

Forensic psychology and the law criminal profiling essay examples

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Forensic Psychology and the Law/Criminal Profiling

Introduction

Forensic psychology is a field that provides a connection between criminal justice practices and psychology. Such criminal justice practices include criminal profiling, interrogation of suspects, the interviewing of witnesses and the sentencing of criminals. A forensic psychologist is expected to understand and apply criminal law in justice practices to ensure impartiality in decision-making. Criminal profiling involves an analysis of the background of an offender, to provide the relevant and required information about them. A wrong analysis of a criminal's profile may result into a conviction of an innocent individual. There is, therefore, a need for the application of psychology to prevent the occurrence of such cases. This overview will discuss how psychology has contributed to criminal profiling.

An overview of the discussion

This discussion seeks to provide detailed descriptions of the term criminal profiling. It will also provide examples of criminal profiles designed in the past. The discussion will also show how forensic psychology links to criminal profiling. The paper will include a discussion of the benefits and drawbacks of forensic psychology application to criminal profiling.

The conclusion will give a summary of the points discussed in the body of the paper. It will also provide recommendations for future studies. The conclusion will also propose the changes that would improve criminal profiling as a practice of justice.

Forensic psychology

The term forensic psychology is often linked to crime scene investigations; forensic psychologists, however, are specialists involved in legal settings, for example, criminal court rooms whose role is performing offender evaluations. A subspecialty of psychology in forensics involves the psychologists' helping the court attorneys pick juries. Forensic psychologists may also be linked to correctional facilities; their role in these facilities is providing counseling to the inmates (O'Gorman, 2007, pp. 103).

The broad definition of forensic psychology includes penal institutions that provide job opportunities for psychologists in developed nations. Countries such as Australia have recorded a growth in the number of forensic psychologists from the rapid changes in their health policy (Shipley & Arrigo, 2005, pp. 96). The role of a forensic psychologist in Australia is varied because of the effectiveness of criminal justice practices conducted in the country.

The knowledge and understanding of the legal system is a significant part of forensic psychology. The forensic psychologists must understand the categorization of the legal system to carry out their duties competently. The legal system, for example, is divided into civil and criminal law. Psychologists in either division face different responsibilities and issues; they are frequently confronted with dilemmas and conflicts between psychology and the law. This is because the legal system often basis decisions on human reasoning while the field of psychology provides answers by the use of experiments (Huss, 2009, pp. 20). A competent forensic psychologist, therefore, is knowledgeable and applies ethics in their practice to avoid

malpractices.

Ethics govern the activities of forensic psychologists; for example, discretion is required of forensic psychologists. These specialists are also expected not to take sides in their practice. The work of a forensic psychologist differs from that of an average practicing psychologist, hence an imposition of strict ethical standards. Malpractices associated with forensic psychologists include the breach of duty, wrongful commitments, and uninformed consents.

Criminal Profiling

Criminal profiling refers to the identification of an offender's traits, both personal and demographical, based on the characteristics of the crime they have committed. The use of criminal profiling has increased in the past two decades; majorities of people, however, dispute the use of this tool for the analysis of an offender. The critiques argue that criminal profiling does not adequately contribute to solving crimes.

An example of criminal profiling is the 2005 arrest of a man known as Dennis Rader in the United States of America, Kansas. Dennis was arrested during an investigation for a killer who was believed to operate in Kansas. The media argued that the man did not fit the profile provided by the police. They did not understand the concept of criminal profiling; they suggested it was a blueprint as opposed to the behavior derived from a crime scene, which helps the police narrow down to the suspects.

The criminal profiling concept in Australia has not been admitted in courtrooms yet. There has been no significant decision made by the courts

seeking to ban the use of criminal profiling evidence in these courts. The Australian rules state that the testimony of an expert is admissible if it is relevant and aligned to the issues at hand (Ebisike, 2008, pp. 131).

Criminal Profiling and Forensic Psychology

The development of a criminal profile is based on an individual's psychology.

A forensic psychologist is capable of assessing whether a suspect fits the profile of the criminal, or just an organized predator from a crime scene.

Forensic psychologists base their knowledge about psychopathology behavior to develop the profiles of offenders. Some criminals often leave behavioral manifestation on crime scenes. This helps forensic psychologists to link any discernible patterns at different scenes of crime, hence criminal profiling.

Competent forensic psychologists use their knowledge from experience to develop intuitive senses concerning different crime types. These specialists employ psychological theories to analyze mental issues such as delusions, and character defects (Fritzon & Wilson, 2008, pp. 124). Forensic psychologists use their knowledge about human behavior and pathology patterns to create offender profiles viable to the legal authorities. It is, therefore, crucial that their reports are valid and accurate, to ensure that justice is served.

Forensic psychology provides a link between psychology and criminal behavior. The critiques of criminal profiling argue that traits such as personality are skeptical and vary depending on the social factors involved and the mood of an individual. Statistics also reveal that psychological

disorders in individuals may affect a psychologist's judgment of a crime scene. Forensic psychologists, thus, are faced with the obligation to ensure the reliability and validity of their reports.

