructive (e.g., war) because those result in a gap between traditional values and individual attitudes. Robert Faris (1955) extended the concept of social disorganization to explain social pathology and social problems, including crimes, suicide, mental illness and mass violence. He defines social disorganization as weakening or destroying of relationships that held social organizations together.

Social disorganization is defined as an inability of community members to achieve common values or to solve common problems. In recent decades, the topics of social disorganization theory has been articulated and expanded more clearly by scholars Kornhauser (1978); Bursik and Grasmick (1993); Sampson and Groves (1989).

Researches by Beverly Kingston, David Huizing, and Delbert S. Elliott (2009) attempts to explain and empirically test the relations between social structure, social processes, delinquent structures, and adequate adolescent delinquency levels between unfavorable environments and neighborhoods.

Regarding to the theory of social disorganization in Kosovo and Albania, it has been written very few. Maloku (2015) in his paper "Fear of Violence and Crime in the Region of Gjilan, Kosovo", shows that in neighborhoods where there are low levels of interaction and trust, the greatest criminality is likely to occur in those neighborhoods, and at the same time these neighborhoods tend to have higher levels of fear of criminality. In countries with great political and economic instability and

with extreme poverty, many people leave their countries to provide better living conditions. (Maloku&Maloku, 2020:22)

The author Ragip Halili (2011) in his book "Criminology" dedicates space in general in this regard. Maloku (2020) among other things discusses the behavior of juvenile delinquents in the group, where in a state of social disorganization is the only stable social group for them.

From the brief summary of some of the existing researches, it is seen that scientific researches by sociologists and criminologists regarding to the theory of social disorganization are scarce. Hopefully in the future there will have more scientific researches regarding the testing of social disorganization theory.

3. Results and Discussion

a. Research of Roncek (1981)

Roncek (1981) was worried about the differential spatial distribution of crime within cities. To verify this hypothesis, in his research *Dangerous places: crime and residential environment*, researched crime models in 1970 in two cities in Cleveland and San Diego using city housing complexes as a unit of measurement of analysis. He analyzed the relations between the social characteristics of residential centers and the physical characteristics of the cities of Cleveland and San Diego. Roncek (1981) in his research, found that in cities with large residential buildings, living is more dangerous. This risk appears because in these residential complexes there are higher concentrations of: a) Primary individuals (family with one person); b) African Americans; c) Residential buildings; and d) Large concentration of population in an area. (Roncek, 1981)

Roncek (1981) believes that in these areas, levels of social interaction and social control are lower. Roncek also believes that residents in these areas have more difficulties to identify "foreigners" who can potentially commit various criminal offenses. He also concluded that the social and environmental characteristics of residential complexes combined to influence the possibility of victimization. Overall, Roncek (1981s) Research in Cleveland and San Diego provides important support for the traditional theory of social disorganization. Despite this, the research provides evidence that the theory can be applied to smaller units of analysis, such as city residential complexes, rather than larger community areas within a city.

b. Research of Sampson and Groves (1982), and (1984)

Using data from British research for Criminality in 1982, Sampson and Groves offered a compelling evidence for the theory of social disorganization. Although macro-level theory was during a revival, when the *Research on Community Structure and Crime* emerged, not a single research made more fuss to improve the image of Social Disorganization theory that had been left over the years aside and unresearched than the research of Sampson and Groves of 1982 and 1984.

Shaw and McKay's theory on the impact of community social disorganization had not been directly tested before. To address this flaw Sampson and Groves (1989) analyzed a community-level theory that is built on the original model of Shaw and McKay (1942). Sampson and Groves (1989) extended and tested the theory of Shaw and McKay (1942) on the impact of social disorganization in the community. Their model included the main disorganization variables such as: socio-economic status; residential stability; ethnic heterogeneity and family disruption, which further affect the increase in criminality and delinquency rate. Sampson and Groves (1989) in their research have assumed that: informal networks of local friendships; formal participation of residents in local voluntary organizations; committees (governing bodies composed of people appointed to organize the work, the activity of the community); clubs and other activities are genuine indicators of the social organization of a community. In order to verify the level of social disorganization in the community, they observed residents living in 238 of the 552 community areas that were officially designated as parliamentary constituencies in England and Wales in 1982. In each of these areas of the Sampson community and Groves chose 60 addresses. With a response rate of 80%, their final sample consisted of 10,905 inhabitants. To measure the extent of local friendship networks, they asked respondents in one of the variables to indicate the number of friends they had encountered during a 15-minute walk from their home. Two years later Sampson and Groves (1984) tested again the same model with an independent national sample of 11,030 inhabitants from 300 British areas. The results of both studies support this theory, showing that the communities that are characterized: with few networks of friends; unsupervised adolescent groups; and low participation in community organizations, have high disproportional rate of criminality and delinquency.

