

A Criminological Analysis of Social and Economic Factors Triggering Criminal Acts in Urban and Rural Areas

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ABSTRACT

Criminal acts in urban and rural areas are influenced by differing social and economic factors. This research aims to analyze the primary triggers of criminal behavior in both types of regions. Employing a qualitative approach, the research utilizes in-depth interviews and participatory observations to gain an understanding of the social and economic dynamics that contribute to crime rates. The results reveal that in urban areas, economic factors such as unemployment and poverty are the dominant drivers of criminal acts. In contrast, in rural areas, social factors such as inter-community tensions and limited access to education play a more significant role. These results offer important insights for governments and policymakers in formulating contextual and effective crime prevention strategies that are tailored to the specific characteristics of each region.

Keywords: criminology, social factors, economic factors, urban areas, rural areas

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of society in the modern era has brought significant impacts on social and economic dynamics, particularly in urban and rural areas. The continuous rise in urbanization has led to shifts in lifestyle patterns, which, in turn, can trigger a range of issues, including criminal behavior. Criminal acts no longer occur solely in densely populated urban regions but have also begun to spread into rural areas. This phenomenon demands closer attention and a deeper understanding of the underlying factors driving criminal behavior in both environments.

Urban areas are generally characterized by high population density, social diversity, and greater access to economic opportunities (Daniella & Widyastuti, 2019; Isdijoso et al., 2016; Firdaus & Amin, 2024). However, these characteristics also present specific challenges, such as rising unemployment, poverty, and social dissatisfaction. Conversely, although rural areas typically exhibit lower crime rates, they are not immune to the influence of social and economic factors that can lead to criminal acts. Limited access to education, inadequate infrastructure, and interpersonal tensions within rural communities can contribute to the emergence of deviant behavior (Harefa, 2021).

Therefore, it is essential to analyze the social and economic factors contributing to criminal behavior in both settings. This research seeks to examine how differences in the social and economic contexts of urban and rural areas serve as driving forces behind criminal activity, as well as the implications of these differences for the formulation of more effective crime prevention policies (Jannah, 2023). By gaining a better understanding of this phenomenon, more targeted efforts can be undertaken to prevent and reduce crime rates across Indonesia.

Data from Indonesia's Central Bureau of Statistics (Badan Pusat Statistik/BPS) show that crime rates in the country have fluctuated significantly in recent years. In 2021, urban areas recorded approximately 1.5 million criminal cases, while rural areas reported around 400,000 cases. Although the number of crimes in rural areas is lower, its proportion relative to the population may offer a more accurate picture of the threats faced by these communities. In this context, urban areas home to over 56% of Indonesia's population are more vulnerable to various forms of crime, including theft, robbery, and violence (Hakim, 2024).

One of the key factors contributing to the high crime rate in urban areas is the rising level of unemployment. According to a report from the Ministry of Manpower, in 2022 the open unemployment rate in urban regions reached 8.8%, while in rural areas it was only around 4.5% (Yoertiara, 2022; Indra, 2021; Saweho et al., 2025; Sembiring, 2022). This high unemployment rate affects not only individuals' economic well-being but can also lead to criminal behavior as a means to meet daily needs. Furthermore, widespread poverty among urban families often causes social frustration, which contributes to deviant behavior (Harahap, 2022).

On the other hand, in rural areas, social factors such as limited access to education and healthcare services also act as triggers. According to data from the Ministry of Education and Culture, approximately 25% of children in rural regions do not continue their education to higher levels, potentially resulting in a generation with limited skills and knowledge (Septiawan, 2024). Dissatisfaction with social and economic conditions may lead to interpersonal tensions, which pose a risk of triggering criminal acts, such as assault or vandalism. By integrating these data, this article aims to provide a comprehensive picture of how social and economic factors interact to influence crime rates in both urban and rural settings.

The objective of this research is to identify and analyze the social and economic factors that trigger criminal behavior in urban and rural areas. By understanding the contextual differences between these two environments, this research seeks to offer deeper insights into how these elements contribute to criminal conduct (Baktinadi, 2024). Through a comprehensive approach, the research aims to explore the similarities and differences in the contributing factors of criminality across the two settings, as well as their broader impact on society.

