

Criminological theories for lone actor terrorism



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Literature review:

Environmental Criminology and Crime Analysis (ECCA) has become an integral part of the criminology field itself, in which ECCA or crime science allows organisations and individuals today to understand various crime types, analyse crime patterns and prevent crime (Townesley & Wortley , 2017). Crime script analysis is a concept that was proposed by Derek Cornish (1994) and in relation to ECCA is significant to better understanding crime events and increasing the efficacy of situational crime prevention. Ultimately crime script analysis involves recognising the crime commission process before, during and after the specific crime to identify intervention points. Crime script analysis can be applied to various crimes, and lone actor terrorism is a crime that crime scripts have been highly beneficial to (Leclerc, Crime Script Analysis, 2018). Lone actor terrorists are single individuals who radicalise, operate, plan and execute plots of terror with little connection to organised terrorist networks (Asal, 2013). The importance of crime script analysis to lone actor terrorism is that identifying the modus operandi and decision-making process of a lone terrorist allows the implementation of effective prevention techniques. Thus throughout the literature review multiple theories are discussed, including rational choice theory, routine activities approach and crime pattern theory, in relation to crime script analysis in order to understand and provide intervention points for lone act of terrorism offences.

To understand the crime of lone actor terrorism, rational choice theory can be applied. Rational choice theory is based on the notion that as offenders seek benefit through contemplated decision making processes, they are

considered both purposive and rationale. In relation to criminals and criminal behavior, rational choice theory assumes that criminal behavior is personal choice, thus rationale, due to their individual crime commission process. Rational choice theory was first proposed by Clarke and Cornish (1983) in which they suggest that crime is purposive behavior, in which costs and benefits are weighed up to make a rationale decision. Ultimately the rational choice perspective focuses on the offender's opportunity to commit crime and how criminal choices are controlled by the environment (Clarke & Cornish, 2017). In relation to the crime script, as crime scripts recognise that crime does not occur as a single event, but rather across time, the rational choice theory can be applied, as there is not only one rational choice but multiple across the timeline of the crime. Applying rational choice theory to lone actor terrorism, the theory would suggest that their actions derive from conscious, rational and calculated decision making processes to accomplish a goal, by ultimately implementing an evaluation influenced by rational actors. Thus rational choice theory and crime script analysis enables a more comprehensive understanding in the modus operandi of offenders in relation to lone actor terrorism (Leclerc, Crime Scripts, 2017).

The routine activity theory is another theory that provides a theoretical background for the crime script, in which the routine activity theory also provides a framework for analysing the dynamics of individual crime events and recognising intervention points for situational crime prevention (Felson, 2017). The routine activities approach is a theory initially suggested by Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson. Felson and Cohen hypothesize that crimes happen when three variables are present, which include a target, the

absence of a capable guardian and a motivated offender. Thus, the presence of the specific components allows a potential offender to rationalize committing a crime. The routine activity approach suggests that crime is caused through the convergence of these three elements and ultimately the approach examines the how the spatial-temporal organisation of activities allows the translation of criminal tendencies into action (Wikström, 2009). The routine activity approach can be beneficial in regards to crime script analysis of lone actor terrorism as through sequentially deconstructing the events leading up to the crime, a greater sense of what is needed to manage, control and alter the situations and contexts the offender is in. It is suggested that disrupting either one of the three elements will deter the crime. Thus the routine activity approach can assist in predicting, understanding and preventing acts of lone terrorism (Gill, 2012).

Crime pattern theory, which is closely related to rational choice theory and routine activity theory, is another theoretical approach, which assists in crime script analysis and ultimately the implementation of intervention techniques. This theory is based on the notion proposed by the Brantingham's, which is there is a strong relation of the geographic resonance of an individual and the thought process of committing a crime (Brantingham & Brantingham, 2017). Ultimately movement from one place to another creates awareness space, a cognitive map, in which places and pathways will become of familiarity. These places and pathways, or nodes, become embedded in an offender's cognitive map, in which suitable targets will be victimised in the offenders awareness space. In relation to crime script analysis, the crime pattern theory provides insight into how offenders

and victims encounter each other through each other's pathways and nodes, thus taking into account rational choice and routine activity theory, a criminal opportunity is present (Wortley & Tilley, 2018).

Collectively rational choice theory, routine activity approach and crime pattern theory suggest that offenders actively select targets and areas that minimise risk and maximises rewards. Ultimately rational choice perspective and routine activity approach is the foundation of crime script analysis, as the analysis is focused on the decision-making processes that can potentially cause an individual to commit a crime, including the cost-benefit analysis associated with choosing to offend. Whilst the rational choice theory has been critiqued in relation to lone actor terrorism, as it is an expressive crime, it has been refuted. Lone Actor terrorism is a crime that is expressive, yet the offender still makes decisions that they think will benefit them in some way. In summation, the theoretical background of crime script analysis can assist in understanding and providing effective intervention techniques for lone actor terrorism crimes.

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