

## **Theoretical Perspectives of Female Criminality with Reference to Strain Theory**

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### **Introduction**

Criminality of women has for some time been disregarded in the light of customary certitude that women are honest and are less crime inclined. Women in Indian culture are approached with defence and poise. They are thought to be the preservers of social standards, conventions, traditions, ethical quality, and cohesiveness in the family. Usually, faith in the Indian culture that the role women are confined to home, she commits her life in serving all individuals from the family<sup>1</sup>. Her happiness lies in the prosperity of different individuals from the family; her prosperity lies in the accomplishment of individuals from family. The annals of human history unveil that women have, for an extended period, been the cornerstone of the family, particularly, and society at large. Particularly in the context of India, a woman is perceived as the guardian of societal standards, traditions, practices, ethics, and familial unity. In today's world, women have taken on the added responsibility of establishing their individual identity while

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<sup>1</sup>Poonam, 'An account on female criminality and its theories in India', Vol-12, Journal of Advances and Scholarly Researcher in Allied education, (2017)

simultaneously nurturing their families. However, it is disheartening to witness that women's accomplishments are now extending into the realm of criminality within India's social, cultural, economic, and political landscapes. The issue has escalated to a concerning level, prompting conscientious scholars to delve into the fundamental reasons behind the increasing involvement of women in criminal activities. The phenomenon of female criminality is complex, relatively less understood, and seemingly susceptible to control, with the social environment playing a significant role in shaping women into criminals.

The seriousness of this challenge becomes more pronounced when examining the available crime data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). While female criminals still constitute a minority, accounting for only 6.3% (according to the NCRB Crime report of 2009) of those convicted for offenses under the Indian Penal Code (IPC), there is a noteworthy trend in the rising numbers of female offenders. The Crime in India Reports indicate that the number of women arrested for criminal activities was 151,675 in 2003, and this figure increased to 154,635 in 2007.

Interestingly, the nature of the crimes committed by women is also undergoing a significant transformation. It is shifting from relatively milder offenses such as drug trafficking and prostitution to more heinous crimes like murder. In 2005, 3,439 women were arrested for murder, a number that escalated to 3,812 in 2007 and further to 4,007 in 2009, representing an increase from 5.4% in 2005 to 6% in 2007 and eventually to 6.4% in 2009, according to NCRB statistics. Despite being traditionally regarded as upholders of societal norms, for the past decade, a growing number of women have been involved in legal transgressions and criminal activities in India, reflecting a global trend.

Female criminality in India has also increased considerably. There could be several factors involved for such an increase, some of which would be discussed briefly hereinafter. The evolving role, move-in occupation, and status, the idea of women liberation, financial freedom, and political autonomy opens the passage for ladies to participate in different activities, and so the exposure to crimes is increased than in past. The nature of crimes committed by women does not conform to only petty crimes, they are involved in a lot of non-traditional and serious crimes as well, which also would be discussed in this article. The crimes amongst women have increased with the changing times but the law has still remained the same as it was in the olden days. Thus, the law also needs a necessity to made fewer women protective and more gender-neutral.<sup>2</sup>

Traditionally, the perpetration of crime has been regarded as the prerogative of the male; criminal activity has been seen as aggressive and masculine. Few women engaged in criminal behavior and, in such a typical cases, explanations given emphasized deviance from traditional female roles, thereby focusing the characteristics of female criminality is not founded on assumptions but rather on inherent nature of women. Other causal explanations (notably mono-causal) have centered on gender-role explanations (and deviations from such expectations); hypotheses have ranged from physical abnormalities, to various forms of psychological and social pathology; moral corruption and disease. Generally, it is argued that

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<sup>2</sup>UNODC, "Gender-based Discrimination and Women in Conflict with the Law," available at <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/crime-prevention-criminal-justice/module-9/key-issues/1--gender-based-discrimination-and-women-in-conflict-with-the-law.html> (last visited Feb. 14, 2023).

females are more law abiding than men; less delinquent, less dangerous, and less involved in criminal subcultures and thus they have less frequently been provided for in criminological theory.<sup>3</sup>

