Original Research

The Role of Social Prevention in Criminal Policy for Protecting Victims of Emerging Sects

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The activities of emerging mystic sects have led to numerous social harms for victims and society. This makes examining social prevention of this social phenomenon essential, especially considering that a purely criminal approach in addressing such social dilemmas is not particularly effective. Accordingly, the present article aims to explore the critical question of what role social prevention can play in the criminal policy for protecting victims of emerging sects. This descriptive-analytical article uses the library research method to investigate the stated issue. The findings indicate that while the legislator has not provided specific criminal prevention measures for protecting victims of emerging sects, social prevention, including developmental and community-based social prevention, can play a significant and decisive role in this regard. In this type of prevention, institutions such as the family, school, peer groups, and media can influence norm acceptance and simultaneously raise awareness about the destructive effects of emerging sects through education, transmission of values and norms, and cultural activities. However, this approach faces challenges such as a lack of coordination among the institutions responsible for social prevention. This means that there may be overlap and duplication of efforts. Therefore, it is necessary to delineate the responsibilities in this area and assign a specific responsible institution to ensure the necessary follow-up.

Keywords: Social Prevention, Criminal Policy, Victims, Emerging Sects

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1. Introduction

The activities of emerging mystic sects in the contemporary era and the expansion of their activities in Iran have caused numerous problems and harms to the system and society from various dimensions. Corrupting human spiritual potentials, undermining social norms and family foundations, and promoting certain deviant behaviors are among the most significant detrimental effects of the activities and expansion of such mystic sects in society.

Moreover, emerging mystic sects, as a social phenomenon, have imposed negative impacts and adverse security consequences on society, to the extent that security, considered one of the fundamental and primary factors of societal stability, has been affected due to the activities and inclination of young people towards these sects. The threat posed by sects to society is pervasive, with extensive and influential dimensions, raising growing concerns about the ruination of the lives of a segment of the society due to the extensive activities of these sects.

The effects and consequences of sectarian behaviors manifest in various aspects of social life and across different sectors of society and executive bodies. Sectarianism, with exclusive characteristics such as totalitarianism, asceticism, fanaticism, fundamentalism, and separation from the larger society, exacerbates various social, cultural, and economic conflicts and, by fragmenting identities, prevents the formation of a collective identity and a sense of national belonging.

In Iran, emerging mystic sects have grown significantly in recent years, particularly in the 2010s. The aforementioned harms have necessitated an examination of the role of social prevention in the criminal policy for protecting victims of emerging sects. Accordingly, the present article aims to explore the critical question of what role and position social prevention holds in the criminal policy for protecting victims of emerging sects. In other words, what role and position can social prevention play in the criminal policy for protecting victims of emerging sects? To address this question, the criminal policy approach to protecting victims of emerging sects is first examined, followed by a discussion on the role of developmental and community-based social prevention in the criminal policy for protecting victims of emerging sects.

2. Criminal Policy Approach to Protecting Victims of Emerging Sects

In examining the strategies for combating sects and emerging ideological movements, the emphasis is generally placed on counteractive policies, particularly by law enforcement authorities to safeguard public order.

"It is noteworthy that adopting a preventive policy is entirely essential; in other words, when no comprehensive, systematic plan or framework has been devised and implemented to address the growing problem of sectarianism in the country, relying solely on a criminal approach and law enforcement to uphold social norms and values is insufficient. Rather, it is necessary to adopt social prevention policies for individuals or groups at risk or even those already harmed, to dissuade them from deviant or syncretic ideologies in the first instance, and subsequently apply defensive policies to uphold religious and spiritual values" (Shakeri & Abdi, 2016).

In the legal system of our country, there is still no specific and comprehensive criminal policy addressing legislative, judicial, participatory, and preventive dimensions, and therefore, no legal provisions exist in this regard.

