

# CONTEMPORARY CRIME TRENDS AND THE ETIOLOGY OF CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL CRISES

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This paper aims to explore how global crises, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic and the processes of globalization, have influenced the structure, frequency, and nature of contemporary forms of crime. The focus is on identifying aetiological factors behind the rising trends in specific types of crime, such as domestic violence, cybercrime, and transnational organized crime.

**Design/Methods/Approach:** The study applies a qualitative methodology rooted in criminological theory, supported by analysis of secondary data and international reports. A multidisciplinary perspective is adopted to contextualize the societal, economic, and psychological triggers of modern criminal behaviour.

**Findings:** The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a marked increase in domestic violence, largely due to imposed isolation, financial hardship, and stress. Parallel to this, cybercrime spiked globally, exploiting digital dependency during lockdowns. Additionally, globalization facilitated the expansion of transnational criminal networks that exploit legal loopholes and operate beyond national jurisdictions.

**Originality/Value:** This paper offers a timely and comprehensive analysis of how macro-social stressors contribute to criminal behaviour, reinforcing the importance of responsive, adaptive, and socially-aware criminal justice policies. The findings serve legal scholars, policymakers, and practitioners aiming to modernize prevention strategies and develop more holistic models of criminal justice in times of systemic disruption.

**Keywords:** contemporary crime, aetiology, global crises, COVID-19, cybercrime, transnational crime

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## PURPOSE

The twenty-first century has been marked by an intense interplay of global crises that have fundamentally reshaped the fabric of contemporary societies. From the rapid spread of pandemics, such as

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COVID-19, to prolonged economic recessions, political instability, technological disruption, and the far-reaching consequences of globalization, these systemic upheavals have not only challenged governance structures and public health systems but have also had a profound impact on the configuration and prevalence of criminal behaviour.

Criminality, as a social phenomenon, is deeply intertwined with broader structural conditions. In moments of crisis, when institutions are strained and individual resilience is tested, crime often evolves both in form and function. As scholars such as Garland (2001) and Bauman (2000) have pointed out, contemporary society, under the conditions of what they term “late modernity”, is particularly susceptible to the emergence of new forms of deviance due to growing uncertainty, insecurity, and social disintegration. In this context, crime can be interpreted as both a symptom and a consequence of broader structural turbulence.

This paper seeks to explore how global crises, most notably the COVID-19 pandemic and the processes of globalization, have transformed the structure, frequency, and nature of criminal offenses, with particular focus on three paradigmatic manifestations: domestic violence, cybercrime, and transnational organized crime. These categories were not chosen arbitrarily; rather, they represent the convergence of micro-level victimization and macro-level criminal networks, encompassing both interpersonal and systemic forms of deviance that have intensified in recent years.

The core objective of the study is to analyse the aetiological dimensions of these crime forms, identifying both proximal and distal causes, including socio-economic pressures, psychological distress, institutional failures, digital dependency, and the erosion of territorial boundaries. Such an analysis is necessarily multidisciplinary, drawing on criminological theories (e.g., strain theory, routine activity theory, globalization theory), legal frameworks, public health data, and sociological insights.

In doing so, the paper aspires to contribute to a more adaptive and socially-responsive criminal justice model, one that is capable of operating effectively in the face of systemic disruption. In times of global instability, criminal justice institutions must transcend reactive models of repression and punishment and instead embrace anticipatory, integrative, and rehabilitative strategies that align with human rights standards and international best practices (UNODC, 2021; Council of Europe, 2020).

Through a combination of theoretical grounding, empirical data, and comparative analysis, the paper ultimately proposes *de lege ferenda* recommendations aimed at enhancing the resilience and responsiveness of legal systems. These recommendations are intended not only to address the immediate challenges of crisis-induced criminality but also to foster long-term transformation in how societies understand, prevent, and respond to crime in the context of globalization and instability.