### **Indian female criminality**

In numerous cultures, such as in India, there has persisted a long-held notion that women are less inclined to participate in criminal activities when contrasted with men. In India, there has been a longstanding belief that women are less inclined to partake in unlawful activities compared to men. This perception is frequently rooted in gender clichés and societal anticipations that women are more nurturing and virtuous than men. Nevertheless, research has demonstrated that this viewpoint does not align with the reality of female delinquency. Although women might commit fewer transgressions in general, they possess an equal capacity for engaging in criminal conduct as men. In actuality, certain investigations propose that women may have a higher propensity to commit specific kinds of offenses, like deceit or misappropriation of funds. The rationales behind female lawbreaking might also diverge from those of men, with economic hardship, domestic mistreatment, and substance misuse constituting notable factors that contribute to unlawful actions among women.

In India, women have historically been perceived as submissive and docile, which may contribute to the impression that they are less likely to engage in illicit behaviour. However, as women gain more opportunities for learning and job prospects, they are becoming more empowered and prominent in

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3 L Geslsthorne, *Sexism and the Female Offender* (London: Gower Publishing Co Ltd, 1989).

society. This increased prominence has led to heightened awareness of female wrongdoing and a change in opinions regarding women's inclination to partake in criminal actions. It is imperative to acknowledge that gender stereotypes and biases can yield adverse consequences for women, including perpetuating gender disparity and obstructing women's access to justice within the penal system. To tackle these concerns, there is a necessity for increased education and consciousness surrounding gender stereotypes and their repercussions on women's existence, along with strategies and procedures that advocate gender parity and impartial treatment for all individuals, irrespective of their gender.<sup>4</sup>

In the past few decades, the function of women in Indian culture has changed significantly, resulting in greater financing in criminal activities by them. Women's criminality, women's prison sentences, and their rights have all been ignored by philosophers and knowledge relating to the phenomenon.<sup>5</sup> Supervisory fairness for women, in particular, has proven to be critical in context of the new economic and personal landscape, which has expanded

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<sup>4</sup>UNODC, Gender-Based Discrimination and Women in Conflict with the Law, <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/crime-prevention-criminal-justice/module-9/key-issues/1--gender-based-discrimination-and-women-in-conflict-with-the-law.html> (last visited Feb. 14, 2023).

<sup>5</sup>Male members of the family protect a female member of the family. When compared to men, their interference in criminal activities is relatively low." (source: Vikaspedia, last visited January 12, 2023), available at <https://vikaspedia.in/social-welfare/women-and-child-development/women-development-1/women-in-prisons>.

women's role in crimes. Supervisory offenses against women prisoners have also increased, necessitating a fact required of current legal provisions, their organized violation, and the ways and means, lawfully and primarily, to associate provisos to the treatment of women prisoners at various stages of accusation guilty verdict and detainment. Women's financing in crime will rise as their job opportunities expand in accordance with their interests, desires, and self- definition shifts from traditional to more progressive. We discover that the amount of abusive behavior at home is rising, which is attributed to the agreement structure, this creates a rebellion state of mind, which has compelled women to commit crimes. Crime, like infestation, sickness, and death, is a continual event. It is as long-lasting as spring and as monotonous as winter. Criminality is not created, rather, it is the result of social factors. The importance and relevancy of the current work on women prisoners is substantial in the sophisticated situations, taking into account the examination deems relating to female criminality and female prioritization by various philosophers at the regional and global level. The offenses perpetrated by women are like prostitution, child marriage, dowry murder, kidnapping, abduction, theft, drug trafficking, etc.<sup>6</sup>

### **Historical Background of Strain Theory:**

Strain theory is a sociological concept aimed at elucidating the connection among societal framework, anomie (a condition of normlessness), and deviant behavior. It posits that deviance is the result of individuals' inability

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<sup>6</sup>K. Swesthiga & Ms. Golda Sahoo, Theories of Female Criminality in India, International Journal of Advances in Engineering and Management Vol. 4, 368-372 (August 8, 2022).

