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GROUP 1

TOPIC: PSYCHOLOGICAL CAUSES OF CRIME

Crime can be defined as any specific act committed in violation of the law. The main idea of the psychological theories is that potential criminal behavior is the result of stable psychological trait of a person. These personality characteristics are he ones to push people towards committing crimes and demonstrating deviant behavior. The psychological theories emphasize the meaning of extraversion, neuroticism, psychotisism and may others of the conduct of a man. According to the psychological theories the disposition to crime is the result of inadequate socialization. They consider the social factor to be one of the most important ones in terms of inclination to deviance.

Among the numerous psychological/causal theories/causes, it is important to point out Sigmund Freud’s and Erik Erikson’s psychodynamic theories, Skinner’s operant conditioning, Albert Bandura’s social-learning theory and the theory of moral development based on Kohlberg’s and Piaget’s stages of development. Freud touched the problem of possible personality imbalance based on the functioning of Id, Ego and Superego resulting in the repression which can later proceed into criminal behavior. Erikson made an emphasis on the child development. He was particularly solicitous about the problem of identity diffusion which resulted in excessively self-conscious people who are overly concerned with sexuality. Erikson pointed out the problem of unfulfilled expectations which form a negative identity. In its turn this negative identity when possessed by a person make him want to show it out and he most common way to do it is to rebel against everything. The rebel against social norms is a bright example of how negative identity can result in criminal behavior. This theory performs a perfect base of how deviance can be stopped at early age.

The next major theory to mention is Skinner’s operant conditioning theory which is founded on the standard scheme of stimulus > reaction. According to Skinner the reward-based actions can form the desired behavior of a person and therefore also provide important information in terms of the prevention of criminality.

Bandura in his psychological social learning or also known as the social learning theory states: “Learning would be exceedingly laborious…if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do… from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action” [Bandura, 22]. Bandura claimed that modeling plays the most important role in the behavior formation.

Kohlberg’s theory of moral development is based on the thoughts revealed in the works of Jean Piaget. According to Kohlberg every individual passed six stages throughout his development as a personality. Each of the stages belongs to a definite level, so Kohlberg marked out three levels: pre-conventional level, conventional level and the post-conventional level. Each of the three levels has is own social orientation. The diapason of the social orientations varies from obedience and punishment, and ends up with principled conscience. If something is missed along the way principled conscience is never achieved and therefore the adult person does not understand what “social mutuality and a genuine interest in the welfare of others” means [7]. Kohlberg indicates that the only way out of the situation of “immaturity” is to face the required social dilemmas at each of the six stages.

All these theories mentioned above require socialization and without it no morality can be achieved by any means. No morality is a guarantee of the future anti-social criminal behaviour. The psychological theories in criminology in he modern times are the major hope to cope with the ever-lasting problem of crime prevention. Psychology has given these theories and supported them various widely known experiments. This makes the contribution of the psychological theories to the criminology as a discipline immense and irreplaceable. These psychological theories give an opportunity for the future adults spend their lives decently and definitely not in jail.

The guiding principle in this entry is that psychological theories focus especially on the influence of individual and family factors on offending. Psychological theories are usually developmental, attempting to explain the development of offending from childhood to adulthood, and hence based on longitudinal studies that follow up individuals over time. The emphasis of such theories is on continuity rather than discontinuity from childhood to adulthood. A common assumption is that the ordering of individuals on an underlying construct such as criminal potential is relatively constant over time. Psychologists view offending as a type of behavior that is similar in many respects to other types of antisocial behavior. Hence, the theories, methods, and knowledge of other types of antisocial behavior can be applied to the study of crime. Lee Robins popularized the theory that offending is one element of a larger syndrome of antisocial behavior, including heavy drinking, drug-taking, reckless driving, educational problems, employment problems, difficulties in relationships, and so on. This is the basis of the psychiatric classification of antisocial personality disorder. Robins also argued that antisocial personality is obvious early in life and that it tends to persist from childhood to adulthood, with different behavioral manifestations.