## DESIGN/METHODS/APPROACH

This study is based on a qualitative methodological framework that combines legal and criminological analysis with insights from related social sciences. The research primarily employs normative analysis to examine the evolution of international legal standards and national criminal legislation in response to contemporary crime trends. In addition, a comparative method is applied to explore how different jurisdictions have reacted to the rise of crisis-related forms of criminality, particularly in areas such as domestic violence, cybercrime, and transnational organized crime.

To provide a deeper understanding of individual and collective behaviour under conditions of systemic stress, the study draws on sociological and psychological interpretation, especially in relation to social disintegration, digital dependency, and the erosion of protective institutions. The empirical basis of the research is supported by secondary sources, including official statistical data and reports



from international organizations such as UNODC, Interpol, Europol, and UN Women, as well as relevant academic literature.

The paper is structured around three interconnected thematic areas, each representing a key challenge to contemporary criminal justice systems: private sphere violence, cyber-enabled criminality, and globalized criminal networks. This structure allows for a focused yet integrated analysis of how global crises shape the nature and aetiology of modern crime.

## GLOBAL CRISES AND THE CRIMINOGENIC CONTEXT

To what extent do global crises function as catalysts for crime, and how do they reshape the sociological foundations of deviant behaviour?

This question lies at the heart of contemporary criminological inquiry, particularly in the wake of systemic disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the intensified processes of globalization. Both phenomena, though different in origin, have acted as profound stressors on the structural and normative stability of societies, thus altering the context in which criminal behaviour emerges and evolves.

Criminology has long emphasized the role of macro-social stressors in generating conditions conducive to deviance. From Robert Merton's anomie theory (1938) to Agnew's General Strain Theory (1992), scholars have identified how systemic inequalities, institutional failures, and blocked opportunities produce psychological tension and social disintegration, fertile ground for various forms of criminal behaviour. Similarly, Bauman (2000) highlights the consequences of "liquid modernity", where traditional social anchors, such as stable employment, family structures, and institutional trust, are increasingly eroded, leaving individuals exposed to insecurity and moral ambiguity.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented an acute manifestation of these theoretical frameworks in practice. As a global health crisis, it triggered a cascade of socioeconomic consequences: mass unemployment, disruptions in public services, limitations on mobility, and an overwhelming psychological toll on individuals and communities. These conditions created what some scholars term a "criminogenic crisis environment", one in which both motivation for crime (due to need or distress) and opportunity for crime (due to weakened surveillance or institutional paralysis) were simultaneously increased (UNODC, 2021).

At the same time, the ongoing dynamics of globalization, though not a sudden crisis in the same sense as the pandemic, constitute a chronic source of normative dislocation. Global flows of capital, goods, information, and people have produced not only economic interdependence but also jurisdictional ambiguity, legal asymmetries, and institutional vulnerabilities. As Beck (2002) argues in his theory of the "risk society", modern societies are increasingly characterized by transnational threats that escape the regulatory capacities of the nation-state, among which transnational crime is particularly prominent.

These global transformations have altered the traditional boundaries of crime control. National legal systems, rooted in territorially defined sovereignty, struggle to respond effectively to cross-border criminal phenomena, such as cybercrime, human trafficking, and international financial fraud. Meanwhile, domestic institutions (police, courts, social services) are often overburdened or structurally unprepared for the multidimensional nature of crisis-induced crime.

In both pandemic and globalization contexts, key criminogenic factors have been amplified. These include:

- **poverty and economic marginalization**, as a result of job loss and market disruption;
- **psychological instability**, fuelled by uncertainty, fear, and isolation;
- **social fragmentation**, as collective rituals and community networks were interrupted;



- **institutional fragility**, with delays in legal procedures, reduced protection services, and emergency governance mechanisms that sometimes deprioritize rights-based approaches.

Thus, global crises do not merely correlate with rising crime rates; they transform the very conditions under which crime is defined, motivated, and enacted. They also challenge the effectiveness of traditional criminological and legal categories, pushing scholars and practitioners alike to rethink how deviance is produced and how justice systems can respond in a way that is both efficient and ethically sustainable.

