
UNIT 2 CAUSES UNDERLYING CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will be dealing with causes underlying criminal behaviour. We will first define crime and introduce criminal behaviour in terms of what it is and what are its characteristic features etc. We will then deal with the various approaches to the understanding of the causes of criminal behaviour. Some of the theories in this regard which explain crime are the social learning theory, control theory, differential association theory etc. We will then critically examine how these theories are adequate or inadequate in explaining the causes of criminal behaviour. Other important causes such as the biological causes, neurochemical factors, personality disorders, and environmental influences will be taken up and discussed in regard to their causing criminal behaviour. Some of the important familial factors including the background history of the individual, the education level, the peer influence, and the effect of drugs and alcohol as factors influencing criminal behaviour will be discussed in detail. We will also touch upon how

these criminal behaviours could be controlled if we know the causes underlying these behaviours.

2.1 OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Define and describe Crime and criminal behaviour;
- Elucidate the different approaches to understand the causes of criminal behaviour;
- Explain the theories related to the causes of criminal behaviour;
- Describe the various biological factors causing criminal behaviour;
- Analyse the various psychological factors causing criminal behaviour;
- Elucidate the environmental factors that contribute to criminal behaviour;
- Explain how gene and environment interactions cause criminal behaviour; and
- Put forward certain strategies to control criminal behaviour based on the causes identified.

2.2 INTRODCUTION TO CRIME AND CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR

As for the dictionary meaning of the word crime, it refers to a person who has committed a crime. A person who has been convicted of a crime. It also refers to some aspect of the penal code or its administration.

2.2.1 Crime

Crime is the breach of rules or laws for which some governing authority (via mechanisms such as legal systems) can ultimately prescribe a conviction. Individual human societies may each define crime and crimes differently. Modern societies generally regard crimes as offences against the public or the state, distinguished from offences against private parties that can give rise to a civil cause of action.

When informal relationships and sanctions prove insufficient to establish and maintain a desired social order, a government or a state may impose more formalised or stricter systems of social control. With institutional and legal machinery at their disposal, agents of the State can compel populations to conform to codes, and can opt to punish or attempt to reform those who do not conform.

Authorities employ various mechanisms to regulate (encouraging or discouraging) certain behaviours in general. Governing or administering agencies may for example codify rules into laws, police citizens and visitors to ensure that they comply with those laws, and implement other policies and practices which legislators or administrators have prescribed with the aim of discouraging or preventing crime.

In addition, authorities provide remedies and sanctions, and collectively these constitute a criminal justice system. Legal sanctions vary widely in their severity;

they may include (for example) incarceration of temporary character aimed at reforming the convict. Some jurisdictions have penal codes written to inflict permanent harsh punishments: legal mutilation, capital punishment or life without parole.

The label of “crime” and the accompanying social stigma normally confine their scope to those activities seen as injurious to the general population or to the State, including some that cause serious loss or damage to individuals. Those who apply the labels of “crime” or “criminal” intend to assert the hegemony of a dominant population, or to reflect a consensus of condemnation for the identified behaviour and to justify any punishments prescribed by the State.

2.2.2 Criminal Behaviour

Law in our society is defined by social and legal institutions, therefore determining what constitutes criminal behaviour can envelope a wide variety of activities and for that reason, researchers tend to focus on the wider context of antisocial behaviour. Authors Morley and Hall (2003), who have investigated the genetic influences on criminal behaviour, point out three different ways to define antisocial behaviour.

- i) First is equating it with criminality and delinquency, which both involve engaging in criminal acts. Criminality can lead to arrest, conviction, or incarceration for adults, while delinquency is related to juveniles committing unlawful acts (Rhee & Waldman, 2002). Information can be collected using court and criminal records, as well as self report surveys to analyse the influences that were present.
- ii) Secondly, define antisocial behaviour through criteria used to diagnose certain personality disorders. More specifically, they mean those personality disorders, such as Antisocial Personality Disorder, which is associated with an increased risk in criminal activity.
- iii) Thirdly, define antisocial behaviour by examining personality traits that may be influential in the criminal behaviour of individuals. Traits such as aggressiveness and impulsivity are two traits that have been investigated the most (Morley & Hall, 2003).

Self Assessment Questions

1) Define crime?

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2) What is criminal behaviour? Describe its characteristics.

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3) How does law define crime and criminal behaviour?

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2.3 APPROACHES TO CAUSES OF CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR

There are certain important approaches which help understand the underlying causes of criminal behaviour. These include (i) Social learning approach (ii) Cognitive learning approach (iii) Control theory.

2.3.1 Social Learning Approach

This is an important approach to understand the causes of criminal behaviour and focuses on the fact that people learn new behaviours through observational learning of the social factors in their environment. If people observe positive, desired outcomes in the observed behaviour, then they are more likely to model, imitate, and adopt the positive behaviour themselves. Social learning theory is derived from the work of Cornell Montgomery (1843-1904) which proposed that social learning occurred through four main stages of imitation:, namely (i) close contact,(ii) imitation of superiors (iii) understanding of concepts, (iv) role model behaviour and all these together consist of three parts, viz. (i) *observing*, (ii) *imitating*, and (iii) *reinforcements*.