to achieve socially approved goals through legitimate means.<sup>7</sup> The development of strain theory can be traced back to the work of several key scholars over the past century. One of the earliest scholars to develop ideas related to strain theory was Émile Durkheim, who in his 1897 work "Suicide," argued that anomie, or a state of normlessness resulting from rapid social change, was a key factor in explaining the incidence of suicide. Durkheim suggested that when individuals proficient a mismatch between their aspirations and the opportunities available to them, they were more likely to feel alienated and become deviant.<sup>8</sup>

Robert Merton, a prominent sociologist in the mid-20th century, advanced the strain theory to explain the relationship between social structure and deviant behaviour. According to Merton, American society valued material success, but not everyone had equal opportunities to achieve it through legitimate means such as education and employment.<sup>9</sup> This created a disconnect between the goals and means of achieving success, resulting in anomie and strain. Merton proposed that individuals facing this strain might resort to diverse manifestations of deviant conduct, such as innovation, ritualism, retreatism, rebellion, or adherence to societal norms. Since Merton's initial work in 1938, other scholars have expanded on and refined the strain theory. For example, Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin's 1960 book "Delinquency and

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<sup>7</sup> Strain Theory, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/strain-theory-sociology> (last visited February 24, 2023).

<sup>8</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Suicide*, trans. I.A. Spaulding and G. Simpson, p. 362

<sup>9</sup> Robert Merton, "Social theory and Social Structure", p.75

Opportunity"<sup>10</sup> highlighted the importance of subcultures and criminal opportunity structures in shaping deviant behaviour. They argued that individuals who lacked access to legitimate opportunities for success were more likely to turn to illegitimate means, such as crime, to achieve their goals. This approach to strain theory emphasizes the role of social structures in shaping criminal behaviour and provides a framework for understanding how factors such as poverty and inequality contribute to deviance.<sup>11</sup>

The progress of strain theory reflects a broader concern within sociology with understanding the ways in which social structure and culture shape individuals' behavior and opportunities, and how these in turn can influence the incidence of deviance and crime.<sup>12</sup> Since its inception, strain theory has been objected to a number of criticisms and debates. One critique is that it focuses too heavily on individual-level factors and underestimates the importance of group-level factors and the social and economic structures that contribute to inequality and social stratification. Critics argue that strain theory may not be applicable to all types of deviance, and that it may overemphasize the role of social class and economic factors in shaping individuals' behavior.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> K. Swesthiga & Ms. Golda Sahoo, "Theories of Female Criminality in India," *International Journal of Advances in Engineering and Management*, vol. 4 (August 8, 2022), 368-372.

<sup>11</sup> Strain Theory, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/strain-theory-sociology> (last visited February 24, 2023).

<sup>12</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Suicide*, trans. I.A. Spaulding and G. Simpson, p. 362.

<sup>13</sup> Emile Durkheim, "Durkheim suggested that when individuals experienced a mismatch between their aspirations and the opportunities," <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23639375> (last visited February 24, 2023).



Strain theory has left a profound mark on the realm of criminology and continues to exert a considerable influence today. Its application has extended to elucidating various deviant actions, encompassing substance abuse, property offenses, and affiliation with gangs. It has found relevance across a broad spectrum of demographics, spanning from urban youth to white-collar workers. Furthermore, the theory has contributed insights to shaping criminal justice policies and proposing approaches for curbing criminal activities and tackling the underlying factors of deviance. In recent times, strain theory has undergone certain conceptual enhancements and adaptations. For example, some scholars have emphasized the role of emotions, such as anger and frustration, in mediating the relationship between strain and deviance, while others have explored the intersection of strain theory with other theoretical perspectives, such as social control theory and social learning theory.

Overall, the historical development of strain theory reflects a broader effort to understand the complex and multifaceted relationship between social structure, culture, and individual behavior, and to identify the underlying mechanisms that drive deviant behavior. While strain theory has faced criticism and debate, it remains a valuable tool for understanding the causes and ramifications of deviance in modern society.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Cloward & Lloyd Ohlin, *Delinquency and Opportunity: A Theory of Delinquent Gangs* (2000) 50-52.

## Factors That Lead to Strain Theory

Strain theory is a sociological concept that suggests that social structures may pressure individuals to commit deviant acts. Below are several elements that can contribute to the development of strain theory.

