

Crime and delinquency in the virginia tech massacre



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In April 16, 2007, 32 people were killed in a shooting incident that occurred on the campus grounds of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University located in Blacksburg, Virginia. The incident became known as the Virginia Tech massacre and is considered to be the deadliest shooting incident that happened in United States to date. Apart from the 32 who died, the perpetrator, Seung-Hui Cho, also wounded a number of people. At the end of the shooting incident, Cho committed suicide. The shooting incidents took place twice at different locations in the school and two hours apart. The first incident took place in West Ambler Johnston Hall, a co-ed dormitory. Here, Cho killed two people: a student named Emily Hilscher and a resident assistant, Ryan Clark, who tried to help Hilscher (William & Morrison, 2007).

Two hours after the first shooting, Cho reportedly mailed to the NBC News a package which contained writings and video clips. He then proceeded to Norris Hall armed with guns, ammunitions, a knife, hammer and several chains. Upon entering the Norris Hall, Cho locked the three main entrances of the hall. He also left a note in one of the entrances saying any attempt to open the door would lead to a bomb explosion. Immediately after that, the shooting began. At about ten to twelve minutes at after the second shooting

incident, Cho fired his gun to his own head. During this short period of time, Cho fired almost 200 times, killing 30 people in the process and severely wounding 17 more people. All in all, Cho shot 27 students and five faculty members. It has been revealed later after the investigation that Cho's choice of gun, a 9-mm hollow point, intensified the severity of the injuries sustained by the victims. After the incident, the Virginia Tech Panel released a report about the incident. The 100-page report talked about Cho's troubled background. It revealed that Seung-Hui Cho was a student at the school and was majoring in English at the time of the shooting incident. He was in eighth grade when he was diagnosed with severe depression and mutism (Golden, 2007). People suffering from this disorder have trouble speaking and mingling with other people. Cho has been reportedly bullied because of this difficulty. Throughout his childhood and teenage years, Cho received treatments. His parents worked hand in hand with school officials and mental counselor to help Cho. Cho ultimately chose to stop undergoing treatments. Cho applied at Virginia Tech for college and got admitted. However, the school officials were prevented by federal privacy laws from talking about Cho's conditions. According to the law, such disclosure is only allowed if a student seeks for special accommodation. While a studying at Virginia Tech, Cho has been accused of aberrant incidents, including stalking of two female students. The case was investigated and the judged ruled Cho to be mentally ill. He was ordered to undergo treatments (Luo, 2007). The school had also asked Cho to take counseling.

Theoretical Explanations

Cho's true psychological condition at the time of the incident is unknown. However, Cho's difficulty to speak that eventually led to the diagnosis of mutism could have been signs that he was becoming schizophrenic. Cho has been also reported to show signs of paranoia and delusions, symptoms which are associated with schizophrenia. There have been reports that Cho has been romantically linked with Emily Hilscher. The two had a disagreement and this led Cho to perpetrate the shooting. In the package Cho sent to NBC news, he stated how he hated the wealthy and how he was forced into limited options. The review went to discuss how Cho's thoughts have become so distorted that he views his evil deeds as acts of goodness. Eventually, his destructive tendencies turned into an obsession.

The case of Cho and the Virginia Tech Massacre is a case of delinquency that had gotten out of hand. There are several theories that try to explain what makes people delinquent and commit crime. Delinquency theories generally fall into three categories: choice theory, biological theories, and psychological theories.

The choice theory of delinquency assumes that human behavior is a direct consequence of people's conscious decisions to engage or not engage in a particular behavior. The theory basically highlights man's capacity to make decisions for his own. There are several persons associated with the choice theory. Among them is Cesare Beccaria, the one who formulated ideas on crime control during 18th century. Another school of thought under the choice theory as pioneered by Jeremy Bentham is the assumption that people are calculators. We can determine whether an action will lead toward

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pleasure or pain. If we apply choice theory to Cho's case, it will be argued that it was conscious decision to commit murder and he is able to realize the extent of his behavior. However, this assumption fails to answer why Cho committed the crime. This is the very weakness of the choice theory and why it has not been a popular choice in analyzing incidents of delinquency.

The second type of delinquency theories is the biological theories. These theories try to take into account factors that already exist prior to the commitment of crime. One biological theory, atavism, theorizes that criminals are atavistic or being that act more like our primitive ancestors. This theory has already been disproved by Charles Goring. In the theory by William Sheldon, he related body type to delinquency. In a study by Maddan, it was found that mesomorph body types often more liked o violent offenses. Biological theories have evolved into trying to take into account internal body factors such as brain activity and heart rate rather than dwelling on physical appearance alone. There have been many researches for instance on ADHD and autonomic hypoactivity and there have been increases evidences that criminality is linked to differences in the brain structure. Biological theories are also looking genes that are related with environmental conditions in explaining personalities and temperaments. It's hard to determine whether Cho's actions were biological in origin. There has been no mention of his parents' behaviors nor his of his ancestry and whether they have a history of committing violent crimes. Though this may seem illogical, some aspects of personality are actually partially heritable.

