

Social Bonding Theory

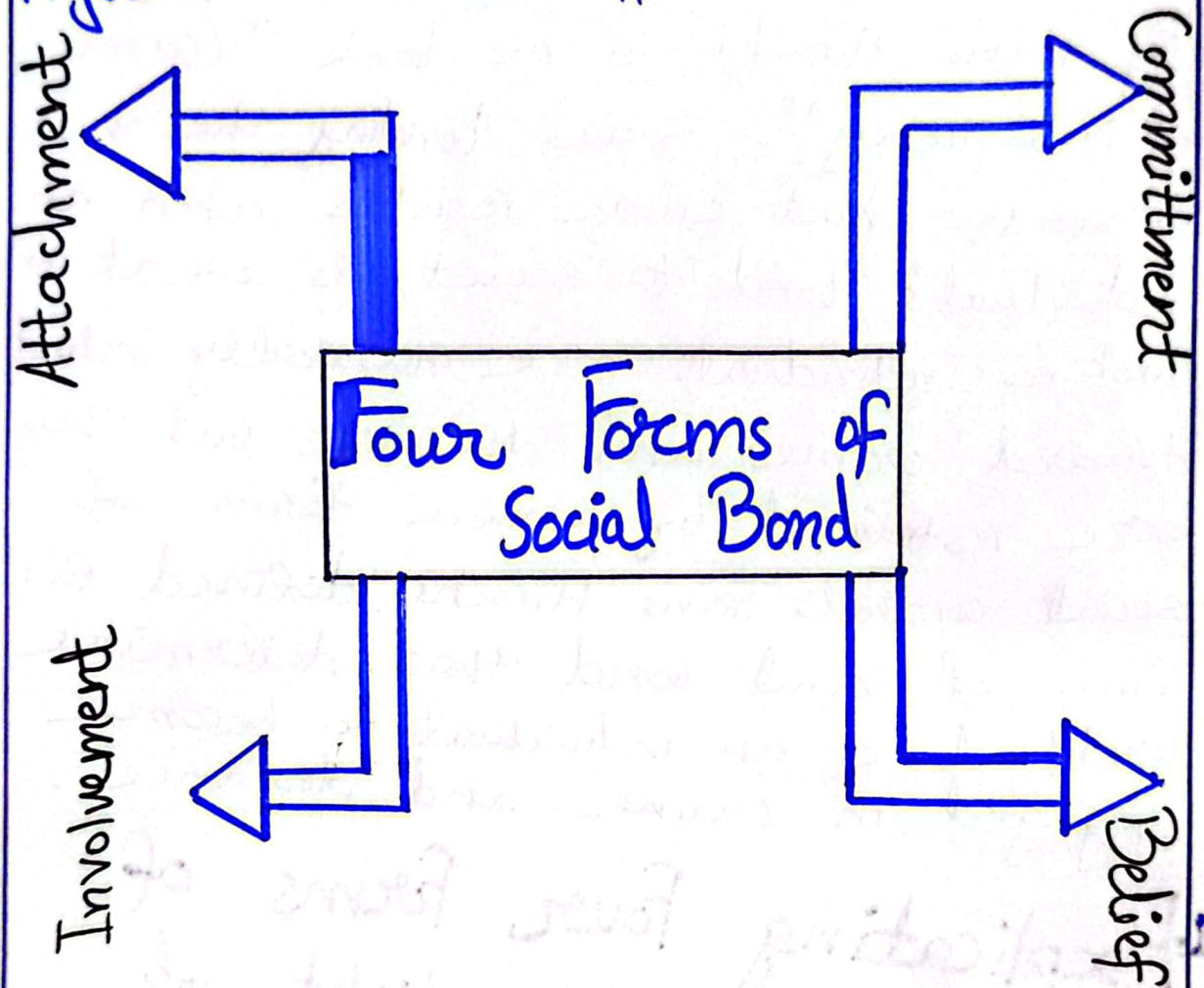
Social bonding theory is a major variant of social control theory. It was propounded by Travis Hirschi in his book "Causes of Delinquency". Social bonding theory asserts that crime results when an individual's bond to society is weak or broken. Individuals are naturally inclined toward crime and deviance but they are restrained by various forms of social control. Travis Hirschi defined four forms of social bond that determine likelihood of an individual to become engaged in crime and deviance.