**Inequality:**<sup>15</sup> When people are deprived of equitable opportunities to access social, economic, or political resources, they may experience a sense of frustration or injustice. This can lead to feelings of strain that can consequences in deviant behavior.

**Status frustration:**<sup>16</sup> Certain individuals might experience feelings of frustration or insufficiency when they fail to attain the status they aspire to. This can lead to deviant behavior as a way to gain status or recognition.

**Cultural goals:**<sup>17</sup> The cultural goals of society may put pressure on individuals to achieve success through means that are not always legal or acceptable. This can lead to strain as individuals struggle to meet these expectations.

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<sup>15</sup> Inequality, <https://www.oecd.org/social/inequality-and-poverty.htm> (Last visited on February 25, 2023).

<sup>16</sup>'Status Frustration', <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01639625.2017.1286197> (Last visited on February 13, 2023).

<sup>17</sup> 'Cultural Goals', <https://soztheo.de/theories-of-crime/anomie-strain-theories/anomie-theory-merton/?lang=en> (last visited January 20, 2023).

Blocked opportunities:<sup>18</sup> When individuals face obstacles or barriers to achieving their goals, they may feel frustrated and turn to deviant behavior as a way to overcome these obstacles.

Social disorganization:<sup>19</sup> When social structures such as families, schools, or communities are weakened or disrupted, individuals may experience a sense of strain that can lead to deviant behavior.

### **Significance of Strain Theory in female Criminality**

Strain theory is a criminological theory that suggests that individuals who experience strain or stress due to their inability to achieve their goals or meet their beliefs are more likely to engage in criminal behavior.<sup>20</sup> This theory is significant to female criminality as it highlights the unique strains and stresses that female may experience in society, which may contribute to their involvement in criminal activity.<sup>21</sup> Women may experience strain due to gender-specific expectations and social roles, such as those related to motherhood, domesticity, and care taking. They may also experience strain due to gender inequality and discrimination, such as unequal access to

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<sup>18</sup> 'Blocked Deviance/Opportunities', <https://revisesociology.com/2016/04/16/mertons-strain-theory-> (last visited January 12, 2023).

<sup>19</sup> 'Social Disorganization', <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/wm-introductiontosociology/chapter/theoretical-perspectives-on-deviance/> (last visited February 24, 2023).

<sup>20</sup> A. Thomas William & A.J. Christopher, *Women Criminals in India: Sociological and Social Work Perspectives* (Anmol Publications PVT. LTD, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> Robert Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* 230-35 (1928).

education, employment, and economic resources. These strains may lead to feelings of frustration, anger, and resentment, which may in turn contribute to criminal behavior. Moreover, strain theory may seek to explain why women engage in different types of criminal activity than men. For example, women could have a higher propensity to engage in property crimes or prostitution as a means of economic survival, in contrast, men are more inclined to engage in violent crimes. Overall, strain theory offers insights into the elements that contribute to female criminality, and may help to provide insights for devising approaches to prevent and addressing women's involvement in criminal activity. When considering the importance of strain theory to female criminality, it should be emphasized that women could encounter unique types of strain that can contribute to criminal behavior. For example, women may face strain related to gender roles, such as the pressure to conform to traditional expectations of femininity and motherhood while also pursuing career goals. Additionally, women might undergo strain related to interpersonal relationships, such as domestic violence or sexual abuse. Studies have indicated that stress theory can help to explain some forms of female criminality. For example, women encountering financial strain, such as poverty or lack of access to education and employment opportunities, be more to engage in property crimes or drug offenses. Similarly, women who experience strain related to their gender roles, such as the pressure to conform to traditional expectations, may be more likely to engage in prostitution or work. Overall, strain theory provides a framework in order to grasp the social and cultural factors that contribute to female criminality. By addressing the root causes of strain, such as poverty and gender-based discrimination, it may be possible to reduce the incidence of female criminal behavior and promote more equitable and just outcomes for all individuals.