The last of the three theories is the psychological theories. This theory examines a person based on his beliefs, ways of thinking, and behavior.
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These set of theories is able to account different aspects of human personality and they provide explanations as to why some has deviant beliefs and antisocial behavior. According to the behavioral theory, our environment plays our role in our shaping our behavior. A child learns to be aggressive by watching his parent argue, watching violent films, etc.

Psychological theories recognize the existence of behaviors that are related to psychological impairment, referred to as psychopathology.

In Cho's case it is quite apparent that his actions were strongly related to his severe anxiety disorder. Cho also largely fits the description of a psychopath, a person with difficulty in processing and expressing emotions such as empathy. The cause of psychopathy is unknown but is said to be a combination of biopsychological and sociological disorders. The term psychopath is used interchangeably with sociopath though they largely pertain to the same characteristics. Psychopath is often used when the condition is brought about by psychological and biological factors and sociopath is when used when the condition is caused by social factor or prior experiences (Hare, 1993). There are basically two types of psychopath: primary and secondary. A primary psychopath is a person with brain abnormality which causes his difficulty in managing and expressing emotion. A secondary psychopath shows the same characteristics as a primary psychopath except that his condition developed as an adaptation from a prior trauma.

By the definitions of the primary and secondary psychopaths, it appears that primary psychopathy is biologically related. Thus, people preempted with this condition will already exhibit aberrant behavior at an early age, as in the <https://assignbuster.com/crime-and-delinquency-in-the-virginia-tech-massacre/>

case of Cho (Mealey, 1995). There could be damages to the brain, particularly the frontal lobe, which controls body functions related to self-control, judgments, and related social skills. This area of the brain also controls fear (Laakso et al., 2001). Coupled with social factors such as lack of peer support, friendships, and rejection biologically-related problems may contribute to psychopathy.

People with this problem also have the ability to make relationships with other people though they may take the relationship into two extremes. They treat the relationship as nothing or become too attached to it. They may end a relationship whenever it suits them or because of too much attachment. Often, they view it too negatively when someone ends a relationship with them. In short, a psychopath may live in a world of his own. They are driven by their needs and they only interact with other people when they can gain something for their own. When brought to the extreme, their unusual behavior can lead to murder, rape, and other violent crimes, as in the case of Cho in the Virginia Tech Massacre.

In Cho's case, it can be seen clearly how the medical system failed to control psychopathic behavior. Eventually, his lack of emotion drove him to commit murder and to do a definitive act of denial by committing suicide.

Policy Implications

The Virginia Tech massacre drew significant media and international attention. U. S. law enforcement, the education system, and the criminal justice system also suffered extensive backlash. The incident instigated

heated debates on gun control, mental health, school accountability, federal privacy laws, and many other issues.

The incident promoted Virginia to look again into their policies which allowed Cho, an individual who had been diagnosed to be mentally unstable, to purchase a gun without being detected by the National Instant Criminal Background System(NICS). After the massacre, Virginia started to address the gaps between the federal and the state gun policies. The federal government also passed the most important gun control law after almost a decade. The new law mandates a more stringent reporting to the NICS board so gun purchases by mentally-ill people and criminals can be prevented (Simon, 2008).

In connection to the massacre, the US Department of Education also proposed amending the policies regarding education records contained in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). In relation to the incident, schools are also are to look into the balance of when public safety should be more of a concern rather than individual privacy.

The massacre also prompted universities to look into their firearms ban policy. Virginia Tech has a total gun ban policy but at times students are discovered to be carrying concealed fire arms. To date, a total of 38 US states apply the ban weapon in schools.

Conclusion

The Virginia Tech Massacre presented a very important case of delinquency that gotten out of hand. As a person, Cho has suffered from psychological problems that have affected his social skills throughout his entire life. His <https://assignbuster.com/crime-and-delinquency-in-the-virginia-tech-massacre/>

personal problems, as well as social and environmental factors exacerbated his mental disorders. Coupled with lapses in the mental health system and federal policies that could have alleviated his condition, Cho was not prevented from committing the brutal incident. Brutal as it may have been, it taught America a lesson that there is a need to upgrade mental and medical services for people with such problems. At the same time, there is a pressing need to address policies that touch incidents associated with such disorder. In this way, both the disorder the crimes associated to them is controlled.