

**Criminal Psychology**

## Aim of study

This course is aimed that those who may have an interest in criminal psychology and for those that may wish to study this for future qualifications.

Although this course does not qualify you to become a criminal psychologist, it will give you an insight into what is involved for future reference; therefore this course will still be suitable as a first step of knowledge into this field of work.

If you have a general interest in psychology and want to study how the mind works, this will also be a beneficial course for you to undertake.

The course has units of information which we would recommend for you to read through before you answer any of the assignment questions which are situated at the front of the course. Within the units there are also case studies that we recommend for you to complete in order to gain the most you can from this course. The case studies require you to apply the knowledge you have acquired from the course and involves using critical skills and thinking, they are based on real cases that have happened in the past and therefore, you can apply your knowledge to real life situations.

The assignment questions test the knowledge you have acquired from completing this course and work towards completing the course and gaining a certificate at the end. However, we do recommend carrying out further internet research to help you answer all the questions.

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# Assignments

## Assignment 1

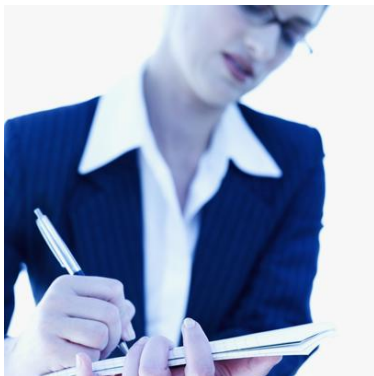
1. Discuss your understanding of the role of a Forensic Psychologist and other related roles such as; Clinical Psychologist, School Psychologist, Neurologist and Counsellor.
2. Describe criminal profiling and what it involves.
3. Why should the scientific method be used for psychological research?
4. Discuss the ethical considerations for psychological research.

# Unit 1: Introduction to Definitions and Roles

## Unit Aims:

- Introduction to criminal psychology
- Crime definitions
- Psychology definitions
- Criminal psychology definitions
- Role of criminal psychologists and other relating roles
- Introduction to criminal profiling

## Introduction to Criminal Psychology



Criminal psychology involves considering how psychology is applied to the study of crime and to criminals. Throughout this course we will look at different psychological perspectives and research in order for us to understand and explain the variety of different situations that can occur when investigating with the use of criminal psychology including discussing with witnesses, criminal behaviours and investigations.

## Crime definitions

Crime can be defined as below:

*“Crime is an act of committed or omitted, in violation of a public law either forbidding or commanding it; a breach or violation of some public right or duty due to a whole community, considered as a community. In its social aggregate capacity as distinguished from a civil injury”*

The Law Dictionary (2014), quoted from <http://thelawdictionary.org/crime/>

Thus this is denoting an unlawful and punishable act. Crime also described as an offence or a criminal offence is an act harmful to individuals as well as to the community. To be classified as a crime, the act of doing something bad normally is usually accompanied with the intention to do something bad.

It is important to bear in mind that over time what is considered an act of crime may change as opinions, beliefs and laws can change, thus can lead to acts of behaviour being criminalised and decriminalised. For example, homosexual activity and fox hunting have been illegal and legal over time.

### Psychology definitions

Psychology is about the scientific study of the human mind and its functions including those affecting behaviour in a given context. The human mind is very complex and is the source of all thought and behaviour. Studying the mind as a Psychologist involves predicting how a human should behave in different contexts and situations. This is completed through conducting a series of experiments which will either confirm or refute their expectations and therefore, psychology involves psychologists using human behaviour as a clue to establish how the mind works. There is a relationship between the brain, the mind and behaviour which can be difficult and take quite a long time to establish. This is why controlled experiments need to be compiled carefully and conducted to help Psychologists study how the mind works through observing behaviour.

### Criminal psychology definitions

This move on to the discussion of criminal psychology which involves the mental characteristics or attitude of a person or group. Criminal psychology or criminological psychology is the study of the will, thoughts, intention and reactions of criminals and all that partakes in the criminal behaviour.

