



## MODERATING ROLE OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS IN SECURED ATTACHMENT STYLE AND TENDENCY TO COMMIT CRIME

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### **Abstract**

*The study investigated how socioeconomic status influenced the association between secure attachment style and the tendency to commit crime among undergraduates. The participants were 295 undergraduates from Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Awka. The participants' ages ranged from 17 to 43 years, with a mean of 21.96 and a standard deviation of 3.18. Data were collected using three instruments: Animsahun's (2011) Crime Behavior Rating Scale (CBRS), Feeney and Noller's (1994) Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ), and Obi-Nwosu et al.'s (2018) Socioeconomic Wellbeing Scale (SEW). The study used a moderation predictive design, and the PROCESS Macro Model was employed for data analysis. Hypothesis one was confirmed. Hypothesis two was confirmed, and moderation result revealed a moderate positive effect on tendency to commit crime. It was suggested that university administration implement a job study program to help undergraduates meet some of their demands and reduce their proclivity to commit crimes.*

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## Introduction

Crime is frequently viewed as a normal aspect of everyday life, appearing in a variety of ways and impacting people from all demographics. Crime appears to be a significant threat to a country's progress, happiness, and peace. Crime frequently reduces investment, causes migration, raises transaction costs, and creates inequality. Adults in numerous societies have been documented participating in criminal activity for a variety of reasons, including economic difficulty, societal constraints, and personal motives. However, general information indicates that undergraduates are not left behind. Some undergraduates commit numerous types of crimes, including robbery, kidnapping, rape, auto theft, and cybercrime. The government routinely complains about an increase in criminal behavior within society. The undergraduate population may represent considerable hazards to society, raising questions about the safety and integrity of educational institutions. Although previous research looked at numerous causes related to crime, it appears that the increase in crime is out of control. The purpose for this study is to investigate the moderating influence of socioeconomic status on the link between secure attachment style and proclivity to commit crime among Nnamdi Azikiwe University undergraduates. Authors define crime as an act committed or omitted in violation of a public law, either forbidding or commanding it (Davies & Woodhams, 2019).

According to Paul W. Tappen (2006), a crime is an intentional act or omission that violates criminal law without justification and is punishable by law as a felony or misdemeanor. Tendency to Commit Crime is the possibility of an individual engaging in illegal behavior in the presence of particular variables, such as stress, bad emotions, and a lack of social control." (Agnew, 1992). The fact that people are not born criminals undermines the notion that our behavior is predetermined. Instead, it implies that criminal conduct is complicated and impacted by a variety of elements, including: social (environment, family, friends), economic (poor, unemployment), biological, and psychological. Serious, persistent criminal activity frequently begins in childhood, when specific features form and evolve, laying the groundwork for future antisocial behavior. According to research, nearly all major offenders begin their lives as impulsive and antisocial children, implying a

complex interplay of social and biological variables in creating these characteristics (Robins, 1978). Authors argue that characteristics that spark criminal tendencies include insufficient self-control, aggression, high testosterone levels, negative emotionality, and decreased cognitive functioning. High testosterone levels and unpleasant emotions (Booth & Osgood, 1993), as well as limited self-control, impulsivity, lack of task persistence, high activity levels, bodily responses to conflict, and risk-taking behavior (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). The concept of criminal tendency incorporates a variety of psychological and biological characteristics that influence an individual's chance of participating in criminal behavior. Scholars discovered a link between the likelihood to commit crime and socioeconomic position (Blessing et al., 2020).

The link between crime rates and socioeconomic conditions has been the focus of global research, finding a complex interplay with important implications for society well-being. Evidence in the literature has long demonstrated that many socioeconomic characteristics are inextricably linked to crime rates (Inokoba & Maliki, 2011) (AGBAMU & IROGBO, 2024) . These socioeconomic determinants include a variety of characteristics such as income, education level, employment status, and social disparity. These elements jointly influence people's quality of life and have serious consequences for their physical, psychological, and socioeconomic well-being. According to research, lower socioeconomic status is frequently associated with poor health outcomes, increased stress, and limited access to resources, all of which can promote criminal behavior (Chen & Miller, 2013). Socioeconomic status is an important component that influences how people interact with their communities and make decisions. Individuals in lower socioeconomic position, for example, may suffer increasing irritation and limited options, disrupting well-being and leading to increased involvement in criminal activities as a method of survival or expression of displeasure. These persons frequently struggle to enhance their quality of life through numerous means, experiencing institutional hurdles that limit their possibilities for upward mobility (Halkos & Aslanidis, 2023).