The most significant legal provision concerning the legal response to emerging sects is Article 500 bis, added in 2020 to the Islamic Penal Code (Ta'zirat, ratified in 1996). According to the advisory opinion of the Legal Department of the Judiciary, "Article 500 bis, added in 2020 to the Islamic Penal Code (Ta'zirat, ratified in 1996), criminalizes methods leading to mind control and psychological suggestions, and Clauses 1 and 2 of this article are not exclusive to specific methods. Thus, if the outcomes of the methods mentioned in this article result in any of the actions enumerated in the clauses, the material element of the crime is established. Although the terms 'contrary' and 'disruptive' differ lexically and may have a general-specific relationship in that any disruptive act is also contrary to the Shari'a, not all contrary acts are considered disruptive. However, the criminalization in Article 500 bis, with regard to any educational or promotional activities that are deviant and contrary to the sacred Shari'a of Islam, establishes the material element of the crime upon occurrence. Deviant educational or promotional activities that are contrary or disruptive to the sacred Shari'a of Islam, regardless of whether the audience is Muslim or non-Muslim, fall under this article. Given that Article 500 bis is categorized under Chapter One of crimes against internal and external national security, the crimes under this article are considered crimes against national security, and jurisdiction over such crimes, according to Clause A of Article 303 of the Criminal Procedure Code ratified in 2013, belongs to the Revolutionary Court."

In prosecuting and sentencing criminal sects under this article, four scenarios must be distinguished:

a) Cases where the criminal act aligns with Hudud offenses, in which case fixed and unchangeable Hudud punishments are applied to the individual. Notably, considering that Hudud punishments are fixed, for instance, the punishment for rape under the Islamic Penal Code is execution, one may question whether a reduction in punishment is possible if the act was committed based on a mistaken religious teaching. At first glance, due to the legislator's silence, one must conclude that no reduction or conversion of punishment

is permissible. However, given that the primary cause of crimes within the religious framework is the individual's ignorance, one could argue that Article 217 states: "In Hudud crimes, the offender is responsible only if, in addition to having knowledge, intent, and criminal responsibility conditions, they are also aware of the religious prohibition of their conduct." This article essentially qualifies the rule that ignorance of the law is no excuse, meaning that if the offender is unaware of the religious prohibition of their conduct (ignorance of the law), Hudud punishment will not be applied. Thus, for a Hudud crime punishment to be enforced, certain conditions must be met: 1) knowledge, 2) intent, 3) awareness of the religious prohibition of the act, 4) sanity, 5) maturity, and 6) voluntariness (Taghizadeh Shahrokhabadi, 2013). Legal scholars have defined legal mistake as "a person committing a crime due to ignorance of the legislator's commands or prohibitions or due to misinterpretation of legal provisions, which they would have avoided had they known the actual law" (Ardebili, 2008).

Considering the aforementioned article, the presiding judge, in cases where the individual is significantly influenced, can take necessary measures to mitigate the punishment by establishing the absence of one of the conditions set forth in Article 217 of the Islamic Penal Code (2013) or by relying on the individual's legal mistake or ignorance of the religious ruling. However, the notable issue here is that this matter is subject to the judge's judicial interpretation, making such a solution somewhat subjective. Ultimately, an individual, regardless of their motivation—which may even be honorable though mistaken—would be sentenced for the committed crime.

b) Cases where the committed act does not fall under Hudud offenses but resembles other criminal titles in the law. In the text of the mentioned article, acts such as indecency and self-harm are cited, for which specific provisions exist in the Islamic Penal Code. Therefore, the application of the relevant article concludes that if a crime is committed by followers of criminal sects under the influence of their teachings, the matter falls under Article 500 bis. However, if an individual commits an indecent act irrespective of their religious inclination, the matter falls under relevant provisions such as Article 637 of the Ta'zirat (Gholizadeh & Shakeri, 2018).

c) Cases where an individual commits a crime under sectarian teachings, but the committed crime is not explicitly mentioned in the article, such as vandalism, bribery, etc. In addressing such crimes, it may be argued that sexual, physical, and financial exploitation are broad terms, and based on this article's generality, punishment can be imposed. However, it is essential to note that adhering to the principle of legality of crimes and punishments and logical interpretation of the law prevents such interpretations. Additionally, bribery by sect members or vandalism of others' properties cannot be considered financial exploitation since the latter generally pertains to the crime victim. Given the dual nature of sectarian crimes, where the offender and victim can be the same individual, applying Article 500 bis is not feasible, and actions must be taken based on the relevant legal provisions, raising concerns about ignoring the offender's motivation (Shapouri & Ebrahimi Varkiani, 2014).

d) Crimes with specified punishments in the article, such as providing financial support to a sect, which is prosecutable based on the punishment stipulated in the article. Notably, the legislator, by introducing this differentiation, has acknowledged the influence of an individual's motivation in committing religious crimes, but such motivation is disregarded in Hudud and Qisas cases. This inconsistency is one of the article's criticisms, as one of the philosophical reasons for mitigating and aggravating punishments is to ensure the principle of proportionality between crime and punishment. In crimes where the offender's motivation plays a primary role, the existence of mitigating and aggravating factors serves as a guarantee for maintaining this principle.