As a result, one must ask not only how crime increases during crises, but which crimes increase, why they increase, and how state and non-state actors can respond without compromising human rights, procedural fairness, or long-term social cohesion. These are the questions that will define the future of criminology and criminal law in an age of recurring global disruption.

Anticipated climate migration and technological disruption align with Agnew's (1992) framework of generalized strain, as future shocks may create mass psychosocial tension conducive to criminal adaptation.

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

One of the most disturbing and immediate social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic was the global surge in domestic violence, particularly gender-based violence against women and children. As governments around the world imposed lockdowns and movement restrictions to contain the virus, many victims found themselves effectively confined with their abusers, isolated from support networks, and cut off from access to protective services.

The phenomenon has been widely described as an "epidemic within the pandemic" (Van Gelder et al., 2020), revealing the extent to which private spaces, traditionally viewed as sanctuaries, can become environments of control, coercion, and violence in the absence of institutional visibility. According to UN Women (2020), more than 30% of women worldwide experienced increased violence in the first six months of the pandemic, a pattern echoed across continents. In Serbia, civil society reports and media outlets have indicated a noticeable increase in domestic violence incidents during the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially following lockdown measures (Autonomous Women's Center / WomenNGO, 2020).

To understand the criminogenic nature of this escalation, it is crucial to explore the etiological dimensions underlying this form of violence. Firstly, the enforced isolation created conditions that allowed perpetrators to exert sustained and unchecked psychological, physical, and economic control. The absence of third-party observers, such as teachers, employers, social workers, or neighbours, meant that early warning signs often went unnoticed and unreported (Peterman et al., 2020).

Secondly, the economic fallout of the pandemic served as a critical aggravating factor. Job losses, income insecurity, and the collapse of informal labour markets disproportionately affected lower-income households and exacerbated pre-existing stressors within the family unit. Research indicates that financial stress can directly correlate with increased incidences of intimate partner violence, as it undermines traditional power dynamics and coping mechanisms, particularly in patriarchal societies where economic control is often entangled with male identity (Van Daalen et al., 2020; EIGE, 2021).

A third, and equally significant factor, was the reduction in institutional protection mechanisms. Courts operated at reduced capacity, often delaying or suspending hearings on protection orders. Shelters faced limitations due to social distancing protocols and budgetary constraints. Many non-governmental organizations and victim support services were forced to move online, rendering their services



inaccessible to victims with limited digital literacy or access to private internet-connected spaces. This “digital gap” had a disproportionately negative effect on rural women, ethnic minorities, and individuals with disabilities, compounding their marginalization in an already exclusionary system (Fraser, 2020). Legal scholars have further highlighted how access to justice during lockdowns was undermined by the technological mediation of protective measures and the limited readiness of judicial systems (Tešović & Milovanović, 2022).

In addition to these structural issues, the psychosocial environment of the pandemic must be considered. Heightened anxiety, loss of routine, substance abuse, and a general atmosphere of fear and uncertainty created a fertile psychological terrain for aggressive behaviour. Studies in crisis psychology suggest that when individuals feel a loss of control in the external environment, they may attempt to assert dominance within their immediate surroundings, often targeting those most vulnerable (WHO, 2020).

What emerges, therefore, is a multidimensional aetiological matrix in which domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be attributed to a single factor, but rather to the intersection of personal, structural, and institutional vulnerabilities intensified by crisis conditions. This reality calls into question the adequacy of the existing criminal justice mechanisms to respond to violence in private spaces during public emergencies. The pandemic has demonstrated that domestic violence is not merely a private issue, but a public concern with far-reaching social and legal implications.

Consequently, post-crisis criminal justice reform must address these gaps by reinforcing integrated victim protection frameworks, enhancing the accessibility and resilience of support services, and adopting emergency protocols that preserve the visibility and priority of domestic violence cases, even during times of broader systemic disruption. Only by recognizing the structural roots of such violence can legal systems respond in a manner that is both immediate and transformative.