In *Social Learning and Clinical Psychology* (1954), Rotter suggested that the effect of behaviour has an impact on the motivation of people to engage in that specific behaviour. People wish to avoid negative consequences, while desiring positive results or effects. If one expects a positive outcome from a behaviour, or thinks there is a high probability of a positive outcome, then they will be more likely to engage in that behaviour. The behaviour thus is reinforced, with positive outcomes, leading a person to repeat that behaviour.

This social learning theory suggests that behaviour is influenced by these environmental stimuli, and not by psychological factors alone. Thus if a person is observing and imitating negative behaviours such as criminal behaviour, aggression, assaulting etc., and if these also provide the person some positive outcomes such as excitement, pleasure, a feeling of success, dominance, power etc., these behaviours will be repeated as these outcomes reinforce the negative behaviours.

2.3.2 Cognitive Approach of Bandura

Another approach is that of Albert Bandura (1977) who expanded on Rotter's idea, as well as earlier work by Miller & Dollard (1941), and is related to social learning theories of Vygotsky and Lave. This approach incorporates aspects of behavioural and cognitive learning.

Behavioural learning assumes that people's environment (surroundings) cause people to behave in certain ways. Cognitive learning presumes that psychological factors are important for influencing how one behaves. Social learning suggests a combination of environmental (social) and psychological factors as influencing behaviour. Social learning theory outlines four requirements for people to learn and model behaviour. These are (i) attention (ii) retention (remembering what one observed) (iii) reproduction (ability to reproduce the behaviour), and (iv) motivation (good reason) to want to adopt the behaviour.

2.3.3 Perceptual Control Theory

Control theory eventhough is an interdisciplinary branch of engineering and mathematics, it deals with the behaviour of dynamical systems. The desired output of a system is called the *reference*. When one or more output variables of a system need to follow a certain reference over time, a controller manipulates the inputs to a system to obtain the desired effect on the output of the system. A related theory known as perceptual control theory has been used to model living systems on the premise that outputs are manipulated to obtain the desired effect on the input to the system.

According to perceptual control theory, behaviour is the control of perception rather than the response to a stimulus. Research involving various types of control systems that can be found in the brain demonstrates that control systems are not solely the domain of engineers. If the concepts of homeostasis and homeorhesis may be applied to internal environments, they can very effectively be applied to the external environment of an organism.

The brain is a means toward transferring perceptual signals derived from the external environment into the internal environment of billions of interconnected neurons. Control systems within the brain and body are responsible for keeping perceptual signals within survivable limits, regardless of the nature of the environment that they are derived from. By integrating perceptual control theory with research from the field of neuroscience, the future of human self awareness might be realised by individuals *willing* to do so.

Thus Control theory is an approach that deals with influencing the behaviour of dynamical systems. It is an interdisciplinary subfield of science, and over a period of time evolved into use by the social sciences, like psychology, sociology and criminology.

2.3.4 Sutherland's Differential Association Theory

In criminology, Differential Association is a theory developed by Edwin Sutherland proposing that through interaction with others, individuals learn the values, attitudes, techniques, and motives for criminal behaviour.

Differential Association theory states that criminal behaviour is a learned behaviour and learned via social interaction with others.

This theory focuses on how individuals learn to become criminals. It does not however, concern itself with why they become criminals. Individuals learn how to commit criminal acts, they learn motives, drives, rationale, and attitudes. It appears socially easier for the individuals to commit a crime. They get inspired in the processes of cultural transmission and construction. Sutherland had

developed the idea of the “self” as a social construct, that is a person’s self image is continuously being reconstructed especially when interacting with other people.

Phenomenology is a method of inquiry based on the premise that reality consists of objects and events as they are perceived or understood in human consciousness and not of anything independent of human consciousness. It originated in 1905 and put forward by Edmund Husserl. Phenomenology emphasises the immediacy of experience. It is an attempt to isolate the experience and set it off from all assumptions of existence or causal influence and lay bare its essential structure. Phenomenology restricts the psychologist’s attention to the pure data of consciousness, uncontaminated by metaphysical theories or scientific assumptions. It emphasises on immediacy.

Phenomenology also encouraged people to debate the certainty of knowledge and to make sense of their everyday experiences. People define their lives by reference to their experiences, and then generalise those definitions to provide a framework of reference for deciding on future action. From a researcher’s perspective, a subject will view the world very differently if the person is employed as opposed to unemployed. Similarly the person will view the world differently if the person is in a supportive family or in a family abused by parents or others close to the individual. However, individuals might respond differently to the same situation depending on how their experience predisposes them to define their current surroundings.

