

# **Chapter 1**

## **What Is Criminology?**

### **Learning Objectives**

After reading this chapter, students should be able to:

- 1.1 Understand what crime is and how it is defined in this text.
- 1.2 Recognize the difference between criminal and deviant acts and the complexity of this distinction.
- 1.3 Discuss who decides what should be criminal and how such decisions are made.
- 1.4 Define what criminology is and the role of theoretical criminology.
- 1.5 Explain what criminologists do.
- 1.6 Appreciate the role of research and experimentation in theory building in criminology.
- 1.7 Explain how social policy in the area of crime control is determined.
- 1.8 Discuss the theme of this text and explain the distinction between the social problems and social responsibility perspectives of crime causation.
- 1.9 Understand what it means to say the “criminal activity is diversely created and variously interpreted.”
- 1.10 Discuss the discipline that has contributed the most to the theoretical understandings of crime causation over the past century.

### **Chapter Outline**

Introduction

What Is Crime?

Legalistic Perspective

Political Perspective

Sociological Perspective

Psychological Perspective

Crime and Deviance

What Should Be Criminal?

Consensus Perspective

Pluralist Perspective

Conflict Perspective

What Is Criminology?

Defining Criminology

Theoretical Criminology

What do Criminologists do?

The Evolving Science of Criminology

Theory Building

The Role of Research and Experimentation  
    Problem Identification  
    Development of a Research Design  
    Choice of Data-Collection Techniques  
    Review of Findings  
    Quantitative versus Qualitative Methods  
Values and Ethics in the Conduct of Research  
Social Policy and Criminological Research  
    Social Policy and Public Crime Concerns  
The Theme of This Text  
The Social Context of Crime  
    Making Sense of Crime: The Causes and Consequences of the Criminal Event  
    Crime and the Offender  
    Crime and the Criminal Justice System  
    Crime and the Victim  
    Crime and Society  
    The Consequences of Crime  
The Primacy of Sociology

## Lecture Outline

### I. Introduction.

Discuss the public fascination with crime-themed entertainment in popular culture and the questions it raises.

### II. What Is Crime?

A. Legalistic Perspective. From this perspective, **crime** is human behaviour that violates the law of the federal government or provincial or local jurisdiction with the power to create law.

#### 1. Key Terms:

- a. *Crime*: Human conduct in violation of the criminal laws of a jurisdiction that has the power to make such laws, and for which there is some authorized sanction.
- b. *Common Law*: Law originating from usage and custom rather than from written statutes. The term refers to nonstatutory customs, traditions, and precedents that help guide judicial decision-making.
- c. *Statute*: a formal written enactment of a legislative body.
- d. *Statutory Law*: Law in the form of statutes or formal written strictures, made by a legislature or governing body with the power to make law.
- e. *Criminalize*: to make illegal.

#### 2. Limitations of the Legalistic Perspective:

- a. Yields the moral high ground to those with the power to make and enforce law.
- b. The social, moral, and the individual significance of fundamentally immoral forms of behaviour are not easily recognized.
- c. Failure to recognize that formal laws have not always existed.
- B. Political Perspective. Powerful groups create law to label select undesirable forms of behaviour as illegal. Law serves the interests of powerful elites.
- C. Sociological Perspective. Sociologists offer broad definitions of crime and anti-social acts that encourage use to question legal definitions of crime. Sociologists such as Ezzat Fattah, Ron Classen and Jeffrey Reiman have offered a number of definitions of crime.
- D. Psychological Perspective. Psychologists view crime as a problematic behaviour that contravenes criminal law and makes it difficult for a person to live within a framework of socially acceptable arrangements.

**Discussion Topic:** What are some challenges involved in defining crime? Do you think a single, simple definition of crime is useful?

**Discussion Topic:** Discuss the characteristics of crime news reporting. What factors do the local newspapers in your community tend to emphasize? What do pictures include? Do you think that various news sources report on crimes in different ways? How might these things shape the public's perception of crime?

**Discussion Topic:** Compare and contrast political, sociological and psychological perspectives on crime.

### **III. Crime and Deviance.**

A. **Deviant behaviour** is human behaviour that violates a social norms. Most crimes can be considered deviant forms of behaviour. Criminalized behaviour varies across jurisdictions.

**Discussion Topic:** The text argues that deviant behaviours are not always thought of as criminal, and criminal behaviours are not always thought of as deviant. Can you think of examples to illustrate this point? What does this tell us about social dimensions of crime and deviance?