In many areas, the ongoing cycle of poverty not only impacts undergraduates but also contributes to broader community challenges, such as higher crime

rates. Recent data show that a sizable proportion of the population lives in locations with high levels of criminal activity, which are frequently associated with poor socioeconomic position. According to Hodgkinson (2022) and Ucko & Marks (2023), these places usually face a lack of resources, underemployment, and limited access to decent education, making crime a more realistic alternative for many. Individuals are more likely to secure stable employment, access quality education, quality healthcare, a safe environment, a healthy lifestyle, increased political power, improved civil engagement, and supportive social networks when their communities experience economic growth (Baker et al 2015; OECD, 2020). These advances have the potential to reduce criminal activity as people seek more legitimate means to meet their wants and aspirations. Scholars have linked attachment to certain criminal behaviors (Crarofalo & Bogert, 2017).

The type of a child's early interaction influences their attachment patterns, conduct, and proclivity to commit crime. Individuals' ability to develop connections and achieve personal goals is heavily influenced by how they were raised and the quantity of love they received. Attachment style is determined by the degree of relational bonding between the child and caregivers, which can lead to positive or negative beliefs about oneself and others. According to research, secure attachment, defined as a reliable and supportive caregiver, promotes healthy emotional development, whereas insecure attachments can lead to issues in social interactions and emotional regulation (Wisniewski et al., 2017). Quality parental care is critical for a child's long-term psychological well-being. A warm, intimate, and ongoing mother-child bond creates an environment in which both sides feel joy and satisfaction, setting the framework for healthy mental health. In contrast, insufficient parental care can result in maladaptive attachment styles, which can impede the development of trust and security. Scholars believe that a lack of secure attachment is frequently associated with negative behavioral outcomes, such as deviancy as a teenager, crime indulgence as an adult, or even the intention to commit crime, because the absence of stable, nurturing relationships during formative years may contribute to feelings of isolation and rejection, prompting some individuals to seek validation or acceptance through delinquent activities (Ye et al., 2022).

Finally, the current study investigated the moderating influence of socioeconomic status in the link between secure attachment style and criminal tendencies among Nnamdi Azikiwe University undergraduates in Awka. In this context, literature on socioeconomic status suggests that higher levels of socioeconomic status may lead to a lesser likelihood of committing crime. Similarly, empirical evidence supports the association between secure attachment style and beneficial life outcomes. Researchers in the current study hypothesize that a rise in socioeconomic status will result in a lesser inclination to commit crime within the current sample.

### **Statement of the problem:**

Previous research investigated the relationship between poverty and crime (Jafaru et al., 2024), inflation, youth unemployment, and crime (Olofinbiyi & Singh, 2020), family socioeconomic status and juvenile delinquency (Gunuboh, 2023), and socioeconomic status and crime (Obi-Nwosu et al., n.d.). However, it appears that experts have yet to investigate the relationship between socioeconomic status and the tendency to commit crime among undergraduates at Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. Similarly, authors explored features of attachment styles on criminal behaviors; secure attachment style and anxiety attachment on offenders' status (Nweke et al., 2024), insecure attachment style organizational deviant behavior (Ye et al., 2022), Ambivalent attachment style and violent crime (Simane-Vigante et al., 2020); insecure attachment style and criminal behavior (Kiessling-Caver & Kiessling-Caver Kiessling, 2018); and anxious attachment style and criminal behavior (Garofalo & Bogaerts, 2019). However, it appears that these researchers have yet to investigate the association between secure attachment style and the tendency to commit crime among undergraduates at Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. Despite these knowledge gaps, it appears that scientists have yet to investigate the moderating impact of socioeconomic position in the association between secure attachment style and the likelihood to commit crime among undergraduates at Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Awka.

