

# The Dark Side of the Mind: A Psychological Study of Deviant Behaviour

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## ABSTRACT

Criminal behaviour is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by psychological, cognitive, social, and environmental factors. This study investigates deviant behaviour through the analysis of empirical research, case studies, and forensic reports. Key predictors examined include childhood trauma, peer influence, cognitive distortions, personality disorders, and socio-economic disadvantages. Employing a descriptive and analytical design with mixed methods, the research identifies patterns in childhood-onset and adolescent-onset deviance. Findings reveal that criminal behaviour emerges from the interaction of multiple factors rather than a single cause. The study underscores the importance of evidence-based interventions, early preventive strategies, and rehabilitation programs to reduce criminal tendencies and recidivism.

## INTRODUCTION

Crime is a significant social problem affecting communities and nations globally. Understanding the psychological underpinnings of criminal behaviour is essential for both preventive and rehabilitative measures. Criminal psychology explores the cognitive, emotional, and social factors that drive individuals to engage in deviant acts, aiming to understand their motives, mental processes, and risk factors.

Research indicates that criminal behaviour is rarely the product of a single factor; instead, it arises from the interaction of multiple influences. Early childhood experiences, including emotional neglect, abuse, and family dysfunction, can impair moral development and emotional regulation, predisposing individuals to antisocial behaviour. Peer relationships and social learning further influence deviance, as association with delinquent peers or exposure to aggressive role models normalizes criminal acts.

Cognitive distortions, impulsivity, and antisocial personality traits are additional psychological determinants of criminality. Environmental and socioeconomic stressors, such as poverty, limited education, and exposure to violence, exacerbate these tendencies. The interplay of these factors demonstrates the complexity of criminal behaviour, necessitating a multidisciplinary approach to prevention and rehabilitation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Research in criminal psychology consistently demonstrates that deviant behaviour arises from a complex interplay of psychological, social, and environmental influences. Childhood trauma, such as emotional neglect and abuse, is a major predictor of later antisocial behaviour. Boren and Wynn (2014) found that children who experience neglect often develop aggression, impulsivity, and moral disengagement, increasing their likelihood of engaging in delinquent acts. Longitudinal research by Farrington (2005) also highlights that inconsistent parenting, harsh punishment, and inadequate supervision significantly contribute to juvenile delinquency. In India, Sharma and Kaur (2018) observed that urban youth exposed to family dysfunction exhibited higher rates of deviance, indicating the cultural relevance of family influences.

Peer influence has been identified as another key factor in deviant behaviour. Akers and Jennings (2009) reported that individuals associating with deviant peers are more likely to commit crimes, as antisocial behaviours are reinforced within social groups. Loeber et al. (2003) demonstrated that exposure to aggressive

or delinquent role models increases the likelihood of violent behaviour during adolescence. These studies confirm that social learning plays a critical role in shaping criminal tendencies.

Cognitive distortions also significantly contribute to deviance. Gibbs (2016) found that criminal thinking patterns, including externalizing blame, minimizing harm, and justifying behaviour, correlate with persistent antisocial behaviour and recidivism. Yochelson and Samenow (1976) similarly noted that early development of distorted thinking predicts continued criminal activity, emphasizing the need for early psychological interventions.

Personality traits and mental disorders are strongly linked to deviant behaviour. Hare (1999) identified psychopathy and antisocial personality traits, characterized by impulsivity, manipulateness, and lack of empathy, as significant predictors of criminality. Kiehl (2006) provided neuroimaging evidence of impaired moral reasoning in individuals with psychopathic traits, demonstrating a biological basis for antisocial behaviour.

Socioeconomic and environmental factors further influence criminal tendencies. Moffitt (1993) emphasized that life-course persistent offenders often face cumulative disadvantages, such as poverty, limited education, and exposure to violence. Sharma (2020) showed that urban Indian adolescents exposed to delinquent peers and violent media exhibited increased deviant behaviour, while Gupta and Verma (2019) highlighted the role of substance abuse in recidivism among adult offenders.

Empirical case analyses provide additional insights. The 2012 Nirbhaya case illustrated how impulsivity, peer influence, and socio-cultural factors converged to produce extreme violent behaviour. The 2024 Pune Hit-and-Run case revealed cognitive distortions, moral disengagement, and social privilege as contributing factors to deviance. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that deviant behaviour is multifactorial, arising from the interaction of psychological, social, cognitive, and environmental factors, and necessitating multidisciplinary intervention strategies.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The study employs a descriptive and analytical design using a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative case study analysis with quantitative data trends to explore factors influencing deviant behaviour.

### Hypotheses

Childhood trauma and dysfunctional family environments significantly influence deviant behaviour.

Peer influence and social learning positively correlate with criminal acts.

Cognitive distortions and mental disorders increase the likelihood of persistent deviance.

Socioeconomic disadvantages are significant predictors of criminal behaviour.

### Variables

Independent: Childhood trauma, peer influence, cognitive distortions, mental disorders, socioeconomic status

Dependent: Deviant behaviour

Control: Gender, education, urban/rural context

### Population and Sample

Population includes children, adolescents, and adults documented in forensic reports, case studies, and research studies. Sample consists of 15–20 purposively selected documented cases with detailed psychological profiles.

### Data Collection Methods

Secondary data from journals, books, NCRB reports, and online research; case study analysis; qualitative

thematic analysis; quantitative descriptive statistics.

## Data Analysis

Thematic analysis for qualitative data; descriptive statistics for quantitative variables; cross-comparison to test hypotheses.

## Ethical Considerations

Confidentiality and anonymity maintained; proper citation of secondary data; sensitive personal information protected.

## Factors Influencing Deviant Behaviour

Deviant behaviour emerges from multiple interacting factors, including childhood trauma, family dysfunction, peer influence, cognitive distortions, personality traits, substance abuse, and socioeconomic disadvantages. Understanding these factors is essential for designing effective prevention and rehabilitation strategies.

## Case Studies / Practical Examples

The 2012 Nirbhaya case demonstrated the convergence of impulsivity, peer influence, and socio-cultural factors in producing extreme violent behaviour. The 2024 Pune Hit-and-Run case highlighted how cognitive distortions, moral disengagement, and social privilege contribute to deviance. These cases illustrate the practical applicability of psychological and social research in understanding criminal behaviour.

## Implications

Policy: Implement early intervention programs targeting childhood trauma and family dysfunction. Law Enforcement: Use psychological profiling and predictive analytics for crime prevention. Rehabilitation: Provide cognitive-behavioural therapy, social skill training, and mentorship programs. Community Measures: Ensure safe school and neighborhood environments, implement anti-bullying programs, and provide recreational opportunities to reduce risk factors.

## CONCLUSION

Deviant behaviour is the result of a complex interaction of psychological, cognitive, social, and environmental factors. Childhood experiences, peer influences, cognitive distortions, personality traits, and socio-economic conditions collectively shape criminal tendencies. Evidence from empirical studies and case analyses underscores the need for multidisciplinary interventions, including prevention, rehabilitation, and policy measures. Understanding these factors can reduce recidivism, improve rehabilitation outcomes, and promote safer communities.

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