*"The study of the mental processes, motivational patterns, and behaviour of criminals"*

Mosby's Medical Dictionary, 2009, Elsevier from <http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/criminal+psychology>

Within the scope of criminal psychology, deviance and crime can be related but not considered the same in all cases. For example, an act can be criminal and deviant such as rape, murder and kidnapping. Acts that are criminal but not deviant can be failing to wear a seatbelt; the act is criminal because it is against the law, however people that do fail to wear a seatbelt are not considered criminal by the general public.

Acts can be deviant but not criminal such as adultery as this deviates from mainstream society, however adulterers are not considered criminals by mainstream society. Also actions and behaviours that are considered unlawful differ in various cultures and nations.

### Role of a Criminal Psychologist and other related roles

We have established that the role of a criminal psychologist is to study the behaviours and thoughts of criminals and there has been a growing interest of study in this career field. The field is related to forensic psychology and the terms can be interchanged, therefore it is necessary to also clarify forensic psychology. Forensic psychology is a field that deals with psychology and the law; forensic psychologists play an important role in the criminal justice system and can aid in applying psychological principles to the legal system. Forensic psychology can be explained as the intersection of psychology and the law and a forensic psychologist can perform many roles which can make this definition a difficult one to define.



The scope of the role of a forensic psychologist can include many roles within this framework such as:

- Clinical psychologists
- School psychologists
- Neurologists
- Counsellors

Clinical psychologists for example often work in hospitals and private practice and they are more concerned with assessment, diagnostic treatments and prevention of mental disorders and they are trained in a range of techniques and theoretical approaches. So how does forensic psychology interlink? Criminal psychologists may provide mental health services such as assessment diagnosis and treatment to individuals who may have come into contact with the criminal justice system, so they may be asked to determine if a suspected criminal suffers



from a mental illness or may be asked to provide treatment for individuals suffering from substance abuse and addiction issues.

Another subsection to this is a school psychologist, working with children in a school setting; a school psychologist working within forensic psychology may evaluate children in suspected abuse cases; help them prepare for testimony in court; or testify on their behalf in child custody disputes.

The majority of the work of a criminal psychologist is to study why people commit crime, however they may need to assess and evaluate the risk of a criminal repeating criminal acts or make educated guesses on the actions of a criminal after a crime has been committed. They may be asked to provide expert testimony in court and they also have a duty of criminal profiling or offender profiling which we will discuss shortly.

Criminal psychologists spend a lot of time in court or in an office setting, and their work involves a considerable amount of research as they may need to research an offender's life history; conduct a great deal of interviewing; and provide expert testimony in the courtroom. So there is plenty of close work with the police and federal agents.

It is important for the criminal psychologist to understand and interpret behaviour that exists in all types of offences; this will lead to them exploring the choices, thoughts, motivations and reactions of criminals. The police may find the information that a criminal psychologist can relay to them very useful in their investigations and criminal psychologists have the knowledge and understanding of the mental processes that encourage an individual to commit a crime. Criminal psychologists are also involved with treating convicted criminals, therefore they may also be involved with the development of criminal rehabilitation programmes such as; anger management training, social and cognitive skills training and treatment of drug and or alcohol addiction.

## **Introducing criminal profiling**

Criminal profiling or offender profiling is a behavioural and investigative tool to help investigators to accurately predict and profile the characteristics of unknown criminal subjects or offenders. Some may argue that the characteristics of an offender can be examined and worked out by examining the characteristics of their offences, thus putting the pieces of information together, trying to fix the puzzle of the offender by examining their offences in great detail.

Criminal profiling can help the police to target their investigation more effectively and prioritise suspects more effectively, therefore profiling involves a close relationship with conventional detective work.

Ainsworth (2001) identified four main approaches to criminal profiling which are:

The geographical approach- this observes the patterns in the location and timings of offences in order to make judgements about links between crimes and suggestions about where offenders live and work.

Investigative psychology- this uses established psychological theories and methods of analysis to predict offender characteristics from offending behaviour.

Typological approach- this approach involves looking at the characteristics of crime scene to assign offenders to different categories, each category of offender having different typical characteristics.