In his work "Delinquent Boys," American social scientist Albert Cohen<sup>22</sup> explicitly embraced Merton's concept of 'strain' to elucidate the distinct behavioral patterns exhibited by male and female individuals, particularly concerning youth crime. Cohen construed 'strain' as the principal instigator behind the formation of delinquent gangs among working-class American boys. Unintentionally, he broadened this theory by positing that lower-class boys, when confronted with thwarted ambitions for status within a middle-class environment, tend to establish delinquent structures. In contrast, Cloward and Ohlin<sup>23</sup> intentionally expanded upon Merton's theory by proposing that the actual transformation of potentially delinquent lower-class youths into delinquents hinges on the presence of differential illegitimate opportunities. While this theory has faced criticism for its lack of empirical substantiation, its disregard for value diversity, and its neglect of the element of amusement in delinquency, it has received acclaim for its shift from a psychological perspective to a sociological one on deviance and for presenting a sound premise regarding the disparity between aspirations and opportunities.

### **Strain Theory and Criminal Behaviour**

Criminal behavior or deviant behavior among women this subject has piqued considerable curiosity. interest in criminology and sociology for many years. Historically, women have been considered less likely to engage in criminal

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<sup>22</sup> Albert K. Cohen, *Delinquent Boys* 75 (1976).

<sup>23</sup> Richard Cloward & Lloyd Ohlin, *Delinquent and Opportunity: A Theory of Delinquent Gangs* 50-52 (1988).

behavior than men, and their crimes have often been seen as less serious.<sup>24</sup> However, recent research has challenged these assumptions, revealing that women are indeed involved in criminal behavior and deviant behavior, and that their experiences are often different from those of men. Criminal behavior among women can take many forms, including property crimes, drug offenses, white-collar crime, and violent crime. However, women are often involved in these activities for different reasons than men. For example, women may be more likely to engage in property crimes to provide for their families, while men may do so for the thrill of the crime.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, women may encounter distinctive obstacles that contribute to their criminal behavior, including gender-based discrimination, poverty, and limited access to resources and opportunities. Women who are victims of abuse, for example, may turn to drug use or prostitution as a way to cope with their situation.

Deviant behavior among women can also take many forms, including engaging in risky sexual behavior, substance abuse, and self-harm. Women may engage in these behaviors as a means of dealing with the stress and strain of their daily lives, or as a way to rebel against societal expectations. Understanding criminal behavior and deviant behavior among women is important for developing effective prevention and intervention

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<sup>24</sup> Author Unknown, 'Criminal Behavior', in *ScienceDirect Topics*, available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/medicine-and-dentistry/criminal-behavior> (last visited Feb. 23, 2023).

<sup>25</sup>N.V. Paranjape, *Criminology & Penology with Victimology* 11 (Central Law Publications 2011).

strategies. It requires recognizing the distinct hurdles confronting women as well as the social and cultural factors that contribute to their behavior. By addressing these underlying issues, we can work to reduce the prevalence of criminal behavior and deviant behavior among women, and promote greater gender equality and social justice.

However Strain theory is a sociological perspective that suggests that people may turn to criminal behavior when they experience strain or stress that prevents them from achieving their goals through legitimate means. The theory posits that individuals who are unable to attain their desired goals may experience a sense of frustration and anomie, this may drive them to resort to criminal actions as a means of managing their circumstances a way to cope with their situation. According to strain theory, there are various sources of strain that can lead to criminal behavior, including:

**Blocked opportunities:** When individuals are unable to achieve their goals due to a lack of opportunities or resources, they may experience strain that can lead to criminal behavior.

**Differential treatment:** When people believe that they are being treated unfairly or unjustly, they may experience strain that can lead to criminal behavior.

**Negative stimuli:** When people encounter adverse situations, like loss of a job or the death of a loved one, they may undergo stress that may result in criminal behavior.

Disjunction between expectations and reality: When people hold elevated expectations for their lives but are unable to achieve them, they may experience strain that can lead to criminal behavior.