Moreover, this research intends to examine the policy implications of these factors and their relevance to crime prevention strategies. By identifying the specific needs of each region, the research can provide more targeted recommendations for formulating effective public policies to address criminal acts (Utami, 2021). For instance, understanding the influence of educational attainment and employment opportunities in rural areas can assist policymakers in designing more effective community empowerment programs, while an analysis of social conditions in urban areas may guide the development of suitable intervention programs (Pattianakota, 2023).

Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the body of criminological literature in Indonesia by offering relevant data and analysis regarding criminal phenomena within their social and economic contexts. It is expected that the results will benefit not only academics and researchers but also relevant stakeholders such as government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and civil society, in their collective efforts to foster a safer and more prosperous environment (Satrio, 2024). In this regard, the research has the potential to serve as a strong foundation for the development of more effective policies and programs aimed at preventing criminal acts across diverse communities.

METHOD

This article adopts a qualitative approach to analyze the social and economic factors that contribute to criminal behavior in urban and rural areas. The qualitative method is chosen for

its capacity to provide an in-depth understanding of complex social dynamics and the contextual background behind criminal acts.

Data were collected using two primary techniques: in-depth interviews and participatory observation. Interviews were conducted with respondents from diverse backgrounds, including community leaders, law enforcement officers, business actors, and residents in both urban and rural areas. Through these interviews, the researchers sought to explore individual perspectives and lived experiences related to the factors influencing criminal behavior in their respective environments.

Participatory observation was employed to obtain a more holistic view of the ongoing social and economic interactions in both regions. Researchers directly engaged in the daily activities of the communities, enabling them to capture nuanced behaviors and contextual realities that might not be revealed through interviews alone. This approach allowed for the identification of underlying patterns and triggers of criminal behavior embedded in everyday life.

The data gathered from interviews and observations were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. This method aims to identify recurring patterns and themes within the data and explore the relationships between social and economic factors and criminal behavior. The results were then compared between urban and rural areas to highlight both the differences and similarities that exist.

Through this methodological framework, the research aspires to make a meaningful contribution to the understanding of criminal phenomena in Indonesia and to present practical recommendations for the development of more effective and context-sensitive crime prevention policies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Economic Factors in Urban Areas

This research finds that economic factors play a significant role in triggering criminal behavior in urban areas. Data collected indicate that high unemployment rates and poverty are the two primary elements contributing to increased crime. In many urban regions, the number of individuals without stable employment continues to rise, reaching approximately 8.8% of the total workforce, as reported by the Ministry of Manpower. This level of unemployment has led to financial difficulties for many individuals and families, pushing some to engage in unlawful acts as a means of survival.

Moreover, economic instability in urban areas has generated widespread dissatisfaction and frustration among residents. The research shows that many individuals feel burdened by the rising cost of living, while their incomes remain stagnant. This situation creates an environment in which criminal acts—such as theft, robbery, and fraud—become perceived as viable alternatives for those facing economic desperation. Respondents interviewed during the research expressed that, in some cases, they felt compelled to commit crimes as a last resort to support themselves and their families.

The social environment also influences the relationship between economic conditions and criminal behavior. In urban settings, the high rate of migration from rural areas introduces people from diverse social and economic backgrounds. This can lead to heightened social tensions and increased competition for limited resources, such as employment and housing. Dissatisfaction with these social conditions, combined with economic pressure, contributes to a rise in criminal activity. Through participatory observations, researchers noted frequent

conflicts in densely populated settlements, which often escalated into criminal acts as expressions of frustration.

The results of this research indicate that economic factors in urban areas have a substantial impact on crime rates. To reduce criminal behavior in these environments, it is essential to implement interventions that focus on job creation, poverty alleviation, and economic empowerment programs. By expanding opportunities for urban residents, it is expected that crime rates can be reduced and the well-being of communities can be improved.