It is also noteworthy that Article 500 bis does not address crimes resulting in Qisas. Hence, if a Qisas-worthy crime is committed by sect followers, the sect leader would be sentenced under Article 500 bis, while the offender would be punished under the general Qisas provisions.

3. The Role and Position of Developmental Social Prevention in Criminal Policy for Protecting Victims of Emerging Sects

In criminology, "prevention refers to taking proactive measures against crime by employing various intervention techniques to prevent criminal acts without resorting to the threat or imposition of punishment.

Criminal prevention, through the threat of punishment for subjects of criminal law on the one hand, and the implementation of this threat by punishing those who violate criminal prohibitions on the other, aims at both general and specific prevention of crime. Non-criminal prevention, carried out before the occurrence of crime, involves non-repressive and non-coercive measures with economic, cultural, social, situational, and educational natures" (Najafi Abrand Abadi, 2004).

"To socialize and legalize individuals and protect crime targets to prevent criminal acts, non-criminal prevention is divided into two types: situational prevention and social prevention. Social prevention comprises preventive measures affecting all the environments surrounding an individual that play a role in the socialization process and have social functions. According to Clause (a) of Article 1 of the Crime Prevention Bill, social prevention refers to educational, cultural, economic, and social measures and methods by the government, non-governmental organizations, and civil society organizations aimed at sanitizing the social and physical environment to eliminate or reduce social factors leading to crime" (Mo'azzami, 2007).

This method of crime prevention, focusing on supplementary programs, seeks to improve family life hygiene, education, housing, employment opportunities, and leisure activities to create a healthy and secure environment. In essence, social prevention directly or indirectly aims to influence individuals' personalities to prevent them from organizing their activities around criminal motivations. According to Clause (8) of Article 4 of the Law on NAJA (ratified on July 18, 1990), crime prevention is one of the judicial duties of NAJA. Generally, these functions are classified into two branches: community-based social prevention and developmental social prevention.

3.1. Family

One of the fundamental pillars of developmental social prevention is the family institution, as developmental social prevention, as its name implies, takes shape during the physical, emotional, mental, and psychological growth period of an individual and contributes to personality formation. The first institution a child encounters after birth is the family. The family, typically composed of parents and siblings, forms the initial nucleus of society and usually cohabits for an extended or indefinite period (Javanmard, 2011).

In human societies, any established institution is generally designed to fulfill certain human needs. Like any other social institution, the family meets specific human needs, including: a) regulating sexual behaviors and reproduction, b) socializing individuals, c) providing welfare and economic needs for children, and d) caring for children and the elderly (Sotudeh, 2007).

Humans have various physical and psychological needs, one of which is the need for sexual relationships and offspring, embedded by God in all creatures for the preservation of the species. In most societies, particularly Eastern and Islamic societies, families guide and counsel individuals on whom to marry and how to maintain a healthy sexual relationship. Thus, families, either directly through guidance and advice or indirectly through behavior and modeling, regulate their children's sexual relationships. This practice varies across societies based on culture, religion, laws, and customs, including those governing families.

Another critical role of the family is teaching children societal norms, values, and customs, effectively socializing them. Additionally, the family is responsible for providing economic and welfare needs, including food, clothing, and shelter. From the dawn of human life and according to religious teachings and civil and criminal laws of various countries, particularly Islamic countries, which often derive from religious texts, fulfilling children's economic needs is the family's responsibility. Caring for children and the elderly is another essential family function, emphasized in moral and religious teachings, especially in Islam. Even animals, devoid of religious and moral teachings, instinctively care for their offspring.

The family significantly influences an individual's behavior, actions, and socialization. However, if the family itself faces problems and challenges, this adversely affects the socialization process of children, potentially leading them to delinquent and antisocial behaviors (Salehi & Faraji-ha, 2007).