## CYBERCRIME AND THE DIGITALIZATION OF CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR

The COVID-19 pandemic catalysed an unprecedented acceleration in the digitalization of everyday life. Virtually overnight, societies across the globe migrated critical activities, including work, education, healthcare, commerce, and social interaction, into digital environments. While this shift was necessary for the continuation of public and private functions under lockdown conditions, it also created an expansive and largely unprotected terrain for cybercriminal activity. This transformation did not merely amplify the existing cybercrime trends but significantly restructured the opportunity landscape in ways that favoured rapid criminal adaptation. As Wall (2007) argues, cybercrime is not merely an online version of conventional crimes, but a fundamental transformation in the structure and scope of criminal opportunity in the information age.

Interpol notes that the pandemic’s rapid shift of work, education, and services online coincided with a sharp rise in phishing, ransomware, identity theft, and online child sexual exploitation, especially in early 2020–2021 (Interpol, 2021). The speed and breadth of this growth reflect both the increasing sophistication of offenders and persistent preparedness gaps across public institutions and end users.

From a theoretical perspective, these developments are well-explained by Routine Activity Theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979), which posits that crime occurs when three elements converge in time and space: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian. The pandemic disrupted normal routines and replaced them with new digital habits, working from home, remote schooling, telemedicine, thereby increasing the exposure of individuals and organizations to online threats. Motivated offenders, ranging from lone hackers to transnational cybercrime syndicates, ex-



exploited the expanded presence of vulnerable targets, including children, the elderly, small businesses, and under-resourced public bodies. Simultaneously, the absence of capable guardianship, such as robust cybersecurity infrastructure, digital literacy, or real-time institutional monitoring, created ideal conditions for exploitation.

One particularly alarming trend was the dramatic rise in ransomware attacks on hospitals and health systems, where criminals targeted critical infrastructure during peak pandemic pressure. These attacks posed not only financial risks but also direct threats to human life, delaying patient care and endangering sensitive data (Europol, 2020). Additionally, online child exploitation cases surged, as children spent more unsupervised time online and predators took advantage of closed schools, reduced law enforcement capacity, and increased psychological vulnerability among minors (UNICEF, 2020).

The abrupt transition to digital workspaces exposed profound cybersecurity gaps, particularly among small and medium enterprises (SMEs), educational institutions, and non-governmental organizations. With limited technical capacity and financial resources, many became vulnerable entry points for wider criminal networks. This vulnerability was compounded by the jurisdictional complexity of cybercrime enforcement, as the transnational nature of online activity outpaces domestic legal systems. European cybersecurity agencies have further highlighted the susceptibility of SMEs and public sector systems, especially in healthcare and education, which experienced surges in phishing, ransomware, and supply-chain attacks (ENISA, 2022).

In light of these patterns, the pandemic revealed that digital environments are not merely neutral spaces of communication and productivity, they are contested arenas of power, vulnerability, and criminal opportunity. Cybercrime, in this context, should not be understood solely as a technological issue, but as a socio-legal phenomenon that intersects with broader questions of inequality, governance, and institutional resilience.

As digital dependency becomes a permanent feature of modern life, it is imperative that criminal justice systems evolve accordingly. This includes the development of specialized cybercrime units, cross-border legal cooperation, public-private partnerships in cybersecurity, and the integration of digital literacy into national education curricula. Moreover, future crisis preparedness plans must anticipate digital vulnerabilities as critical points of national and human security.

## TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

Globalization, while widely celebrated for facilitating economic integration and cross-cultural exchange, has also created an environment ripe for the expansion and entrenchment of transnational organized crime (TOC). The very mechanisms that enable the legal movement of goods, people, services, and capital across borders - open markets, digital connectivity, and the reduction of regulatory barriers - have simultaneously been co-opted by criminal networks to expand their operations on a global scale.

