

Colorado Probation Research in Brief

Integrated Theory and Crimes of Trust

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Key Words: Crimes of Trust; Integrated Theory; National Youth Survey; White collar crime; Peers

Summary/Conclusions

There has been debate about whether factors that drive crime generally also contribute to economic or "white collar" crime. Utilizing data from the National Youth Survey Family Survey, researchers examined correlations between criminological theories and crimes of trust (e.g. fraud, workplace theft, embezzlement). The study analyzed self-report data from approximately 1,725 individuals between the ages of 18 to 24 and 38 to 45. After examining a number of factors in an individual's life, the most influential factor for the prevalence and frequency crimes of trust was the criminality of one's peers.

Limitations of Information

The study is based on self-report data, which may impact the accuracy of data provided. It included many different types of crimes of trust. Research in the future may consider focusing on one or two types of crimes of trust. The study examined two groups, which excluded a large portion of early adult life (25 –37). Since the study used survey participants in the general population, it is unclear if individuals under community supervision would have similar results.

Caveat: The information presented here is intended to summarize and inform readers of research and information relevant to probation work. It can provide a framework for carrying out the business of probation as well as suggestions for practical application of the material. While it may, in some instances, lead to further exploration and result in *future* decisions, it is not intended to prescribe policy and is not necessarily conclusive in its findings. Some of its limitations are described above.

Peers and Crimes of Trust

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

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

The results of the study found the most significant predictor of crimes of trust is criminality of one's peers. For OR both prevalence and frequency of crimes of trust were significantly correlated with criminal peers. For AO, only prevalence of crimes of trust was correlated with criminality of one's peers. For ORs, time spent with family and on work had a significant reduction in the prevalence of crimes of trust. The study notes that the amount of the reduction will differ depending on offense type, as some types of crimes of trust rely on employment. This may also explain why only ORs

had a significant reduction in prevalence of crimes of trust. In the OR group, beliefs (anti-social attitude) had the strongest influence on peer criminality. Lastly, no sociodemographic (e.g. age, ethnicity, race) variable was directly correlated with of the commission of crimes of trust.

Practical Applications

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

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