

## Ethnicity and Crime: A Sociological Analysis

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### Abstract

Social deviation, particularly criminal conduct, is one of the most prevalent phenomena within human society. There is also support to conclude that there is a correlation between crime and ethnic group. To examine this more closely, one could say that crime is a function of structural conditions to which ethnic groups belong. In Iran, the number and variety of crimes have not been committed equally amongst ethnic groups. Consequently, the highest rate of crime has been observed in Sistani groups and the least in Turkish groups. Upon closer analysis, addiction, murder and theft constitute the most prevalent crimes within specific ethnic groups. The number and variety of the crimes among immigrant ethnic groups is considerably higher than in native (local) ethnic groups. In the following study, the ethnic groups in Golestan Province (one of the northern province of Iran) have been classified into six groups, and the types and the crime rates of these ethnic groups have been identified. These groups have specific and different structural and cultural conditions. The sociological analysis of crime committed by these ethnic groups crimes relate to the structural conditions (socio-cultural) and cultural differences, more specifically to: the migrant and native culture, poverty culture, attitudes, values, beliefs, and standard of living in these groups. These relationships will be examined more closely below.

### Keywords

Crime, Ethnic Group, Golestan Province

### Introduction

In today's world, crime is considered as one of life's social realities. The fact that people and groups benefit from crime contributes to both stability and disorder. This disorder is based on contradictions between norms and roles. One can be isolated if they pay no attention to other groups functioning in their regional arena. These crimes and deviance result from the opposition between basic societal values and the ability of certain communities, and in the case of Iran tribes, to achieve these values. On the other hand, weaknesses to expected societal conduct can be caused the plurality in ethnic, cultural and social groups.

### The Issue: Ethnicity and Crime

Ethnicity is a fundamental category of social organization which is based on membership as defined by a sense of common historical origins and which may also include shared culture, religion or language. Sub-cultural variations, caused by the plurality of the social and cultural groups within an ethnic group, are common characteristics noted in highly populated and colonial societies. When locations

become too populated, it is ethnicity and the different social groups that affect integration and the acceptance of social regulations. Population density and dissimilarity within different ethnic and social groups will cause difficulties for newly arrived immigrants (Fox, 1984: 230 and Reckless, 1967: 123).

From both sociological and social pathology perspectives, one can conclude that the variety of ethnic and cultural groups could create social “distance” and develop both competition and individualism that are factors of both conflict and social anomie. It would appear that in societies consisting of a variety of ethnic and social groups, cultural pluralism would develop and create a form of consistency, resulting in different ethnic and cultural groups living together and where each group or tribe keeps its respective customs, but accepts the social living methods of other groups. In this case, the cultural differentiation coefficient would be high and cultural contradictions and negative competition would create an atmosphere where crime and social deviation will develop and eventually increase.

### **Research Questions and Concepts**

The research below was created to address the following general theoretical questions:

- Is there any relationship between ethnic groups and crime?
- To what extent is the type of crime a function of the type and texture of the ethnic group?
- How can these phenomena be explained from a sociological perspective?
- Can there be general conclusions drawn from studying an example of a similar society and examining the ethnic groups within Golestan Province in Iran?

The main concepts of this research include:

#### **1) Crime**

Crime is said to include those actions that violate the law (Mann, 1983:69). On the other hand, crime could be viewed as an action or inaction that is not foreseen in the law, but for which a punishment would be considered as appropriate and which can be documented by the actor. As a comprehensive definition, one can state that crime generally means law deviation and, in judicial terms, any action being contrary to the written law which defines criminal conduct.

#### **2) Ethnic Group**

The term of ethnicity is derived from the Greek word “ethnos,” which may be translated as a people or nation. One of the most influential definitions of

ethnicity can be found in Max Weber's *Economy and Society* (1968[1922]), where he describes ethnic groups as “human groups ( other than kinship groups ) which cherish a belief in their common origins of such a kind that it provides a basis for the creation of a community.” An ethnic group has also been referred to as a “group of people having similar characteristics such as religion, language and nationality” (Theodorson 1996:135). And finally, ethnic group exhibit “common culture” and are “full of identity” and a “feeling” that they should be recognized as a “sub-group of a society” (Blumer, 1986: 54 and Box, 1971: 119). As a result, members of every ethnic group are, due to their special cultural characteristics, different from other members of their society. As a comprehensive definition, one could conclude that an ethnic group consists of a group of people with special religious, racial and geographic characteristics with special customs, thereby forming a specific social and cultural identity.