1. Explicating Four Forms of Social Bond in the Light of Travis Hirschi's Social Bonding theory

In social bonding theory, Travis Hirschi defined four forms of social bond that act as deterrence for an individual against crime and deviance. An individual's bond to society is determined by attachment, commitment, involvement

and belief of that individual in society social norms and values.

Fig:- Four Forms of Social Bond



i- Attachment:

This form of social bond is defined as

“Emotional connectivity and sensitivity of an individual to feelings and opinions of others i.e. parents, teachers and peers.”

Strong attachment of an individual to society compels individual to prevent crime and deviance because he does

Not want to hurt those he values. However, weak family attachment is an indicator of weak social bond which contributes to crime and deviance.

Example showing correlation between weak family attachment and crime
Case study of various school shooters in the US reveal weak parental bonds (The New York Times, School shooting in US, Sept 2025).

ii- Commitment

This form of social bond is defined as

“Investment of an individual in conventional activities such as education, employment, reputation.”

The more people have to lose, the more they are reluctant to deviance and crime. Poor commitment to education and unemployment reflect weak social bond and contributes to crime and deviance.

a- Example showing correlation between
“poor commitment to education” and
“deviance and crime”

In Capetown, nearly 63% of young offenders engaged in drug trafficking

are school drop-outs (CNN, Drug addiction and Illiteracy in Africa, Dec 2026)

b- Correlation between Unemployment and Crime

The worldly notorious MS-13 and Barrio-18 gangs ^{thrive} on recruiting unemployed individuals, struggling with economic hardships.

iii- Involvement

This form of social bond is defined as

“Participation of individuals in conventional activities. When individuals are involved in education, career, and constructive activities their bond to society is strong and they are less likely to engage in deviance and crime.”

Example showing correlation between 'lack of involvement in constructive activities' and crime

Around 6500 Pakistani nationals who joined radical groups between January 2024 to October 2025 were disengaged from constructive activities (Dawn, Radicalism in Pakistan, Oct 2025)

Belief

This form of social bond is defined as

“The extent upto which an individual accepts and internalizes social norms and values. Strong belief of individuals in law, regulations and authority compel individuals not to violate them.”

Weak belief in law and order compels individuals not to follow them.

Example showing correlation between ‘weak belief in law and order’ and ‘crime’

Due to weak belief in law and order of Pakistani citizens Pakistani people in they feel less bound to follow them. Due to prevalence of corruption and lack of accountability citizens lack belief in state institutions.

Country's ^{corruption} Perception index stands at 144 out of 148 countries due to which trust of citizens in state has eroded. This contributes to surge in crimes that is why Pakistan has become third worst country in terms of law and order (Tribune, Surge in Crimes, Feb 2026).

2- Factors showing Crime results when an individual's bond to society is weak

Juvenile delinquency caused by weak family attachment

Drug addiction caused by poor commitment to education

Surge in crimes caused by unemployment

Involvement in criminal networks due to lack of involvement in positive activities

Increased susceptibility to crimes caused by community breakdown

Fig:- Factors showing Crime results when an individual's bond to society is weak

Juvenile delinquency caused by weak family attachment

One of the factors that show crime results when an individual's bond to society is weak is juvenile delinquency caused by weak family attachment.

The weak family attachment is an indicator of weak social bond that compels individuals to delinquency. Its clear evidence is that in Pakistan there has been a surge of 37% in number of broken homes since 2020 due to which juvenile delinquency increases by 2.9% every year (The News, Juvenile Delinquency and weak parental bonds, Jan 2027).

ii- Drug Addiction Caused by Poor Commitment to education

Another factor that shows crime is the outcome of weak social bonds is drug addiction triggered by poor commitment to education. Poor commitment to education weakens social bond and increases susceptibility to deviance and crime. Its clear

example is that around 39% of drug addicts in Punjab are school drop-outs.

Moreover, nearly 17000 cases of snatching and shop-lifting reported in Karachi in 2025 were committed by 8 out-of-school children (The Bloomberg, Illiteracy causing crimes in Pakistan, Nov 2026).

iii. Surge in crimes caused by lack of career opportunities

Unemployment weakens social bond by causing social isolation of individuals.

It is a major contributor to crimes.

For instance, in Pakistan country's unemployment stands at 8.3% with 44.6% job-seekers have age between

18 to 38 years; due to this chronic unemployment crimes are surging.

Unemployment in Pakistan contributes upto 12% to 15% in crimes (BBC,

Unemployment causing crimes in Pakistan, March 2026).

