

What drive individuals to commit crime

[Law](#), [Crime](#)



Every crime is the result of individual, physical and social conditions. (Ferri, 1893). In "Thinking seriously about crime" Jock Young described crime as "a product of the undersocialisation of the individual. This can be a result of (a) an innate genetic or physiological incapacity of the individual to be easily socialised; (b) a family background which was ineffective in the use of socialisation techniques in its child-rearing practices; (c) a social setting which lacked coherent and consistent consensual values". This statement nicely introduces this essay, as all the main aspects that lead people in to crime will be discussed.

Drugs are constantly the issue of intense government and political debate. Drugs and Alcohol are major factors in why people commit crime. An individual may be dealing in drugs to make money; they may commit crimes to feed their habit or they may just use drugs for recreational use. All these practices are illegal. In the United States of America the number of inmates and prisoners has more than tripled since 1980. Four out of every five got there with the help of drugs and alcohol, says a report released by the National Centre on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University. The report says: Of 1.7 million prisoners in 1996, 1.4 million had violated drug or alcohol laws. They had been under the influence when they committed their crimes, they had stolen to support their habit or had a history of drug or alcohol abuse that led them to commit crimes.

In "The Drugs-Crime Connection" John Ball discusses the criminality of heroin addicts. "There is a general agreement among criminologists that an increase in criminality commonly occurs following the onset of heroin addiction". Ball goes on to present the results of a survey conducted on a <https://assignbuster.com/what-drive-individuals-to-commit-crime/>

large group of heroin addicts and their activities whilst on and off heroin. The results are quite significant and clearly show that more crimes were committed whilst on heroin. It is important to note that most of the crimes reported were for theft and that drug use or possession was not classified as a crime. This is hardly surprising. Drug addiction is expensive.

But have these people been propelled in to crime or are they committing crime by their own choice? It was most likely that they chose to take heroin but eventually could not come off it. They were then forced, because of their addiction, to go out and commit crime. So in a way they were propelled in to committing crime. But the question should be asked: What propelled them in to taking drugs?

Are individuals who grow up or live in poverty propelled in to committing crime? It is certain that individuals who live in poverty are more prone to committing crime than individuals who live in opulence. Comparing crime figures for different areas will clearly show that. But do individuals who live in poverty only commit crime for financial gain? The fact that money is not in abundance is not a just reason to commit crime. There are many people who live in less privileged areas that do not commit crime. So what is the main reason why a person will commit crime?

An individual's upbringing surely plays the most significant part in determining how they will turn out in life. An article published by Reuters in 1998 discussed the effects absent fathers had on children: " Sons with absent fathers are more likely to be jailed". When a father is not present in the home, his son is twice as likely to end up in jail, according to a new study

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by Cynthia Harper of the University of Pennsylvania and Sara S. McLanahan of Princeton University. Tracking a sample of 6,000 males ages 14 to 22 from 1979 to 1993, the sociologists also found that even after accounting for differences due to race, income and education:

The boys who grow up with a stepfather in the home were "more at risk than those with an absent father, with roughly three times greater risk of incarceration than those who live with both their parents". Young men whose parents divorced during their adolescence were "roughly one and a half times as likely to wind up in jail as children from intact families" -- faring slightly better than boys who were born to single mothers. While whites have lower rates of father absenteeism than blacks, white youths whose families split are at a higher risk of incarceration than their black peers. The presence of live-in grandparents in households without fathers "appears to help improve youths' chances of avoiding incarceration", the study found.

The lack of a decent role model in a child's upbringing can cause many problems. When a child is growing up he/she needs discipline. They need to know what is right and what is wrong. Discipline is best administered by both parents and not just the mother. The statistic above clearly show how detrimental an absent father is to a child but other homes have fathers who, although present, did not nurture their children, or provide basic instruction on establishing healthy boundaries.

Child abuse is found in families at every income. It is much more common at the lower income levels. Children who grow up in violent homes tend to use violence when they become adults in marriage and as parents. Each

generation directly affects its descendants and indirectly influences later generations in the same family line. If a child grew up in an abusive household and later went on to commit violent crime, would his upbringing be a major factor? From the evidence presented here it can be concluded that an individual's upbringing has a significant influence on their life. So an individual can be propelled in to crime. But perhaps he/she still has to be a certain type of person? Can people be born bad?

The possibility that genetic research might identify genes for criminal Tendencies" has stimulated intense controversy. Media interest in the case of Stephen Thomas Mobley in which a 'genetic defence" was pursued, together with News coverage of a conference in London in 1995 on 'The Genetics of Criminal and Antisocial Behaviour", brought the question of a link between genetics and Criminal behaviour to wide public attention. Mobley was convicted in February 1994 of the murder of John Collins and sentenced to death.

Inspired by patterns of aggression in the Mobley family tree, his lawyers attempted to put together a genetic defence, not in hope of an acquittal, but to try to have the sentence reduced from death to life imprisonment (Mobley vs. The State 1995). The defence claims that there is a pattern of aggression and business success in Mobley" s ancestry that suggests a relevant genetic underlying for his criminal behaviour.

In Mobley" s case the jury rejected the genetic defence. Whatever the merits of that particular case, might the findings of Behavioural Genetics provide any grounds for a legal defence? Since then a steady output of Newspaper

articles and television documentaries have reflected continuing interest and concern over the suggestion that criminals might be born, not made. The nature/nurture debate rages on in many channels, but amongst psychologists and geneticists it is largely resolved that both are important.

There are two possible theses of Genetic Determinism. Firstly there is 'Weak Genetic Determinism' which suggests genetics has a role in the causation of a range of Behavioural and/or personality traits, such as aggression, dominance and IQ which are relevant to criminality. Secondly there is 'Strong Genetic Determinism' which suggests genetics is a causally sufficient condition (under normal circumstances) for a range of behavioural and/or personality traits that Lead to criminality.

But can an individual's genes lead to a life in crime? Are they the main contributing factor?

Weak genetic determinism seems to be the more plausible theory. Strong genetic determinism would suggest that there exists something like a "Murderer gene" or a "Bank robber gene". We clearly know this not to be true. We would then see a more even spread of crime throughout the nation if this were so.

The premise that genes contribute towards persons' outcome in life can be accepted. If an individual has genes which make them highly aggressive then that person would be more prone to violent situations than a person whose genes make them a less aggressive person. The same would apply to IQ and dominance. However, it is sensible to say that not enough is known

about genetics to make these theories solid fact but enough is known to show that genes can influence a person when certain situations exist. It is therefore safe to conclude that an individual is not propelled in to crime because of his genes, they can only influence him.

This essay has looked at many possible reasons why individuals are propelled in to committing crime. We know that individuals' upbringing is clearly a large factor in determining an individuals' outcome in life. When an individual is being brought up he/she are taught what is right and wrong by their parents.

The data shown in this essay clearly shows the detrimental effect that absent parents have on a child. The possibility that genetics plays a key role in the reasons why people commit crime has been looked at. It is safe to say that most likely, individuals are not propelled in to crime because they were "born bad". It is also safe to say that not enough is known about genetics to present a concrete conclusion on the matter. From the data shown we know that when people are on drugs such as heroin, they will commit crime.

Most individuals commit crime of their own accord. Whether they had a poor upbringing, they live in a "problem area", are on drugs or have "criminal genes" they still commit crimes for personal gain. They are not propelled in to committing anything.