Differential association predicts that an individual will choose the criminal path when the balance of definitions for law-breaking exceeds those for law-abiding. This tendency will be reinforced if social association provides active people in the person’s life. The earlier in life an individual comes under the influence of those of high status within that group, the more likely the individual is to follow in their footsteps. This does not deny that there may be practical motives for crime. If a person is hungry but has no money, there is a temptation to steal. But, the use of “needs” and “values” is equivocal. To a greater or lesser extent, both non-criminal and criminal individuals are motivated by the need for money and social gain. Therefore, the principles of Sutherland’s Theory of Differential Association can be summarised into nine key points:

- 1) Criminal behaviour is learned.
- 2) Criminal behaviour is learned in interaction with other persons in a process of communication.
- 3) The principal part of the learning of criminal behaviour occurs within intimate personal groups.
- 4) When criminal behaviour is learned, the learning includes techniques of committing the crime, which are sometimes very complicated, sometimes simple and the specific direction of motives, drives, rationalisations, and attitudes.
- 5) The specific direction of motives and drives is learned from definitions of the legal codes as favourable or unfavourable.
- 6) A person becomes delinquent because of an excess of definitions favourable to violation of law over definitions unfavourable to violation of the law.

- 7) Differential associations may vary in frequency, duration, priority, and intensity.
- 8) The process of learning criminal behaviour by association with criminal and anti-criminal patterns involves all of the mechanisms that are involved in any other learning.
- 9) While criminal behaviour is an expression of general needs and values, it is not explained by those needs and values, since non-criminal behaviour is an expression of the same needs and values.

2.3.5 General Approach to Crime

Introduction

Each society has its own way of social control for which it frames certain laws and also mentions the sanctions with them. These sanctions are nothing but punishments. Punishment has the following features:

- 1) It involves the deprivation of certain normally recognised rights, or other measures considered unpleasant.
- 2) It is consequence of an offence.
- 3) It is applied against the perpetrator of the offence.
- 4) It is applied by an organ of the system that made the act an offence.

The kinds of punishment given are surely influenced by the kind of society one lives in. Though during ancient period of history punishment was more severe as fear was taken as the prime instrument in preventing crime. But with change in time and development of human mind the punishment theories have become more tolerant to these criminals. Debunking the stringent theories of punishment the modern society is seen in loosening its hold on the criminals. The present scenario also witnesses the opposition of capital punishment as inhumane, though it was a major form of punishing the criminals earlier.

As punishment generally is provided in Criminal Law it becomes imperative on our part to know what crime or an offence really is. Crime is an act deemed by law to be harmful for the society as a whole though its immediate victim may be an individual. Let us say a murderer injures primarily a particular victim, but its blatant disregard of human life puts it beyond a matter of mere compensation between the murderer and the victim's family.

Thus it becomes very important on behalf of the society to punish the offenders. Punishment can be used as a method of reducing the incidence of criminal behaviour either by deterring the potential offenders or by incapacitating and preventing them from repeating the offence or by reforming them into law-abiding citizens. Policies regarding theories of punishment are Deterrent, Retributive, Preventive and Reformative.

Punishment, whether legal or divine, needs justification. Many a time this punishment has been termed as a mode of social protection. The affinity of punishment with many other measures involving deprivation by the state morally recognised rights is generally evident. The justifiability of these measures in particular cases may well be controversial, but it is hardly under fire.

The attempt to give punishment the same justification for punishment as for other compulsory measures imposed by the state does not necessarily involve a particular standpoint on the issues of deterrence, reform or physical incapacitation. Obviously the justification in terms of protection commits us to holding that punishment may be effective in preventing social harms through one of these methods.

As punishments generally punish the guilty mind it becomes very important to know what crime really is. But it is quite difficult on the part of the researcher to say whether or not there must be any place for the traditional forms of punishment. In today's world the major question that is raised by most of the penologist is that how far are present 'humane' methods of punishment like the reformatory measures successful in their objective. It is observed that prisons have become a place for breeding criminals not as a place of reformation as it was meant to be.

It may be clearly said that the enactment of any law brings about two units in the society– the law abiders and the law breakers. It is purpose of these theories of punishment to transform or change these law breakers to the group of abiders.

Self Assessment Questions

- 1) What are the various approaches to understanding causes of human behaviour?

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- 2) What is meant by social learning approach?

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- 3) How does cognitive approach explain criminal behaviour?

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- 4) Describe perceptual control theory and how it explains criminal behaviour.

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- 5) Explain Sutherland's Differential Association theory and how it explains criminal behaviour.

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- 6) What is the general approach to understanding causes of criminal behaviour?

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2.4 OTHER APPROACHES TO CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR

In addition to the many approaches mentioned above in order to understand the criminal behaviour and its causes, there are many other approaches which are biological, environmental etc. These are being mentioned below.