Overall, strain theory posits that one who experience strain are more likely to engage in criminal behavior as a way to cope with their situation. This viewpoint has been employed to explain a variety of criminal behaviors, including theft, drug use, and violent crime. However, it's worth noting that strain theory is not the only explanation for criminal behavior, and other factors such as biological and psychological factors may also play a role. Additionally, not every individual facing strain will resort to criminal behavior, and other coping mechanisms, such as seeking social support or engaging in legal forms of behavior, are also possible. Merton's Strain theory posits that individuals might adopt criminal behaviour as a response as a means of coping with the frustration caused by their inability to achieve societal goals through legitimate means. This may involve engaging in illegal activities such as theft, drug dealing, and prostitution, or lashing out at others in their anger. Alternatively, individuals may turn to drugs as a way to alleviate their stress, or reject the goal of monetary success altogether and pursue other criminal activities instead. While Merton acknowledged that most people do not resort to crime as a coping mechanism, he identified different elements that impact the probability of criminal behaviour, including an individual's socialization and attitudes towards crime.

Albert Cohen expanded on Merton's theory by exploring the origins of lower-class adolescent male gangs, which were prevalent in the 1950s. Cohen posits that these individuals desired the status and respect associated with middle-class values and norms, but were unable to attain them through legitimate



means. Specifically, lower-class youth faced obstacles such as lack of preparation for school and social humiliation from middle-class teachers and peers. Unlike monetary success, achieving middle-class status was not a goal that could be easily achieved through illegitimate means, leading some lower-class adolescents to cope with their frustration through participation in gang activity and other criminal behaviour. Similarly to Cohen, the theorists sought to understand the origins and characteristics of lower-class juvenile gangs, linking them to the inability to achieve success goals through legitimate means. However, their theory distinguishes itself by emphasizing the importance of considering both legitimate and illegitimate opportunities for achieving success in explaining criminal behavior. This means that any explanation of crime must account for the individual's potential to engage in violence, theft, drug use, and other illicit activities in addition to legitimate avenues for success. The theorists suggest that a focus solely on conventional goals and opportunities may overlook the influence of the larger social context in shaping an individual's choices and actions. The notion that criminal behavior is influenced by both legitimate and illegitimate opportunities for success has been further developed in contemporary routine opportunities and rational choice theories, which focus on the availability and variability of criminal opportunities. Despite differences in approach, the 'classic' strain theories of Merton, Cohen, and Cloward and Ohlin share a common thread: they all posit that the inability to achieve conventional success goals through legitimate means leads to feelings of strain, this in consequence, can result in to criminal behavior. These theories were influential during the 1950s and 1960s and had significant impacts on public policy, including inspiring the War on Poverty.

## **Strain Theory and Female Criminality: A Theoretical Perspective**

Merton's (1938) theory is widely considered the first major theory in criminology. According to his theory, the cultural goal of monetary success<sup>26</sup> is highly valued in the United States, and all individuals are encouraged to strive towards it. However, for lower-class individuals, achieving this objective through lawful methods is often difficult due to various factors such as lack of access to quality education and financial resources. Consequently, lower-class individuals strain as they try to navigate their way towards success. Merton's theory highlights the manner in which societal and economic factors can impact an individual's ability to achieve success, this, in its turn, can shape their probability of engaging in criminal behavior with the strain being a key factor of the disjunction between their goals and the relevant means for achieving them. Strain theory proposes that people who experience strains or stressors in their lives that prevent them from achieving their goals and aspirations may turn to deviant or criminal behavior as a means of coping or adapting to those strains. The theory proposes that there are several types of strain, including economic strain, social strain, and personal strain. When considering female criminality, strain theory may help explain why some women turn to criminal behavior. Females might encounter distinct pressures that set them apart from others experienced by men, such as gender discrimination, limited access to resources, and societal expectations regarding their roles as caregivers. These strains may lead women to engage

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<sup>26</sup> Sung Joon Jang, 'Strain Theories And Crime' in International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences 495 (2nd ed. 2015).

in criminal behavior as a means of coping with the stress and frustration they experience. Research has shown that strain theory can be applied to female criminality in various ways. For example, certain research has discovered that economic strain, such as poverty and unemployment, is a significant predictor of female criminal behavior. Additionally, social strain, such as relationship problems and lack of social support, has been linked to female criminality.

