

# 1013CCJ Intro to Criminology

## Weekly Topics

**Week 1: What is Criminology**

**Week 2: Perceptions, Facts and Fallacies**

**Week 3: Defining and Measuring Crime**

**Week 4: Prevalence**

**Week 5: Street Crime and Violence**

**Week 6: White Collar Crime**

**Week 7: Psychological Theories of Crime**

**Week 8: Sociological Theories of Crime**

*Week 9: Policing Public and Private (Notes omitted)*

*Week 10: Criminal Courts and Judiciary (Notes omitted)*

**Week 11: Corrections**

**Week 12: Victims and Restorative Justice & Crime Prevention**

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## WEEK 1: WHAT IS CRIMINOLOGY

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### 1.1 Introduction

*What is criminology?*

- Is a scientific, multi-disciplinary field that includes:
  - Sociology
  - Psychology
  - Law
  - Geography
  - Political science
  - And many more other fields (e.g. economics)

*Crime and its causation*

- Criminology includes the study of:
  - The “characteristics of the criminal law”
  - The extent of crime
  - The effects of crime on victims and on society (repeat victimisation)
  - Methods of crime prevention
  - The attributes of criminals
  - The characteristics and workings of the criminal justice system

-Williams 2012

*So, what is crime? (looking at multiple definitions)*

- Can define crimes as acts or omissions that
  - Cause public harm
  - Are forbidden by law
  - Are punishable by law
- As a concept – complex and incorporates broad range of behaviours
  - e.g. Petty shop theft, violent assault, large-scale corporate crimes, murder
- Crime is a social construction – behaviours defined as criminal vary across time and place

*\*Defining crime is not straight forward\**

## **1.2 Facts and Fallacies about Crime** (myths about crime)

- How do we get our information about crime, what are our sources?
- Formal and informal sources of knowledge about crime
- Formal sources
  - Official statistics – ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) and AIC (Australian Institute of Criminology) etc.
  - Research Studies
- Informal Sources
  - Personal Experience
  - Experiences of relatives and friends
  - The media (newspapers, TV, radio, crime dramas, internet)

*Inconsistencies between what official research tell us and media portrays*

Why do these inconsistencies exist? What impact do these inconsistencies have?

- Module 2
  - What is crime news
  - Determining newsworthiness
  - Influence of the media
  - Crime myths

*How accurate is your knowledge about crime? (online quiz)*

- Violent crime in our society is on the rise False
- Most crime victims are victimised by strangers False
- The elderly is the least at risk of becoming the victims of crime. True
- Female are more likely to become victims of crime compared to males. False
- Most offenders who begin offending in adolescence continue to offend well into adulthood. False

## **1.3 The Criminal Justice System**

- Key Function – bring offender before courts for adjudication and then, upon a finding of guilt, to sentence the offender
- Different aims in sentencing
  - Retribution
    - An approximate form of proportional harm as ‘payback’
  - Restitution
    - Compensation to victim or society
  - Deterrence
    - Specific deterrence and general deterrence
  - Incapacitation
    - Restricts potential offenders access to victims
  - Rehabilitation
    - Behavioural change through therapeutic programs

### **The Criminal Justice System (3 main components)**

- Policing
- Courts

- Corrections

### *Legitimation*

- CJS (Criminal Justice System) attempts to control behaviours defined as unlawful – giving substantial powers over citizens
  - Common rationale is that this power is ‘legitimated’ because majority of citizens approve of it and are prepared to accept some lawful restrictions on their freedom in return for social stability and regulation
  - Problem for state and CJS – maintain balance between protecting civil liberties and enforcing a degree of social control
  - CJS is the formal mechanism of social control utilised only in cases where informal agencies (families, school, employment) have not adequately socialised people.
  - If informal controls worked adequately then (it is said) that there would be little need for formal mechanisms of coercion.
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## **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER (MODULE 1)**

- Is it really a system?
  - Is there a common connection between the parts?
  - Do they balance each other?
  - What holds the components together?
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## **WEEK 2: PERCEPTIONS, FACTS AND FALLACIES**

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### **2.1 Crime News and Selectivity**

#### *Overview*

- The media is the primary source of indirect knowledge of the crime problem (shapes our ideas)
- The direct knowledge may come from personal experience and/or the experiences of those people known to us.

#### *The Volume of Crime news*

- Varies over time and place
- Is influenced by how crime is defined
  - Less crime news when crime is narrowly defined as violation of criminal laws
  - More crime news when crime is broadly defined as all forms of social deviance

#### *Selectivity*

- The way crime is reported in the media can influence the way we think about crime
- The reporting of crime is selective
- The types of crimes and criminals reported in the media are those deemed ‘newsworthy’
- The media present a variation of crime and criminality because:
  - Rather than rely on statistical data or academic research for information about crime (usually violent) and portray as more the typical and greater threat to the community.