Typically, psychological theories may include motivational, inhibiting, decision-making, and learning processes (Farrington, 1993). The most common motivational idea is that people (and especially children) are naturally hedonistic and selfish, seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, and hence that children are naturally antisocial. Another classic idea is that people are motivated to maintain an optimal level of arousal; if their level falls below the optimum, they will try to increase it, whereas if it is above the optimum they will try to decrease it. Thus, someone who is bored might seek excitement.

Since offending is viewed as essentially natural, most psychological theories attempt to explain the development of mechanisms that inhibit offending such as the conscience. The conscience is often assumed to arise in a conditioning process (depending on the association between antisocial behavior and the anxiety created by parental punishment) or in a learning process (where the probability of behavior increases or decreases according to parental rewards or punishments). Psychological theories often include cognitive (thinking or decisionmaking) processes that explain why people choose to offend in a particular situation. A common assumption is that offending is essentially rational, and that people will offend if they think that the expected benefits will outweigh the expected costs.

Generally, psychologists are committed to the scientific study of human behavior, with its emphasis on theories that can be tested and falsified using empirical, quantitative data, controlled experiments, systematic observation, valid and reliable measures, replications of empirical results, and so on. Much research in recent years has been carried out within the risk factor paradigm (Farrington, 2000), focusing on the extent to which risk factors such as impulsiveness or poor parental supervision predict offending. This research also investigates possible causal mechanisms or processes that intervene between and explain the link between risk factors and crime.

There are also four basic theories of crime, and knowing and understanding each one is imperative for one to succeed in any legal profession. Whether one desires to become a lawyer, crime scene investigator, law enforcement officer, they will need to understand the different theories of crime. Understanding these theories will help with dispute resolution, crime identification, justice for all.

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| **Theory of Crime** | **Characteristics or Beliefs of Theory** | **Solutions to Crime** |
| **Classical Theory** | * Crime is caused by the individuals free will * Human beings are rational and make decisions freely and with understanding of consequences * Crime is an immoral form of human behaviour * Such behaviour weakens society   + Punishment is a necessary evil sometimes intended to deter criminals and serve as an example to those who would violate the law   + Crime prevention is possible through swift and certain punishment that counters possible gains from criminal behaviour * More prisons and stiffer criminal laws with greater penalties for offenders are the best solutions to crime | * Punishment is a necessary evil sometimes intended to deter criminals and serve as an example to those who would violate the law * Crime prevention is possible through swift and certain punishment that counters possible gains from criminal behaviour   More prisons and stiffer criminal laws with greater penalties for offenders are the best solutions to crime |
| **Biological Theory** | * The basic determinants of human behaviour are to a considerable degree, determined by genetics * These basic determinants of human behaviour may be passed from one generations to the next * Human DNA, environmental contaminants, nutrition, hormones, trauma to the brain, exposure to drugs and alcohol during pregnancy and body chemistry can all contribute to criminal behaviour. | * Historically, individuals with genetic defects have been sterilized (meaning there will be no offspring) * Research  to find genes that encourage criminal behaviour * Research into medicines (tranquilizers, anti-psychotic drugs and other mood altering drugs to control behaviour) |
| **Sociological Theory** | * Social Environment as the cause of criminal behaviour * Weak, broken bonds with family, school, religion as catalyst to human behaviour * People engage in criminal behaviour because they do not see the benefits of adhering to conventional social values and believe that crime is a way to improve their social, financial conditions * Positive alternatives divert people’s actions away from criminal activity and create a sense of belonging, competence,  and empowerment * Social programs that change the cultural and social conditions that lead people to crime * Government programs with funding to alleviate poverty | * Positive alternatives divert people’s actions away from criminal activity and create a sense of belonging, competence,  and empowerment * Social programs that change the cultural and social conditions that lead people to crime   Government programs with funding to alleviate poverty |
| **Interactionist Theory** | * Association with other criminals is the factor most contributing to criminal behaviour among individuals. * Failure of self-direction and inadequate social roles are the root causes of behaviour * Individuals are looking for acceptance, social standing and power within that group * Offenders have the responsibility and ability to change their own behaviours * Opportunities for positive interaction with society will enable the criminal to choose productive and lawful behaviours to meet needs | * Offenders have the responsibility and ability to change their own behaviours   Opportunities for positive interaction with society will enable the criminal to choose productive and lawful behaviours to meet needs. |