2.4.1 Neurochemicals in Criminal and Anti -Social Behaviour

Neurochemicals are responsible for the activation of behavioural patterns and tendencies in specific areas of the brain (Elliot, 2000). As seen in the Brunner et al. study, there have been attempts to determine the role of neurochemicals in influencing criminal or anti-social behaviour. Included in the list of neurochemicals already cited by researchers are monoamine oxidase (MOA), epinephrine, norepinephrine, serotonin, and dopamine.

Serotonin is a neurochemical that plays an important role in the personality traits of depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder (Larsen & Buss, 2005). It is also involved with brain development and a disorder in this system which in turn could lead to an increase in aggressiveness and impulsivity. Low levels of

serotonin have been found to be associated with impulsive behaviour and emotional aggression. In addition, children who suffer from conduct disorder have also been shown to have low blood serotonin (Elliot, 2000). Needless to say, there is a great deal of evidence that shows serotonin is related to aggression, which can be further associated with antisocial or criminal behaviour.

Dopamine is a neurotransmitter in the brain that is associated with pleasure and is also one of the neurotransmitters that is chiefly associated with aggression. Activation of both affective (emotionally driven) and predatory aggression is accomplished by dopamine (Elliot, 2000). Genes in the dopaminergic pathway have also been found to be involved with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) (Morley & Hall, 2003). In one study cited by Morley and Hall (2003), a relationship was found between the genes in the dopaminergic pathway, impulsivity, ADHD, and violent offenders. Obviously, from this list of neurochemicals it seems plausible that there is a genetic component to antisocial or criminal behaviour.

2.4.2 Personality Disorders / Traits and Criminal Behaviour

Personality traits and disorders have recently become essential in the diagnosis of individuals with antisocial or criminal behaviour. These traits and disorders do not first become evident when an individual is an adult, rather these can be seen in children. For that reason it seems logical to discuss those personality disorders that first appear in childhood. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Conduct Disorder (CD), and Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD) are three of the more prominent disorders that have been shown to have a relationship with later adult aggressive behaviours (Holmes, Slaughter, & Kashani, 2001).

Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) is characterised by argumentativeness, noncompliance, and irritability, which can be found in early childhood (Holmes et al., 2001). When a child with ODD grows older, the characteristics of their behaviour also change and more often for the worse. They start to lie and steal, engage in vandalism, substance abuse, and show aggression towards peers. Frequently ODD is the first disorder that is identified in children and if sustained can lead to the diagnosis of Conduct Disorder (CD). It is important to note however that not all children who are diagnosed with ODD will develop CD.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is associated with hyperactivity, impulsivity and the inability to keep attention focused on one thing. Holmes et al. (2001) state that, "impulse control dysfunction and the presence of hyperactivity and inattention are the most highly related predisposing factors for presentation of antisocial behaviour" (p.184). They also point to the fact that children diagnosed with ADHD have the inability to analyse and anticipate consequences or learn from their past behaviour. Children with this disorder are at risk of developing ODD and CD, unless the child is only diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), in which case their chances of developing ODD or CD are limited. The future for some children is made worse when ADHD and CD are co-occurring because they will be more likely to continue their antisocial tendencies into adulthood (Holmes et al., 2001).

Conduct Disorder (CD) is characterised with an individual's violation of societal rules and norms (Morley & Hall, 2003). As the tendencies or behaviours of those

children who are diagnosed with ODD or ADHD worsen and become more prevalent, the next logical diagnosis is CD. What is even more significant is the fact that ODD, ADHD, and CD are risk factors for developing Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD). This disorder can only be diagnosed when an individual is over the age of eighteen and at which point an individual shows persistent disregard for the rights of others. ASPD has been shown to be associated with an increased risk of criminal activity. Therefore, it is of great importance that these early childhood disorders are correctly diagnosed and effectively treated to prevent future problems.

Another critical aspect that must be examined regarding antisocial or criminal behaviour is the personality characteristics of individuals. Two of the most cited personality traits that can be shown to have an association with antisocial or criminal behaviour are impulsivity and aggression. According to the article written by Holmes et al. (2001), antisocial behaviour between the ages of nine and fifteen can be correlated strongly with impulsivity and that aggression in early childhood can predict antisocial acts and delinquency. One statistic shows that between seventy and ninety percent of violent offenders had been highly aggressive as young children (Holmes et al., 2001). These personality traits have, in some research, been shown to be heritable.

2.4.3 Environmental Influences

Thus far it has been established through research and various studies that genetics do influence criminal or antisocial behaviour. Researchers agree on the point that genes influence personality traits and disorders, such as the ones just mentioned. However, researchers also agree that there is an environmental component that needs to be examined. Environmental influences such as family and peers will be discussed, as well as a look into the social learning theory.