Social Factors in Rural Areas

The results of this research indicate that social factors play a crucial role in triggering criminal behavior in rural areas. Although the overall crime rate in rural regions is generally lower than in urban settings, the prevailing social conditions can act as catalysts for conflict and criminal acts, particularly in the context of inter-community tensions. Data obtained through in-depth interviews suggest that factors such as competition over resources, social stigma, and social exclusion often lead to disputes that escalate into violence or other forms of criminal behavior.

One of the primary issues identified is the limited access to education and vocational training in rural areas. According to data from the Ministry of Education and Culture, approximately 25% of rural children do not continue their education to higher levels. This lack of access contributes to a low level of human capital development, creating a generation with limited skills and competencies, thereby increasing the likelihood of deviant behavior. Respondents stated that dissatisfaction with the lack of opportunities for personal and professional growth often pushes individuals toward criminal acts such as assault and theft.

In addition, the social structure of rural communities typically more homogeneous and deeply rooted in traditional norms can foster social stigma against individuals involved in criminal behavior. This often results in feelings of shame and alienation among offenders, who may choose to resolve conflicts through violence rather than through formal legal channels. In some cases, offenders prefer to preserve their social standing through acts of retaliation, which can perpetuate cycles of violence. The research notes that strong social bonds in rural areas can function as both a protective factor and a source of social pressure, which may become counterproductive.

Therefore, the research concludes that social factors in rural areas, including dissatisfaction with educational access, interpersonal tensions, and prevailing stigma, significantly contribute to the emergence of criminal acts. To address these issues, targeted interventions are required, such as expanding educational access, implementing skills development programs, and strengthening positive social networks within rural communities. These efforts are expected to reduce social tensions and foster a safer, more harmonious rural environment.

Differences in Public Perceptions of Criminality

This research reveals significant differences in how urban and rural communities perceive criminal behavior. In urban areas, residents tend to view criminality as a systemic issue, closely linked to broader socioeconomic conditions. Many urban respondents identified factors such as unemployment, poverty, and social inequality as the primary causes of crime. There is a general belief among these communities that addressing crime requires structural reforms, including improved public policies and government support to create job opportunities and enhance overall social welfare.

In contrast, rural communities tend to perceive criminal behavior as a localized and interpersonal issue, often stemming from community-level tensions and conflicts. Interview responses indicated that crimes in rural areas are frequently associated with disputes over

limited resources such as land and water and dissatisfaction within social relationships. These communities tend to focus more on internal dynamics, placing emphasis on the social fabric and day-to-day interactions, rather than attributing crime to broader systemic failures.

Moreover, the research found that social stigma is more prevalent in rural areas, making residents more reluctant to report criminal acts. Many respondents acknowledged that reporting a crime could damage the reputation of individuals and families involved, potentially leading to further conflict and social division. As a result, there is a tendency among rural residents to resolve conflicts informally, even when they involve criminal behavior. This contrasts with urban communities, where there is generally a greater willingness to report crimes to authorities, based on the belief that doing so contributes to a safer public environment.

The results suggest that public perceptions of crime are shaped by the unique social and economic contexts of each region. In urban areas, the emphasis is on systemic solutions and institutional accountability, while in rural areas, the focus lies more on maintaining social harmony and resolving conflicts within the community. Understanding these differing perspectives is essential for the development of region-specific crime prevention strategies that are both effective and culturally appropriate.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

The results of this research highlight several critical policy implications that must be considered to effectively address criminal behavior in both urban and rural areas.

First, in urban areas, policies should prioritize job creation and poverty reduction. The government must enhance vocational training programs and entrepreneurship initiatives to improve the competitiveness of the workforce, particularly among vulnerable groups facing unemployment. Additionally, expanding access to quality education is essential to equip individuals with the necessary skills to participate in the modern labor market and reduce the appeal of criminal activities.

Second, in rural areas, policy efforts should focus on improving access to education and social infrastructure. Educational programs must not only increase literacy rates but also offer practical skills training that aligns with the needs of rural communities. Furthermore, investment in social infrastructure, such as community centers and inclusive public programs, can foster stronger social cohesion and help prevent conflicts that may lead to criminal behavior. Strengthening community solidarity is key to reducing interpersonal tensions and maintaining public order.

