

Theories of criminality, aggression and violence



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Criminal Psychology

- George C. Wall

Crime will affect every one of us one way or another at some point in our life. We may not be the one who is victimized but it may be a family member or neighbor, but we are still affected in some way. Criminals have many reasons why they choose that lifestyle, whether it is a psychological defect or just a way to make it through life, they all have their reasons. If we can find the reason for the crime then we may be able to start combating it and help change those who commit crime.

There are many factors that cause a person to choose the criminal lifestyle. There are psychological factors as well as social risk factors when it comes to crime and these factors have different effects on people. When we examine the various psychological risk factors we look at the cognitive and language deficiencies, the individual's intelligence, conditions such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), conduct disorder and oppositional defiant disorder (Bartol & Bartol, 2014, Pg. 45). These psychological issues can affect the way a person learns proper behavior and affects the way they assimilate into society.

The way a person learns and interprets what they are taught can make a difference in the way they behave. "Cognitive and language impairments increase the risk of antisocial behavior, at least in boys" (Bartol & Bartol, 2014, Pg. 47). Antisocial behavior is a key item when it comes to the choice to violate the norms of society and the choice to become a criminal. These impairments can also lead a person to have a lower intelligence level. It is

believed that if a person has a low intelligence level then they may be more apt to commit crime, due to their failures in school and these failures can lead to delinquency (Bartol & Bartol, 2014, Pg. 47).

Let us take a moment to look at how conditions such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, conduct disorder and oppositional defiant disorder apply to criminal psychology. ADHD has three key behaviors, inattention, impulsivity and excessive motor control (Bartol & Bartol, 2014, Pg. 50).

ADHD can contribute to criminal behavior, “ some researchers estimate that about one-fourth of all children with ADHD engage in serious antisocial behavior during childhood and adolescence and criminal behavior as adults (Bartol & Bartol, 2014, Pg. 51). Another serious condition is called conduct disorder, which is “ characterized by persistent misbehavior” (Bartol & Bartol, 2014, Pg. 52). This misbehavior can lead a person to take on the criminal lifestyle without looking back. The final condition we will look at is oppositional defiant disorder, which is a child who is “ negative, hostile, and defiant, more than is expected for his or her age, and lasting for at least six months” (Bartol & Bartol, 2014, Pg. 54). As with many psychological diagnoses, you can have a person who suffers from any combination of disorders.

We have now examined the psychological factors in criminal psychology; now let us look at the social factors. The social factors include issues such as poverty, peer rejection, poor preschool child care, school failure, association with antisocial peers and the lack of proper after school care (Bartol & Bartol, 2014, Pgs. 31-37). The various social factors can be present in any level of society from the wealthy to the poor. When we talk about those who live in

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poverty it is important to recognize that “ the great majority of poor children and adults are law-abiding citizens” (Bartol & Bartol, 2014, Pg 33). There is some connection between poverty and crime but it is not always the case, “ while people in poverty might commit crimes of desperation, white-collar criminals often commit crimes of opportunity” (Vogel, 2008).

Early peer rejection is a social factor that can cause a normally happy and compliant child to turn into a hostile antisocial child. “ One of the strongest predictors of later involvement in antisocial behavior is early rejection by peers” (Bartol & Bartol, 2014, Pg. 33). When a child is rejected by their peers they must fulfill that need for acceptance somewhere, they tend to find each other and only interact with each other. “ During the adolescent years, involvement with antisocial peers shows a robust and consistent relationship to delinquency, drug use, and a range of other problematic behaviors” (Bartol & Bartol, 2014, Pg. 34).

Poor preschool care and the lack of proper after school care can also contribute to antisocial and criminal behavior. Preschool is often a child’s first lengthy interactions they have outside of their immediate family. Preschool is also where they begin to develop their social, language and learning skills. “ Poor-quality child care has been reported to put children’s development at risk for poorer language, poor cognitive development, and lower ratings of social and emotional adjustment” (Bartol & Bartol, 2014, Pg. 36). This poor development goes hand in hand with the psychological issues of inadequate cognitive and language development. Proper after school care can also help prevent antisocial behavior. It is believed that children who are by themselves for large amounts of time after school tend to develop

behavior problems (Bartol & Bartol, 2014, Pg. 37). Organizations within the community can make a difference in a child's life, " day-care centers that open their doors to children after school hours or community groups that offer after-school programs in troubled neighborhoods can make a positive difference" (Bartol & Bartol, 2014, Pg. 37).