The family environment is critical to the upbringing of a child and if problems exist then the child is most likely to suffer the consequences. We have seen the problems associated with a child who is diagnosed with ADHD and how that can influence antisocial or criminal behaviour. In relation to that, some researchers have claimed that it is the family environment that influences the hyperactivity in children (Schmitz, 2003). In addition there are also family risk factors as poverty, education, parenting practices, and family structure. The relationship between family environment and child behaviour characterises a child's well being with a positive and caring parent child relationship, a stimulating home environment, and consistent disciplinary techniques. Families with poor communication and weak family bonds have been shown to have a correlation with children's development of aggressive/criminal behaviour. Therefore it seems obvious to conclude that those families who are less financially sound, perhaps have more children, and who are unable to consistently punish their children will have a greater likelihood of promoting an environment that will influence antisocial or delinquent behaviour.

Another indicator of future antisocial or criminal behaviour is that of abuse or neglect in childhood. A statistic shows that children are at a fifty percent greater risk of engaging in criminal acts, if they were neglected or abused (Holmes et al., 2001). This has been one of the most popular arguments as to why children develop antisocial or delinquent behaviours.

One additional research finding in the debate between genetic and environmental influences on antisocial or criminal behaviour has to deal with the age of the individual. Research seems consistent in recognising that heritability influences adult behaviour more than environmental influences, but that for children and adolescents the environment is the most significant factor influencing their behaviour (Rhee & Waldman, 2002). As an adult, we have the ability to choose the environment in which to live and this will either positively or negatively reinforce our personality traits, such as aggressiveness. However, children and adolescents are not in a position to choose their environment, which accounts for the greater influence of environmental factors on childhood behaviours.

Another significant factor in the development of antisocial or delinquent behaviour in adolescence is peer groups. Garnefski and Okma (1996) state that there is a correlation between the involvement in an antisocial or delinquent peer group and problem behaviour. One of the primary causes as to why this occurs can be traced back to aggressive behaviour in young children. When children are in preschool and show aggressive tendencies towards their peers, they will likely be deemed as an outcast. This creates poor peer relationships and relegates those children to be with others who share similar behaviours. A relationship like this would most likely continue into adolescence and maybe even further into adulthood. Similar tendencies of these individuals create an environment in which they influence one another and push the problem towards criminal or violent behaviour (Holmes et al., 2001).

Social learning theory has been cited as a way to explain how the environment can influence a child's behaviour. Using this theory to explain the aggressive or antisocial behaviour of a child means that a child observes aggressive behaviour between parents, siblings, or both. As a result, the children believe that this aggressive behaviour is normal and can therefore use it themselves because they do not see the harm in acting similar to their parents (Miles & Carey, 1997).

As stated earlier, interaction between family members and disciplinary techniques are influential in creating antisocial behaviour. Using the social learning theory these two factors are also critical in the development of aggression. Children who are raised in an aggressive family environment would most likely be susceptible to experiencing a lack of parental monitoring, permissiveness or inconsistency in punishment, parental rejection and aggression.

The exposure to such high levels of aggression and other environmental factors greatly influences and reinforces a child's behaviour. A significant point that should be known however is the fact that other research has supported the notion that genetics do influence levels of aggression, which stands in opposition to the social learning theory (Miles & Carey, 1997).

2.4.4 Gene-Environment Interactions

There are theories, however, concerning genetic and environmental influences, which seem to suggest an interaction between the two and one such theory is the general arousal theory of criminality. Personality psychologist Eysenck created a model based on three factors known as psychoticism, extraversion, and neuroticism, or what is referred to as the PEN model (Eysenck, 1996). Psychoticism was associated with the traits of aggressive, impersonal, impulsive, cold, antisocial, and un-empathetic. Extraversion was correlated with the traits

of sociable, lively, active, sensation-seeking, carefree, dominant, and assertive. Finally, neuroticism was associated with anxious, depressed, low self-esteem, irrational, moody, emotional, and tense (Eysenck, 1996). Through research and surveys, Eysenck found that these three factors could be used as predictors of criminal behaviour. He believed this to be especially true of the psychoticism factor and that measuring it could predict the difference between criminals and non-criminals. Extraversion was a better predictor for young individuals, while neuroticism was a better predictor for older individuals (Eysenck, 1996). An important point about these factors and the personality traits associated with them is that most of them have already been found to be heritable .

Understanding Eysenck's original model is critical to assessing the general arousal theory of criminality, which suggests an interaction between factors. Research has shown that criminality is strongly correlated with low arousal levels in the brain. Characteristics related to low arousal levels include lack of interest, sleepiness, lack of attention, and loss of vigilance.

Eysenck (1996) believed that these characteristics were similar to the personality factor of extraversion. Individuals with low arousal levels and those who are extraverts need to seek out stimulation because they do not have enough already in their brains. Therefore, the premise of the general arousal theory of criminality is that individuals inherit a nervous system that is unresponsive to low levels of stimulation and as a consequence, these individuals have to seek out the proper stimulation to increase their arousal. Under this theory, the proper stimulation includes high-risk activities associated with antisocial behaviour, which consists of sexual promiscuity, substance abuse, and crime (Miles & Carey, 1997).