For effective prevention of juvenile delinquency, families must be healthy. A healthy family comprises mentally and psychologically sound parents who are aware of and fulfill their familial roles and responsibilities (Shambiati, 2006). Since parents are the first individuals a child interacts with and depends on, their behaviors become

models for the child. Mentally and behaviorally healthy parents are more likely to raise children less prone to delinquency. Conversely, parents with behavioral issues hinder their child's socialization process, making it challenging to instill societal values in them.

Cult leaders aim to dominate individuals, starting with capturing their minds and souls. Cult programs and teachings are meticulously designed for this purpose. Aware of contemporary psychological crises and needs, cult leaders exploit superficial solutions to attract and manipulate members. Accurate identification of needs and timely, suitable responses are crucial for captivating the minds and hearts of cult members. However, the family, with its emotional and psychological bonds, poses a significant obstacle to cult leaders, as it fulfills these needs for individuals, leaving no room for cult manipulation.

Cult leaders thrive on absolute obedience and idolization by their members, which they cannot achieve outside the cult environment. This dependence on cult members' unwavering submission is achieved through psychological manipulation, resulting in their servitude. Hence, cult teachings are strategically designed to achieve this domination.

As long as individuals receive adequate emotional and psychological support from their families, cult leaders cannot effectively replace the family. Therefore, cult leaders either challenge healthy family relationships using manipulative tactics or target individuals from troubled families, who are often their primary recruits. Even these individuals must undergo cognitive persuasion processes designed by the cult to sever ties with their families.

3.2. School

Another pillar of developmental social prevention is the school institution, or in other words, the education system and the learning environment. The goal of developmental social prevention is to socialize children and adolescents during their intellectual and physical growth period so that they learn, respect, and internalize the values, norms, principles, and regulations governing society. The school environment serves as a platform for preparing children and adolescents for social life, as it is the first place where children interact with individuals from various social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. Gradually, children learn that maintaining friendly relationships with peers requires respecting their opinions, beliefs, values, and convictions. Consequently, they come to understand that living a peaceful and healthy life alongside other members of society necessitates adhering to societal laws and respecting others' rights, which in turn signifies compliance with social norms and values and refraining from violating laws (Danesh, 1989).

The school, due to its control over children's and adolescents' behaviors, prevents their delinquency and deviation towards emerging sects, as their actions, behaviors, and speech are monitored by teachers and educators. Any antisocial behavior is corrected through various means such as punishment, reprimand, or counseling. Therefore, even if a child or adolescent lives in a dysfunctional family that disregards societal values, norms, laws, and regulations, the school's oversight ensures that they understand the consequences of violating norms and values, thus internalizing proper behavior, which persists into adulthood. According to developmental theory, the school plays a critical role in correcting students' deviant behaviors, as they spend a significant portion of their formative years in schools. If the school effectively fulfills its role and addresses risk factors and deviant behaviors in students through scientific and logical methods, it contributes significantly to aligning individuals with societal norms (Sotudeh, 2007).

Additionally, the content of school curricula is crucial. Educational content should not be excessively dense but should be designed reasonably to foster students' talents and growth. Instruction hours should not be overly long and continuous; rather, subjects like physics and mathematics should be interspersed with music or art classes. The school environment, especially in elementary years, should not be gloomy, rigid, or overly dogmatic but should include joy, play, and activity (Mohammadnasl, 2007). Furthermore, inadequate educational facilities, teacher violence, discrimination among students, and neglect of students' interests may lead some students to engage in delinquent behaviors as a compensatory mechanism to gain attention (Chalechale, 2008).

The school must stimulate students' enthusiasm through appropriate programs, creating excitement rather than offering tedious and burdensome curricula. Teachers and educators should identify students' talents and

differences, tailoring their expectations to each student's abilities and potentials (Salehi & Faraji-ha, 2007).

Several factors within the education system can directly or indirectly contribute to student deviations, including: 1) the inability of the education system to accommodate all students needing education and provide free education for all social classes, 2) a shortage of qualified teachers and educators, 3) insufficient educational resources and auxiliary materials, 4) school officials' neglect of student behavior, 5) teachers' disregard for maintaining students' self-esteem and dignity and their failure to interact appropriately with students, 6) lack of communication between families and school officials, 7) the government's inability or unwillingness to address teachers' financial and economic concerns, and 8) the absence of counselors and social workers in educational settings (Bokharai, 2014).