Clinical approach- uses insights from psychiatry and clinical psychology to aid investigation where an offender is considered to be suffering from mental illness or other psychological abnormality.

One approach cannot claim to be better than others; however with knowledge, training and understanding, the criminal psychologist will be able to identify the most appropriate approach in his or her opinion for the case they are presented with. Some may argue whether criminal profiling is of any use in helping the police with their investigations into solving crimes and identifying criminals. However, you will find vast literature on this subject and there are cases for and against this with proven facts and figures and also some that have been of little use. In helping the police with their investigations, criminal psychologist can give some insight into what to look out for if indeed a criminal cannot be identified and cases of crime appear difficult to resolve.

To help the police with their investigations to help identify criminals or possible criminals, reconstruction and the use of scientific method, logical reasoning, sources of information on people, criminology, victimology and the experience and skill to analyse and interpret the events that surround the commission of a crime.

Thus criminal profiling is about determining the most probable sequence of events.

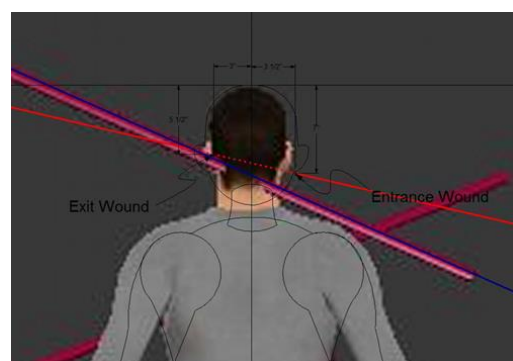
With criminal profiling, to determine the sequence of events, reconstruction is necessary as we have mentioned above. Reconstruction begins with detectives conduct a walk through of the actual crime scene and also simulating the events that may have occurred in their minds. Their main concern in conducting this is to prove or disprove any sequence of events that may have happened. The best use of reconstruction can be made if there is a criminal profiler available immediately while the crime scene is still fresh, therefore a consultant would need to be contacted as soon as the police are at the crime scene. However, where this opportunity is missed or is not possible, criminal profilers can work with information and documentation afterwards which involves physical evidence, statements from witnesses, and analysing the reports compiled from other experts such as analysing the angles of shots, the length of blood stains and wound patterns for example. These are all important information that can help the criminal profiler with their investigations.



There are general protocols and checklists that one should go through when conducting reconstruction. It depends heavily on logic and situation which makes it difficult to standardise. Turvey (1999) defines these as being;

- Wound pattern analysis
- Victim state mind
- Victim mental health

Wound pattern analysis should take place at the crime scene and at the autopsy and it should be assessed whether the deceased could have caused the injuries. Further investigations will then proceed which include police, hospital and employment records. Interviews should take place with various people who can shed light on the background of the victim. Using information from



the wound analysis and the interviews with the people that knew the victim, you can distinguish if suicide could be a possible cause of death. For example, if the wound could have been self-inflicted and if the people that knew the victim and were close to them noticed a sudden change in the behaviour of the victim, also if they gave them certain

possessions, belongings, money etc. before the victim died, and then it could possibly be suicide as the cause of death for the victim. However, it is important not to assume and make judgements on flimsy evidence, as thorough investigations must still take place to rule out all other possibilities.

In a psychological autopsy, investigating the victim would include the following;

**Alcohol and drug history** - this would include how the victim dealt with stress, any medications they were on, family medical history, recent stresses that the victim went through and any other relevant information on their history.

**Interpersonal relationships** - any writings such as diaries kept and maintained by the victim, history of phone calls and websites visited, any relationships with friends, relatives, work colleagues, current and past enemies and any interests and hobbies the victim held.

**Reactions to death** - this is the reactions of friends, family members, colleagues etc., those that were in the life of the victim and how they have reacted to the death of the victim, and addressed questions to them of who may have caused harm to the victim.

**Assessment of intention** - the role of the victim in their own demise. By analysis of family and friends, any role of the victim towards the final days including conscious or sub-conscious.

**Accomplishing goals** - patterns of how the victim went about accomplishing their goals, ambitions and dreams, any fears or phobias they had to face in their life, mood swings, and concentration and judgement abilities.