The research results of Sampson and Groves (1989) provide support to explain victimization norms within social disorganization. In essence, their findings support key elements of systematic theory and social disorganization, so that local friendship/community networks and resident participation mediate the effects of social disorganization, resulting in lower victimization rate, while the presence of independent oversight groups has a very strong impact on victimization rate. By integrating systematic theory into their social disorganization theory, Sampson, and Groves (1989) changed the nature of the theory itself, prompting the addition of new dimensions to later scientific research.

c. Research of Sampson (1985)

Sampson (1985) in his research, *The Structural Determinants of Personal Victimization*, examines the effects of neighborhood characteristics on a rate of personal criminal victimization (*rape, robbery, assault, and theft*). The data used by the author Sampson (1985) in this research are from the National Crime Survey (NCS) for the years 1973-1975, based on existing theory and empirical research in the field of social ecology of crime. The research data was obtained through a survey, conducted through a telephone call (*via a random method*) in the family, attended by 136,000 individuals, who lived or cohabited in approximately 60,000 families. Sampson's final sample consisted of about 400,000 respondents. To approximate the context of a "neighborhood," he used the 1970 Census data as a reference to combine households with similar neighborhood characteristics. Each neighborhood feature is categorized as *low, medium, or high*.

According to Sampson (1985), the previous literature had neglected certain dimensions of community structure, a lot of research aimed to focus on racial and economic factors. His model included additional indicators of relative deprivation, family disorganization as a measure of community integration and measures of criminal opportunity.

Sampson (1985) studies neighborhood factors, such as: *unemployment; income inequality; racial composition; structural density; residential mobility and family structure*. Previous victimization research reveals that these neighborhood characteristics predict risk of victimization regardless of individual characteristics, such as: *age; race; gender; income; and marital status*. Parameter estimates from analysis of variance models, show that *structural density, residential mobility, and female-headed households* have strong positive effects on personal victimization rate, other results do not

match previous research. A major finding is that inequality and racial composition have little effect on victimization when social integration (*family structure, mobility*) and opportunity factors (*density*) are included in the model. The results of Sampson (1985) clearly show that the relation between the structural characteristics of the neighborhood and criminality norms are very complex, and further, research is more than necessary to test the effects of structural characteristics on victimization and criminality norms. Also, the increase in structural density and family structure indicates a need for future tests of social disorganization theory involving some comparable measures of each concept.

d. Research of Snell (2001)

Snell in his research *Neighborhood Structure, Crime, and Fear of Crime*, indicates about primary and secondary relation weakness, poor public control, and high levels of disorganization. All of these are directly related to the growing criminality and fear of crime in disorganization, heterogeneous racial neighborhoods. The results of Snell (2001) show that minority neighborhoods with high levels of disorganization and with low levels of interaction and trust in neighborhoods, are more likely to have higher criminality rate. Urban slums with high levels of disorganization and with less complete families and small networks of friends tend to have higher levels of fear of criminality. Recently, neighborhood disorganization is an important factor in explaining the rate of criminality and the fear of criminality. Research of Snell (2001) suggests that a sense of security strengthens a sense of togetherness, connection in place, social cohesion, and social life of a neighborhood, encourages people to stay and increase their stay, increases urban sustainability and contributes to satisfaction and neighborhood well-being. In addition, urban insecurity affects the health of individuals, cohesion, and social order (*ethnic and social division and isolation*).

These findings provide partial support for the Neighborhood Control System Theory of Bursik and Grasmick (1993). Their theory is that differences in the level of criminality rate and fear of criminality, result from changes in neighborhoods' ability to preserve social control. Neighborhood social control is a function of the quality and density of formal and informal networks.

e. Research of Osgood and Anderson (2004)

Osgood and Anderson (2004) in their research *Unstructured Socializing and Rates of Delinquency* implemented a perspective of individual-level routine activities to explain delinquency rates. Their theoretical analysis also connects the processes of possibilities of that perspective with the main themes of the theory of social disorganization. The data came from a survey of more than 4,358 eighth graders from thirty-six schools in Ten American Cities. Osgood and Anderson (2004) in their research provided strong evidence for the existence of individual and contextual effects of unstructured socialization on delinquency.