3.3.   Peer Groups

As children grow physically, they also develop rationality and social awareness. As they move from childhood to adolescence, the natural desire for an independent identity intensifies, leading them to distance themselves from their parents and seek comfort and enjoyment in peer groups, which are free from parental control and unequal relationships. Independence inherently conflicts with inequality, and the parent-child relationship, characterized by parental authority, is inherently unequal. As children and adolescents distance themselves from their parents and integrate into peer groups, the influence of parents in transmitting values and norms diminishes, while the influence of peer groups grows.

Therefore, peer groups represent another critical element of developmental social prevention, contributing to human socialization. Peer groups serve as a bridge from childhood to adulthood, playing an essential role in socializing individuals.

From a psychological perspective, the influence of peers' thoughts, beliefs, behaviors, and speech on an individual is far greater than that of parents, as people are more receptive to those they trust and feel connected to. Peer groups foster a strong sense of trust and dependency because members see each other in similar circumstances, share close age ranges, and hold similar beliefs and values due to being from the same generation. This perceived equality and shared experience enhance

mutual understanding and trust, leading individuals to accept and emulate peers more readily than parents (Salehi & Faraji-ha, 2007).

Thus, peer groups can be a double-edged sword. If a peer group aligns with societal values and norms, it positively influences its members' socialization. However, if a peer group is deviant and anti-value by societal standards, membership can lead to norm-breaking behaviors. Hence, peer groups significantly impact adolescent socialization or, conversely, can foster antisocial behaviors and deviant acts, serving as either a platform for greater social integration or for increased social alienation.

4.   The Role and Position of Community-Based Social Prevention in Criminal Policy for Protecting Victims of Emerging Sects

Community-based social prevention aims to identify the causes and factors contributing to crime in society and subsequently implement programs to prevent their occurrence, neutralize them, or at least reduce their impact on society (Welsh & Farrington, 2012). Community-based social prevention seeks to prevent the emergence and growth of criminogenic factors through cultural and social programs and, if such factors have already surfaced, to confront and eliminate them or minimize their harmful effects (Rocque et al., 2012). This type of prevention is not limited to a specific group or class within society but targets the entire population. Essentially, it strives to maintain a healthy and safe social environment free from criminogenic factors that may lead individuals toward criminal behavior.

4.1.   Culture

Culture is an intertwined whole comprising values, norms, symbols, methods, and language inherited from previous generations and transmitted to individuals through socialization. "Culture can serve as a suitable foundation for preventing crime in society. As mentioned, culture encompasses the customs, traditions, values, and norms of a society. If every individual respects these values and norms by not violating them or engaging in contrary actions, crime will be prevented, as crime and deviance entail the violation of societal norms and values—whether those officially protected by the state, whose violation constitutes a crime, or those not officially safeguarded by the state, whose breach may be

deemed immoral or socially unacceptable despite not being criminal" (Ahmadzadeh Kermani, 2011).

Culture is a fundamental component of every society, and its preservation is crucial for societal well-being. If a society's values and norms are upheld, the rates of crime, delinquency, and deviance are significantly reduced. To ensure respect for societal values, both families and government officials must establish the necessary economic, social, and educational conditions. Families must teach and internalize these values in their children through verbal communication and practical demonstration, as children and adolescents are highly impressionable and prone to imitation. Government officials must also promote these values through various initiatives, such as television programs, films, and series that encourage societal adherence to values and norms.

What sustains and preserves a society is its culture—the values and norms that govern it (Criminal Sociology Lecture Notes). According to this theory, societal values and principles maintain social cohesion, and any breach undermines societal integrity. Ahmadzadeh Kermani (2011) asserts that culture is the spirit of a society. If society is likened to a body, culture represents its spirit, and any harm to a society's culture inevitably affects its body. Therefore, threats to culture jeopardize the very existence and survival of society (Ahmadzadeh Kermani, 2011).

Thus, fostering appropriate conditions such as education, training, and internalization of societal values among all individuals is essential for preventing norm violations. Crime prevention through cultural institutions is a gradual process, as embedding societal values in individuals' minds and hearts requires time and continuous effort. However, once internalized, these values foster a crime-free or minimally criminal society. According to the consensus theory, maintaining cultural integrity plays a critical role in crime prevention. A deteriorating cultural structure leads to increased crime and deviance, as societal values and norms that preserve social order become destabilized. Culture also functions as a social control mechanism; for instance, an act that is legally permissible but socially condemned subjects the individual to societal disapproval and reproach. However, if societal values erode, even non-criminal violations may no longer be met with social censure, leading to cultural decay and societal disintegration (Ebrahimi, 2005).

