

The Problem of Deviant behaviour and Its Socio-Psychological Essence: Causes, Manifestations, and Preventive Approaches in Contemporary Society

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Abstract

Deviant behavior represents a complex socio-psychological phenomenon that reflects various forms of individual actions deviating from socially accepted norms, moral values, and institutional expectations. The present study examines the nature, essence, and underlying causes of deviantism, emphasizing its multidimensional character and its close connection with the structural and functional transformations of modern social systems. Deviant behavior is not an isolated or foreign element within society; rather, it constitutes a recurring pattern of social conduct that emerges within the broader context of social change, cultural dynamics, and institutional instability.

The article highlights that the roots of deviantism should be sought within the wide spectrum of social structures and processes. As social systems undergo rapid transformation—driven by globalization, technological development, socio-economic inequality, and cultural shifts—individual psychological stability and social consciousness are significantly affected. These changes may weaken traditional normative frameworks and increase the likelihood of behavioral deviations, particularly among vulnerable social groups.

A special emphasis is placed on the difficulty of identifying primary (initial) deviance. In its early stages, deviant tendencies often remain latent and are not easily observable. However, when such tendencies evolve into stable behavioral patterns or harmful habits, their consequences become more visible and significantly more difficult to prevent. The problem is further complicated by the fact that individuals frequently do not perceive their behavior as problematic or socially unacceptable. In the absence of social control mechanisms, moral regulation, or public disapproval, such behavior may become normalized in the individual's perception, gradually leading to deeper ethical and social disorientation.

The study also discusses the role of social environment, education, and socialization processes in shaping behavioral orientations. Weak social control, inadequate educational influence, dysfunctional family structures, and exposure to criminogenic or conflict-prone environments increase the risk of deviant development, especially among youth. Moreover, the paper distinguishes between individual deviance and collective or systemic forms of deviation, arguing that when deviant patterns become widespread within groups or institutions, they transform into a broader social pathology requiring coordinated preventive and policy-level interventions.

The findings underline the importance of early prevention, strengthening social institutions, promoting positive social values, and enhancing individual self-regulation and social responsibility. Effective prevention strategies must integrate socio-psychological support, educational programs, community engagement, and institutional cooperation at national and international levels.

Overall, the article contributes to the understanding of deviantism as a dynamic social phenomenon shaped by the interaction between individual psychological factors and structural conditions of

contemporary society, and it emphasizes the necessity of comprehensive preventive approaches to maintain social stability and moral integrity.

Keywords: deviant behavior, deviantism, socio-psychological factors, social change, social environment, social control, prevention.

he Concept of Deviant Behavior and Its Socio-Psychological Foundations

As one of the important problems studied within sociology, deviantology encompasses various forms of deviance, including crime, terrorism, corruption, suicide, and other behaviors that violate established social norms. Researchers characterize deviance as a distinct social problem that possesses a specific social nature and is directly connected to the functioning and stability of social life. According to Gliniski, deviance represents a social phenomenon that underscores the necessity for societal life to be regulated by legal and normative standards. Deviant behavior occurs when an individual departs, to a certain extent, from the moral principles and behavioral models positively accepted within society. In a collective social environment, such actions are perceived as alien elements, and society often attempts to isolate or marginalize individuals who display them.

The manifestations of deviance are associated with specific individuals and the groups they form. These actors often attempt to introduce behavioral models that are new or unconventional for the society to which they belong. Such efforts may be carried out consciously or may emerge spontaneously. Importantly, new behavioral patterns do not arise suddenly within individual consciousness; rather, they develop gradually over time. In many cases, particularly among adolescents and minors, deviant tendencies emerge as a consequence of insufficient education, weak socialization, or inadequate moral guidance.

At the stage of primary deviance, the manifestation of deviant behavior is usually limited, and therefore it may not yet be appropriate to classify such actions as fully deviant. However, in the absence of early preventive measures, the tendency toward deviance gradually intensifies and eventually begins to shape and regulate the individual's behavior. If the social environment, especially for young people, is characterized by instability or social danger, the risk of deviant orientation increases even when the individual attempts to resist such influences. At this stage, although overt deviant behavior may not yet be present, the emerging inclination can take the form of a persistent psychological tendency, gradually exerting negative effects on consciousness and behavior.

The individual's willpower and internal regulatory mechanisms play a significant role in resisting such tendencies. However, when social threats persist and deviant patterns become widespread, society itself may be described as socially dysfunctional. It is important to distinguish between a "deviant individual" and a "deviant social environment." While the harmful effects of a single individual are limited and often manageable, the spread of deviant norms within groups or communities represents a broader social pathology. In such cases, deviance transcends individual behavior and becomes a societal problem requiring coordinated intervention at national and international levels.