### **Empirical review between Socioeconomic wellbeing and Tendency to commit crime**

(Jafaru et al., 2024) studied poverty, family status, and crime: findings from Gwagwalada Abuja. The

participants were 158,618 people who lived in Gwagwalada Area Council, Federal Capital Territory. The data was interpreted using descriptive statistics in the form of frequency distribution. The study's findings show that poverty fosters crime. In a comparable study, (Olofinbiyi & Singh, 2020) investigated youth, unemployment, poverty, and criminality. The survey included 1,200 people from various groups from three major cities: Enugu, Ibadan, and Kaduna, which are located in the country's three main ethnographic regions. The technique employed in statistics is the Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. According to the reviewed research, the GDP growth rate, inflation rate, and youth unemployment all contributed to increased crime in Nigeria during the period under study. This study supports the findings of (Jafaru et al., 2024). Similarly, (EDAFE, 2022) explored the relationship between socioeconomic status and peer influence as predictors of juvenile involvement in internet fraud in Delta State, Nigeria. A sample of 648 people aged 18 and under. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was utilized as the statistical measure. The examined research found a very low negative connection between family socioeconomic position and youth engagement in internet fraud (crime). On the other side, the study found no statistically significant link between family social economic position and child engagement in internet fraud. This demonstrates that a low level of family income leads to increased juvenile engagement in internet fraud. This observation is reinforced by the study of Jafaru et al. (2024). In another study, (Obi-Nwosu et al., n.d.) used 150 participants aged 20 and up to evaluate the association between facial emotional recognition and the likelihood to commit crime, with socioeconomic well-being moderating the effect. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was employed as the statistical measure. The findings demonstrated a significant weak positive association between socioeconomic well-being and the likelihood to commit crime.

### **Empirical review between Attachment style and Tendency to commit crime.**

(Obi-Nwosu et al., n.d.) conducted research on attachment styles and impulsivity as predictors of offenders' status (recidivism and non-recidivism) among convicts at Awka Correctional Service. Participants included 103 convicts from Awka Correctional Service, all of whom were Christian and male. Their ages ranged from 18 to 45 years, with an

average of 30.3 and a standard deviation of 8.8. Binary logistic regression is the statistical method employed in this investigation. The findings revealed that attachment styles such as close and anxious attachment styles strongly impacted offenders' status. Close attachment style was found to be positively and significantly connected with offenders' status, whereas dependent attachment style had a negative but significant correlation. However, the anxiety attachment style was not detected to correlate significantly with offenders' status. The current study is similar to one conducted by Obi-Nwosu et al. (n.d.). The participants in the two research differed. Another study (Ye et al., 2022) investigated the impact of insecure attachment style on workplace deviant conduct. The survey included 422 Chinese employees from the northern, central, and southern regions of China. The working age ranges from 20 to 69. The study's findings demonstrated that an insecure attachment style is associated with organizational deviant behaviour. The study found that there was a positive association between insecure attachment style and organizational deviant behavior.

The current study focuses on undergraduates' secure attachment style and inclination to commit crime. It differs from (Obi-Nwosu et al., n.d.). In a related study, (Simane-Vigante et al., 2020) presented a study on the relationship between criminal violence, adult attachment styles, and personality traits of violent male offenders. The participants here are 77 male prisoners aged 20 to 62, with a standard score of 10.6, and a mean of 35.5. The findings indicate that anxious-ambivalent attachment styles are more common among violent criminals. (Simane-Vigante et al., 2020) work differs from previous works (Obi-Nwosu et al., n.d.); (Ye et al., 2022)) and the current work. In another study (Kiessling-Caver & Kiessling-Caver Kiessling, 2018) looked at attachment security and violence, specifically the effect of reflective functional capacity. A total of 17 adult participants from the United States ranging in age from 18 to 50, with a mean of 35. This study used self-reports. The statistics employed were Comparative Analysis. The outcomes of this study imply that reflective functioning skills among insecurely attached adults may have a mediating role in violent actions.