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2020a, 2020b), TOC has evolved into a complex, adaptive, and networked phenomenon, exploiting jurisdictional asymmetries and institutional vulnerabilities between states. The contemporary transnational criminal landscape includes a wide array of illicit activities such as drug trafficking, human trafficking, arms smuggling, wildlife and environmental crimes, counterfeit goods, and large-scale money laundering. These crimes often intersect with other forms of corruption, political instability, and armed conflict, creating what scholars refer to as “grey zones” of governance where state and non-state actors collude or compete for control over territory and resources (Cockayne, 2016).



One of the key transformations in TOC under globalization is the increasing sophistication and decentralization of criminal organizations. Traditional hierarchical structures have given way to fluid, networked formations that are far more resilient and difficult to dismantle. These groups leverage emerging technologies, including end-to-end encrypted communication platforms, cryptocurrency transactions, and operations on the dark web, to evade detection, obfuscate financial trails, and coordinate transnational operations in real time (Europol, 2020).

This technological infrastructure has become a crucial component of TOC's adaptability. The intersection of technological innovation and criminal justice also raises critical challenges in the protection of witnesses and procedural fairness when using remote tools in organized crime trials (Tešović & Milovanović, 2022). For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, organized criminal groups quickly diversified their activities into areas such as counterfeit medical products, online fraud related to vaccine registration, and exploitation of supply chain disruptions, illustrating a capacity for rapid strategic realignment in response to global events (UNODC, 2021).

Moreover, legal and regulatory asymmetries between national jurisdictions continue to provide safe havens for illicit financial flows and the relocation of operations. While one country may impose strict anti-money laundering controls or criminalize certain activities, others may offer weak enforcement, permissive laws, or outright complicity from corrupt officials. This fragmented global legal landscape enables TOC groups to "forum shop" for the most favourable operational conditions (Shelley, 2014). In many cases, organized criminal groups strategically invest in legitimate businesses, using them as fronts for money laundering, corruption, and market manipulation (Savona & Riccardi, 2015).

From a criminological standpoint, the globalization of organized crime aligns with Zygmunt Bauman's concept of liquid modernity, in which institutions and norms struggle to maintain coherence in the face of constant movement, uncertainty, and transnational complexity (Bauman, 2000). Simultaneously, Manuel Castells (2010) conceptualizes criminal networks as "perverse connections" within global flows, entities that mirror, exploit, and even depend on legal systems of exchange, while operating outside their normative frameworks.

Furthermore, TOC does not merely threaten public safety; it also undermines democratic governance, erodes trust in institutions, and fuels systemic inequality. In regions where state capacity is weak or contested, criminal organizations often assume quasi-governmental roles, providing services, enforcing rules, and even distributing food or healthcare, as documented in Latin America, parts of South-east Asia, and West Africa. Armed conflicts and state collapse often provide fertile ground for illicit economies to thrive, creating feedback loops between violence and organized crime (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2022). Such dynamics blur the boundaries between criminality and governance, complicating both enforcement and policy responses.

Addressing TOC in the context of globalization requires more than cross-border policing, it demands a coordinated, multilateral legal and policy framework, grounded in mutual legal assistance, harmonization of criminal codes, transparency in financial systems, and sustained investment in institutional capacity building. Equally important is the inclusion of preventive strategies that target the socioeconomic root causes, such as poverty, displacement, and political exclusion, that render populations vulnerable to recruitment, trafficking, and exploitation.

In sum, the globalization of crime reflects the darker side of an interconnected world, where criminal actors are often more agile and cooperative than the legal systems meant to contain them. A resilient response requires not only innovation and cooperation, but a paradigm shift in how law enforcement, policy-makers, and international institutions conceptualize sovereignty, justice, and transnational responsibility.



