

## CONCEPTS

### What is Criminology?

- Criminology is the scientific study of crime, criminals, and criminal behavior.
- Criminologists scientifically study the nature and extent of crime; patterns of criminality; explanations for and causes of crime and criminal behavior; and the control of crime and criminal behavior.
- Criminologists: (1) Contribute to the study of crime mainly through scientific research that enables them to obtain facts and develop conclusions concerning crime; (2) Help identify the public's values and attitudes and major issues of public concern about crime and criminal behavior; and, (3) attempt to measure the actual extent of criminal behavior in society and its relationship to factors such as age, sex, race, religion, social class, location, and time of year.
- Criminologists define and describe the many issues and problems raised by criminal activities and behavior in society. They also provide us with factual data on variety of crimes and criminal behavior. However, the role of criminologists is not merely to identify a crime problem and list various facts and figures; they also *analyze, interpret* and *organize* this information within a systematic framework.
- In a sense, criminologists attempt to answer the question, "What are the causes of crime?"
- To answer this question, criminologists draw from many fields, such as sociology, psychology, biology, criminal jurisprudence, political science, anthropology, public administration and history.
- Society is complex, so it is not easy for criminologists to come up with a clear explanation of why crime occurs.
- As a social scientist, the criminologist is both a theoretician and a researcher. In fact, criminologists relate scientific theory and research to the practical questions of how to predict and prevent crime and how to treat criminals.
- In the role of theoretician, criminologists develop **theories**, or tentative explanations, concerning the causes of criminal behavior.
- Criminologists provide a wide variety of theories regarding criminal behavior. These theories: (1) contribute to the understanding of crime; (2) provide a framework within which people can examine current social policies and treatment proposals, and (3) Help us understand the success

or failure of treatments that have been established to prevent or alleviate crime.

- Criminologists clearly recognize that theories are important for the development of political and social policies and treatment programs for criminals and their victims. The fact is, any proposed social or political policy or treatment program for dealing with crime is based on some type of theory, regardless of whether the authors of the proposal are aware of it (e.g. Martison "Nothing works" 1974).
- The criminologist sometimes plays the role of sociopolitical critic and policy advocate or evaluator of anticrime measures and criminal treatment programs. In fact, criminologists: (1) may take an active part in formulating and advocating the adoption of policy decisions aimed at alleviating society's crime problems; (2) propose social, economic, and legal reform measures to reduce crime; and, (3) use their knowledge and skills to evaluate and test the adequacy of specific programs for treating criminals.
- The analysis and evaluation of treatment and rehabilitation programs are an important area of criminological inquiry. Criminologists, penologists, and other social and behavioral scientists have amassed much evidence on the effectiveness of treatment programs for delinquent and criminals, such as the influence of different therapeutic programs on delinquents or the effects of imprisonment of subsequent criminal behavior.
- In the role of evaluator, the criminologists analyzes many kinds of programs for dealing with criminal behavior, recommends changes, if any, and suggests the direction that new programs should take.

### Classes of theories

- There are two general forms of theory: **Unit Theory** and **Metatheory**.
- Unit Theories emphasize a particular problem (such as crime and delinquency) and make testable assertions about that problem.
- Metatheories are rarely testable and they can be seen as "theories about theories." In fact, they discuss the kinds of concepts that should be used in unit theories, the general approach to using those concepts, and the way unit theories should be constructed. For instance, a criminological metatheory might specify that explanations of criminal behavior should emphasize social concepts rather than psychological and biological ones, and that social class should be used as the dominant variable.

*Classes of Theories according to Levels of Abstraction*

- **Macrotheories:** Macrotheories are broad in their scope (they are the most abstract of all) and perhaps are best characterized as those that explain social structure and its effects. They paint a picture of the way the world works, fit the structure of society into that picture, and suggests how crime is related to that structure. Macrotheories focus on rates of crime rather than the criminals and their behavior. Macrotheories are simply not interested in individual behavior. Examples of macrotheory are anomie and conflict theories.
- **Microtheories** are more concrete (less abstract) theories which concentrate in explaining how people become criminals. The focus may be on specific groups of people (small groups) or on the individual. Microtheories are not interested in social structure or crime rates. Examples of microtheory are social control and social learning theories.
- **Bridging Theories** attempt to tell us both how social structure comes about and how people become criminal. Examples of bridging theories are subculture theory and differential opportunity theory.

*Common Ways to Classify Criminological Theories*

- **Structure and Process Theories**
  - (1) Structural Theories are those that focus on the way society is organized and its effect on behavior (e. g. Strain Theories).
  - (2) Process Theories attempt to explain how people become criminal.
- **Consensus and Conflict Theories**
  - (1) Consensus Theories are those based on the assumption that there is agreement among people in society. At the least, they assume that members of a society hold common values.
  - (2) Conflict Theories are based on the assumption that disagreement is common and people hold conflicting values. Laws that seem to benefit only small groups of elites or powerful business owners are often pointed to as evidence of a conflict orientation.

## How Criminologist Define Crime?

- Criminologists view deviant behavior as any action that departs from the social norms of society.
- Deviance thus includes a broad spectrum of behaviors ranging from the most socially harmful, such as rape and murder, to the relative inoffensive , such as joining a religious cult or cross-dressing.
- A deviant act becomes a crime when it is deemed socially harmful or dangerous; it then will be specifically defined, prohibited, and punished under the criminal law.
- The three most common concepts of crime used by criminologists are the Consensus view, the conflict view, and the interactionist view.
- According to the **consensus view**, crimes are behaviors that all elements of society consider to be repugnant. The rich and the powerful as well as the poor and indigent are believed to agree on which behaviors are so repugnant that they should be outlawed and criminalized. Therefore, criminal law – the written code that defines crimes and their punishments – reflects the values, beliefs and opinions of society's mainstream. The term "consensus" implies general agreement among a majority of citizens on what behaviors should be prohibited by criminal law and hence be viewed as crimes.
- The **conflict view** depicts society as a collection of diverse groups who are in constant and continuing conflict. According to some criminologists, those in a position of power define criminal behavior to protect and advance their own self-interest. In fact, usually the poor go to prison for minor law violations, while the wealthy are given lenient sentences for even the most serious breaches of law.
- According to the **interactionist view**, the definition of crime reflects the preferences and opinions of people who hold social power in a particular legal jurisdiction. They maintain their power by stigmatizing or labeling people who fall outside their definition of right and wrong. Criminals therefore are individuals that society labels as outcasts or deviants because they have violated social rules. Interactionists see criminal law as conforming to the beliefs of moral crusaders or moral entrepreneurs, who use their influence to shape the legal process as they see fit. Laws against pornography, prostitution, and drugs are believed to be motivated more by moral crusades than by capitalist sensibilities. Consequently, interactionists are concerned with shifting moral and legal standards.

- **A definition of crime:** “Crime is a violation of societal rules of behavior as interpreted and expressed by the criminal law, which reflects public opinion, traditional values, and the viewpoint of people currently holding social and political power. Individuals who violate these rules are subject to sanctions by state authority, social stigma, and loss of status’ (Siegel, 2008, p. 15).

### Sources

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