That is, persons with an insecure attachment style are more likely to engage in criminal behavior than those with a secure attachment type. (Kiessling-Caver & Kiessling-Caver Kiessling, 2018) work appears to be

different from the subject of the current investigation and differs from other studies on the sort of attachment style that is related to crime (Obi-Nwosu et al., n.d.); (Ye et al., 2022) (Simane-Vigante et al., 2020). (Garofalo & Bogaerts, 2019), researched on "The relationship between attachment, personality and antisocial tendencies in a prison sample". Participant involved were 92 Norwegian prison inmates. Age between 18-68 (mean age = 32.47, Standard Deviation = 20.35). Statistics used was Pearson product moment correlations and Logistic regression analyses, the result of this study establish that, anxious attachment style is the only significant predictor variable, of aggression and violence in interpersonal intimate relationships.

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical paradigm underlying the current study is Robert Agnew's (1992) general strain theory, which states that when people are stressed, they may resort to crime in order to ease the stress and accompanying emotions. The basic assumption of this theory is that everyone experiences strain, which causes negative emotions that can lead to legitimate or illegitimate coping strategies. People experience strain or stress when they are unable to achieve their goals or when they are subjected to negative events such as parental absence, abuse, or neglect. Strains or pressures enhance the likelihood of experiencing negative emotions such as anger and frustration. According to Agnew (1992), these emotions produce demand for corrective action, with crime being one possible response. Anger, frustration, melancholy, and despair are common unpleasant feelings associated with strain or stress. Strain includes not only negative interpersonal relationships, but also situations, conditions, and events that are objectively expected or subjectively perceived to be negative, such as parental abuse or neglect, which can disrupt the child's attachment formation, leaving the child insecure and rigidly independent.

### Hypotheses

- i. Socioeconomic status will positively and significantly predict tendency to commit crimes among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka.
- ii. Secure attachment style will positively and significantly predict tendency to commit

crime among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka.

- iii. Socioeconomic status will positively and significantly moderate the relationship between secure attachment style and tendency to commit crimes among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka.

## Methods

### Participants

The research was conducted using a total of two hundred and ninety-seven (295) undergraduate's students from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka as participants. The Participants were randomly selected from the Psychology department without cohesion or any sort of reinforcement from my end. The participants are from different levels of such; 2 participants are 100l student, 80 individuals were 200l students, 97 individuals were 300l and 116 individuals were 400l student. The participants also included: Christians (291), Muslims (1), and others (3). The participants were made up of (77.1%) males, and (22.9%) females whose age ranges between 17 to 43 years, with mean age of 21.96 and standard deviation 3.18.

### Instrument

The following instrument were used for data collection. The included: Crime Behavior Rating Scale (CBRS) was developed and by Animasahun (2011). These thirty-three (33) items scale was used to measure tendency to commit crime. The crime behavior rating scale (CBRS) was developed and by Animasahun (2011). It is designed to measure behaviors and characteristics that can easily predispose an individual to commit crime. The 33 items were directly scored. The scoring was done on five (5) point scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree" indicating the extent to which the items apply to the participants. Sample items of the (CBRS) include statements such as "my behaviours often go contrary to acceptable norms", "I can find any means to make money to survive". Animasahun (2011) reported internal consistency reliability estimates (Cronbach Alpha) for CBRS 0.94 and the validity was obtained by inter items correlation ranged from 0.56 to 0.88; convergent validity of 0.86 and discriminant validity of 0.02. In this study, the scale was subjected to pilot testing with two hundred and seven (297) undergraduates in

the Department of psychology, and a Cronbach alpha's coefficient of 0.91 was obtained.

Attachment style questionnaire (ASQ) by Feeney & Noller, (1994). This is a broad-based self-report measure developed by Feeney & Noller, (1994), The scale consists of multiple items that respondents answer to reflect their feelings and behaviors in close relationships. For the purpose of this study, one dimensions of this scale was used. The secure attachment style domain has 8 items each and Each item was rated on 5-point Likert type rating scale ranging from 1 "Strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree". which targets the respondent's views of self and other, and are conceptually compatible with Bartholomew's (1990) and Hazan and Shaver's (1987) understandings of attachment. The internal consistency estimates (Cronbach Alpha) coefficient of 0.78 indicating good internal consistency. In this study, pilot study was conducted using same sample of one hundred and ninety-six (197) participants and the Cronbach alpha's coefficient of 0.40 is relatively low and suggests poor internal consistency.