### 3) **Ethnic Groups in Iran**

In Iran, there are a variety of identified ethnic groups and those that will be examined in the research below will include the: Sistani, Balooch, Turkish, Turkman, Persian (local), and smaller groups including the Shahroodi and the Khorasani. In the most general terms, one can divide Iranian ethnic groups into two categories: immigrant and Persian (local) groups.

## **Theoretical Framework**

A wide variety of theoretical perspectives can be found supporting contemporary studies of ethnicity and ethnic conflict (Rex and Mason, 1986). Some, like rational choice theory, are methodologically individualistic and apply a cost-benefit formula to account for ethnic preferences and to explain the dynamic of ethnic group formation. These have been criticized on the grounds that they fail to appreciate the collective dynamics of much ethnic behavior and underestimate the irrational side of ethnic violence. Another common perspective focuses on ethnic stratification: neo-Marxist theories that stress that the economic components underlie much of the ethnic discrimination. Another paradigm has been presented by George Ritzer (Ritzer, 1988: 397-400), specifically the convergent theoretical model, which consists of three main theories including sociology, crime, and social pathology.

### **Social Disorganization Theory**

Social Disorganization Theory consists of the three concepts of anomie, social control and cultural pluralism. This theory emphasizes that the causes of criminal activity rely on the regional social structure, cultural conflict, internal and religious control weaknesses, social failures, and the relationships between groups to explain the reasons for an increase in crime.

## **Social Ecology Theory**

Social Ecology Theory includes such factors as social environment, social determinism, population density, immigration, social solidarity, ethnic conflicts, and the location of human residential places to explain individual and group personalities as crime increases.

## **Social Inequalities Theory**

Social Inequalities Theory refers to such dynamics as economical poverty, unemployment, economical discrimination, insufficient service distribution system and life resources, competition between groups, and cultural contradictions to clarify the relation on the development of crime.

## **Research Hypotheses**

- Two different hypotheses alternatives will be examined and will be divided into “macro” and “micro” hypotheses within the research explained below. “Macro” hypotheses used in this research include:
  - Rate and type of crime is a function of the ethnic groups' structure;
  - Rate of crime will be higher in migrant ethnic groups in local or native groups;
  - Crimes are a function of geographical structure and are based on the environmental quality of each respective ethnic group;
  - There is significant relationship between economical situation of each ethnic group and crime rate; and
  - The rate of crimes in ethnic groups will benefit from internal and external weakness and those that are weakest from this perspective will exhibit higher crime rates (i.e. there is significant relationship between social control quality and crime).
- Sixteen micro hypotheses are used in this research that analyzes the relationship and correlation between these 16 factors and their correlation with the crime committed by each respective ethnic group.

## **Research Variables**

The “macro” variables include:

1. Group ethnic structure
2. Group economic structure
3. Group geographical structure

4. Group defined as native or migrant
5. Group social and individual control
6. Group cultural norms

and the “micro” variables consist of: age, gender, job situation, financial poverty, religion, attitude, education, frustration, residential place, relation with criminal behaviors, family density, family's tangle, criminal record, and values.

## Research Methodology

Field research surveys were the predominant used in this research. Required data were collected through “fish” techniques, questionnaire forms, interview, and observation.

Statistical population included all prisoners who were serving their punishment period in prisons in Gorgan and Gonbad (the counties of Golestan province in Iran). Each of the prisons belonged to special ethnic group (located in Golestan province). Statistical population consists of 3865 persons as follows:

Prison Association	Number	Percent
Gorgan	1741	45/05
Gonbad	2124	54/95
Total	3865	100

The sample volume consisted of 460 persons selected based on the Cochran method. The sample unit of this research analysis was type of crime. Some special persons in proportion to population structure were elected from every group. Research samples were obtained by probability sampling methods through simple random and classified method. The obtained data was analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistical methods.