**Discussion Topic:** Do you believe some acts that are now legal should be criminalized and some that are now criminal should be legalized? Why or why not?

### **IV. What Should be Criminal?**

A. Consensus Perspective. An analytic perspective that assumes laws should be created to criminalize behaviour when members of a society generally agree such laws are necessary.

1. Basic principles:

- a. Most members of society share notions of right and wrong.
- b. Law reflects the collective will of the people.
- c. Law serves all people equally.

d. Law-breakers are a distinct subgroup of people with values that contravene the majority.

B. Pluralist Perspective. Complex societies host groups with a multiplicity of values and beliefs. Though there is difference, most groups agree on the utility of law as a formal mechanism of dispute resolution.

1. Basic principles:

- a. Society is comprised of diverse groups.
- b. Diversity creates natural opposition between groups.
- c. Different social groups agree on the utility of law in resolving disputes.
- d. The law is value-neutral and concerned with the best interests of society.

C. Conflict Perspective. Holds that conflict is a fundamental and unresolvable aspect of social life.

1. Basic principles:

- a. Society is comprised of diverse social groups with different values and opinions.
- b. Conflict is unavoidable because groups compete for power.
- c. Law is a tool that powerful groups use to maintain their power and privilege.

**Discussion Topic:** How might we reconcile tension between law and religious freedom? Can you think of examples of this tension?

## V. What Is Criminology?

A. Defining Criminology.

- 1. Social policy refers to a government initiative, program or plan designed to address problems in society.
- 2. There are many definitions of criminology. The term was thought to be coined in 1889 by Paul Topinard who used it to differentiate between criminal body types. Others have expanded the definition to encompass the disciplinary, scientific and causative aspects of criminology.
- 3. Criminology is interdisciplinary, in that it draws upon other disciplines (i.e., biology, sociology, political science, psychology, economics, medicine, psychiatry, law, philosophy, statistics, computer science, and others) to provide an integrated approach to understanding the problem of crime in contemporary society and to advance solutions to the problems crime creates.
- 4. Key questions for criminologists include:
  - a. Why do crime rates vary?
  - b. Why do individuals differ as to criminality?
  - c. Why is there a variation in reactions to crime?
  - d. What are the possible means of controlling criminality?
- 5. Criminology also contributes to **criminal justice** – the study of criminal law and the components of the criminal justice system.

**Discussion Topic:** Identify and discuss the four main areas of criminological study.

**Discussion Topic:** Discuss the differences between a criminologist, a criminalist, and a criminal justice professional.

B. Theoretical Criminology.

1. **Theory** refers to a set of interrelated propositions that attempt to describe, explain, predict, and ultimately control some class of events.

a. **General theory** attempts to explain all, or at least, most crimes with a single overarching approach.

b. **Integrated theory** merges concepts from different sources.

**VI. What do Criminologists do?**

1. A **criminologist** is a person trained in the study of criminology, or one who studies crime, criminals and criminal behaviour. A criminalist is a person who specializes in the collection of and examination of physical evidence of crime.
2. Criminologists publish their research in academic journals.
3. People with an education in criminology may find careers in academia, policy development, policing, as court or correctional personnel, or as advocates in civic organizations.

**Discussion Topic:** Discuss the differences between a criminologist, a criminalist, and a criminal justice professional.

**VII. The Evolving Science of Criminology.**

- A. **Evidence-based criminology** is predicated on the use of rigorous social scientific techniques, especially randomized, controlled experiments and the systematic review of research results.
- B. Present day criminology is more scientific than in the past. Criteria for a discipline to be deemed 'scientific' include:
  1. The systematic collection of related facts.
  2. Emphasis on the application of the scientific method.
  3. The existence of general laws, a field for experiment or observation, and control of academic discourse by practical application.
  4. The fact that it has been accepted into the scientific tradition.
  5. An emphasis on a worthwhile subject in need of independent study even if adequate techniques of study are not yet available (as in the investigation of paranormal phenomena).
- C. Theory-Building.
  1. The goal of criminological research is to construct theories or models that improve our understanding of criminal behaviour and help us create effective strategies intended to address the challenge of crime.
  2. A **theory** is a series of interrelated propositions that attempt to describe, explain, predict, and ultimately to control some class of events. A theory gains

explanatory power from inherent logical consistency and is “tested” by how well it describes and predicts reality.