Strain theory can offer valuable perspectives on relationship between female criminality and the strains that women experience in their lives. By addressing these strains and providing support and resources to help women cope with them, we may be able to reduce female criminality and promote healthier and more productive lifestyles. Strain theory suggests that individuals who experience strains or stressors in their lives, various factors can hinder them from achieving their goals and aspirations may turn to deviant or criminal behavior as a means of coping or adapting to those strains. This theory proposes that there are several types of strain, including economic strain, social strain, and personal strain. When considering female criminality, strain theory may help to explain why some women turn to criminal behavior. Women may experience unique strains that differ from those experienced by men, such as gender discrimination, limited access to resources, and societal expectations regarding their roles as caregivers. These strains may lead women to engage in criminal behavior as a means of coping with the stress and frustration they experience. Research has shown that strain theory can be applied to female criminality in various ways. For example, some studies have found that economic strain, such as poverty and unemployment, is a significant predictor of female criminal behavior. Additionally, social strain, such as relationship problems and lack of social support, has been linked to female criminality too. This theory can provide insights into the relationship

between female criminality and the strains that women experiences in their lives. By addressing these strains and providing support and resources to help women cope with them, we may be able to reduce female criminal behavior and promote healthier and more productive lifestyles.

Strain theory is a sociological viewpoint proposing that when people find themselves unable to accomplish their objectives through lawful channels, they may turn to unconventional or illicit means. According to strain theory, individuals may turn to criminal conduct often arises when individuals are incapable of achieving their goals through legal means due to limited opportunities or social barriers. When it comes to female criminality, the theory helps to explain why some women engage in deviant behavior. Women face a variety of unique societal pressures, including gender-based discrimination and limited access to resources and opportunities. These pressures can create feelings of frustration and stress that may lead some women to turn to criminal behavior as a way to cope. Overall, strain theory provides a useful framework for understanding the connection between societal pressures and female criminality. By recognizing the social factors that contribute to women's criminal behavior, we can work to address these issues and reduce the prevalence of female criminality in our society.

### **Perspectives of Various Jurists on Strain Theory**

Strain theory is a sociological concept initially proposed by Robert Merton in the mid-twentieth century. According to this theory, when individuals in society experience a strain or stress between their goals and the means to achieve them, they may resort to deviant or criminal behavior. There have been various jurist viewpoints on strain theory, all of them contribute their

distinct viewpoints to the causes and implications of strain in society. Some of these viewpoints are:

**Classical Strain Theory.**<sup>27</sup> Classical strain theory was first introduced by American sociologist Robert Merton in the mid-twentieth century. This perspective holds that the root cause of strain is the discrepancy between culturally-valued goals and the legitimate means to achieve them. This creates a sense of frustration and tension in individuals, leading to deviant behavior. This viewpoint emphasizes the importance of the social structure in shaping behavior.

**General Strain Theory.**<sup>28</sup> This theory builds upon the classical strain theory, but also takes into account the role of negative emotions such as anger and frustration in deviant behavior. This perspective posits that strain can arise from a variety of sources, including the failure to achieve goals, the loss of valued possessions or relationships, and the experience of negative treatment by others.

**Institutional Anomie Theory.**<sup>29</sup> This viewpoint focuses on the role of economic institutions in creating strain in society. According to this theory, when economic institutions become dominant, they can undermine the

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<sup>27</sup> Robert Merton, "*Classical Strain Theory*," available at [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314633272\\_Classical\\_Strain\\_Theory](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314633272_Classical_Strain_Theory) (last visited March 31, 2023).

<sup>28</sup> Robert Agnew, "*General Strain Theory*," available at [https://study.sagepub.com/system/files/Agnew%2C\\_Robert\\_-\\_General\\_Strain\\_Theory.pdf](https://study.sagepub.com/system/files/Agnew%2C_Robert_-_General_Strain_Theory.pdf) (last visited March 31, 2023).

<sup>29</sup> Institutional Anomie Theory, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23638963> (last visited March 23, 2023).

importance of non-economic institutions such as family and community, leading to a breakdown in social norms and an increase in deviant behavior.

Cultural Deviance Theory<sup>30</sup>. This perspective argues that strain arises from the clash of different cultural values within a society. This can lead to individuals feeling caught between conflicting norms and expectations, leading to deviant behavior as a way to resolve this tension.