For example, high levels of crime or terrorism within a particular country pose risks not only to its own citizens but also to neighboring societies. Consequently, states develop cooperative programs, conventions, and partnership frameworks aimed at preventing the expansion of socially destructive environments. The primary goal of such collective measures is to prevent social threats from escalating to critical levels and to minimize their long-term societal costs.

Causes and Determinants of Deviant Behavior

Human behavior is highly complex, and it would be simplistic to attempt to define universal norms capable of fully categorizing all individual actions. For this reason, not every deviation from

expected behavior should be interpreted as deviance, nor should all behavioral differences be placed within a single social category (Səməndərova, 2005). Minor deviations may be observed in almost every individual, and if all such variations were labeled as deviant, deviantology would expand into an overly broad concept encompassing virtually all human behavior. Nevertheless, given the richness and diversity of human personality, systematic study of behavioral patterns remains essential (De Groot et al., 2003).

Every action or behavioral response has underlying causes. These may include emotional states such as anger or frustration, positive or negative life events, family dynamics, social environment, peer relationships, or broader collective influences. The range of possible determinants is extensive, and behavioral types vary according to individual personality traits, cognitive abilities, moral development, and social experience. People differ in their intellectual capacity, value systems, emotional regulation, and decision-making processes, which explains the diversity of their reactions to similar situations. An individual may interpret the same event positively or negatively, and this interpretation may either lead to adaptive coping or contribute to the formation of deviant tendencies.

The primary sources of deviance should be sought within the broader social system. As social structures evolve under the influence of modernization, globalization, and socio-cultural transformation, significant psychological and cognitive pressures emerge at the individual level. Early deviant tendencies are often difficult to detect because they may not be immediately visible. However, once such tendencies develop into stable habits or behavioral patterns, prevention becomes considerably more difficult (Ahmadov, 2025).

Another challenge lies in the individual's perception: persons engaging in deviant behavior often do not view their actions as problematic and may consider them normal. In the absence of social control, moral evaluation, or public disapproval, such behavior may intensify and lead to deeper ethical and social disorientation.

Adolescents and young people represent the most vulnerable group in this context. A young individual encountering deviant behavior for the first time may not fully understand its implications. One critical factor influencing susceptibility is the level of cognitive and moral development. Psychological research indicates that full maturation of higher cognitive functions and self-regulation mechanisms typically occurs between the ages of 25 and 30. Consequently, youth and adolescence are considered high-risk periods for the emergence of deviant tendencies, and this age group remains the primary focus of deviance research (Ahmadov, 2026).

Social Reactions to Deviance and Socio-Psychological Determinants

In the early stages of deviance, society's reaction may not be immediately visible; however, as deviant behaviors are repeated, they gradually become socially unacceptable and inevitably provoke a negative social response. Deviant behavior is typically accompanied either by legal violations or by actions that contradict moral norms and social values. In such cases, public condemnation functions as a form of social control, serving as a warning mechanism, particularly for young individuals (Najafov, 2025).

In some situations, deviant acts are not committed individually but within the framework of a group or gang. In legal terms, such a group may acquire the status of a criminal organization, whose activities become prohibited and subject to legal sanctions. These measures aim not only to prevent further harmful consequences but also to rehabilitate the members involved. Group-based deviance represents a more complex social problem, requiring carefully selected corrective and preventive interventions (Najafov, 2025).

The manifestation of deviance at the level of a group or collective often indicates a more serious phenomenon. While an individual may engage in deviant behavior due to personal motives or situational pressures, deviant groups frequently develop their own internal norms and ideological justifications, sometimes coercing others to join. Such alternative normative systems weaken the institutional foundations of society, negatively affect the moral development of the younger generation, and make social intervention more difficult.

Deviance as a Socio-Psychological Factor in Social Dynamics

The social structure and dynamics of society are inherently characterized by diversity and individual differences. These differences exist both within large civilizations and within local communities and are closely related to human nature as well as geographical and socio-cultural conditions. An individual's current social position is shaped by accumulated life experiences, social opportunities, and environmental influences, which significantly affect life trajectories, social roles, and behavioral orientations (Ahmadov, 2025).

Among the social institutions influencing personality formation, the family plays a particularly important role. Research indicates that the dialectical transformations occurring in society are reflected in social institutions, including the family, which is influenced by legal, political, religious, and cultural norms. Scholars emphasize the family's role in shaping personality, values, ideals, and attitudes toward cultural heritage. According to Murdock, the core functions of the family include sexual regulation, reproduction, socialization (educational function), and economic support (Azimov, 2004).