Involvement in criminal networks ^{spelling} triggered by lack of involvement in constructive activities

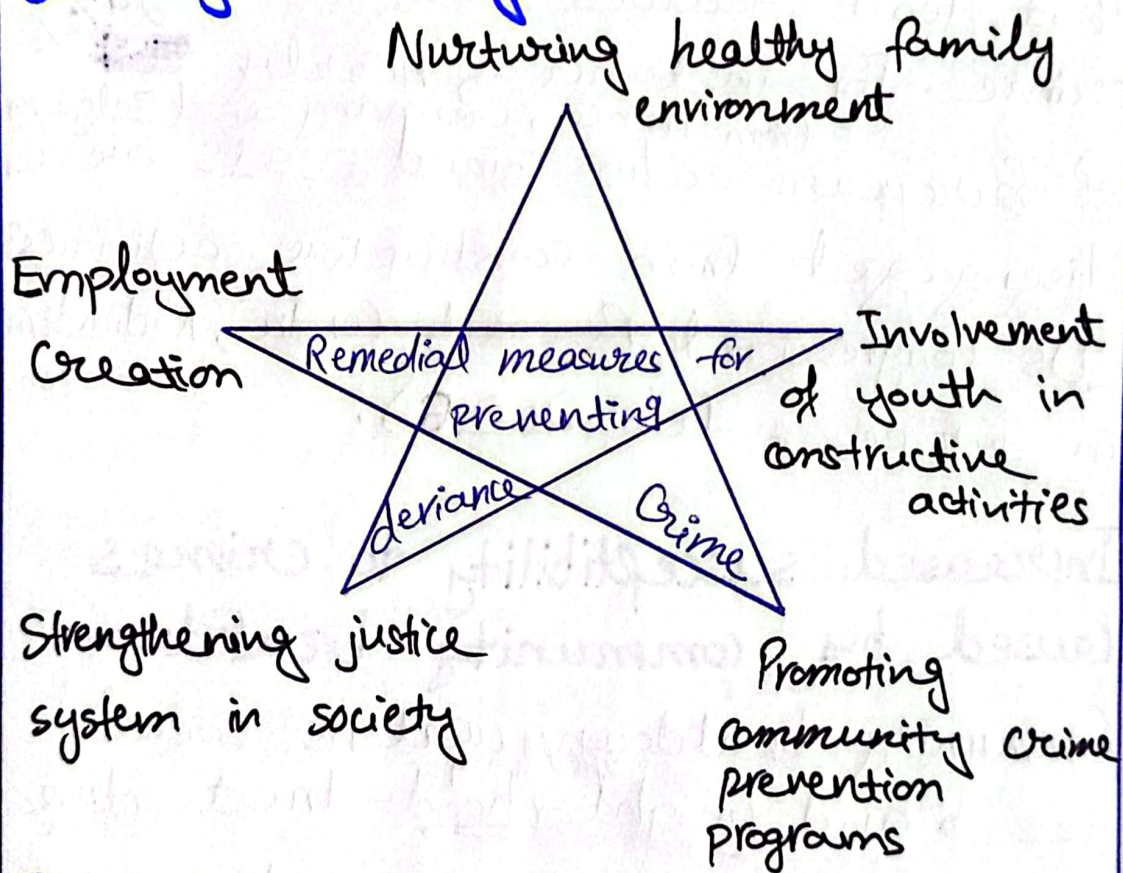
lack of involvement of individuals in constructive activities like education, skill-building, employment, cultural and community service programs contribute to weakening of social bond that leads toward deviance and crime. For instance, nearly ~~29%~~ ^{29%} of Europeans who joined ISIS were disengaged from constructive activities (US Congressional Research Centre, Radicalism in Europe, Feb 2026).

1- Increased susceptibility to crimes caused by community breakdown

Community breakdown ^{spelling} weakens social ties and neighborhood trust due to poverty, migration and urbanization. This leads to deviance and crime because individuals lose meaningful connections and oversight.

For instance, in 1980s to 1990s in Detroit (USA) community collapse due to industrial decline and poverty fostered gang culture in the city.

3. Remedial Measures for Preventing Crime in the Light of Social Bonding Theory



Conclusion

Social bonding theory of Travis Hirschi defines four forms of social bond i.e. attachment, commitment, belief and involvement which prevent individuals

engagement in crime and deviance.

- Strong attachment to society, strong commitment to education, career, involvement in positive activities and strong belief in law and order prevents deviance and crime.