Socioeconomic status (SES) which is measure with Socioeconomic wellbeing Scale was developed by Obi-Nwosu et al (2018), using Interviewer Rated Multivariate Assessment of Socioeconomic wellbeing (IRMASW). It is a 5-item questionnaire that's means socioeconomic status and wellbeing. Possible least total score is 12, while possible highest total score is 60. The higher the score, the better well-being is assumed; however, scores 12 to 36 depict low general socio-economic well-being. The items represent the results of item analysis conducted on a Nigerian sample. The reliability coefficient for the

IRMSEWAS) was 0.68. In this study, pilot testing was conducted with a sample of two Hundred and seventy (270) participants and the Cronbach alpha is 0.51.

### Procedure

The researchers developed the topic for the current investigation. All of the faculties at Nnamdi Azikiwe University were alphabetically arranged on the floor, with a total of 15 faculties and a passerby was invited to choose one. The passerby picked social science faculty. All of the departments within the faculty of social sciences were written down on pieces of paper, which were meticulously folded and another individual randomly selected the department of psychology. Participants received copies of the questionnaire, which included a page containing informed consent through a google form. Copies of the questionnaire were distributed online to students who volunteered, met the inclusion criteria, and were willing to participate in the study. They were given the opportunity to complete the Google form online. Each participant gave informed permission and was informed that they might decline or exit participation at any time. The participants' responses were kept strictly confidential. This study analyzed data from a total of two hundred and ninety-five (295) questionnaires.

### Design and statistics

The design for the study was moderated predictive design. Statistics used for data analysis was PROCESS Macro Model 1 using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 30.0

## Results

**TABLE 2: Summary table of secure attachment style and socioeconomic status on Tendency to commit Crime.**

| R      | R-Sq   | F     | df1   | df2     | P     |
|--------|--------|-------|-------|---------|-------|
| 1.0000 | 1.0000 | 2.723 | 3.000 | 292.000 | .0000 |

The R-squared table above indicated that changes 100% in the tendency to commit crime among the participants of the study was accounted for by changes in the independent variable and the moderating variable of the study. Results further revealed that overall, these changes were significant at .0001.

**TABLE 3: Moderation Analysis of the study variables**

| Variables                      | B.cofficient | T       | P     | LLCL   | LLCL   |
|--------------------------------|--------------|---------|-------|--------|--------|
| <b>Secure Attachment Style</b> | .0000        | -7.2548 | .0000 | .0000  | .0000  |
| <b>Socioeconomic Status</b>    | 1.0000       | 8.97    | .0000 | 1.0000 | 1.0000 |
| <b>Int-1</b>                   | .0000        | .5850   | .5590 | .0000  | .0000  |

Specifically, socioeconomic status positively predict tendency to commit crime ( $b = 1.0000$ ,  $t = 8.987$ ,  $P < .0001$ ), secure attachment style negatively and significantly predicted tendency to commit crime among undergraduates ( $b = .0000$ ,  $t = -7.2548$ ,  $P < .0001$ ), and moderation of socioeconomic status on secured attachment style and tendency to commit crime was positive but not significant ( $b = .0000$ ,  $t = .5850$ ,  $P > .5590$ ).

**Table 4: Test for highest order unconditional interaction**

|  | R2-change | F     | df1   | df2     | P     |
|--|-----------|-------|-------|---------|-------|
| <b>Socioeconomic Style * Secure Attachment Style</b> | .0018     | 3.422 | 1.000 | 292.000 | .5590 |

Overall moderation revealed that changes in the R-squared value of .0018 were positive but not significant, and was accountable for .18% of the effect of moderation of socioeconomic status on secure attachment style and tendency to commit crime among undergraduates.