Culture provides a solid foundation for crime prevention, and every member of society must strive to uphold societal values to foster a safe, peaceful, and thriving community. Cultural poverty is a significant factor driving individuals toward emerging sects. Therefore, educating children, adolescents, and adults about societal values should be undertaken by families, schools, universities, and media outlets such as television, radio, magazines, and newspapers.

One effective cultural countermeasure against destructive mystic sects like Satanism is utilizing internet-based activities. Critiquing emerging sects, exposing their hidden agendas, highlighting their dangers, sharing other nations' experiences, and establishing online Q&A centers for families can raise public awareness and prevent individuals from falling prey to these sects. Establishing scientific and cultural internet-based institutions is essential for this purpose.

One of the attractions leading individuals to deviant sects is the promotion of sexual freedom. Human needs and the desire to satisfy them are fundamental in shaping and controlling behavior. Individuals deprived of legitimate means to fulfill their sexual needs are drawn to sects that provide ideological and practical opportunities for such gratification. Promoting marriage and facilitating its conditions are crucial cultural strategies to counter the sexual appeal of sects for young people. Studies indicate that married individuals enjoy greater protection against sexual exploitation (Jahansir, 2005). Therefore, providing conditions for easy marriage through governmental and executive support and cultural reforms to eliminate societal rigidities, especially in Iran, is essential for reducing vulnerability to sectarian influences. In addition to permanent marriage, advocated by all monotheistic religions (Moland, 2002), fostering self-control, chastity, modesty (Qur'an, Noor/33; Amadi, 1987, Vol. 1, p. 233), enhancing self-worth (Majlisi, 1992), and raising awareness about the intellectual and spiritual harms of sexual deviance (Faghihi, 2008; Kolaini, 1983) are other vital preventive strategies.

4.2. The Role of Media

"Today, various sects and groups claiming mysticism and spirituality have proliferated in society, especially with their adoption of new technologies such as virtual social media, which significantly influences young people, the

primary users of these platforms. Therefore, steps must be taken to accurately identify these pseudo-mysticisms and examine their methods of dissemination, particularly their activities and propaganda on virtual media. National media, as the principal and most influential arm of cultural policy implementation, must act with greater precision in combating false mysticisms" (Mo'idfar, 2001).

As a developing third-world country transitioning from a traditional to a modern society, Iran is experiencing normative disorder that weakens traditional values to the extent that the new generation often rejects them (Ghasemi, 2007; Ravdrad, 2009). Consequently, national media can utilize its agenda-setting function to highlight issues, transforming them into pressing societal values or threats. However, Iran's national media has underperformed in this regard. For instance, the production and broadcast of the documentary *Shock* and the series *Eghma* introduced Iranian society to Satanic teachings, while the dubbing and airing of films like *Van Helsing*, which promotes Satanic values, accelerated this exposure.

The national media can educate various social classes through impactful programs, as cultural engineering relies on educating society to reform, create, or eliminate cultural elements. Additionally, the media can promote legitimate national symbols, music, and true mysticism, embedding these values into public culture, while simultaneously disregarding or condemning deviant artistic productions through critical programming, thereby deterring public acceptance and preventing their normalization in society.

5. The Challenge of Social Prevention's Impact on Criminal Policy for Protecting Victims of Emerging Sects

"When implementing a program at any societal level—be it a small community like a family, a larger one like a university, or at the national level—the cooperation of various individuals, organizations, and institutions is required. The larger the target community, the greater the number of entities involved. For a program to be effectively designed, organized, and implemented, each participating entity must understand its role and responsibilities, ensuring orderly and timely execution and ultimately achieving the desired objectives" (Gholizadeh & Shakeri, 2018).

"However, if the duties of the involved individuals and institutions are not clearly defined and delineated, disorder and inefficiency may ensue, potentially leading to the program's failure. Therefore, the presence of a leading institution that oversees the entire process and assigns specific responsibilities to each participant is essential. As previously mentioned, community-based prevention seeks to reduce crime through educational, cultural, economic, and scientific initiatives, necessitating research and study as a preliminary step" (Rayejian Asli, 2004).