A significant fact that must be pointed out though is that not every individual with low arousal levels or those who are extraverts will seek those high risk activities just mentioned. It takes the right environment and personality to create an individual with antisocial or criminal tendencies and that is why this theory can be considered to take into account both factors of genetic and environmental influences.

2.4.5 Parental Relations

Cleckley's ideas on sociopath were adopted in the 1980s to describe a "cycle of violence" or pattern found in family histories. A "cycle of violence" is where people who grow up with abuse or antisocial behaviour in the home will be much more likely to mistreat their own children, who in turn will often follow the same pattern.

Children who are neglected or abused are more likely to commit crimes later in life than others. Similarly, sexual abuse in childhood often leads these victims to become sexual predators as adults. Many inmates on death row have histories of some kind of severe abuse. The neglect and abuse of children often progresses through several generations. The cycle of abuse, crime, and sociopathy keeps repeating itself.

Children who are neglected or abused commit substantially more crimes later in life than others.

The cycle of violence concept, based on the quality of early life relationships, has its positive counterpart. Supportive and loving parents who respond to the basic needs of their child instill self-confidence and an interest in social environments. These children are generally well-adjusted in relating to others and are far less likely to commit crimes.

By the late twentieth century the general public had not accepted that criminal behaviour is a psychological disorder but rather a willful action. The public cry for more prisons and tougher sentences outweighed rehabilitation and the treatment of criminals. Researchers in the twenty-first century, however, continued to look at psychological stress as a driving force behind some crimes.

2.4.6 Hormones

Hormones are bodily substances that affect organs in the body functioning. Researchers also looked at the relationship between hormones, such as testosterone and cortisol, and criminal behaviour.

Testosterone is a sex hormone produced by male sexual organs that cause development of masculine body traits.

Cortisol is a hormone produced by adrenal glands located next to the kidneys that effects how quickly food is processed by the digestive system. Higher cortisol levels leads to more glucose to the brain for greater energy, such as in times of stress or danger.

Testosterone measurements in prison populations also showed relatively high levels in the inmates as compared to the U.S. adult male population in general.

Animal studies showed a strong link between high levels of testosterone and aggressive behaviour.

Studies of sex offenders in Germany showed that those who were treated to remove testosterone as part of their sentencing became repeat offenders only 3 percent of the time. This rate was in stark contrast to the usual 46 percent repeat rate. These and similar studies indicate testosterone can have a strong bearing on criminal behaviour.

Cortisol is another hormone linked to criminal behaviour. Research suggested that when the cortisol level is high a person's attention is sharp and he or she is physically active. In contrast, researchers found low levels of cortisol were associated with short attention spans, lower activity levels, and often linked to antisocial behaviour including crime. Studies of violent adults have shown lower levels of cortisol; some believe this low level serves to numb an offender to the usual fear associated with committing a crime and possibly getting caught.

It is difficult to isolate brain activity from social and psychological factors, as well as the effects of substance abuse, parental relations, and education. Yet since some criminals are driven by factors largely out of their control, punishment will not be an effective deterrent. Help and treatment become the primary responses.

2.4.7 Education

Conforming to Merton's earlier sociological theories, a survey of inmates in state prisons in the late 1990s showed very low education levels. Many could

not read or write above elementary school levels, if at all. The most common crimes committed by these inmates were robbery, burglary, automobile theft, drug trafficking, and shoplifting. Because of their poor educational backgrounds, their employment histories consisted of mostly low wage jobs with frequent periods of unemployment.

Employment at minimum wage or below living wage does not help deter criminal activity. Even with government social services, such as public housing, food stamps, and medical care, the income of a minimum wage household still falls short of providing basic needs.

People must make a choice between continued long term low income and the prospect of profitable crime. Gaining further education, of course, is another option, but classes can be expensive and time consuming. While education can provide the chance to get a better job, it does not always overcome the effects of abuse, poverty, or other limiting factors.

2.4.8 Peer Influence

A person's peer group strongly influences a decision to commit crime. For example, young boys and girls who do not fit into expected standards of academic achievement or participate in sports or social programs can sometimes resort to drug abuse such as cocaine etc. . Drugs and alcohol impair judgment and reduce inhibitions, giving a person greater courage to commit a crime. Researchers believe these youth may abandon schoolmates in favor of criminal gangs, since membership in a gang earns respect and status in a different manner. In gangs, antisocial behaviour and criminal activity earns respect and street credibility.

Like society in general, criminal gangs are usually focused on material gain. Gangs, however, resort to extortion, fraud, and theft as a means of achieving it.