**Table 5: Effects of the moderator at different levels of moderation**

| Socioeconomic Status | Secure Attachment Style | Tendency to Commit Crime |
|----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| -4.5293              | 0.0000                  | 69.3805                  |
| .0000                | .0000                   | 70.2495                  |
| 4.5293               | 3.9745                  | 71.1375                  |

Table 5 above revealed that at the lowest level of socio-economic status -4.5293, and average level of secure attachment style 0.0000, effect on tendency to commit crime was 69.3805, at average level of socio-economic status 0.0000, and average level of secure attachment style 0.0000, effect on tendency to commit crime was lowest at minimum 70.2495, while at highest level of socio-economic status 4.5293 and highest level of secure attachment style 3.9745 effect on tendency to commit crime was highest at 71.1375.

## Discussion

This study investigated the moderating influence of socioeconomic position in the link between secure attachment type and the inclination to commit crime among undergraduates. The investigation found that hypothesis one was confirmed. Socioeconomic level

significantly and positively predicted the probability to commit crime among undergraduates at Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. The findings are similar with previous investigations (Jafaru et al., 2024; (Olofinbiyi & Singh, 2020) . In this setting, undergraduates who are deprived of fundamental

requirements of living, such as proper housing and regular pocket money,

School fees and proper nutrition may inspire the desire to participate in actions that compensate for the basic shortage. On the contrary, if fundamental necessities are met, it may be difficult for the undergraduate to become aroused enough to engage in criminal behavior. The preceding empirical finding may have an explanation in strain theory. For example, the presence of strain or stress indicates that an undergraduate is experiencing basic needs deficiencies. These deficiencies may interfere with an undergraduate's normal daily functioning. This may include being unable to eat properly, pay rent, get to school, or satisfy essential educational financial requirements. These deficiencies may cause bad emotions in the individual, which is referred to as strain. When stress arises, the individual will do whatever it takes to relieve the situation and feel better. This means that, even if the targeted conduct is criminal, such an undergraduate will engage in it. However, such behaviour is considered a coping tactic. When economic conditions worsen, strain theory predicts that undergraduates would participate in more crime to meet the level of need required to survive.

Similarly, Hypothesis two was confirmed. This finding is consistent with previous research on features of attachment styles (Obi-Nwosu et al., n.d.; Simane-Vigante et al., 2020; Ye et al., 2022). Although these studies did not particularly focus on secure attachment style, they did look at other forms of attachment style and how they related to the inclination to commit crime. This finding can be explained using the strain theory. As a result, fundamental deficiencies tend to exacerbate people's suffering. This discomfort indirectly stimulates the desire to meet wants in the form of economic and social deficiencies. The process of meeting these needs may drive an undergraduate to engage in activity that society regards as criminal. However, the undergraduate may progress in the act since the strain generated by the deficiency makes the individual uncomfortable.

Finally, the prediction that "socioeconomic status will positively and significantly moderate the relationship between secure attachment style and tendency to commit crimes among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka" was moderately positive. There was no previous empirical data about the

moderation role of criminal tendencies. However, the relationship between secure attachment type and criminal behavior found a negative. Thus, as secure attachment style declines, the tendency to commit crime increases, and vice versa. The results of the moderating effect revealed that socioeconomic status has a beneficial but moderate effect. Simply demonstrating that the effect strengthens the link, by reducing the likelihood of criminal activity among undergraduates.

### **Limitations of the study**

The study was limited to regular undergraduates, of Nnamdi Azikwe University, Awka.

### **Implication of the Study**

The study's findings suggest that secure attachment style positively and significantly predicts the tendency to commit crime. Similarly, socioeconomic status significantly and positively predicts the tendency to commit crime and as well as strengthens the inverse association between secure attachment style and the tendency to commit crime among undergraduates at Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka.

### **Recommendation**

The University Management should create a work study program in which undergraduates can enroll to lessen their desire to engage in criminal activity. Parents should nurture their children in an atmosphere of peace, love, and friendship, as well as provide support with their schoolwork. Also, provide rewards where necessary so that they may not engage in crime.

### **Conclusion**

Finally, the study looked into how socioeconomic status influenced the relationship between secure attachment type and the tendency to commit crime among Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka undergraduates. According to the findings, socioeconomic status positively influenced the association between secure attachment style and propensity to commit crime.

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