

Introduction be used
both for retribution
and deterrence



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Introduction

The survival of any civilization hinges on the establishment of laws and codes of conduct and the subsequent obeying of the same by the members of the society. Due to the fact that not all members of the society follow the law on their own accord, forms of punishment for wrongs done may be used both for retribution and deterrence purposes. Over the years researchers have developed theories on how the brain works in regards to processing information, learning and environmental adaptation.

These theories have made it possible for various experts to identify and divide human beings according to their different intellectual capabilities and behaviors. In this paper, we shall research on how criminals come into being, the different types of criminals and the theories that best relate crime to the perpetrators. This paper argues that criminals in our societies are fueled by various political, social and environmental factors. The different theories that have been formulated to correlate this statement shall be explored and the rationale behind them analyzed. According to Dweck (2000) there is a difference between a fixed and a growth mindset.

She states that people with a fixed mindset often believe in the basic intelligence they are born with. They often doubt their abilities because their minds cannot perceive beyond what they believe they can manage and as such they lack the motivation to try harder because they are afraid to loose. On the other hand those with a growth mindset perceive challenges as an opportunity to prove and test their mental capabilities. With this in mind, the question that begs to be answered is: why do people commit crimes? The

answer to this question can best be addressed by exploring the various theories that explain the causes of crime.

The rational choice theory

Miller (2009) asserts that this theory assumes that crime is a rational action undertaken by people and aimed towards an expected outcome. Therefore, crime is a matter of choice and is orchestrated with due diligence to the risks and benefits that may be accrued upon the undertaking of such actions.

He claims that this theory is based on concepts that determine the motive behind every criminal action. From this statement, it is evident that crime is a matter of careful planning and cost-benefit analysis. Siegel (2003) states that the perpetrators decide on which crime to commit after evaluating both the personal factors (financial gain, entertainment, revenge etc) and the situational factors such as availability of opportunities, police concentration and the level of security present. According to Siegel (2003) there are two types of crimes in this theory. An offence-specific crime refers to an event chosen by the perpetrator due to its type or characteristics. Criminals who specialize in this type of crime are mostly driven by the expected gain, ease of execution (escape routes and getaway vehicles) of the crime or the probability of evading capture/apprehension.

On the other hand, an offender-specific crime depends mainly on the personal traits of the perpetrator. Before executing the crime, the criminals analyze their skills and capabilities to gauge whether they indeed have what it takes to successfully carry out the act. In addition to this, the individuals with this mind set are less likely to commit a crime if they feel that there are

other legitimate means to actualize their specific goals. It should be noted that there is a very great difference between crime and criminality.

Siegel (2003) contends that while crime refers to the actual event, criminality is a personal trait. This being said, it may not be surprising to find criminals that do not commit crimes or innocent people that commit crimes. This is because crime is influenced either by personal or situational factors. Criminality as a trait is fostered mainly by personal factors such as economic needs or seizure of available opportunities.

For example, a student may choose to peddle drugs in order to supplement for tuition fees or even maintain a certain lifestyle (economic needs). On the other hand, one may decide to shoplift simply because an opportunity has presented itself. Another factor constituting to criminality is false expectations. In this segment, the perpetrators view their criminal activities as a ticket to a better life. They believe that committing crimes present them with a chance of becoming successful or wealthy in an uncompromising world. Siegel (2003) states that others learn criminal techniques in a bid to avoid detection and apprehension.

In this case, the criminals manage to master ways of blending in and minimizing the risks of getting caught. The above mentioned factors have been noted and documented as means that condition people to adapt to criminality. Crime on the other hand is structured by two main factors; where it occurs (location), and the type of target.

The social structure theory

Akers (2009) affirms that there is a very strong relationship between poverty and crime.

The social structure approach to crime assumes that people commit crimes due to social, political, cultural and economical structures that govern them. To further understand the relationship between these structures and crime, we shall divide them and discuss them separately. The economic structure of any nation determines the atmosphere that its citizens dwell in (Deflem, 2006). This is because the availability of money makes it possible to access necessary amenities required by humans to exist. Such amenities include food, clothing, education, health facilities, security and shelter among others.

However, almost every nation in the world experiences inequalities among its citizens in terms of wealth, prestige and power. Such inequalities further leads to socioeconomic stratification where people are grouped according to their financial status. Those people classified as the lower class at times have problems in accessing the aforementioned amenities due to inadequacies in their finances or neglect from the responsible authorities. As a result, they are left in a state of despair, frustration and poverty factors which lead most of them into crime as they try to make their ends meet.

In addition to this, lack of these resources accompanied by poverty has contributed to the elevated levels of school dropouts among the minorities. Siegel (2003) states that the lack of education minimizes the chances of succeeding in life, kills the motivation required to achieve and increases unemployment. Therefore, in order to cope, people often find themselves

committing crimes or doing drugs. Socially, the theory assumes that people commit crimes as a result of the social structures adopted by a community. As mentioned earlier, this approach to crime dwells on the assumption that unequal distribution of resources leads to an increase in criminal activities within a given area or social group. As such, the presence of gangs, lack of adequate security in the neighborhoods and social disorder are among the major causes of crime. Akers (2009) states that the social structure approach to crime is further divided into other sub-theories which explain the causes of crime. The social disorganization approach is one such theory and it assumes that crime is committed due to a general breakdown in the system which leads to a disorganized community.

Secondly is the strain theory which contends that people commit crime due to a conflict between personal goals and the ability to achieve them. Despite the fact that we all have goals and dreams, our ability to realize them depends on our social class. This means that the higher class members of the society have a better chance of realizing their goals than those in the lower class. This leaves those in the lower class desperate, angry and frustrated; factors which may lead them into committing crimes. The final sub-theory is the cultural deviance theory.

This theory is a combination of the other two sub-theories and articulates that the factors that lead to crime push members of the community into formulating a culture which works for their interests.

Conclusion

Criminology is a very important science in today's society. The need to understand the mindset of criminals is invaluable to say the least. As such, the development of theories that best explore criminality plays a pivotal role towards the reduction of crime in our societies. Two of these theories have been highlighted and the various factors that lead to crime discussed.

It is however evident that there is a difference between crime and criminality. Therefore, in order to minimize crime, the responsible authorities must ensure that they focus on finding the solutions to the latter because solving such issues will go a long way in fighting crime and ensuring a safer future for generations to come.

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