

CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR: CAUSES AND FACTORS

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One of the proverbial ten thousand dollar question is: Are we able to identify potential criminals and therefore predict and prevent criminal behaviour?

When viewing crime statistics of various countries one realises how important would an answer be to such a question. For example, in the U.S.A. 18,000 murders are committed annually, i.e. one American in ten thousand is murdered. In Malta, over the period 1973-1980, the crimes reported and known to the Police have been 28,486.

In trying to attempt an answer as to what are the causes and factors vis a vis criminal behaviour we have to lean heavily on Sociology, Psychiatry and Social Psychology. Sociology helps to visualise the trends and distribution of crime; psychiatry gives an insight into how and why certain individuals commit crimes; whilst social psychology helps us to understand and co-ordinate the sociological and psychiatric findings.

Starting from the sociological perspective we immediately ask: What changes in economic or social conditions are linked with changes in the forms and level of criminality?

The social factors which are mainly linked with crime are economic conditions. In the history of Criminology there has always been a close relation between crime and poverty. It may sound a truism to state that men steal because they are poor. However, when delving deeper in our investigations, the simplicity of such a conclusion vanishes. In defining the word "poverty" we immediately meet a hurdle, since few people in developed countries nowadays are faced with total destitution and so are forced to steal by way of feeding their families. Therefore while we can safely say that in the poorest parts of the world today, absolute destitution is a direct factor in crime, we have to search for the causes of crime in countries where poverty is not so impelling.

Sociological studies have

concluded that in countries where there has been a sudden drop in prosperity, this created a stronger pressure towards the commission of crimes than in countries which are accustomed to poverty. However here one must distinguish between different types of crimes, since not all kinds of crimes move in the same direction. Thus whilst theft, generally, rises during a depression, crimes of sex and violence tend to diminish. One must also note that even amongst crimes of theft one finds differences: thus, for example, pick pocketing goes down in depression. The reason being obvious since wallets, during depression, are more likely to be empty.

How we have to tackle the highly problematic aspect of rising crime in prosperous countries where virtually full employment, social welfare and provisions for education exist. The problem being: why is crime rising in affluent countries?

Sociological studies conducted in U.S.A. have reached the conclusion that the answer to such a question is the breakdown or conflict in Social Organisation. From these studies it emerged that successive waves of immigrants moved in particular city centres where they were able to find cheapest housing. Subsequently, those who prospered moved elsewhere. Thus these areas were left to the weak and the failures. As a result there was the breakdown of informal social controls, since in those areas what remained were pockets of social disorganisation in which delinquency could develop practically unchecked. Such a situation was naturally passed on from one generation to the other.

Emile Durkheim, an eminent Sociologist, has adopted the concept of Anomie, in trying to explain the rise in crime in prosperous countries. According to this concept, the limits formerly imposed by Society upon the aspirations of individuals in the various classes of society have been swept away

owing to the overriding importance attached to industrial advancement. In other words, since it is impossible for everyone to succeed in becoming rich, those who failed to achieve success in material terms ended branded as failures. Since the one goal is of getting rich, so many, especially those in the poorer strata, cannot envisage the hope of arriving there, if stuck with rules for doing it legally. Thus there is loss of confidence in the social structure and regulations and so some would become criminals in order to achieve their goal of success. Fortunately not all people resort to such a means, and would prefer to adopt legitimate means to achieve success, rather than resorting to crime.

Another important cause leading to criminal behaviour is the role of culture-conflict. In today's world there is the speed of change, where values and beliefs of one generation are challenged or even abandoned by the next. Information is easily available in viewing the contrasting beliefs and ways of life of different cultures. Thus, for example, up to two generations ago it was possible to grow up firmly believing that the ways matters were run in one's own country were virtually beyond question. Nowadays everything seems open to comparison and dispute.

Fortunately, although there is this pressure towards crime, the great majority of people do not resort to persistent criminality. One is here tempted to ask why is it then that individuals or groups of individuals resort to crime whilst others do not?