- Public perceptions about crime can influence the development of public policy around ‘the crime problem’
  - Agenda-setting or representing crime in a way to increase the urgency for policy makers to respond to the crime problem.
- Selective reporting of crime can lead to ‘moral panics’
  - “...a condition, episode, person or group of persons that emerges to become defined as a threat to a societal values and interests”
  - Possible examples – Bikies on the Gold Coast, war on terrorism

## 2.2 Determining Newsworthiness

Various criteria exist for determining newsworthiness but all are linked to news values:

- Prominence (Well-known individual)
  - The media tend to report on crimes that involve people or organisations who are prominent or well-known (e.g. Politicians, Actors/ Celebs, Sporting stars, well-known companies/ businesses)
  - These prominent people or organisations may feature in a variety of capacities (e.g. as victims, offenders or witnesses etc.)
- Timeliness
  - Report on crimes that have occurred recently rather than some time in the past.
  - Tends to present information about crime which focuses on immediate events surrounding the crime, rather than information about the broader social and/or historical contexts.
- Impact
  - Likely to have a higher impact
  - Impact a greater number of people, as opposed to crimes that impact only a small number of people or small segment of the population
- Proximity
  - Are geographically closer to the audience (e.g. crimes in your local community or state/ territory as opposed to those that are further away)
  - Are emotionally close to the audience (e.g. crimes that happen to groups of people who are similar to audience)
- Novelty
  - Focus on the most unusual and dramatic crime events (e.g. sexual offences committed by strangers and acts of extreme or unusual violence)
  - Treat rare and unusual crimes as common everyday events
  - Use dramatic and provocative language in crime reporting for impact
- Conflict
  - Stories contain two or more parties in conflict are deemed more newsworthy (e.g. stories of environments vs. developers: feuding neighbours or businesses)
  - The greater the level of conflict, the more newsworthy the story
- Contemporaneousness
- Human Interest
  - Media report on stories that show some positive aspect of human behaviour
  - May not contain any of the previous highlighted news values
  - Tend to be limited in number

## 2.3 Media Crime Frames

- Media outlets engage in a process of ‘framing’ news stories
- Framing presents a particular point of view and assists journalists in presenting news stories in the limited time or space available.
- Framing is in essence the process of organising the news story. Within a given frame the news story then denies the problem, makes moral judgements about the problem and suggests remedies.
- The process of framing consciously or unconsciously conveys a particular, easy to understand view.

*In relation to crime, there are 5 principle news frames:*

- Faulty criminal justice system frame
  - People commit crime because the criminal justice system is not effective
    - E.g. stories about the length of police investigations, the inadmissibility of evidence, recidivist offenders who commit offences on parole
  - Criminal justice system doesn’t punish enough.
    - E.g. stories about supposed ‘light sentences’ for some offenders, or stories of ‘weak’ judges/ magistrates.
  - Criminal justice system is focused too heavily on the rights of the offender (often opposed to the rights of the victim)
    - E.g. stories about the ‘luxury’ of prison
- Blocked Opportunities frame
  - Commit crime because they are unable to participate in society
  - They have a lack of opportunities (e.g. employment and education)
  - They are in dire circumstances (e.g. poverty, homelessness)
  - They are victims of discrimination or social injustice (e.g. racial background)
- Social Breakdown frame
  - Commit crime because of social ills such as a decline in social values (usually white, middle class values) (e.g. respect for elders)
  - A decline in morality (e.g. not swearing in public)
  - Increasing levels of divorce, or particular family structures.
- Racist System frame
  - commit crime because of ethnic and racial minority groups are disproportionately caught and punished (perhaps due to differential enforcement or racism)
  - people from ethnic and racial minority groups may be more frequently wrongly arrested and convicted.
- Violent Media frame
  - Commit crime, particularly violent crime, as a consequence of increased exposure to violent media.
    - E.g. news media stories of young people watching violent movies, video games etc. before committing an offence.
  - Often presented alongside other media frames so that the media isn’t portrayed as the sole source of violent crime.

## **2.4 Crime Myths**

*News values, selectively of reporting and media frames influence how people think about crime and criminals. Research on this phenomenon adopts one of the 3 models to explain this relationship:*

- The Effects Model

- Argues that people are directly affected by what they see and read in the media
- Views consumers of media as passive and uncritical
- Assumes consumers of media unquestioningly believe the view of crime within which they are presented
- The Functionalist Model
  - Views consumers of media as active participants in media consumption
  - Focus on consumer engagement with media content for gratification
  - E.g. active choice of dramatic and fictional portrayals of crime and criminals
- The Institutional Model
  - Media influence is via process of active subjective interpretation mediated by experience and perception
  - Views media as a powerful institution of social control
    - By shaping the social views of crime and criminals
    - By reinforcing community attitudes about crime, criminals and criminal justice responses

### *Myths*

- Crime is on the rise
  - Most public opinion polls and social attitude surveys show that most people regard crime as high and on the rise
  - Official crime data show that crime has either remained stable or declined in recent years.
- Most crimes are violent in nature
  - Media tend to portray typical and frequently occurring crime as violent in nature (e.g. homicide, assault and sexual assault)
  - A lot of crime goes unreported and most reported and detected crime is property related.
- Typical offenders come from certain socioeconomic gender and racial groups
  - Stereotypical images of offenders shift the focus away from other forms of serious offending (e.g. white collar and corporate crime, child abuse and domestic violence).
- Females are more likely to become the victim
- Sentences are too lenient

*\*Media = infotainment\**

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## **WEEK 3: DEFINING AND MEASURING CRIME**

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### **3.1 Definitions of Crime**

#### *What is Crime?*

- Depends upon how crime is defined
- Crime can be defined multiple ways including:
  - *Dictionary-based Definitions*
    - *Common elements of dictionary based definitions of crime:*
      - *Cause public harm*
      - *Are forbidden by law*