Table I: Crimes of the Sistani Group

S. No.	Crimes	Frequency	Percent
1	Theft	17	12/69
2	Drug Addiction	23	17/16
3	Murdering (Homicide)	18	13/83
4	Drugs Smuggling and Distribution	58	43/28
5	Assault and Battery	3	02/24
6	Embezzlement	1	00/75
7	Sexual Offences	2	01/49
8	Fraud	2	01/49
9	Worthless Check	2	02/24
10	Others	7	05/23
	<b>Total</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>100</b>

As Table I shows, the major crimes within the Sistani group were: drug smuggling and distribution, drug addiction, murdering/homicide, and theft. On the basis of the above table, 86.96% crimes in the analyzed population was committed by the Sistani ethnic group.

Table II: Crimes of the Persian (Local) Group

S. No.	Crimes	Frequency	Percent
1	Theft	16	14/03
2	Drug Addiction	17	14/91
3	Murdering (Homicide)	8	07/02
4	Drugs Smuggling and Distribution	32	28/07
5	Assault and Battery	10	08/77
6	Embezzlement	3	02/63
7	Sexual Offences	11	09/65

S. No.	Crimes	Frequency	Percent
8	Fraud	3	02/64
9	Worthless Check	7	06/14
10	Others	7	05/23
	<b>Total</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>100</b>

As Table II shows, major crimes committed by the Persian (“local”) group included drug smuggling and distribution, drug addiction, theft, sexual offences, and assault and battery.

Table III: Crimes of the Turkman Group

S. No.	Crimes	Frequency	Percent
1	Theft	14	24/14
2	Drug Addiction	8	13/79
3	Murdering (Homicide)	4	06/90
4	Drugs Smuggling and Distribution	18	31/04
5	Assault and Battery	5	08/62
6	Embezzlement	0	0
7	Sexual Offences	1	01/72
8	Fraud	0	0
9	Worthless Check	3	05/17
10	Others	5	08/62
	<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>100</b>

Table III reveals that the major crimes committed by the Turkman consist of drug smuggling and distribution, theft, and drug addiction.

Table IV: Crimes of the Balooch Group

S. No.	Crimes	Frequency	Percent
1	Theft	10	13/51
2	Drug Addiction	12	16/23
3	Murdering (Homicide)	6	08/10
4	Drugs Smuggling and Distribution	33	44/59
5	Assault and Battery	4	05/41
6	Embezzlement	0	0
7	Sexual Offences	4	05/41
8	Fraud	2	02/70
9	Worthless Check	2	02/70
10	Others	1	01/35
	<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>100</b>

Table IV indicates that the major crimes involving the Balooch group are drug smuggling and distribution, drug addiction, and theft.

Table V: Crimes of the Turkish Group

S. No.	Crimes	Frequency	Percent
1	Theft	12	27/03
2	Drug Addiction	4	09/09
3	Murdering (Homicide)	3	06/80
4	Drugs Smuggling and Distribution	13	29/60
5	Assault and Battery	3	06/80
6	Embezzlement	5	11/40
7	Sexual Offences	0	0
8	Fraud	0	0



S. No.	Crimes	Frequency	Percent
8	Worthless Check	3	06/80
9	Others	1	02/30
10	<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100</b>

Table V shows that the major crimes of the Turkish groups involve drug smuggling and distribution and theft.

Table VI: Crimes of other Groups

S. No.	Crimes	Frequency	Percent
1	Theft	4	11/11
2	Drug Addiction	7	19/44
3	Murdering (Homicide)	4	11/11
4	Drugs Smuggling and Distribution	10	27/78
5	Assault and Battery	1	02/78
6	Embezzlement	0	0
7	Sexual Offences	2	05/55
8	Fraud	1	02/78
9	Worthless Check	4	11/11
10	Others	3	08/23
	<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>100</b>

Table VI reveals that the major crimes of other groups within the Golestan Province in Iran include drug smuggling and distribution and drug addiction.

