

2 questions in criminology

Law



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1. The recent killing and bombing incident in Norway has underscored in a dramatic way the need to take criminal justice research seriously, and to invest time, energy in resources in studying patterns and phenomenon in criminal behavior as they develop over time. In Norway, for example, the killer did not fit the typical profile of a criminal who would be disposed to savagely killing over 80 individuals. He was blond and blue-eyed and educated in the Norwegian educational system. The police themselves admitted that there was nothing in his background to put him in the radar. And yet, he had managed to throw one of the most peaceful and stable countries in the world in a state of utter shock and disarray. An important lesson that this teaches us is that the criminal mind is constantly evolving and characterizations of criminals can change faster than we think. It is important therefore that the research continues and adapts to the changing times. (Ellis, Hartley, Walsh: 2010). Let me argue three specific reasons as to why criminal justice research is of utmost importance.

First, modern technology has given criminals more weapons than ever before and also, more opportunities to commit their crimes. The internet, which just two decades ago, was not seen as a vehicle to commit crime is now a favorite haunt of criminals - from con artists embezzling money from gullible individuals, to pedophiles preying on unsuspecting children or selling child pornography, to even identity theft. Hence, if law enforcement wants to keep with the times, it has to keep abreast of this new technology. Even new ammunition, such as new bomb-making techniques, are developing by the day. Law enforcement will be at a loss if it fails to be apprised of these new developments.

Second, the profiles of criminal offenders are constantly changing. For

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example, new research has surfaced disputing the conventional notion that crime is more often than not committed by young men. In fact, in a study published in the *Journal of Criminal Justice Research* it was found that “offenders aged 25 and over were responsible for the majority of the crime.” (Diplock and Pleckas: 2010: 1). Criminal justice research must be knowledgeable in these trends in order to do better law enforcement.

Thirdly, criminal laws are constantly changing, and procedural due process guidelines can be different now than they were before. Hence, legal updating is in order to ensure that law enforcement officials do not overstep their boundaries or otherwise act in a manner contrary to law.

2.

Without in-depth criminal justice research, the default of a law enforcement official is to effect an arrest. A problem arises when arrest is seen as a solution to deal with a complex social problem like domestic violence, where gender politics and household dynamics create a web of tensions and complications that require more sustainable strategies. Indeed, the agenda of law enforcement officials should not simply be to prevent crime for that one time, but also ensure that the offender would not relapse and the victim is protected in the long-term from similar violations. The Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment is a very interesting experiment because when the experiment was repeated in Miami, Milwaukee, Colorado Springs, Omaha and Charlotte, it was discovered that “compulsory arrest reduces violence against middle-class women at the expense of those (often black) who are poor.” (Sherman, et. al.: 1992, 443). An ethical dilemma emerges, and I argue that this dilemma must be resolved in a manner that renders justice to all women – not just those who are middle class. In fact, criminal

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justice must be more protective of the rights of the most vulnerable members of society, because it is they who suffer the most from crimes and find it hardest to recover from victimization. In a sense this calls for innovative research in order to come up with more flexible and responsive strategies that address the problem in a more equitable way. For example, community policing and grassroots education programs may serve as better alternatives to arrest and criminal apprehensions.

In the end, the most important point to underscore is that learning and education is always a process. One must be motivated by a continuous drive to learn as much as one can about criminal justice. It is only that we can make law enforcement more effective, reduce crime, render justice for all the parties and ensure safe and thriving communities.

WORKS CITED

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