Moreover, parental monitoring created a contextual effect on unstructured socialization, supporting the integration of routine activities and theories of social disorganization. When parents are informed about adolescent activities, less time is spent on unstructured socialization, thus reducing opportunities for deviation.

The combination of social disorganization and perspectives of routine activities allows the connection between the patterns of daily activity at the individual level and the delinquency differences at the total level. Future research should further explore these perspectives in explaining crime and delinquency.

f. Research of Beverly Kingston, David Huizinga, and Delbert S. Elliott (2009)

The last two decades we have a great increase of research that are based on the theory of social disorganization, among these research we also have those related to the context of the connection between the neighborhood and crime. This research was conducted by testing and using empirical data obtained through the survey of parents and young people in the neighborhood, where in their research were included 44 neighborhoods of Denver.

Kingston et al (2009) in their research *A Test of Social Disorganization Theory in High-risk Urban Neighborhoods*, have designed a series of regression models to assess the impact of neighborhood effects on delinquency rate. The research results of Kingston et al (2009) shows that changes in levels and types of structural disadvantages affect neighborhood social processes. For example, when checking for neighborhood poverty, the effects of residential mobility and individual households will be contrary to expectations.

Neighborhoods with the highest level of mobility, in the research of Kingston et al (2009) were perceived by residents in order to have institutions and neighborhoods with greater social power. Whereas neighborhoods with a higher percentage of individual families have lower rates of young people perceiving limited opportunities for their future. Unlike previous research proving the theory of social disorganization using a full range of neighborhoods, research of Kingston et al (2009) shows social process measures that have minimal effects on delinquent opportunity structures and delinquency.

Kingston et al (2009) in their research finally emphasize “(...) that the strongest predictors of delinquent behavior rate in high-risk neighborhoods are objective poverty and youth perceptions of limited opportunities for their future, suggesting the importance of implementing interventions aimed at improving real opportunities and young people's perceptions of their future opportunities.”

g. Research of Wouter Steenbeek and John R. Hipp (2011)

Social disorganization theory holds that neighborhood with greater residential stability, higher socioeconomic status, and more ethnic homogeneity experience less disorder because these neighborhoods have higher social cohesion and exercise more social control. Recent extensions of the theory argue that disorder, in turn affects these structural characteristics and mechanisms (Steenbeek and Hipp, 2011). Wouter Steenbeek and John R. Hipp (2011) have done the research *A longitudinal test of social disorganization theory: feedback effects among cohesion, social control, and disorder* using 10-year period data for 74 neighborhoods in Utrecht in the Netherlands. The study authors tested the theory of social disorganization in the long run interval, which until then only a few studies have been able to be done due to the lack of long-term neighborhood level data. Wouter Steenbeek and John R. Hipp (2011) also improve on previous studies by distinguishing between the potential for social control (*feelings of responsibility*) and actual social control behavior. The key analyzes of Wouter Steenbeek and John R. Hipp (2011) sections replicate previous findings of social disorganization theory, but the results associated with a long-time interval suggest that the disorder has major consequences for later levels of social control and residential instability, thus leading to more disorder.

This data from research of Wouter Steenbeek and John R. Hipp (2011) contrasts with most previous studies on the theory of social disorganization, which assume that the disorder is more of a consequence than a cause. The study of the authors underlines the importance of long-term data, allowing simultaneous testing of the causes and consequences of the disorder, as well as the importance of breaking social control into two dimensions, that of the potential for social control and the actual behavior of social control.

h. Research of Xiong 2016

Nowadays, modern China is experiencing a very rapid social transition. Social change in China is reflected in many social phenomena such as rapid economic growth, rapid urbanization, and significant changes in urban spatial models. It is well known that high crime rates always occur along with a rapid social transition. China without exception is also facing high crime rates in its profound social transformation. Chinese society has experienced rapid social change. The accompaniment of this profound change, criminality and social disorganization has increased significantly in urban China. The research *Urban Crime and Social Disorganization in China. A case study of three communities in Guangzhou* of the author Xiong (2016) focuses on the relation between social transition and criminality in the context of rapid Chinese social change.