Proper implementation of preventive programs requires specialists and experts in various fields to provide guidance and solutions. Crime prevention, particularly social prevention with its multifaceted nature, demands the collaboration of numerous organizations and institutions (Carrie, 2001). To achieve the ultimate goal of reducing criminogenic factors and consequently minimizing crime, each organization must have a clear and defined role, which necessitates precise management and planning, especially in Iran, where numerous public and private entities are involved in crime prevention (Mohammadnasl, 2007).

Successful crime prevention programs require extensive cooperation, including with law enforcement agencies, necessitating proper management. One reason for the limited success of crime prevention initiatives in Iran is the overlap of responsibilities among governmental organizations involved in this domain (Barani, 2010). Legislators must clearly define the duties and responsibilities of each institution and ministry in crime prevention, which can significantly impact crime reduction (Ebrahimi, 2005, 2012). Therefore, delineating the responsibilities of all organizations involved in community-based prevention is essential. A central body, appointed by national authorities, should oversee and manage this process, reducing challenges and enhancing the effectiveness of efforts aimed at identifying and addressing criminogenic factors, ultimately minimizing crime rates in the country.

6. Conclusion

Crime prevention encompasses various types, one of which is social prevention. Social prevention can be categorized into two branches: developmental social prevention and community-based social prevention. Developmental prevention consists of several key

elements, including the family, school, and peer groups. The family is one of the first social environments a child enters after birth, where they learn social norms, customs, and values. Therefore, the family plays a crucial role in crime prevention by teaching societal values and principles to children. Children, due to their imitative nature at a young age, quickly model their behavior after that of their parents and family members. Hence, a healthy and functional family increases the likelihood of raising law-abiding children less susceptible to recruitment by emerging sects in the future. However, if the family is plagued by issues such as economic hardship, immorality, violence, divorce, lack of emotional bonds, neglect, or lack of supervision, these problems can disrupt the socialization process of children and adolescents.

Another fundamental element of developmental prevention is the school. School is the second institution children encounter, where they interact with new individuals from diverse cultural, intellectual, and social backgrounds. Schools significantly contribute to the socialization of children and adolescents, who spend a substantial part of their formative years (typically from ages 6 to 18) in school. This period is critical for intellectual and emotional development, making it an opportune time to teach and instill societal values and norms, either directly through instruction or indirectly through the conduct modeled by teachers and peers. Schools provide a safe haven for students, but if they are deficient in essential criteria such as educational quality, infrastructure, and emotional support, they can inadvertently become breeding grounds for deviant behavior and susceptibility to emerging sects.

Peer groups constitute another vital component of developmental prevention. Peer groups have a profound influence on children's and adolescents' behavior, often surpassing parental influence. Members of peer groups are usually close in age, thought processes, and beliefs, fostering relationships based on friendship and affection rather than parental control and oversight. This environment provides adolescents with a sense of security and understanding, making them highly susceptible to peer influence.

The media also plays a significant role in socializing children and adolescents, with television having a particularly prominent impact due to its widespread use among younger audiences, who may not engage with newspapers or magazines. In recent years, the rapid growth of social media and internet usage among children, especially adolescents, has introduced additional challenges, necessitating the creation of appropriate content to counter the influence of emerging sects on these platforms.

Social prevention faces several challenges, with one major issue being the lack of clear delineation of responsibilities among preventive institutions. Social prevention covers various domains, including culture and education, requiring the collaboration of multiple governmental, private, and civil organizations. Given the multitude of stakeholders involved, clear division of responsibilities is essential to avoid redundancy, conflict, and the tendency to shirk responsibilities by assuming another institution will handle them. Establishing a dedicated institution to oversee and coordinate community-based prevention efforts is imperative. Although numerous institutions in Iran have crime prevention as part of their mandate, success has been limited, possibly because such responsibilities are secondary within their primary areas of expertise. Consequently, allocated budgets are often spent on their core functions rather than preventive measures. The government could consider eliminating preventive responsibilities from institutions that have shown little success over the years, cutting their budgets, and instead establishing a specialized ministry or organization dedicated solely to social crime prevention, consolidating resources, and focusing exclusively on this critical task.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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