## ETIOLOGICAL FACTORS

The expansion and persistence of transnational organized crime (TOC) cannot be understood solely through its visible manifestations, such as trafficking networks or illicit markets, but must be analysed in relation to the deeper etiological structures that sustain it. These root causes are not accidental by-products of globalization, but systemic consequences of political, economic, and legal asymmetries that define the contemporary international order.

First and foremost, the weakness of state institutions, particularly in developing or transitional countries, plays a critical role in enabling transnational organized crime (TOC). Where law enforcement agencies are underfunded, politically manipulated, or lacking technical expertise, organized groups often operate with virtual impunity. Such fragile contexts create what criminologists describe as “zones of criminal opportunity”, where the absence of credible state authority allows non-state actors to impose their own systems of order, typically backed by violence or patronage networks (Williams, 2009).

At the same time, the rapid expansion of digital environments has generated new forms of vulnerability. Online spaces not only increase opportunities for cyber-offenders but also reshape victim-offender dynamics and trigger distinctive social reactions. As Ilić et al. (2025) observe, the interplay of formal legal responses and informal community reactions to digital crime underscores the complexity of governing security in an era where traditional state mechanisms are often outpaced by technological change.

Closely related to institutional weakness is the lack of effective legal enforcement mechanisms. In many jurisdictions, laws related to money laundering, asset forfeiture, or mutual legal assistance remain either inadequate or inconsistently applied. Procedural bottlenecks, corruption within the judiciary, and limited international cooperation all contribute to the failure to dismantle complex criminal networks, even when their operations are well-documented.

Another critical factor is the persistence of global economic disparities, which serve as structural drivers of illicit markets. The disparity between global labour supply and demand, particularly in sectors such as agriculture, construction, domestic work, and sex work, creates a continuous push-pull dynamic. Recent scholarship has emphasized that these dynamics are further complicated by penal policies that disproportionately affect foreign nationals, revealing deeper patterns of systemic exclusion and inequality within European justice systems (Tešović & Bodrožić, 2025). Individuals from impoverished or conflict-affected regions are “pushed” by lack of opportunity, while wealthier destination countries “pull” through demand for cheap, unregulated labour. TOC groups exploit this economic imbalance by offering “services” such as illegal migration routes, forged documents, and debt-based labour arrangements, often leading to situations of modern slavery or human trafficking (ILO, 2022).

Corruption at multiple levels of governance further entrenches TOC. Whether through bribery of border officials, collusion with customs agencies, or infiltration of political parties, organized criminal groups routinely manipulate state structures to protect their interests. This symbiotic relationship between organized crime and political power undermines democratic accountability and obstructs reform efforts (Shelley, 2014). In some cases, entire regions operate under a hybrid order where criminal and state actors co-govern, blurring the boundaries between legality and illegality.

Equally problematic is the lack of harmonization in criminal law and enforcement standards across jurisdictions. What may constitute a serious offense in one country may be treated as a regulatory infraction in another, leading to “safe havens” for illicit operations and financial flows. The absence of standardized procedures for extradition, data sharing, asset recovery, and joint investigations hampers transnational prosecutions and weakens the global rule of law. This legal fragmentation is further



complicated by digital and financial technologies, which allow criminal organizations to transcend national controls while remaining legally obscured.

Taken together, these factors illustrate that the success of transnational organized crime is not simply a failure of law enforcement, but a symptom of structural deficiencies within the global system itself. The adaptability of criminal networks is not a reflection of their sophistication alone, but also of the strategic vulnerabilities within and between states. Addressing these issues requires more than policy adjustments; it demands a fundamental rethinking of sovereignty, development, and justice in a globalized context.

## RESILIENCE-ORIENTED CRIMINAL JUSTICE FRAMEWORK

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed systemic fragilities within global criminal justice systems, underscoring the necessity for a shift toward resilience-oriented frameworks. Rather than merely reacting to crises, institutions must be structurally equipped to adapt to disruption while maintaining core legal functions. The role of artificial intelligence in crime detection and prevention is expanding, but it also raises new questions regarding transparency, accountability, and ethical use of predictive tools (Europol & UNICRI, 2023).