Xiong (2016) in his research selects the city of Guangzhou in southern China, which has the highest crime rate in China and was a very convenient research place to study models of criminality and social disorganization. Xiong (2016) combines content analysis methods with ethnographic fieldwork.

The first research selected 1483 crime cases reported from Southern Metropolis Daily impact in 2013, to identify the overall crime distribution model. The findings suggest that the spatial distribution and demographic density of criminal cases in Guangzhou show a model of district rate from downtown to the suburbs. Focusing on three typical selected communities, Xiong (2016) research finds important models of crime and social disorganization which are very different from Western research. These findings according to the research of author Xiong (2016) are organized according to the main correlations of social disorganization: *including unemployment; marriage and family; housing stability; ethnic heterogeneity; social equality; social capital; social control; social isolation and social exclusion;*

community cohesion; faith and fear; traditions; morals and beliefs; and language. These findings by Xiong (2016) further expand and process the theory of social disorganization in urban China.

i. Research of Rebecca Wickes, Elise Sargeant, John R Hipp and Lorraine Mazerolle (2016)

The objectives of social disorganization say that neighborhood social relations and shared expectations for informal social control are essential to exercising informal social control actions. The research of Wickes, Sargeant, et al. (2016) *Neighborhood social ties and shared expectations for informal social control: Do they influence informal social control actions?* Reviews the relations between neighborhood social ties, shared expectations for informal social control and informal social control actions undertaken by residents as response to major neighborhood problems. Authors Wickes, Sargeant, et al. (2016) have used multi-level logistic regression models by integrating the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data with the Australian Capacity Survey data of research. The authors in their research analyzed the reports of 1,310 residents who reported 2,614 serious problems in 148 neighborhoods. These data, authors Wickes, Sargeant, et al. (2016) used them to analyze specific social control actions when residents encounter problems in the neighborhood. The results of the authors' research do not find a relation between common expectations for informal social control and informal actions of social control of residents. However, authors Wickes, Sargeant, et al. (2016) in their research declare that individual social ties lead to increased informal social control actions in response to big neighborhood problems.

The authors further declare that residents with strong social ties are more likely to involve in public and informal actions of informal social control than those individuals who do not have social ties. However, individuals living in neighborhoods with high levels of social relations, are on average more likely to engage in informal social control activities than those living in areas where these connections are not present at all. The authors further declare that shared expectations for informal social control are not associated with the likelihood that residents engage in informal social control actions when faced with a significant neighborhood problem. Neighborhood social ties and shared expectations for informal social control are not unilaterally necessary for exercising informal social control actions. Results of authors, Wickes, Sargeant, et al. (2016) challenge

contemporary articulations of social disorganization theory, that assume that the availability of neighborhood social relations or expectations for action relate to residents, who are currently doing something to exercise informal social control.

4. Conclusions

We can say that at the global level, the theory of social disorganization did not take its rightful place until two decades ago, when this theory began to become more active. Despite this recognition, there are very few scientific research that addresses the phenomenon of social disorganization, thus depriving the methods of detecting and preventing this phenomenon on a scientific basis. This recognition is an obvious problem that deserves adequate scientific treatment.

Topics from the social disorganization theory have a wider application for communities of all sizes. Research data can be particularly useful for testing and extending social disorganization theory because they represent different models of community variables. For example, findings on poverty and crime show whether in urban communities the direct impact of poverty on community disorganization can be determined. Thus, social disorganization and related theories are suitable points for the development of crime theories that are specific to urban environments or theories of community and crime that are general to all environments. The development of such theories will require a strong foundation in the modern realities of environments, ranging from rural parts of communities to parts of the urban core of the community. For a long time, theories of communities and crime have limited their attention to an image of dense urban neighborhoods, that fully encompass the lives of their inhabitants and that the image does not match the life in most communities today.

In the paper, also is seen that this theory has obvious flaws in their positive contribution to research on social disorganization in the world. In this way, individual research require, first of all, an analysis of each variable included in the research. This is followed by an analysis of their content, a socio-criminological structure in relation to social disorganization, about which very little is known, and which remains mainly at the level of intuitive knowledge, phraseological, knowledge. Moreover, the issue of the connection between crime and the emergence of social disorganization, as well as the emergence of social disorganization in urban and suburban areas,

is particularly important. Regarding the field of form and content of social disorganization in the research topic, there will be relevant international sources that define this field, as well as sources of universal, European, and regional character.

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