

Criminology

Mid-term

Courtney Swink

IDS493 Electric Portfolio Project, Old Dominion University

Dr. Gordon-Phan

November 13, 2025

Criminology is the interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary scientific study of crime, criminals, and the response from society to criminal behavior. It is a diverse and intricate field of study that includes such disciplines as psychology, sociology, law, economics, and biology to explain and understand the complexities of crime, the causes, and the most effective ways to prevent it. It also seeks to understand and explain not only why individuals commit crimes, but how it affects communities, and how the legal justice system responds to crime. Although criminology involves the study of all crimes, the categories such as violent crimes, sex crimes, property crimes, white-collar crimes, organized crimes, and cybercrime are the most often emphasized.

The field of criminology examines crime patterns and trends, and the impact it has on victims, communities, and society as a whole. Criminology differs from the more traditionally well-known discipline of criminal justice. Criminal justice focuses more on the practical application and operation of law enforcement and legal systems after a crime is committed. Criminology is distinct as it seeks to understand the underlying factors, motivations, and thought process behind criminal acts. Simply put, “criminology is the why behind crime” and “criminal justice is the how” a crime is committed. (*Criminal Justice vs. Criminology: What’s the Difference?*, 2024)

There is not a single, universal reason to explain why people may commit crimes. Instead, it is a complicated dynamic, with a variety of factors and oftentimes overlapping theories for which crimes are committed. Understanding why people commit crimes is done through assessing a complex mix of socioeconomic, psychological, and biological factors, in addition to environmental and social influence, and individual choice. Socioeconomic factors include poverty and inequality. Psychological factors like mental health conditions, lack of self-

control, and personality traits. Biological factors include genetic predispositions, neurological abnormalities, and biochemical differences. Environmental and social impact can also play a significant role. Factors such as adverse childhood experiences, including neglect, physical emotional and sexual abuse in childhood, association of criminal peer influence, and learned criminal behavior through family members or role models can influence crime. Lastly, the personal choice factor plays a vital role in why some people choose to commit crime, including jealousy, vengeance, revenge, or the thrill factor. Ultimately, a person's decision to commit a crime come down to various circumstances, along with the opportunity to offend.

A professional who studies crimes, criminal behavior, and the factors that influence them, in order to help prevent future crimes is called a criminologist. Criminologists examine social, psychological, and environmental factors to determine why crimes occur and how to prevent them. Criminologists also may conduct research methods and studies to collect and analyze crime data and evaluate the effectiveness of existing polices and laws. The insights gained from research helps to inform and influence laws and policies to improve justice systems. By conducting systematic research and evaluating intervention strategies, criminologists can help identify and predict what will work in crime prevention and rehabilitation. Criminologists use psychological, biological, and social methods to assess motivations, patterns, and crime demographics to create profiles for law enforcement. Criminology plays a vital role in public education, taking the research findings to the community to help inform and educate the public on the complexities that surround crime and justice. Career paths that criminologists may pursue include forensic technicians, criminal profilers, intelligence analysts, social workers, probation or parole officers, criminal investigators, and many more.

Although it was not referred to as criminology then, the principal dates back to before the seventeenth century, when crime was often viewed as a result of demonic possession, sin, or spiritual temptation. Driven from the power of the “two major authority figures- the church and aristocracy,” punishments depended on “social status” and through “religious interventions.” (Peterson & VanderPyl, 2019) It was not until the early 1800’s when crimes were reported statistically, and the Belgian sociologist and mathematician Adolphe Quetelet, noticed patterns in the statistics. The patterns included “number of people accused of crimes, types of crimes, how many were convicted, and the criminal offenders by age and gender.” (Longley, 2020) An Italian physician named Cesare Lombroso became known as the “father of modern criminology” by applying scientific methods to analyze crime, “studying the characteristics of criminals” in order to learn why they committed crimes during the late 1800’s and early 1900’s. (Longley, 2020) In 1920, when a sociologist named Maurice Parmelee wrote the first American textbook on criminology, which led to the “formal teaching of criminology as a distinct discipline, separate from criminal law and justice.” (Longley, 2020) Criminology has come a long way from its start, with innovative technology and evidence-based methodology.

Although the effectiveness varies on the legal justice system responses to crime, the measures include punitive punishment such as incarceration, rehabilitation and prevention such as substance abuse treatment, vocational education, and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), restorative justice which emphasizes repairing harm through empathy and accountability, and prevention strategies such as policing and addressing the root causes of crime through community based violence prevention programs. Many have proffered that punishment-based approaches show limited success on the deterrence of crime. Criminology being the key in

understanding why crimes were committed in the first place in order to find the most effective strategies, oftentimes combining the approaches previously mentioned.

Criminology is a dynamic, interdisciplinary, and essential field dedicated to the scientific exploration of crime, its underlying causes, and societal responses. Demonstrated through various theories, including socioeconomic, psychological, biological, individual choice, and environmental and social influence, criminal behavior is a complex phenomenon shaped by a multitude of factors. The ultimate goal of criminology is to uncover scientific facts that can inform effective, evidenced based policies and practices for crime prevention and intervention, thereby working towards a more just and equitable society. By understanding these complexities, criminologists can contribute to systematic change and well-being for communities. These insights translate into tangible improvements for public safety and administer justice for victims, offenders, and society as a whole.

References

Criminal Justice vs. Criminology: What's the Difference? (2024, December 11). Louisiana.edu.

<https://louisiana.edu/online/blog/criminal-justice-vs-criminology-whats-difference>

Longley, R. (2020, July 13). *Criminology Definition and History*. ThoughtCo.

<https://www.thoughtco.com/the-history-of-criminology-part-1-974579>

Peterson, J. R., & VanderPy1, T. (2019). *3.2 Pre-Classical Justice and the Birth of Criminology*.

Pressbooks.pub; Pressbooks.

<https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/criminologyintro1e/chapter/oo3-2/>