Another important recommendation is to strengthen collaboration between government institutions, local communities, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Establishing local communication forums that involve all relevant stakeholders can facilitate the identification of region-specific challenges and the development of appropriate solutions. Additionally, increasing public awareness of the importance of reporting criminal acts is essential for building safer communities. Educating citizens about their rights and responsibilities in maintaining public security can contribute to a more proactive and responsive legal culture.

Ultimately, a holistic and integrated policy approach is required to comprehensively tackle the root causes of crime. By acknowledging the distinct social and economic contexts of urban and rural areas, policymakers can design and implement tailored interventions that address the unique needs of each region. Through collaborative and targeted efforts, it is hoped that crime rates can be reduced and that a more just, safe, and prosperous society can be achieved.

The results of this research provide in-depth insights into the complex interplay between social and economic factors that influence criminal behavior in urban and rural areas. First, the research reveals that economic and social conditions are interrelated, creating environments

that may foster criminal activity. In urban settings, high levels of unemployment and poverty are identified as dominant factors pushing individuals toward criminal acts. Dissatisfaction with economic circumstances not only shapes individual behavior but also contributes to broader social tensions among diverse urban populations. These results underscore the importance of poverty alleviation and job creation as central components of urban crime prevention policies.

Meanwhile, in rural areas, the research demonstrates that local social dynamics have a more pronounced effect on criminal behavior. Tensions between residents—often arising from competition over resources and social stigma—create environments in which crime may escalate. The tendency of rural communities to resolve conflicts informally, coupled with reluctance to engage formal legal mechanisms, highlights the importance of community-based approaches in addressing rural crime. Empowering local communities to take an active role in managing social issues is expected to reduce criminal acts by reinforcing positive social networks and community solidarity.

The policy implications of these results are clear. To effectively reduce crime, there must be synergy between economic interventions and social programs. Expanding access to education and skill development in rural areas can provide viable alternatives for individuals under economic stress. Conversely, in urban areas, policies should emphasize sustainable employment creation and targeted support for vulnerable populations. Such approaches not only aim to reduce crime but also to enhance overall quality of life in affected communities.

Lastly, it is crucial to emphasize that the development of effective policy responses must be grounded in a deep understanding of local contexts. This research demonstrates that one-size-fits-all solutions are insufficient, as each region has unique characteristics that require context-specific strategies. By involving communities in both the planning and implementation of crime prevention policies, more sustainable and responsive solutions can be achieved. Through collaborative efforts among government, civil society, and the public, it is hoped that criminal activity can be mitigated and that communities can thrive in a safer, more harmonious environment.

CONCLUSION

This research has successfully identified and analyzed the social and economic factors influencing criminal behavior in both urban and rural areas. The results indicate that in urban regions, economic conditions—particularly unemployment and poverty—significantly contribute to rising crime rates. Public dissatisfaction with economic hardships creates conditions that may lead individuals to engage in criminal acts. Accordingly, policies aimed at poverty alleviation and sustainable job creation are essential to effectively address these issues.

In contrast, the research shows that in rural areas, social factors play a more dominant role in triggering criminal behavior. Interpersonal tensions, social stigma, and conflicts over resources emerge as key contributors to crime within small communities. These results emphasize the importance of community-based approaches that focus on building social harmony, expanding access to education, and enhancing skill development. Empowering rural populations to resolve issues through peaceful and constructive means is expected to reduce crime in these areas.

The recommendations arising from this research stress the need for integrated economic and social policy interventions. A holistic approach involving collaboration between government institutions, local communities, and non-governmental organizations is crucial to designing effective crime prevention strategies. Strengthening social networks, increasing educational

access, and implementing practical skill-building programs can contribute to the creation of safer and more prosperous communities.

This research makes an important contribution to the understanding of the complex nature of criminality in diverse social and economic contexts. By recognizing the differences in public perceptions and structural realities between urban and rural areas, more targeted and relevant strategies for crime prevention can be developed. Further research is recommended to explore additional factors influencing crime and to evaluate the effectiveness of policies implemented across different regions in Indonesia..

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