D. The Role of Research and Experimentation.

1. Criminologists conduct research to learn about crime. **Research** refers to the use of standardized, systematic procedures in the search for knowledge. There are several types of research in criminology:
  - a. Applied Research is designed with practical application in mind.
  - b. Pure Research is undertaken for the sake of advancing scientific knowledge.
  - c. Primary Research refers to original and direct investigation.
  - d. Secondary Research refers to new evaluations of existing information collected by other researchers.

E. Problem Identification.

1. The first step to any research project in criminology is to identify a problem. Much work in criminology explores issues of causality (the relationship between variables) and tests criminological theories.
  - a. **Variable** refers to a concept that can undergo measureable changes.

F. Development of a Research Design.

1. **Research design** refers to the logic and structure inherent in an approach to data gathering. Research designs bring structure to the research process and guide researchers through the systematic process of data collection.
2. Key terms in research design:
  - a. Confounding Effects: Rival explanations, also called competing hypotheses, which are threats to the internal or external validity of any research design.
  - b. Internal Validity: The certainty that experimental interventions did indeed cause the changes observed in the study group; also the control over confounding factors which tend to invalidate the results of an experiment.
  - c. External Validity: The ability to generalize research findings to other settings.
  - d. Controlled Experiments: Those which attempt to hold conditions (other than the intentionally introduced experimental intervention) constant.
  - e. Quasi-Experimental Designs: Approaches to research which, although less powerful than experimental designs, are deemed worthy of use where better designs are not feasible.

G. Choice of Data Collection Techniques.

1. Research depends upon the use of techniques to gather information, or data, for eventual analysis. Key methods of data collection in criminological research include:
  - a. Surveys.

- b. Case studies.
  - c. Participant observation.
  - d. Self-reporting
  - e. Secondary analysis.
- H. Review of findings. In quantitative methods, data analysis involved the mathematical evaluation of data to determine correlations and causal relationships between variables.
- I. Quantitative versus Qualitative Methods. Quantitative methods are directed toward measureable, quantifiable results which are represented numerically. Qualitative methods emphasize subjectivity and narrative. Qualitative results are difficult to quantify. Many criminologists feel that qualitative data-gathering strategies represent the future of criminological research.

**Discussion Topic:** Discuss the difference between qualitative and quantitative approaches to the study of criminal behaviour. Identify strength and limitations of each methodological approach.

J. Values and Ethics in the Conduct of Research.

1. Research is never entirely free from preconceptions and biases. Researchers try to control the effects of bias from the start of a research project.
2. The Tri-Council Policy statement details the guidelines for ethical research with human beings. Basic ethical principles include:
  - a. Informed consent. Research participants must be fully informed about the potential risks of participation in the study, the study goals and purpose, and what a researcher will do with the data collected.
  - b. Data Confidentiality. Researchers ought not to share data outside of the context of a research environment. The participant's identities are to be protected as well.
  - c. Researchers must also avoid any research procedures that bring harm to the research participants, honour commitments to research respondents, respect reciprocity, exercise professional integrity and maintain the privacy of research participants.

**Discussion Topic:** Discuss the significance of research ethics in criminological research. Do you think that criminologists conducting research with people face a unique set of ethical concerns compared to scientists working in other disciplines?

**VIII. Social Policy and Criminological Research.**

- A. Professional criminologists recognize the need to link sound social policy to the objective findings of well-conducted criminological research. However, public officials are often ignorant to criminological research.
- a. For example, criminologists have strongly critiqued the three-strikes laws as well as Bill C-10 but with little impact in terms of shifting social policy.

- B. Similarly, there are a number of hurdles to evaluation research in Canada including resistance from funders, ideology and lack of resources, among others.
- C. Social Policy and Public Crime Concerns.
  - 1. Media shape public perceptions of crime in important ways. The public's perception of risk and threat to safety is skewed in part because media underreport declining crime rates, over-report violent crimes and fail to include statistical context in crime news reporting.
  - 2. Though crime rates have been declining for a decade, fear of crime continues to be a major source of concern for Canadians. Fear of crime is important because it shapes public policy yet is not necessarily related to the actual incidence of crime.

**Discussion Topic:** Discuss the significance of research ethics in criminological research. Do you think that criminologists conducting research with people face a unique set of ethical concerns compared to scientists working in other disciplines?

**Discussion Topic:** What accounts for the lack of integration between criminological research and social policy? What are some costs and consequences of this disconnect? Can you think of examples of Canadian criminal justice policies that contravene criminologists' research findings?