Feminist Strain Theory<sup>31</sup>. This theory emphasizes the role of gender in shaping experiences of strain and deviance. According to this viewpoint, women may experience strain differently than men due to the social and economic inequalities they face in society. This can lead to unique forms of deviant behavior, such as survival crimes.

Overall, these jurist viewpoints on strain theory highlight in light of the intricate interaction among societal frameworks cultural norms, and individual experiences in shaping deviant behavior. By understanding these various perspectives, we can gain a more nuanced understanding of the causes and implications of deviance in society.

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<sup>30</sup> Robert Agnew, 'Feminist Strain Theory', Volume Journal Title Page (1997), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0022427897034003001> (last visited March 21, 2023).

**Merton's Strain Theory of Deviance**

**Robert K. Merton's Deviance Typology**

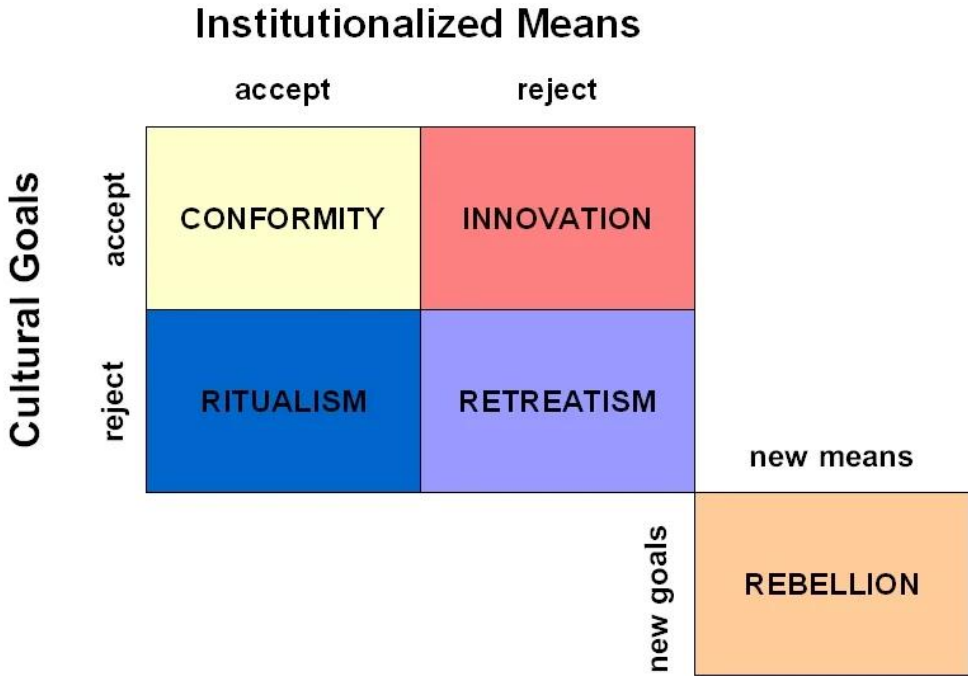


Fig1: Merton's Strain Theory which explain the entire process of strain by institutionalized means cultural goals, new means with new goals which enhances accept and reject which again creates conformity,ritualism and rejection brings innovation and retreatism with rebellion.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, strain theory provides a valuable perspective for understanding female criminality. Women, like men, may experience various forms of strain, such as economic disadvantage, discrimination, abuse, and other negative life events. These strains can lead to feelings of frustration, anger, and distress, which may result in criminal or deviant behaviour as a coping mechanism or means of escape.

However, it's important to note that female criminality may be influenced by additional factors, such as gender-specific roles, societal expectations, and differential treatment within the criminal justice system. Women forms of strain, such as gender-based violence, gender discrimination, and challenges related to care giving responsibilities. Therefore, a gender-sensitive approach that encompasses the interconnectedness of gender with other social categories."such as race, class, and sexuality, is crucial in understanding female criminality from a strain theory perspective. Further research and analysis are needed to fully understand the complexities of female criminality and the role of strain in shaping women's pathways to crime. By considering the specific challenges and experiences of women within the framework of strain theory, we can attain a more profound comprehension of the subject that contribute to female criminal behaviour and develop more effective and gender-responsive interventions to address the issue.