School failure also plays a role in the development of antisocial and criminal behavior. Again, we can see where school failure can affect the cognitive and language development of an individual. " School failure eventually affects the community through higher rates of crime..." (Poole, 1997). In today's world the lack of education limits a person on what jobs they can perform and who will hire them. This lack of employment can cause a person that normally would obey the law to become a criminal just to survive.

In trying to understand the mind of a criminal we must consider all factors that created the person we are studying. These risk factors, rather they are psychological or social play a role in the development of antisocial and criminal behavior. In addition to risk factors we must also study human aggression and violence. These risk factors will affect how a person handles aggression and violence since the way they develop coping methods can be affected by the way they learn to be a part of society.

There are many theories on aggression and violence in humans. Some scientists believe that " humans are born aggressive and naturally violent, or born relatively free of aggressive tendencies" (Bartol & Bartol, 2014, Pg. 111). The human being is able to develop the ability to control the aggression and violence through various learning methods. When the

negative psychological and social issues develop we are unable to develop the proper methods to control ourselves.

There have been many different theories and models developed over the years addressing aggression. The psychodynamic viewpoint assumes “ that humans, by their very nature, will always be prone to aggressive impulses and hence are likely to commit violent acts if these impulses are not appropriately managed or held in check” (Bartol & Bartol, 2014, Pg. 112). In addition to the psychodynamic viewpoint you have the ethological viewpoint, which is “ the study of animal behavior in relation to the animal’s natural habitat, and it compares that behavior to human behavior” (Bartol & Bartol, 2014, Pg. 112).

In addition to these viewpoints there are various models associated with aggression and violence. The Cognitive-Neoassociation Model that thoughts and memories that are created through our early years are associated with aggression (Bartol & Bartol, 2014, Pg. 115-116). There is also the Excitation Transfer Theory, which is a “ theory to explain how physiological arousal can generalize from one situation to another” (Bartol & Bartol, 2014, Pg. 116). This theory purposes that a person can be subjected to a negative event and because of that event they carry that anger or frustration to another event.

Additionally, there is the Displaced Aggression Theory, “ aggression is displaced when the target is innocent of any wrongdoing but is simply in the wrong place at the wrong time” (Bartol & Bartol, 2014, Pg. 116). An example of this would be where a husband is angry at their wife and someone accidentally bumps in to him and in turn they are assaulted. It is difficult to

address all the theories to every incident, but we must keep every possibility in our minds when we are evaluating the cause of the aggression or violent act.

We have theories to follow as well as some cognitive models of aggression. These models “ have hypothesized that, while observational learning is important in the process, the individual’s cognitive learning is important in the process” (Bartol & Bartol, 2014, Pg. 122). The two models we will look at are the cognitive scripts model and the hostile attribution model. These models examine human behavior and the tendency to be aggressive and violent.

The cognitive scripts model believes that “ social behavior in general, and aggressive behavior in particular, is controlled largely by cognitive scripts learned and memorized through daily experiences” (Bartol & Bartol, 2014, Pg. 122). This model states that behaviors and the responses a person has is based on what we all go through in life, our ups and downs. The hostile attribution model believes that people who are violent and aggressive often “ interpret ambiguous actions as hostile and threatening” (Bartol & Bartol, 2014, Pg. 123). These individuals may take a simple shoulder bump as an aggressive action and may become aggressive or violent towards the person.

Exposure to violence in mass media has also been attributed to violent and aggressive behavior. Studies suggest that people, who play violent video games, watch violent movies or television shows may be more prone to

aggressive and violent behavior (Bartol & Bartol, 2014, Pg. 131). These theories are often debated within the psychological community itself.

There are different theories and approaches to aggressive and violent behavior. There are psychological and social factors that come into play as well. There are some environmental factors can lead to a person to make bad choices in life. Complications during birth, prenatal exposure to nicotine, alcohol and drugs, faulty brain development, and exposure to toxins can all lead to antisocial and criminal behavior (Bartol & Bartol, 2014, Pgs. 69-73). Exposure to these environmental factors can cause the fetus to develop improperly, which can lead to antisocial behavior (Bartol & Bartol, 2014, Pg. 69).

The criminal mind is a difficult thing to understand. They each have their own reasons for committing crime and even though there are risk factors that can attribute to the choices that an individual may make. Along with all the theories, models and viewpoints we cannot ignore the person that commits the crime, while one of these may apply the end result is that crime was committed and a victim was created.

References

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