According to Professor E. Sutherland, an eminent Criminologist, the answer to this question lies in his "theory of differential association". Briefly put this theory propounds that the chances of a person becoming a criminal depends upon the balance of influences for and against law breaking which a person encounters in the course of his life. In other words, if a

person has been highly influenced by a majority of attitudes towards criminality, such a person has the likelihood of becoming a criminal. In considering such a possibility, Professor Sutherland added that weight must also be given as to how frequently these encounters occurred, how early in life they were encountered, their duration and also the prestige, in the eyes of the receiver, of people or groups conveying these attitudes.

However this theory has met severe criticism, chiefly because persons can become criminals without learning from direct contact with other criminals the motives, techniques and attitudes pertaining to crime. Moreover, a person might be led to crime by physical or psychological deficiencies which prevented him from meeting his needs in more acceptable ways.

Another criminal phenomenon is the so called "white-collar crimes" committed in prosperous countries by comparatively prosperous citizens during the course of their normal occupations. According to Professor Leon Radzinowicz the extension of physical and social mobility and of contacts with different cultures and values; material abundance; freedom of enterprise and choice; ambition and the will to achieve: all these can be seen as contributing their quota to crime at every level of society.

Up to now we have viewed the causes and factors vis-a-vis criminal behaviour from the Sociological angle, now we will focus our attention on the psychiatric and psychological perspectives and therefore on the individual per se.

Every person is the product of the constitution he has inherited from his parents and of the environment in which he was born and brought up. It is held that what a person inherits is generally a potential, but whether that potential is fulfilled, depends mostly on his environment. In other words a person who inherits a potential for high intelligence or for schizophrenia would act for good or bad in accordance, to a large extent, to his environment. History

abounds with examples of such persons.

Certain kinds of mental illnesses have been associated with certain types of crimes. Thus schizophrenics, and in particular paranoia sufferers, depressives and epileptics have been regarded as especially prone to violence or murder. However statistical studies have proved that the proportion amongst psychotics discharged from hospital who subsequently killed or committed serious assaults is little higher than the proportion amongst the population at large.

Of course there are the occasional rare cases where murder stems directly from madness, examples being, the Jack the Ripper types of murder, the Daniel M'Naghten murder case, or the tragic occasions where a member of a family kills his family under the delusion that they are doomed to some more terrible fate. Unfortunately there are also the cases where a person who started life in promising circumstances begins, in an mysterious way, to deteriorate in behaviour and personality, until he suddenly commits a savage assault or murder.

In relation to minor crimes, schizophrenia, unfortunately, plays a major role. Thus statistics show that in various countries schizophrenics are common amongst social derelicts, drifting into destitution, vagrancy, stealing food or clothes when they get the chance.

Milder forms of pathological depression are connected with mild forms of crime like shoplifters, who in a large majority are women.

However neurosis is considered to have the effect of acting as a barrier against crime, thus making people inhibited, anxious and overconformist. Therefore it is extremely rare for neurosis to manifest itself in crime. Likewise, among the many epileptics it is rare to see manifestations of a criminal nature.

As regards mentally subnormal people, i.e. well below the average intelligence, the great majority of these lead a placid, sheltered life and only a minority, coming from backgrounds and homes which

aggravate their disabilities or lay them open to criminal associations, lead to repeated delinquencies.

In the nineteenth century many held that criminals were mostly illiterates or dullards. However modern studies have done away with this belief. In fact studies have proved that although in most cases, delinquents, especially young in age, were behind others as regards schooling yet they were only a little behind as regards intelligence.

Alcohol and crime are intrinsically linked up. In the words of Professor Leon Radzinowicz, alcohol "is an important contributing factor in crimes of violence". However the liability to fall foul of the criminal law whilst drunk, also depends, to a large extent, on the situation in which the trouble occurs and also on the social standing of the person concerned. Moreover the vulnerability of intoxication varies immensely between individuals.

Interesting studies, especially through personality tests and observation, have produced evidence that young children who tend to be more assertive, prone to fight, daring, quick to anger, and who are resistant to adults and discipline are, on average, the most likely to become involved in later delinquency and crime.

This temperamental characteristic is described in Criminology as the degree of aggressiveness and is considered to be a valid test in discovering "criminal personality". However, *ex abundante cautela* one must hasten to add that it is not infallible. Next in line we have to consider the psychopaths. These are individuals who are unrestrained in their behaviour, callous, impulsive, very troublesome, and unresponsive to ordinary deterrents.