From the perspective of preventing deviant behavior, the socialization and educational function of the family is of particular importance. Through this function, cultural traditions, moral norms, and value systems are transmitted from one generation to another, ensuring the development of socially acceptable behavior. The more effectively the family performs this role, the more successfully children develop as socially adapted individuals.

The frequent occurrence of deviance in society may also be associated with periods of social instability or anomie. Leadership behavior represents another influential factor. When public leaders demonstrate unethical or socially harmful conduct, it may legitimize deviant norms within society. Leadership theories suggest that masses are strongly influenced by leaders, either through imposed authority or through collective identification with leadership figures. In authoritarian contexts, societies may become dependent on the will of dominant leaders, increasing the risk of collective behavioral distortions (Səməndərova, 2005).

Freud emphasized that collective psychology can mobilize individuals toward both constructive and destructive actions, particularly under strong emotional conditions. Thus, mass behavior may be shaped by symbolic ideals, authority, and collective emotional dynamics (Asadov, 2026).

Family Environment and Risk Factors

Research consistently identifies social factors—particularly family conditions—as key determinants of deviant behavior. Empirical evidence shows that individuals raised in dysfunctional families lacking adequate care, supervision, or emotional support are more likely to develop behavioral problems. Family conflict, neglect, low socio-economic status, and emotional deprivation often place adolescents in “risk groups,” increasing their likelihood of engaging in harmful or antisocial behaviors (Ahmadov, 2026).

Incomplete families may contribute to developmental difficulties, especially in the area of communication and emotional regulation. Adolescents who experience emotional neglect often develop feelings of social deprivation or “social hunger,” which increases their vulnerability to deviant influences (Ahmadov, 2026).

Even in two-parent households, the absence of emotional harmony represents a significant risk factor. Frequent conflicts, lack of trust, low cultural or material resources, and emotional distance may lead to loneliness, jealousy, depression, anxiety, or aggression among young people. Exposure to violence or harsh disciplinary practices within the family may foster hostility, resistance, poor self-control, and avoidance of responsibility (Alkayish, 2019).

Parents should recognize that providing food and education alone is insufficient. Adolescents also require meaningful leisure activities and constructive social engagement. Studies show that children raised in culturally enriched family environments internalize social values more effectively and make more balanced life choices (Azimov, 2004).

At the same time, excessive parental control or overprotection (hyperprotection) may also create problems (Asadov, 2026). Adolescents raised under constant supervision and limited autonomy often attempt to assert independence prematurely, sometimes distancing themselves from parental influence, which may result in family conflict and increased vulnerability to external deviant influences.

In some cultural contexts, particularly in extended-family systems with a single child, excessive indulgence may foster entitlement, narcissism, and social intolerance. Such individuals may develop unrealistic self-perceptions and difficulties adapting to social norms (Najafov, 2025).

Even in well-functioning families, the emergence of risky behaviors cannot be entirely ruled out. Psychologists caution against immediate harsh punishment, as excessive or emotionally charged reactions may damage the adolescent's psychological stability and increase resentment toward family and society (Giddens, 2000). Therefore, consistent, supportive, and developmentally appropriate parental guidance remains essential (Bayramov & Alizade, 2004; Hamzayev, 2003).

Research findings further suggest that moral development, self-regulation, self-evaluation, and self-awareness play critical roles in preventing deviant behavior. The formation of moral consciousness among youth largely depends on the socio-psychological characteristics of the environments in which they develop.

Experimental Study of Deviant Behavior Among Youth

Analysis of recent studies indicates that understanding how moral qualities are formed in modern society and identifying the dominant factors in their genesis is essential for a comprehensive investigation of deviant behavior. To clarify the essence of this concept, it is necessary to rely on interdisciplinary sources, including psychological, ethical, and philosophical literature, particularly those that explain the psychological foundations of moral development.

At the same time, the concept of moral development should be distinguished from related integrative constructs, and the similarities and differences among them should be systematically examined. Youth morality should not be treated merely as a component embedded within other personality traits; rather, it should be studied as an independent research problem. Furthermore, moral development should be analyzed not as a static phenomenon but as a dynamic system that evolves across different developmental stages and is influenced by changing social conditions (Piaget, 1965; Kohlberg, 1984; Bayramov & Alizade, 2004).

From a philosophical perspective, the main objective is to systematize the theoretical foundations of morality, examine its ontogenetic development, and analyze its epistemological characteristics. In pedagogical research, scholars such as Ushinsky, Makarenko, and Sukhomlinsky emphasized the role of education and socialization in shaping moral personality (Najafov, 2025). Psychological approaches, in turn, focus on the structure of moral development, its components, and the psychological mechanisms underlying its formation (Freud, 1961; Gilligan, 1982; Hamzayev, 2003).