2.4.9 Drug and Alcohol

Some social factors pose an especially strong influence over a person's ability to make choices. Drug and alcohol abuse is one such factor. The urge to commit crime to support a drug habit definitely influences the decision process. Both drugs and alcohol impair judgment and reduce inhibitions (socially defined rules of behaviour), giving a person greater courage to commit a crime. Deterrents such as long prison sentences have little meaning when a person is high or drunk.

Substance abuse, commonly involving alcohol, triggers "stranger violence," a crime in which the victim has no relationship whatsoever with his or her attacker. Such an occurrence could involve a confrontation in a bar or some other public place where the attacker and victim happen to be at the same time. Criminologists estimate that alcohol or drug use by the attacker is behind 30 to 50 percent of violent crime, such as murder, sexual assault, and robbery. In addition drugs or alcohol may make the victim a more vulnerable target for a criminal by being less attentive to activities around and perhaps visiting a poorly lighted or secluded area not normally frequented perhaps to purchase drugs.

The idea that drug and alcohol abuse can be a major factor in a person's life is why there are numerous treatment programs for young people addicted to these substances. Treatment focuses on positive support to influence a person's future decision making and to reduce the tendency for antisocial and criminal behaviour.

Another factor many criminologists consider key to making a life of crime easier is the availability of firearms in the society. Many firearms used in crimes are stolen or purchased illegally (bought on what is called the “black market”). Firearms provide a simple means of committing a crime while allowing offenders some distance or detachment from their victims.

Of the 400,000 violent crimes involving firearms in 1998, over 330,000 involved handguns. By the beginning of the twenty-first century firearm use was the eighth leading cause of death in the United States.

Similarly, the increased availability of free information on the Internet also makes it easy to commit certain kinds of crime. Web sites provide instructions on how to make bombs and buy poisons; all this information is easily available from the comfort of a person’s home. Easy access, however, will not be the primary factor in a person’s decision to commit a crime. Other factors, such as biological, psychological, or social will definitely have a role in addition to the easy access. Unless a person has a predisposition towards a criminal behaviour, even if there is free access to firearms or other instruments, the person may not indulge in the crime.

Self Assessment Questions

- 1) Explain how neurochemicals contribute to crime and criminal behaviour?

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- 2) How are personality disorders and traits associated with criminal behaviour?

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- 3) Discuss the environmental influences as influencing criminal behaviour.

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4) Discuss peer influences as contributing to criminal behaviour.

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2.5 CONTROLLING CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR

In criminology, Social Control Theory as represented in the work of Travis Hirschi fits into the Positivist School, Neo-Classical School, and, later, Right Realism. It proposes that exploiting the process of socialisation and social learning builds self-control and reduces the inclination to indulge in behaviour recognised as antisocial. It was derived from Functionalist theories of crime and Ivan Nye (1958) proposed that there are four types of control, viz., (i) direct, (ii) internal, (iii) indirect, (iv) control through needs satisfaction. Let us deal with each of these in detail:

- i) **Direct:** This refers to the control in which punishment is threatened or applied for wrongful behaviour, whereas compliance is rewarded by parents, family, and authority figures.
- ii) **Internal:** This refers to the individual's own control from within in which the youth refrains from delinquency deliberately perhaps due to his strong conscience or superego.
- iii) **Indirect:** This refers to the person concerned identifying self with those who influence behaviour, for instance his or her delinquent act might cause pain and disappointment to parents and others with whom he or she has close relationships and this makes the youngster refrain from indulging in delinquent or deviant behaviours.
- iv) **Control through needs satisfaction:** This refers to the fact that if all an individual's needs are met, there is no point in criminal activity.

Thus Social Control Theory proposes that people's relationships, commitments, values, norms, and beliefs encourage them not to break the law. If moral codes are internalised and individuals are tied into, and have a stake in their wider community, they will voluntarily limit their propensity to commit deviant acts. The theory seeks to understand the ways in which it is possible to reduce the likelihood of criminality developing in individuals. It does not consider motivational issues, simply stating that human beings may choose to engage in a wide range of activities, unless the range is limited by the processes of socialisation and social learning.

This derives from a Hobbesian view of human nature which states that all choices are constrained by implicit social contracts, agreements and arrangements among people. Thus, morality is created in the construction of social order, assigning costs and consequences to certain choices and defining some as evil, immoral and/or illegal.

Another view point proposed by Reiss (1951) is that delinquency behaviour is a consequence of the failure of personal and social controls.

Personal control referred to the ability of the individual to refrain from meeting needs in ways which conflict with the norms and rules of the community. On the other hand the social control referred to the ability of social groups or institutions to make norms or rules effective. Reiss thus was of the view that the failure of primary groups such as the family to provide reinforcement for non delinquent roles and values was crucial to the explanation of delinquency.