Whilst not considered as mad, they cannot be defined as normal either. Some of these psychopaths seem to be unable to face the normal responsibilities and irritations of life and so are given to uncontrolled violence.

Innumerable studies have been conducted on the subject of psychopathy. We have been told that there are aggressive

psychopaths, inadequate psychopaths, sex psychopaths and passive psychopaths. Each group shows its manifestations in different ways. However, in spite of intensive studies, no effective criteria have been discovered which differentiate psychopaths from other people. But medical research has discovered certain characteristics which are considered to be prevalent in severely psychopathic persons. A substantial number of these persons have abnormal brain waves, which are revealed by the electro-encephalogram. A much smaller proportion of these persons have an extra male chromosome.

Having gone through the various causes and factors in relation to criminal behaviour it may sound disheartening to conclude that no real cut and dry answers can be given to the various problems posed. Crime covers a vast range of behaviour which cannot be covered by a single explanation and if this were possible, it is highly improbable that it can lead us to a single cause. Thus if we were to take three conductive phenomena to crime, namely, poverty, broken homes and maladjustment, by themselves these mean very different things and have highly different impacts on different parts of the world and at different periods of time.

Moreover factors associated with crime do not necessarily cause it. Thus a person suffering from a mental disability and commits an offence does not necessarily mean that he did so as a result of his disability. In other words the more we try to search for and isolate factors leading to crime, the more we discover combinations of interacting pressures rather than establishing a single decisive influence.

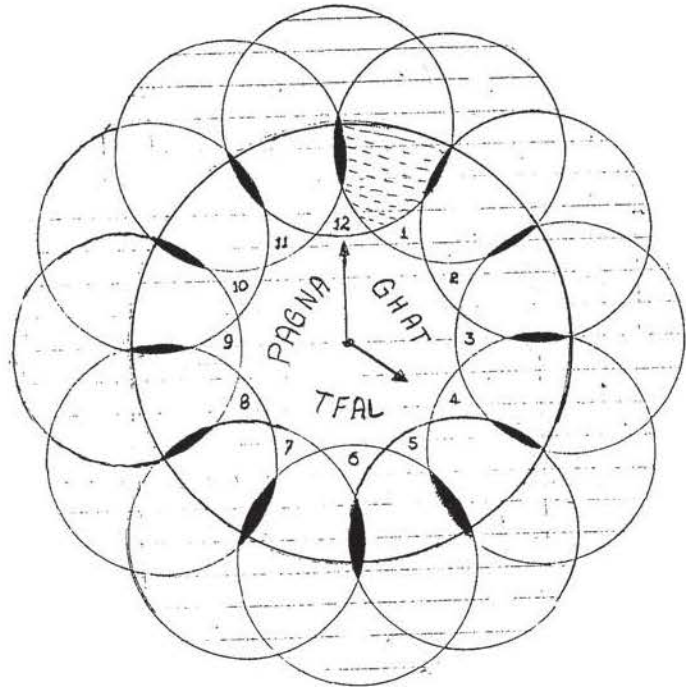
We must bear in mind that crime has a way of feeding upon change, reappearing in new forms as old forms fade, thus battenning on the characteristics of any society. This is most aptly described by Tarde's aphorism "The individual bestirs himself, society sweeps him along".

However such a conclusion does not mean defeat, since effective remedies have been put

to use. Thus for example, special attention by welfare and educational services, corrective treatments, psychotherapy techniques, medical use of drugs and even in certain extreme cases

surgical intervention are all effective methods which have developed following intensive studies undertaken in trying to find causes and factors vis a vis criminal behaviour.

CIRCLEWORD



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| 1 Tpoġġi Fuqu | 7 Jixbah |
| 2 Bih tmur ghand it-Tabib | 8 Furjaniz |
| 3 Akkanit | 9 Mhux mara |
| 4 Aghmel hekk il-Ktieb | 10 Hoss mill-Fomm |
| 5 Mhux kattiv | 11 Hafna Negroes 'La Maltija' |
| 6 (Hu) Ghamel hekk it-taraġ | 12 Prezz Baxx |

**IBGHAT IR-RIŻULTAT
TAS-CIRCLEWORD
U IRBAH RIGAL**