A proposed model of judicial resilience would rest on four pillars: legal adaptability, institutional flexibility, digital capacity, and transnational interoperability. These dimensions enable continuity of justice through mechanisms such as remote court access, emergency legal provisions, integrated victim protection services, and automated international cooperation protocols (Boin & van Eeten, 2013; UNODC, 2021).

For example, countries like Estonia and the Netherlands demonstrated higher resilience due to pre-existing e-justice systems and flexible legal mechanisms that remained operational under lockdown conditions. This model aligns with broader public management literature advocating for institutional robustness in the face of complex risks (Boin & Van Eeten, 2013).

## COMPARATIVE INSIGHTS AND GOOD PRACTICES

While global crises have exposed systemic vulnerabilities in both domestic and transnational contexts, certain jurisdictions have demonstrated notable success in mitigating criminogenic pressures through proactive and adaptive strategies.

In New Zealand, a coordinated multi-agency task force, comprising police, social workers, and health services, was established to respond to increased family violence reports. This integrated response model contributed to a 12% decrease in repeat domestic violence cases during the 2020 lockdown compared to the same period in 2019 (New Zealand Police, 2020).

In Canada, the federal government expanded emergency funding for women's shelters and established mobile legal aid units, enabling victims in isolated rural areas to access protection mechanisms during lockdowns (Government of Canada, 2020).

In France, innovative community-based tools were introduced, including the "Mask 19" code-word in pharmacies and SMS emergency lines, allowing victims to discreetly report abuse (EIGE, 2021). Similarly, Serbia's judiciary undertook important steps in building remote trial capacities, setting out frameworks and practical models to support digital court infrastructure during and beyond the pandemic period (Krstić et al., 2021).



With regard to cybercrime, Singapore's Cyber Security Agency (CSA) launched real-time public education campaigns and partnered with internet service providers to block malicious domains at the infrastructure level. These initiatives resulted in a 23% drop in successful phishing and ransomware attacks during the third quarter of 2020 (CSA Singapore, 2021).

Collectively, these examples highlight the importance of early inter-institutional coordination, flexible funding, and community-based empowerment mechanisms in buffering systemic risks during crises.

## FINDINGS

This research confirms that global crises function as powerful criminogenic catalysts, reshaping both the manifestation and structure of criminal behaviour. The COVID-19 pandemic and the wider processes of globalization have not only intensified the existing vulnerabilities within societies but have also created new spatial, technological, and institutional arenas for deviance to emerge. These developments do not occur in isolation but are embedded within broader patterns of structural tension, institutional fragility, and legal fragmentation.

The first major finding relates to the dramatic escalation of domestic violence, particularly intimate partner violence, during pandemic-related lockdowns. Psychological stress, economic insecurity, prolonged isolation, and a collapse in institutional accessibility, particularly to courts, shelters, and victim support services, collectively contributed to what global institutions have termed an "epidemic within the pandemic". This form of violence emerged not simply as a personal pathology but as a predictable outcome of systemic crisis mismanagement, where the private sphere became both a site of victimization and institutional neglect.

Secondly, the research highlights a surge in cybercrime, closely tied to the rapid and often unregulated expansion of digital life. As work, education, and social interaction migrated online, so did criminal activity, too. The increase in phishing schemes, ransomware attacks, digital fraud, and online exploitation underscores how digital environments, particularly in times of crisis, become amplifiers of pre-existing inequalities and security gaps. These crimes disproportionately targeted individuals and institutions unprepared for the shift, revealing the critical importance of cybersecurity as both a technological and legal priority.

The third key finding concerns the evolution of transnational organized crime (TOC) in the context of globalization. Contemporary TOC groups no longer operate as static, territorially bounded entities; rather, they function as fluid, adaptive, and networked systems capable of navigating and exploiting the asymmetries of the global order. They leverage encrypted communication, cryptocurrency, and legal loopholes to maximize profit and avoid detection, often moving faster than the institutions tasked with their containment. Their operations thrive in environments marked by regulatory inconsistency, political corruption, and fragmented international cooperation.