Table VII: The crimes of Ethnic Groups: Type, Frequency and Percent

S. No.	Crimes	Sistani		Local		Turkman		Balooch		Turkish		Other	
		P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F
1	Theft	17	12/69	16	14/03	14	24/14	10	13/51	12	27/03	4	11/11
2	Drug Addiction	23	17/16	17	14/91	8	13/79	12	16/23	4	09/09	7	19/64
3	Murdering (Homicide)	18	13/83	8	07/02	4	06/90	6	08/10	3	06/80	4	11/11
4	Drugs Smuggling and Distribution	58	43/28	32	28/07	18	31/04	33	44/56	13	29/60	10	27/78
5	Assault and Battery	3	02/24	10	08/77	5	08/62	4	05/41	3	06/80	1	02/78
6	Embezzlement	1	00/75	3	02/63	0	0	0	0	5	11/40	0	0
7	Sexual Offences	2	01/89	11	09/65	1	01/72	4	05/41	0	0	2	05/55
8	Fraud	2	01/89	3	02/64	0	0	2	02/70	0	0	1	02/78
9	Worthless Check	2	02/24	7	06/14	3	05/17	2	02/70	3	06/80	4	11/11
10	Others	7	05/23	7	06/14	5	08/62	1	01/35	1	02/30	3	08/23
	<b>Total</b>	134	100	100	100	58	100	74	100	44	100	36	100

In summary, Table VII highlights that within all of the ethnic groups, the crime of drug smuggling and distribution is the most frequent crime. In all groups, drug addiction and theft ranked highly.

## Conclusion and Discussion

These statistics clearly reveal that the smuggling and distribution of drugs ranks as the top criminal activity for all ethnic groups, followed closely by drug addiction. When the most violent crime is analyzed, it was found to be committed at the highest rate by the Sistani group, and theft was most prevalent in the Shahroodi and Khorasani group.

The highest rate of crime in general was found to be committed by the Sistani and Persian/Local" groups and the lowest crime rate was observed in the Turkish group. The ranking of each group by commission of crime from maximum to minimum was revealed to be: 1) Sistani, 2) Persian/Local, 3) Balooch, 4) Turkman, 5) Turkish, and finally 6) other groups (e.g. Khorasani, etc). In general, one could conclude that the rate of crime and deviance was notably higher when compared to native or local groups. Poverty and economical limitations are likely the cause behind the higher crime rates.

As a result of these findings, one could conclude that population size and density, cultural differences, and the lack of ethnic homogeneity cause social and economic imbalance and thus create the potential for criminal conduct. Furthermore, when social distance and differentiation increases among ethnic groups in a fixed region, ethnocentrism and social and ethnic conflict will evolve. With the accumulation of a variety of ethnic groups in one area, the social disorder coefficient and disorganization will be combined to result in an increase in crime and deviant behavior.

Since the nature of crime depends on social and cultural institutions, one could claim that the criminal actions committed by members of each respective ethnic group are based on those social and cultural structures within each specific group.

Notable findings from this and other studies reveal that:

- Crime is a social phenomenon and is of a sociological nature because crime depends on social system structures and foundations;
- Sociological variables such as social environment, location of residence, economic poverty, social distance, cultural distinctions, social supervision, social insufficiency, career status, and immigration, and also biological and physiological variables such as age, gender, height and psychological variables like individual attitude toward life are important in explaining the commission of crime by tribal groups and individuals;
- Increased crime rate and its variety are rooted in socio-economic structure and are due to the low quality of the ethnic group's living level;

- That part of each respective ethnic group that has managed to acclimate to their environment enjoys better health and as a result, they commit less crime;
- Population density and concentration, and cultural and demographic heterogeneity affect the scope of crimes;
- Migration increases the number and variety of crimes since migrants intensify their commitment to criminal behavior since they fail to adequately adapt to their new environment;
- There is correlation between these factors: social environment, location of residence, social supervision, unemployment, immigration, disappointment, associating with criminals, and prior criminal convictions;
- Crime is observed at the highest levels in those groups with the greatest socio-cultural differences;
- Groups which have not been successful in realizing their goals and objectives are likely to commit more crimes; and
- Higher levels of economic poverty within specific ethnic groups will lead to intensification of criminal behavior.

As a result of the above and other research, one could conclude that it would be possible to explain criminal behavior committed by different ethnic groups by examining the relationship between that group and the local social structure and expected societal norms. Those ethnic groups that struggle the most to meet the local social standards are likely to engage in the highest amount of crime and deviant behavior.

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