Another sociologist who talked about this issue was Toby (1957), who argued that the uncommitted adolescent is a candidate for gang socialisation. He acknowledged gang socialisation as part of the causal, motivational, and dynamic process leading to delinquency. He introduced the concept of “stakes in conformity” and explained how some youths are selected for such learning experiences. He believed that all could be tempted into delinquency, but most refused because they considered that they had too much to lose. But the young who had few stakes or investments in conformity were more likely to be drawn into gang activity. The notion of “stakes in conformity” fits very well with concepts invoked in later versions of social control theory.

Another view point was by Franz Nye (1958) who not only elaborated a social control theory of delinquency, but specified ways to “operationalise” (measure) control mechanisms and related them to self-reports of delinquent behaviour. Nye specified different types of control as given below.

- direct control = punishments and rewards
- indirect control = affectionate identification with non-criminals; and
- internal control = conscience or sense of guilt.

Youth may be directly controlled through constraints imposed by parents, limiting the opportunity for delinquency, as well as through parental rewards and punishments. However, they may be constrained when free from direct control by their anticipation of parental disapproval (indirect control), or through the development of a conscience, an internal constraint on behaviour. Although he acknowledged motivational forces by stating that some delinquent behaviour results from a combination of positive learning and weak and ineffective social control, he adopted a control theory position and proposed that most delinquent behaviour is the result of insufficient social control.

Yet another approach to criminal behaviour was put forward by Reckless (1961), whose approach was termed as Containment Theory, focussed on a youth’s self image of being a good person as an insulator against peer pressure to engage in delinquency. He mentioned the positive sense of self from the inner mind of the individual and supervision and discipline from external source such as parents and family members.

The basic proposition is that there are “pushes” and “pulls” that will produce delinquent behaviour unless they are counteracted by containment. The motivations to deviate as pushes are:

- Discontent with living conditions and family conflicts;

- Aggressiveness and hostility, perhaps due to biological factors; and
- Frustration and boredom, arising from membership of a minority group or through lack of opportunities to advance in school or find employment;

Pulls are:

- Delinquent peers,
- Delinquent subcultures.

Thus there are many approaches to understand the various measures of controlling criminal behaviour.

2.6 LET US SUM UP

There cannot be enough possible evidence to conclude the point that genetics play the most important role in the outcome or behaviour of an individual. The opposing viewpoint of environmental factors is not without its doubts either as to being the prominent factor influencing antisocial or criminal behaviour of an individual.

Researchers, have shown that there is a large consensus of the fact that genes do influence behaviour to quite an extent. At the same time these researchers also believe that environmental factors account for what cannot be explained by genes. Therefore it seems obvious to reach the conclusion that an individual's antisocial or criminal behaviour can be the result of both their genetic background and the environment in which they were raised.

One researcher has proposed a theory relating to sociopaths and their antisocial behaviour. According to the theory, a primary sociopath is lacking in moral development and does not feel socially responsible for their actions. This type of sociopath is a product of the individual's personality, physiotype, and genotype. A secondary sociopath develops in response to his or her environment because of the disadvantages of social competition.

Living in an urban residence, having a low socio-economic status, or poor social skills can lead an individual to being unsuccessful in reaching their needs in a socially desirable way, which can turn into antisocial or criminal behaviour. The first type of sociopath is dependent on their genetic makeup and personality, while certain factors of the second type can also be heritable.

Notwithstanding, the second type has a greater dependence on environmental factors. In other words, both genetic and environmental factors cause the delinquent behaviour. There is a great need to try and identify those individuals, especially children, who may become susceptible to certain disorders or personality traits that can lead into antisocial, delinquent, or criminal behaviour. Society should not try to imitate the era of controlled breeding, but rather focus on the treatment and rehabilitation of those individuals in need. Certain educational, environment enrichment programs have been shown to have a lasting effect on children if given by a certain age. If more of these programs could be developed, society could prevent the future antisocial or criminal behaviour in children.

2.7 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Describe crime and criminal behaviour and bring out the salient features of the same.
- 2) Discuss critically the various approaches to understanding the causes of criminal behaviour?
- 3) Elucidate the various biological factors that contribute to criminal behaviour.
- 4) Discuss the gene-environment interaction in causing criminal behaviour.
- 5) How do education, peer influences and parental relationships influence criminal behaviour?
- 6) Discuss the various methods of controlling criminal behaviour.

2.8 GLOSSARY

Conviction	: The judgment of a jury or judge that a person is guilty of a crime as charged. The state of being found or proved guilty: <i>evidence that led to the suspect's conviction.</i>
Offences	: A violation or breach of a law, custom, rule, etc. any public wrong or crime, an indictable crime punishable on summary conviction. Annoyance, displeasure, or resentment Give offence (to) to cause annoyance or displeasure (to) Take offence to feel injured, humiliated, or offended a source of annoyance, displeasure, or anger (Military) attack; assault.
Infractions	: The act or an instance of infringing; a violation.
Hegemony	: The predominant influence, as of a state, region, or group, over another or others.
Consensus	: An opinion or position reached by a group as a whole:
Incarceration	: To put into jail; To shut in; confine.

2.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

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