Across these three domains, domestic violence, cybercrime, and TOC, a common aetiological thread emerges: the presence of structural strain, whether economic, legal, social, or psychological, compounded by institutional incapacity to respond swiftly and effectively. These findings validate the insights of strain-based and routine activity theories, while also calling attention to the inadequacy of conventional criminal justice models in dealing with crisis-related crime.

Crucially, the research reveals that crime during global crises is not simply a matter of individual deviance, but a symptom of systemic dysfunction, shaped by overlapping layers of inequality, governance failures, and technological disruption. As such, policy responses must transcend the limits of reactive law enforcement. What is needed is an interdisciplinary, preventive, and resilience-based approach,



grounded in international cooperation, legal harmonization, and investment in the structural capacities of institutions most vulnerable during times of disruption.

These findings form the basis for the *de lege ferenda* considerations proposed in the final section of this paper, which aim to translate empirical and theoretical insights into actionable strategies for criminal law reform and institutional modernization.

## ORIGINALITY/VALUE

This paper makes a distinctive contribution to contemporary criminological and legal scholarship by framing criminal behaviour as a structural response to global crises. It bridges theory, empirical insight, and policy analysis through a nuanced integration of classical and modern frameworks, such as strain theory, routine activity theory, and globalization theory, with the real-time dynamics of the COVID-19 pandemic and accelerated globalization.

A key innovation lies in its etiological approach, which moves beyond surface-level descriptions to uncover the structural, psychological, and institutional forces that drive deviance during systemic disruptions. By examining domestic violence, cybercrime, and transnational organized crime as interconnected outcomes of social stress and institutional breakdown, the paper offers a multidisciplinary lens for interpreting crime in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Comparative insights further enrich the analysis. Juxtaposing international practices with national and regional case studies, particularly from Serbia, the paper highlights both successful models and structural blind spots, showing how legal systems adapt, resist, or reflect global pressures.

Normatively, the study advocates for a paradigm shift in criminal justice: one that prioritizes adaptability, resilience, and social responsiveness. It calls for rethinking state responsibility in preventing domestic violence, reinforcing cybersecurity governance, and harmonizing legal frameworks to tackle transnational crime.

By situating crime within broader socio-political transformations, the paper challenges traditional, individualistic views of deviance and invites interdisciplinary dialogue, critical reflection, and systemic reform across legal and policy domains.

## CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis confirms that global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and intensified globalization, act as catalysts for both the emergence and transformation of criminal behaviour. These disruptions have particularly magnified domestic violence, enabled the proliferation of cybercrime, and facilitated the expansion of transnational organized crime networks.

What unites these phenomena is the presence of structural strain and institutional inertia. Socio-economic instability, legal asymmetries, and technological vulnerabilities have created criminogenic conditions that challenge conventional criminal justice mechanisms.

In response, legal systems must evolve through:

1. **Integrated, interdisciplinary policies** that address the root causes of crime during crises.
2. **Strengthening institutional resilience**, particularly in digital infrastructure and victim support services. According to the World Economic Forum (2022), building global cyber-resilience requires multi-stakeholder collaboration, especially in the face of emerging hybrid threats and digital dependency.



### 3. Modernizing legal frameworks to enhance cross-border cooperation and regulate emerging forms of cyber-enabled and globalized crime.

Ultimately, adaptive, human-centred, and preventive approaches must replace reactive legal models to ensure justice and safety in a rapidly changing world. Comparative models such as problem-solving courts illustrate how integration of therapeutic practices and accountability mechanisms can reinforce social rehabilitation and institutional legitimacy during systemic crises (Tešović, 2024). This perspective supports a broader movement toward community-oriented justice that fosters trust through transparency, inclusion, and institutional legitimacy (Tešović, 2025).

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