

# The history of criminology



Kimberly Hussey Criminology-14 Unit 1-Homework 04/18/09 History of

Criminology Criminology is the scientific study of the nature, extent, cause, and control of criminal behavior. Crime has existed in our country for more than two hundred years. The scientific study of crime and criminality is a relatively recent development. During the middle ages (1200-1600), people who violated social norms or religious practices were believed to be witches or possessed by demons. The use of cruel torture to get confessions was common practice. Those convicted of violent or theft crimes suffered extremely harsh penalties including whippings.

In every society, people have free will to choose criminal or lawful solutions to meet their needs or settle their problems. Criminal solutions may be more attractive than lawful ones because they usually require less work for greater payoff. A person's choice of criminal solutions may be controlled by his or her fear of punishment. The more severe, certain, and swift the punishment the better able it is to control criminal behavior. This classical perspective influenced judicial philosophy, and sentences were geared to be proportionate to the seriousness of the crime.

The catch phrase was "let the punishment fit the crime". The Positivist School of Criminology disagreed with the Classical Schools idea that all crime resulted from a choice that could potentially be made by anyone. They didn't disagree with the Classical School that most crime could be explained through "human nature", they argued that the most serious crimes were committed by individuals who were "primitive or atavistic" (who failed to evolve to a fully human and civilized state). Early positivist believed the shape of the skull was a key determination of behavior.

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Crime therefore resulted not from what criminals had in common with others in society, but from their distinctive physical or mental defects. Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), was known as the “ father of criminology”. He believed that violent offenders had inherited criminal traits, and were in fact born criminals who suffered from “ atavistic anomalies”; physically they were throwbacks to more primitive times when people were savages and were believed to have the enormous jaws and strong canine teeth common to carnivores and savages who devour raw flesh.

Sociological Criminology focuses on the relationship between social factors and crime based on the work of Quetelet, and Durkheim. Quetelet along with Michel Guerry used social statistics to investigate the influence of social factors on the tendency to commit crime. They found a strong influence of age, and sex on crime and also uncovered evidence that season, climate, population composition, and poverty were also related to criminality. Quetelet was one of the first criminologists to link crime rates and alcohol consumption.

Chicago School sociologists argued that crime was not a function of personal traits or characteristics but rather a reaction to an environment that was inadequate for proper human relations and development. Criminologist study and analyze patterns in criminal activity and attempt to determine the cause of, future trends in, and potential solutions to crime in society. Criminologist are concerned with questions like how to effectively deter crime, who will commit crime and why, and how to predict and prevent criminal behavior. Criminologist will often work with law enforcement at the local, state, or federal level.