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The Criminality and its Psychological Features

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Abstract: Preventing and fighting crime preoccupied and concerned humanity along its history. This concern is fully justified because the crime is serious harm of the human interests, endangering fundamental values and it is affecting the proper functioning of the social system. But what constitutes criminal behavior and how the individual gets the specialized skills in the area of criminality? What is its specificity? Any society appreciates the behavior of its members in terms of their compliance to the moral and legal rules. Failure to follow these rules will lead to coercive or punitive measures. The collective programming of the mind gives pattern for the individual behavior and about how the individual reacts. The reaction is observable in the diversity of cultural patterns of individuals forming a society. A study recently elaborated by the Journal of the Association for Psychological claims that people belonging to the different cultures perceive the aspects of reality in a different way. The researchers found differences in how different cultures think about other cultures. The originality of this paper is consisting in understanding of criminality using the three factors that define the formation and development of human personality. The added value of the paper come from interdisciplinary presentation of the scourge of this age - criminality.

Keywords: criminality; punishment; behavior; legal rules; psychology

1. Biological Component

This paper highlights the conditions and factors that cause some psychological elements that lead to crime. Evaluation of the nature of the human psyche and its ways of expression is the way the judicial psychology develops its specific psychological concepts. This paper shows that legal psychology is a special science studying psychosocial phenomena and in the same time, facts of individual, group or collective. These phenomena arise from the communication and interaction between people in all their social activities and appear in their conceptions, motivations, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors and mentalities. Some of these are in accordance with rules established by society, but other are not fold on these social standards. Study of crime and its psychological features could be a key for solving many problems. This work may contribute to complex work of police, prosecutors or judicial psychologists who daily fight against crime and its social consequences. Crime gets social characteristics of special importance for the whole society, because the consequences “might be crucial for the working way of the system” – (Anechitoae et al., 2007, pp. 32-40). The specialists involved in studying the phenomenon of crime are primarily interested in causal explanation of it, but also in the psychological aspects of criminality and criminal.

Social environment we are born and raised is a crucial element of our future behavior. People who are born and live in an environment marked by crime are likely to commit crimes in a much higher rate than those born and educated in a moral environment.

Cultural differences are obviously very deep in our thinking way, challenging the commonsense. In this context, the main question is whether the way people react is predetermined (found in ontogenesis of individual group membership) or receive fingerprint of the society where the person has been born

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and educated? The theory of social action of Talcott Parsons shows that human actions are determined by the interaction of different systems: the “behavioral system” of biological needs, the “personality system” of individual’s characteristics affecting their functioning in the social world and the “social system” of patterns.

At the intersection point of these influences we find the member of society, respecting rules in order to be integrated. But what happens to those who deviate from the rules imposed by society? What is an acceptable behavior and what should be punished? If cultural element is the key factor that differentiates categories of people, cultural differences will be a crucial element in influencing the way penalty will be received. In this context, nations, regions, ethnicities, religions, occupations, organizations and genders will be an influencing factor of the way penalty will be interpreted by the individual and by the group.

Another important aspect is the affiliation to a particular gender. This distinction between masculine and feminine is found in the Geert Hofstede’s theory about cultural difference. According to Hofstede’s theory, we have “male pattern society” led by values like assertiveness, performance, success and competition. Thus in the common sense it can be appreciated that in majority of societies, masculinity is associated with crime. The total number of males among those sanctioned by society is noticeably higher than the number of punished females. For an overview of human activity in general and in particularly analyzing the criminal activity, we enunciate the simplest definition of the human individual as psycho-social being. This criminal feature of the human beings has been studied over the time and some results have become famous. The famous Lombroso dealt specifically on the physical component. He made measurements of the skulls of many criminals dead or alive. Lombroso initiated the hypothesis that criminal disposition is predetermined by certain physical features. Recent studies of the genetics disprove this hypothesis.

The current studies in the area of genetics and aggressive behavior mostly provided more questions trying to answer the question: “is there a possible aggression genes?” The geneticists sustain that, the idea of “aggression gene” doesn’t make any sense. Altered behavior is something entirely different than an altered physiological response or disease. It is generally accepted that a simplistic deterministic view of behavior is wrong and moreover a multitude of genetic and non-genetic factors lead to criminal behaviors. There are many possible environmental influences on an individual which make the genetic influences on aggressive behavior to be very dynamic. Development and individual behavior is influenced by “biological, psychological, social, economical environment” (Braşoveanu, 2007).

There are many theories on the topic of heredity and the influence of genetics on the overall character of human beings. One of the studies was performed recently (where family psychology vs. biological heredity in determining criminal behavior has been examined). This study was carried out using identical twins that were adopted by two different families and raised apart from each other. It was observed that adopted children are as aggressive as their adoptive parents rather than their biological parents. The results from both studies indicate that environment and genetic disposition are equally responsible in shaping human behavior. From the psychological point of view personality theories assume that certain predispositions or personality features, increase the chances of criminal behavior. There are two important factors that seem to influence the individual social behavior. First is the moral development factor. Theorists relate these stages of cognitive development to stages of moral development. At the beginning, rules are given by powerful individuals situated near the children. In the early level of development, children permanently search the pleasure and try to avoid punishment. Children at this level consider the needs of others only to the extent that meeting those needs will help the child fulfill his or her own needs. During the next period, which is characterized by conformity to social rules, the child demonstrates respect for duties and recommendations of the authority because is seeking the approval of the authority. As the children grow old the moral judgment is motivated by respect for legally determined rules and an understanding that these rules exist to benefit all. Step by step, universal principles are internalized.