**Timeline** - to include the timeline of events leading up to the day of death.

## Case study

Research and analyse some of the cases committed by the Zodiac killer in the late 1960's to early 1970's,

[http://www.crimelibrary.com/serial\\_killers/notorious/zodiac/river\\_1.html](http://www.crimelibrary.com/serial_killers/notorious/zodiac/river_1.html).

From Ainsworth (2001) Approaches to Criminal Profiling, which approach would you use for this case and why?

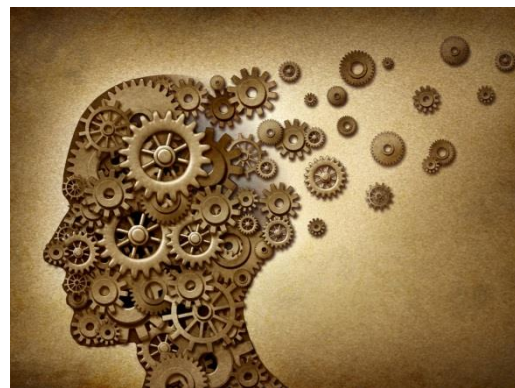
## Unit 2: Psychological Research

### Unit Aims:

- Usefulness of research
- Considerations for psychological research
- Designing a research study experiment
- Reporting results

### Usefulness of psychological research

Many criminal psychologists have carried out research to determine the mental processes that motivate criminals to take part in criminal activity, and over the years these research studies have been used to highlight how psychological research has been used to influence many aspects of the criminal justice system.



To maintain usefulness of psychological research, there needs to be certain methods and processes used that are scientific approaches in developing questions, collecting data and researching conclusions. The scientific approach involves an organised series of steps that involve the maximum possible of objectivity and consistency for everyone involved in carrying out research. This will provide a sound platform for analysis and discussion and avoid research being carried out and interpret the results as a matter of opinion of the researcher or for the others involved in analysing the results.

Therefore using a scientific method to psychological research allows for it to be:

- Valid- true and accurate results can be achieved
- Reliable- the results can be reproduced by someone else at a later date
- Objective- the researcher is able to remain unbiased and does not allow personal feelings, opinions and thoughts to overcloud his or her judgement

- Representative- the sample used represents the group under study.

Therefore in order to make the best use out of psychological research and to enable it to be carried out in the most fair and reliable way, the above standard protocols need to be used and considered and the researcher should remain unbiased and objective disallowing own thoughts and feelings to affect the research and the results. The aim of the allowing fairness, reliability and objectivity in research is to enable the same methods to be used by another research at a later time and the same results can be achieved, also if these were not taken into account, then the results cannot be valid.

## Considerations for psychological research

The main consideration for psychological research is ethical considerations. Researchers should and have a duty to show ethical considerations for the wellbeing of their participants and should take into consideration the factors of; consent, deception, protection, withdrawal.

**Consent** - to enable to observe participants, they must give their consent to take part in the research. To observe them without consent is regarded as unethical.

**Deception** - Researcher should be open and honest about what is going to happen in the research, participants should be fully aware of what they will experience and the processes involved in the research.

**Protection** - Researchers have a duty of care towards the participants involved and they should not do anything that can cause harm physically, mentally and emotionally. It is unethical to frighten or distress participants and this includes the research assistant.

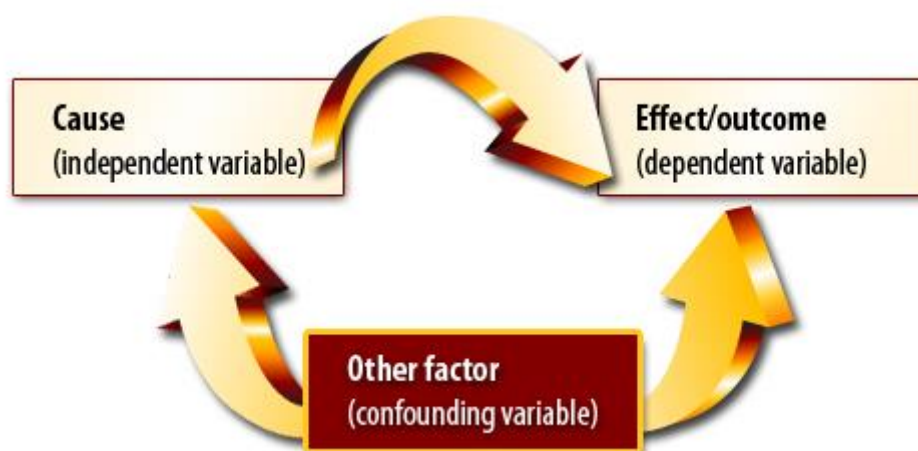
**Withdrawal** - Participants should be able to leave the research experiment at any stage they wish and they do not have to explain themselves to the researcher.

