

CRI1103 CRIMINOLOGY

Criminology

The systematic study of crime, criminality and criminal justice systems, focusing on the definitions and causes of crime, the process of criminalisation, crime prevention, systems of social control, and the treatment, rehabilitation and punishment of offenders.

Criminology focuses on three areas:

- *Sociology of law*: examines why and how societies define crime and the implications this understanding has on people
- *Theories of crime causation*: attempt to explain why people offend
- *Study of social responses to crime*: examines the operation and activities of the formal institutions of criminal justice

Crime

Acts that are legally prohibited by the state and deemed to be deserving of punishment and control

Harm

Physical or other kinds of injury, distress or damage

Defining crime – Hagan (1987)

- *Formal legal definition*: crime is defined by the state. eg. Criminal Code Act of WA
- *Social harm*: defines crime as bringing some kind of harm to people/ society
- *Cross-cultural universal norm*: states that crime does not vary across cultures
- *Labelling*: states that crime only exists when there is a social response to an activity
- *Human rights*: Crime has occurred when there is a violation of human rights
- *Human diversity*: deviance represents a normal response to oppressive circumstances

Key purpose of criminal law:

- *Moral wrongness*: deters immoral/ criminal behaviour
- *individual autonomy*: used against behaviour that affects the rights and interests of other people
- *Community welfare*: protect the physical wellbeing of members of the community

Actus Rea

'guilty act' – criminal responsibility for physical act

Mens Rea

'guilty mind' – criminal responsibility focusing on criminal intent

'Dark figure' of crime

Used to describe criminal acts that haven't been reported to the police and aren't accurate in crime statistics

Crime and Media

- *Technical constraints*: immediacy, dramatization, personalisation, simplification, negativity, structured access, novelty
- *Practical Constraints*
- *Ideological Constraints*

Media can increase fear of crime, moral panic and deviance amplification.

Fear of Crime

Fears may be rational or irrational, depending on specific types of evidence are types of harm.

Moral panic

Is generated when moral outrage is created by the media labelling certain groups or activities as deviant, and a threat to the social and moral order.

Moral panic key elements: Concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality and volatility.

Deviance amplification

The public labelling attached to particular groups or activities can generate further or increased deviant behaviour.

Crime wave

An increased reporting of particular types of crime increase public awareness.

(Increase exists only in public perception, not actual crime figures)

Importance of theory

- They are broad and can be applied in a general sense
- They provide a framework for investigating criminological phenomena
- They offer explanation regarding the causes of crime
- They offer explanation regarding the maintenance of offending behaviour
- They provide recommendations regarding appropriate responses to crime

Criminological theories focus on three factors

Individual factors

- biological reasons: level of intelligence, abnormal chromosomes
- psychological reasons: aggression, lack of self-control
- biosocial reasons: abusive/dysfunctional childhood
- pathological conditions: mental illness

Situational factors

- inadequate socialisation: can't distinguish right and wrong
- negative labelling: stigma of being called "deviant"
- poor school performance: low level of attainment or alienation
- poor parenting: lack of supervision, neglect or maltreatment
- homelessness: lack of stable and safe shelter
- neighbourhood-scale mechanisms: social and demographic risks, social disorganisation, poor collective efficacy
- peer group, subcultural influences and social learning: gangs, criminal social networks

Social structural factors

- colonialism and social disempowerment: denial of culture
- racism and discrimination: negative biases
- poverty, inequality and social marginalisation: social exclusion and lack of means to attain desired ends
- unemployment: lack of opportunities for paid work