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**Topic**

Physiological factor of crime

**What is Crime?**

Crime is the breach of rules or laws for which some governing authority can ultimately prescribe a conviction. Crimes may also result in cautions, rehabilitation, or be unenforced. Individual human societies may each define crime and crimes differently, in different localities, and at different time stages of the crime. While every crime violates the law, not every violation of the law counts as a crime; for example, breaches of contract and of other civil law may rank as “offenses” or as “infractions. ” Modern societies generally regard crimes as offenses against the public or the state, as distinguished from torts, which are wrongs against private parties that can give rise to a civil cause of action.

In sociology, a normative definition views crime as deviant behavior that violates prevailing norms, or cultural standards prescribing how humans ought to behave normally. This approach considers the complex realities surrounding the concept of crime and seeks to understand how changing social, political, psychological, and economic conditions may affect changing definitions of crime and the form of the legal, law-enforcement, and penal responses made by society.

These structural realities remain fluid and often contentious. For example: as cultures change and the political environment shifts, societies may criminalize or decriminalize certain behaviors, which directly affects the statistical crime rates, influences the allocation of resources for the enforcement of laws, and re-influences the general public opinion. One can view criminalization as a procedure deployed by society as a pre-emptive, harm-reduction device, using the threat of punishment as a deterrent to anyone proposing to engage in the behavior causing harm. The state becomes involved because governing entities can become convinced that the costs of not criminalizing, through allowing the harms to continue unabated, outweigh the costs of criminalizing it, restricting individual liberty, for example, to minimize harm to others.

**What** **are** **the** **physiological** **factor** **of** **crime?**

In old fashioned history books, the highest tribute paid to a king was to say that he was just, he helped the poor and punished the wicked. In those days a law-abiding people were sorely in need of protection against powerful law-breakers. Today the power of the state is firmly established. True, quite a number of crimes are never detected; but no criminal has the slightest chance of openly defying society. If we read of a man- hunt in the country we give the poor devil a fortnight at the outside; we know that by then the armed machinery of the law will surely have overtaken him. Society has the right and the duty to protect itself. But its superiority in strength over the individual delinquent overwhelming that it can afford to be generous. The least we owe the criminal is to make an attempt to understand him.

**Types of Criminals**

We may subdivide law-breakers, somewhat schematically, into five types:

1) The ordinary man who is driven to crime by overwhelming external circumstances.

2) The apparently normal individual who is carried away by an irresistible impulse.

3) The neurotic criminal who is driven by equally irresistible but unconscious forces, the nature of which is unknown to him. He regards his criminal tendencies as BBC foreign to his personality and tries vainly to struggle with them.

4) The genuine criminal who prides himself on the delinquent exploits in which he expresses his anti-social attitude.

5) Lastly, a group of criminals whose behavior is the result of mental deficiency or organic illness. They present a medical and not a psychological problem so that I shall disregard them for the purposes of this

paper.

According to the letter of the law a man who is impelled by

hunger to steal is a criminal. I doubt if any decent person

would so regard him. Society is more to blame for such "crimes" than the individuals who commit them. In so far as

such offenses call for social rather than psychological measures.

I need not deal with them here but I might add that such simple and clear-cut cases as the one just described are com- rare. Usually even quite simple types of offense present a psychological problem as well as a sociological one.

Crimes of passion or emotion appear clear enough. We all think we can understand the man who under strong provocation allows himself to be carried away by his emotions. Many people think that such a natural occurrence is not in need of any complicated psycho-analytical explanation. Nevertheless I believe that this type of reaction is much more intricate than appears on the surface and will be discussed in greater detail later.

The next type, the neurotic delinquent, has long been a popular object of psychological interest. A dim realization of the fact that he is driven by overwhelming irrational forces is

reflected in confused conceptions of him as a "Jekyll and Hyde" or "double personality," notions which are scorned by judges and others who wish to maintain the traditional division of all mankind into black and white, and who retain the age-old be- lief that we are responsible for our impulses and control our own destinies. A patient of mine was caught trying to get into the subway without paying her fare. She is a decent and honest girl, who has spent the greater part of her life doing hard work for others, and has few material ambitions. On the day of her offense she was rather worried and in a curious state of absent- mindedness. She behaved most suspiciously and her reaction when found out was out of all proportion. She felt that no decent person would speak to her again, that her career would be ruined, and that she would have to commit suicide. Analysis revealed the following: at the time the incident occurred she was very worried over a sexual affair which had taken place years before. A man in authority had seduced her, and she was frightened that the matter would come out, but at the same time she wished to confess it and thus betray the man. It was not lack of morality, but a moral impulse-the urge to confess and the need for punishment-which drove her to ,Unconsciously she confessed-and expected to be punished for-her guilty sexual behavior which she concealed, while parading instead a guilty non-sexual action. Her exaggerated reactions to being caught cheating reflected her feelings over the sexual matter for which she condemned herself so severely. The fear of having her career wrecked actually turned out to be anxiety felt on behalf of her lover, whose career she would have wrecked by betraying him. She suddenly remembered that he had once boasted to her of having cheated on the sub- way. When her case was dismissed under the "First Offenders' Act" her relief was mingled with resentment against all those who had keen kind to her in the matter. On the way home from the court she took the wrong train by mistake; had this been discovered she would have been suspected of repeating her offense. She felt all along that she simply had to get her- self into trouble, and as there was no one else to punish her, she had to do it herself. As soon as she got home she developed a painful symptom which lasted for days.

I believe that a large proportion of offenses arises as a reaction to sudden mental stress. The psychological and practical consequences of the offense then combine to drive the person deeper still into crime.

Typical Psychological Mechanisms

The psychological mechanisms observed in this case are typical: the connection between the offense and the neurotic symptom; unconscious guilt and the need for punishment in- spiring criminal behavior; substitution of a guilty non-sexual act for a guilty sexual one; identification with a person loved and hated at the same time by borrowing his guilt. And above all it should be stressed that all these complicated mechanisms were completely unconscious at the time of committing the offense.

The following case is a further illustration of the queer mixture of primitive instinct and moral impulse expressed in delinquent conduct, and of the inter-relation between these aspects and the delinquent's personality and sexual life. A woman patient had repeatedly made serious attempts on her life by taking luminal, which she obtained by forging prescriptions.. She felt extremely guilty over her suicidal attempts, by which she contrived to upset her family deeply; yet the more guilty she felt the greater was her impulse to self-destruction. Although ordinarily restrained and correct in her behavior she was prepared to cheat and lie to any extent in order to achieve her purpose: luminal excused everything. She obtained no sexual gratification and very little pleasure out of life. Extremely inhibited and controlled, she could relax and express emotions only under luminal. Taking luminal had become a substitute for all guilty pleasures; for sexual gratification, for enjoying stolen sweets, and so on. Getting luminal by fraud signified getting money by fraud; by having breakdowns she forced her family to spend money on her which she did not dare to steal from them for more enjoyable purposes. In at- tempting to kill herself, too, she was carrying out a wish to kill her parents. The first act in the suicidal drama, the getting and taking of the drug, expressed all her guilty anti-social impulses; the second act, the death which was to follow, represented the death sentences for her sins. The more guilty she felt, the greater be.came her urge to punish herself by suicide. An analysis was able to release some part of her suppressed hostility and it became easier for her to relax. She then developed a habit of dropping off to sleep whenever she felt de- pressed, instead of renewing her attempts at suicide.