Research involving children will need be considered very carefully as they do not have the social skills to walk away from anything that may be distressing to them, they are also vulnerable to harm. Consent can be difficult to gain, although this will be requested by the ...

It is important that secondary data is referenced when it is used in order for the source to be identified.

Primary data is the first hand information that the researcher has conducted and compiled themselves. It will involve the researcher collecting, analysing and presenting their own data or the researcher may have a group of assistants helping in this aspect and will oversee the research although if assistants are used, they will only carry out part of the research.

Primary data can be gathered by two different types of research methods, experimental methods and descriptive methods.



Experimental methods are carried out using field experiments and are the most scientific method of investigation, however they must have independent variables (IV) and dependant variables (DV).

Firstly explain variables, these are things that you are trying to measure, for example and object, event, idea and feeling. IVs in psychological research are variables that cannot be changed or influenced by other variables such as a participant's age, this is independent and cannot be changed; what they eat, how much television they watch for example cannot change their age. When you are looking for some kind of relationship between variables, you are trying to see if the independent variables cause some kind of change in other variables and in independent variables.

Dependant variables are variables that depend on other factors, for example an exam result could be a dependant variable as this result depends on how much you studied, how much sleep was obtained the night before and how hungry you were when taking the test. Research should look at the relationship between two things and the aim is to find out what

example of this is if there is a significant likelihood of something happening, the researcher can be 95% confident that it did not happen by chance.

**Correlation** - this is the measure of how strong two or more variables are related to each other. This measure is represented by something called coefficient which is a figure that can be either be positive or negative between -1.00 to + 1.00. A positive figure implies that both variables will increase or decrease together, a negative figure implies that as one variable increases the other decreases and a coefficient figure close to zero means there is little relationship between the two figures.

**Frequency distribution** - this is achieved by taking measurements and separating them into sub groups, these sub groups are then entered onto a bar graph (known as histogram) or a line graph (known as frequency PolyGram). Scores that appear more on one side of the graph are skewed, but scores that appear more in the middle with equal amounts are seen as symmetrical.

**Qualitative data** - as we have discussed earlier, qualitative data is descriptive and concentrates on the analysis of how people feel their opinions, behaviours and experiences. Researchers requiring this information often seek the following methods to collect data:

- Participant observation
- Case studies
- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Content analysis
- Historical comparisons



Interpreting this data tends to be in the form of descriptive writing rather than for methods we have discussed with quantitative data, therefore it is more time consuming to collect these types of data because it can be quite difficult to organise and categorise the many and various responses, however there are ways this can be made easier for researchers.



# Unit 3: Use of Criminal Psychology to Understand Crime

## Unit Aims

- The major perspectives that explain the causes of criminal behavior
- Biological / physiological behavior
- Cognitions theory
- Behavioural theories
- Developmental theories

## The major perspectives that explain the causes of criminal behaviour

Researchers who have conducted studies in this area have found that some people are more likely to be involved in criminal activity because they are exposed to certain risks factors, and in criminality, this is anything in a person's biology, psychology, developmental or family history that will increase the likelihood that at some point they will become involved in criminal activity.



Research into this area has also identified that some people will be less likely to be involved in criminal activity because they are exposed to certain protective factors and this is also anything in a person's biology, psychology, developmental or family history. Furthermore, risk factors can appear at various points in childhood. Observing Patterson's model (1989) more closely, it suggests that if the following patterns emerge throughout childhood, this can have an effect on whether the individual will be likely to engage in criminal activity.