**Discussion Topic:** Which factors do you think are most important in shaping the public's perception of crime and in influencing national crime prevention policies?

**Discussion Topic:** Reflect on the Robert Pickton case. Do you think that his crimes are differentially interpreted by the police, the public, victims, himself, and residents of Vancouver? How might various parties' roles in crime shape their interpretations?

## **IX. The Theme of This Text.**

- A. This text builds upon a social policy theme by contrasting two popular perspectives, the social problems perspective and the social responsibility perspective.
  - 1. The **social problems perspective** contends that crime is a manifestation of underlying social problems such as poverty, discrimination, pervasive family violence, inadequate socialization practices, and the breakdown of traditional social institutions.
    - a. The social problems perspective advances solutions based upon what is, in effect, a public health model, which says that crime needs to be addressed much like a public health concern.
    - b. Proponents of this perspective typically feel that solutions to the problem of crime come in the form of government expenditures in support of social programs.
    - c. The social problems approach to crime is macro approach to criminal behaviour.



2. The **social responsibility perspective** holds that individuals are fundamentally responsible for their own behaviour and criminals choose crime over other, more law-abiding, courses of action.
  - a. The social responsibility perspective supports crime reduction strategies based upon firm punishments, imprisonment, individualized rehabilitation, increased security, and a wider use of police powers.
  - b. The social responsibility approach to crime is a micro approach to criminal behaviour that focuses on individual offenders and their unique biology, psychology, background, and immediate life experiences.

**X. The Social Context of Crime.**

- A. Every crime has a unique set of causes, consequences, and participants. It affects some people more than others, provokes reactions and forms the impetus for new social policy.
- B. The text addresses diverse perspectives on criminality that reveal that there is a characteristic disjuncture between victims, offenders, the justice system, and society as to the significance which each assigns to the behaviour in question and, often, to its motivation.
- C. Making Sense of Crime: The Causes and Consequences of the Criminal Event.
  1. Criminal activity is diversely created and variously interpreted.
  2. **Social relativity** refers to the notion that social events are differently interpreted according to the cultural experiences and personal interests of the initiator, the observer, or the recipient of that behaviour. It considers:
    - a. The meaning of crime from the offender's viewpoint.
    - b. The meaning of crime from the victim's viewpoint.
    - c. The meaning of crime considering the societal setting in which the crime occurs.
    - d. The meaning of crime considering the manner in which the criminal justice system responds.
  3. Crime and the Offender. Offenders have a unique set of characteristics and experiences that shape their involvement with crime.
  4. Crime and the Criminal Justice System. The **criminal justice system** refers to the various agencies of justice, especially police, courts and corrections, whose goal it is to apprehend, convict, sanction and rehabilitate law violators.
  5. Crime and the victim. Victims have an important role to play in crime in the sense that they contribute their person to the crime situation. Some victims are in the wrong place at the wrong time. Some crimes can be described as 'victim-precipitated' in the sense that an opportunity for the crime was created by the actions of the eventual victim.
  6. Crime and Society. Society contributes informally to crime by producing poverty, patterns of inequality in terms of access to education and opportunities, and discrimination.

1. **Socialization** refers to the lifelong process of social experience whereby individuals acquire the culture of their society. Socialization shapes our actions and interpretations of situations.

7. The Consequences of Crime.

- a. There can be immediate and indirect consequences of crime. Interpretations of crime shape its consequences.
- b. The text takes an integrative view of the social event called crime by focusing on causes that give rise to criminal behaviour, the processes of criminal events as they unfold, and interpretations of the crime phenomena, including social responses to it. From this perspective, crime exists along a temporal continuum and is an emergent activity shaped by complex causes, relationships between victims and offenders, and formal responses that in turn shape public perception and policy.

**XI. The Primacy of Sociology**

A. Although many disciplines contribute to criminology, many criminologists operate primarily from a sociological perspective.

1. The sociological perspective is useful because it rests on a sound tradition of social scientific investigation and because it recognizes that crime is a social phenomenon.
2. Limitations of the sociological perspective include sociology's apparent reluctance to accept or integrate findings from other disciplines and to conclusively identify effective means of controlling crime.

**Discussion Topic:** Do you think a sociological perspective is important to the study of crime? How might the discipline of criminology benefit from integrating insights from other disciplines?

**Discussion Topic:** Discuss how the criminal event results from the inputs provided by the offender, the victim, society, and the criminal justice system.