Benefits of Criminal Profiling

The first benefit of criminal profiling is that it provides leads in criminal investigations. Criminal profilers add value to investigations by pointing out the direction to take in solving a crime (Bartol & Bartol, 2012, pp. 143). In many crimes, investigators are unable to identify the relationship between the crime, the evidence, and any suspects. This occurs when the crime scene has been tampered with or the criminal leaves no evidence behind. Criminal profilers will look into different aspects of the crime. They investigate the nature of the crime, whether it was planned or sporadic, and whether the criminal is skilled or not and the motive behind the crime. This information leads to breakthroughs in certain cases.

Criminal profiling is also important at the interview phase of the investigation. In order to apprehend a criminal, investigators need to be objective in their enquiry of all leads. Criminal profilers provide the focus of the case. They assist investigators by instructing them on what to look for in suspects or what to ask concerning the case. Criminal profiling saves time used in interviewing different suspects. In any criminal investigation, time is a vital factor. The criminal could manage to escape from the investigator's jurisdiction if the investigation takes too long.

Criminal profiling is vital for identification of psychological meaning of clues (Turvey, 2011, pp. 75). Investigators get multiple clues in a criminal case.

Some clues are straightforward, while others are complicated and demand advanced knowledge in profiling. Criminal profiling decodes clues and makes connections between the evidence and the guilty party.

Criminal profilers use the public in the investigation process (Kocsis, 2006, p. 462). Criminal profiling develops a detailed profile of the suspect. This includes physical features, which the public is able to identify. Enlisting the assistance of the public in apprehending the criminal is a benefit of criminal profiling.

Limitations of Criminal Profiling

A criminal profile uses ambiguous and often unverifiable language. Scholars have found that the language used by criminal profilers is ambiguous and open to different interpretations. The profile provided by the criminal profiler is not exact. If followed by investigators and the public, it could lead to apprehension of innocent parties or even put innocent people in danger from those that perceive them as guilty.

Experts in various disciplines have discredited some of the theories used by criminal profilers. Criminal profilers, for example, advance the theory that serial murderers are either highly organized or completely disorganized. This theory has been discredited; several scholars in the field of psychology have established that all serial killers have at least some form of organization.

Criminal profiling is based on the idea that criminal behavior is consistent in different scenarios. This assumption is not true since extreme situations can change the behavior of a person with otherwise consistent behavior (Miller, 2011, pp. 34).

Criminal profiling is not applicable in all criminal investigations. Many criminal profilers are used in solving serial murder crimes. This leaves other sections of criminal investigations, though just as severe, without the perceived benefits of criminal profiling (Torres, Boccaccini, & Miller, 2006, pp. 56).

Critique

Criminal profiling is an approach to solving crimes, which not only considers the crimes committed but also looks into the reasons behind the crime.

Criminal profilers go beyond this scope and investigate the criminal's behavior and the factors that led to the development of this behavior. A collection acts as a reference for future profilers.

Criminal profiling seems to have a positive effect on criminal investigation. Investigations are closed faster if a criminal profiler is involved. There are, however, contentions to the effectiveness of criminal profiling. Criminal profiling is not an exact science. The profiler uses a series of assumptions to come up with the most probable description of the criminal. This means that criminal profiling is 'educated guessing'. The criminal profiler is often wrong, and their profiles are vague. They give a range of descriptions that narrow down suspects, but still leave many suspects who are probable culprits. The technique is also highly dependent on the experience and cognitive ability of the criminal profiler. If the criminal profile is incorrect, it confuses the investigations and may result in injustice.

Criminal profiling is effective as a tool of assistance to investigators. This is because it relies on assumptions. Investigators ought to follow facts to solve

crimes; on the contrary, criminal profiling relies on probabilities and assumptions. Factual investigations are more effective in such a profession where an error can cause denial of justice or wrongful conviction.

Criminal profiling should not be used alone as an investigative tool, since it is ineffective and leaves too much to chance. The prosecution of the criminal could be compromised by the nature of the criminal profiler. Prosecution should be based on the facts of the case rather than the opinion and calculated guess of a person. Criminal profiling, however, should be retained as an assisting tool to investigations.

Conclusion

Criminal profiling has contributed significantly to criminal investigations. The benefits of the field are more than the limitations. Criminal investigators, particularly in serial crimes use the expertise of criminal profilers to focus their investigation and apprehend the guilty parties. Investigators are now acquiring criminal profiling techniques. This combined field offers a better application of criminal profiling.

Criminal profilers are core to the investigative process. In complex cases, the profiler provides leads, which form a critical part of the investigation.

Interviewing serial killers can be difficult without criminal profiles. Criminal profiling generates credible and relevant questions, which are used to interview suspects. Using these questions, investigators are able to uncover important information concerning the case. The psychological meaning of clues is an essential part of criminal profiling. Investigators are able to follow clues they would otherwise not understand. The use of the public to

apprehend criminals is significant to investigations. It increases the number of people looking for a criminal, and consequently the chances of making an arrest.

The limitations of criminal profiling come from conflict between criminal profiling and other psychology fields. Some of the theories they use have been disapproved or are under contention. The limitations of the application of criminal profiling are significant to the future of this practice.

Further research should be conducted on the effectiveness of criminal profiling in investigations. The typology of criminal activity is changing over time. It should be determined whether the criminal profiling techniques that are currently in use will be effective in solving crimes of the future; and if not, how criminal profiling might change with time to maintain effectiveness. Changes should also be made in the investigations where criminal profiling is applied. This could be accomplished through training investigators in other crime areas that could use the help of this practice.

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