It suggests that early childhood risk factors include poor parental discipline and monitoring, poor family environment and instability in the family and childhood environment to conduct

problems. Middle childhood risk factors include rejection by peers and academic failure whilst late childhood and early adolescence risk factors include a commitment to a deviant peer group. However there are other factors which may have an influence such as: hyperactivity/ADHD, learning disabilities, foetal alcohol syndrome, low IQ, hormonal imbalances, antisocial personality disorder and biochemical imbalances.



This brings us onto the major psychological perspectives that explain the causes of criminal behaviour.

The main psychological approaches relevant to criminal psychology are:

**The biological/physiological approach** - an approach where biology and psychology are combined to explain human behaviour, assuming that the brain is the organ of the mind and also where personality is developed, human behaviour is based on a person's disposition or genetics.

**Cognitive approach** - this approach suggests that mental processes help us to make sense of the world, such processes is perception, language, memory, attention and problem solving. Central to this approach is the idea that people actively try to make sense of their environment by imposing order and meaning on the things they encounter.

**Behavioural approach** - behaviour is regarded as a response to all stimuli. Behaviourists assume that behaviour can be shaped by a response to a stimulus in an individual's current environment or that behaviour can be a result of a previously learned reaction to a stimulus which they have experienced in the past.

**Social learning approach** - similar to the behavioural view, there is a belief that people are shaped in fundamental ways by the environment through the learning process. However, consider that observational learning plays a large part in shaping a person's behaviour. This approach believes that people learn by observing others and because of this, other people in the social environment are particular important influences on behaviour.

**Developmental approach** - this observes how the thoughts and behaviours of people are rooted in their childhood experiences, in criminal psychology this often means explaining

criminality by referring to disadvantaged childhoods and considering the nature of children as witnesses.

Having examined some of the theoretical frameworks, you will notice that some criminal psychologists operate within a particular framework whilst others will have a broader horizon and work with different approaches throughout.

As we have now observed the major approaches, we will now consider some research into this area.

### **Biological/physiological theories and criminality**

Lombroso (1876) an anthropologist started a series of research studies into biological and physiological theories and crime as he believed that biological factors lead to criminal activity. This school of thought interlinked with crime suggesting that criminal behaviour has a physiological origin which is why psychologists who adopt this approach tend to study human experience and behaviour from a biologist perspective.

Biological theories of crime include the following main principles:

- People are more prone to crime if they hold certain biological and mental traits.
- These traits are inherited and present at birth
- Physical and mental degeneracies are the cause of crime

The approach argues that the main causes of thinking, feeling and behaviour; environmental factors come into play such as nutrition and the effects of hormones, and the influence of genes which can also have an effect on the development and activity of the brain. The approach also considers racial and gender differences and that the rates and types of crime can partially be the result of biological differences between the sexes or racially distinct groups.

## Unit 4: Use in Criminal Investigations

### Unit Aims

- Investigating a crime
- Witness reliability
- Interviewing witnesses and suspects
- Offender profiling
- Geographic profiling

After reviewing the information we have gone through so far, it is important to look at how criminal psychology is used in criminal investigations. The expertise of a psychologist can be very useful indeed in helping the police during their investigations and the methods used by a psychologist go beyond the role of offender profiling.



### Investigating a crime

Once a suspect has been taken in by the police, they have only 24 hours to charge a suspect, the suspect may be released on bail or remanded in custody whilst further investigations take place to gather further evidence and check alibis. The case is then passed to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) once further evidence has been gathered, the CPS then decide whether the evidence is strong enough to bring the case to court, however sometimes mistakes can be made which results in the case being thrown out and the suspect can then walk free. Therefore great emphasis and importance is placed on gathering strong evidence and gathering this in the correct way.

### Witness reliability

One of the main sources of evidence is the people who witnessed the incident. Interviews need to be conducted and tape recorded to obtain their interpretation of the events occurred and this is normally conducted by the investigating officers. Therefore, the witness