2. Sociological Component

The second factor is the social learning. A kid learns how to behave based on how parents respond to the person's compliance with regulations. The system of reward and penalties indicate at the beginning of the life what an appropriate behavior is. Permanent application of rewards and sanctions will lead to the internalization of these rules and regulations. Using this system, children begin to control themselves accordingly to moral and legal codes. Numerous studies show that delinquents were treated differently by their parents than the non-delinquents youths. These studies suggest that social learning is related to criminal behavior. Those studies suggest social learning is related to criminal behavior.

We are social beings and the criminal predisposition is transmitted by other individuals. Socialization is taking place throughout our lives. Socialization is present in every aspect of life and education. Significant example is the case of "wolf children". They are raised in a group socially. Wolves are organized in packs, are social beings and have a well established hierarchy. Each wolf play certain roles in the group, accepted due to the fact that individuals rejected do not survive alone. Every society educates its members in the spirit of the rules to ensure its proper functioning. It is not enough just to be part of a social organization but to be fully integrated into that organization. Through education, individual acquires necessary knowledge in order to adapt and integrate. There are several factors that impact an individual's destiny and through various studies and theoretical models it becomes obviously that one single factor is impossible to determine the destiny of one individual, in order to become criminal.

The central points of this theory are: the human being is a rational actor, rationality involves calculation, and people freely choose all behavior, both conforming and deviant, based on their rational calculations. One of the important elements of calculation involves an important decision: pleasure versus punishment, choice will be directed towards the maximization of individual pleasure, choice can be controlled through the perception and understanding of the potential punish. Punishment will follow any violation of the social values and the society is responsible for maintaining order and preserving the common good through a system of laws. The swiftness, severity, and certainty of punishment are the key elements in understanding a law's ability to control human behavior. That is why, the understanding of personal choice is commonly based in a conception of rationality or rational choice. In completing this theory on the external "causes" of crime focused attention on the factors that impose upon and constrain the rational choice of individuals. Another point of view is given by the psychological positivism, theorized by Alexander Lacassagne. His assertion is that the causation of criminality is rooted in offender mental illness or personality disorders as schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder, psychopathic personality, antisocial personality disorder, depression and neuroticism. These disorders may be the result of sociological or biological factors such as physical or sexual abuse, parental criminology and intelligence level. Psychological positivism analyzes criminality as the result of an internal and unavoidable cause versus that of a controlled decision.

3. Psychological Component

There are studies supporting the hypothesis that certain personality features can be associated with criminal behavior. Impulsiveness, specific for volcanic type is characterized by increased responsiveness to certain stimuli and a visible manifestation in behavior. Impulsiveness is frequently associated deviant behavior, but this varies from person to person. A study aimed to examine the relationship between impulsivity and criminal behavior has demonstrated a direct connection between these two elements. Impulsivity is often associated with negative emotions that enhance its effects. There is also a correlation between impulsivity, negative emotions and frustration tolerance. When is registered a high level of impulsivity, negative emotions recorded significant increases. Therefore specialists consider that in the absence of strong social control, criminal tendencies can occur. But it must be noted that both elements are influenced by environmental factors, most commonly they are

affected by the family of origin or the family environment (psychological or physical abuse or abandonment). Another feature that can support this criminal behavior is “hard sensation” seeking or addiction to adrenaline. There are people who can not live without the adrenaline. Thus, there are people acquiring these sensations as a result of aggression, others by consuming prohibited substances. In any circumstances, risk is sought or caused by this type of person. Researchers often argue that “sensation seekers” have an average or under average IQ, and, the more impulsive person is, the more dependent on adrenaline will be.

Studies show also, there are some features the potential criminals do not have. The first such feature is the consciousness. This feature involves an accumulation of traits such as discipline, organization, responsibility and trust. Altruism that requires personal sacrifice, or give up its good to offer help to other people is also an incompatible feature for offender profile. Morality, which involves complying with rules imposed even if the rules are coming in conflict with individual desires. Morality requires compliance with a code of moral rules, for example the code of good manners and to have a certain acceptable behavior in society.

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4. Conclusions

Operating system categories with legal psychology belongs largely to general and social psychology. Therefore, psychology is an interdisciplinary domain. This science uses and will use concepts from other fields of psychology: experimental psychology, differential psychology, cognitive psychology, medical psychology, psychopathology, military psychology, psychology of behavior, etc. Legal psychology is to: organize and improve functional conceptual system, validation of conceptual models, and development of theoretical models. Legal psychology of the future should be centered on the criminality and its psychological features and must establish the following *priorities*: developing a specific methodology to investigate the psychological reality of the judiciary system; providing useful information on the physical reality of the judicial system in order to establish the truth; development of psychosocial programs to prevent crime and recidivism; develop strategies to educate criminals; develop programs for social reintegration of criminals; providing psychological support, substantiate both the police officers and criminals.

The future will prove if indeed legal psychology will develop enough to efficiently prevent the commission of crimes and whether the company will find effective solutions to “treat the disease of criminality” as a whole.

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