Empirical research consistently shows that the manifestation and formation of moral values among youth largely depend on the normative standards and value systems prevailing in society. In the contemporary information society, the developmental period of youth is characterized by significant socio-psychological transformations, which complicate the analysis of moral formation. Studies of moral development are generally grouped into two major approaches:

(a) the cognitive approach, which focuses on changes in thinking and information processing (Kohlberg, 1984; Piaget, 1965); and

(b) the social approach, which emphasizes interpersonal interaction and social influence (Bandura, 1977; Vygotsky, 1978).

Methodological Principles of the Experimental Study

Socio-psychological research on youth deviance emphasizes the importance of appropriate methodological selection. The following principles were applied:

1. Selection of instruments appropriate for the youth age group;
2. Use of complementary methods adapted to the cultural context;
3. Simultaneous administration of instruments to reduce situational effects;
4. Modification of tools to ensure age-appropriate comprehension.

The study employed several widely used instruments, including:

- Rokeach Value Survey (Rokeach, 1973);
- Kohlberg's moral dilemmas (Kohlberg, 1984);
- Self-esteem scales;
- Structured questionnaires.

The research examined three criteria:

- (1) attitude toward learning,
- (2) gender differences,
- (3) age-related changes.

To ensure validity, equal numbers of male and female participants were included (N = 50).

Results and Interpretation

Preliminary analysis revealed that youth aged 17–19 demonstrate significant differences in both instrumental and terminal value orientations compared with other age groups. Among instrumental values, optimism and life orientation ranked highest among male participants, while similar values were also highly ranked among female participants (Azimov, 2004). This reflects the psychological characteristics of early youth, a developmental stage typically associated with optimism and future-oriented thinking (Erikson, 1968).

Key moral qualities such as responsibility, honesty, and intolerance toward wrongdoing were ranked highly among both genders, with responsibility showing minimal gender differences (Najafov, Asadov, 2025). However, certain expected gender-related value patterns did not fully correspond to traditional stereotypes, indicating changing social norms.

Results from Kohlberg's moral judgment assessment demonstrated that moral evaluations varied depending on academic performance and cognitive level. Students with higher academic achievement demonstrated more context-dependent moral reasoning, whereas lower-performing students tended toward rigid moral judgments. This finding supports the cognitive-developmental

theory that moral reasoning is linked to intellectual development and worldview formation (Kohlberg, 1984; Rest, 1986).

Based on the findings, the social development of young people may be categorized into three levels:

- Dynamic level
- Situational level
- Stable level

These levels are not fixed and may change under the influence of environmental and psychological factors.

Self-Regulation and Moral Formation

The results indicate that self-education, self-evaluation, and self-reflection play a crucial role in the development of moral qualities. Adequate self-esteem and reflective capacity are essential conditions for healthy moral development. Educational institutions should therefore promote self-observation, self-analysis, and reflective thinking through both classroom and extracurricular activities (Zimmerman, 2000).

The formation of moral qualities should be implemented in three stages:

1. **Cognitive stage** – awareness and understanding of moral values;
2. **Behavioral stage** – application of moral principles in practical situations;
3. **Personalization stage** – integration of moral values into self-identity and self-realization.

Social Determinants of Deviant Behavior

Recent research indicates that deviant behavior among youth is influenced by multiple socio-psychological factors. One of the key determinants is the level of self-esteem, which reflects the individual's moral position and social identity. Studies show that unstable self-concept, lack of future orientation, emotional instability, and social anxiety are common characteristics of adolescents at risk for deviant behavior (Najafov, 2025a; Agnew, 2013).

Many researchers emphasize that hopelessness, distrust, and lack of social support are major predictors of deviance. Therefore, preventive strategies should focus primarily on improving family relationships and strengthening socialization processes.

Key protective family factors include:

- Emotional warmth and mutual respect;
- Stable parent-child relationships;
- Positive psychological climate;
- Optimism and future orientation.

Family dysfunction, emotional neglect, or conflict significantly increases the risk of substance abuse and other maladaptive behaviors (Hirschi, 1969; Patterson, 1982).

Conclusion

Empirical observations confirm that the foundation of social stability and individual development is established within the family environment. Since personality formation occurs primarily within the family, the quality of family relationships and parenting practices plays a decisive role in shaping socially adaptive behavior.

The findings suggest that while family support promotes positive socialization and resilience, family dysfunction and relational instability represent major risk factors for the development of harmful habits and deviant tendencies. Therefore, effective prevention of youth deviance requires strengthening family systems, improving moral education, and ensuring coordinated efforts among family, educational institutions, and broader social structures.

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