



# *Motivation in a Forensic Psychological Perspective*

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## *Abstract*

This article revisits the traditional motivation theories to see them from a perspective that explains criminal motives. McClelland's needs, Murray's psychogenic needs, Maslow's need hierarchy Alderfer's ERG model and Optimal Level Theory are examined using real-life criminal cases that took place in India. The concepts of Kohlberg's moral development, Sutherland's postulates, and the Frustration-Aggression hypothesis are incorporated into these theories to bridge the gap between the forensic-criminal environment and motivational psychology. In conclusion, we understand how the motive for criminal behaviour is derived from the same sources as the motive for non-criminal behaviour.

*Keywords:* Motivation, Drive, Criminal Behaviour, Forensic Psychology

Tomar, Burari's then-beat officer was the first to reach the house. He manoeuvred through the curious crowd and in his words what he saw was 'nothing like he had come across in his policing career. He was stunned and took a few seconds to register before he rushed to call his seniors. Thereafter started the investigation of the infamous 2018 Burari Death Case (Bhandari, 2018).

In July 2018, eleven members of a family living in Burari, Delhi, India were found dead. Ten of them were hanging from a piped grid open ceiling and one elderly member was strangled on the floor (Bhandari, 2018). The police and the entire investigative force were baffled at the scenario. It took some time to conclude for sure that it was an accident and not murder or suicide but one question remained unanswered; 'What was the motive?'

'Motivation' is driving or pulling force that directs one towards a goal giving a reason behind an individual's behaviour (Morgan, King, Weisz, & Schopler, 1993). Most states (countries) legal framework acknowledges the role of motivation in crime. Often the degree of punishment given is also based on the motive of the action.

Lawrence Kohlberg in his process of formulating the moral development theory roughly gives us an idea about the different possibilities of motives behind anti-social behaviour according to age. By recording responses to a moral dilemma faced by Heinz he gives us an idea that at what stages of moral development and what kind of situation may cause an individual to incline towards crime. At an early age or pre-

conventional stage, a child's moral understanding is mostly instrumental. By this, we can assume that the motive of antisocial behaviour will also likely be instrumental. Edward Sutherland in his 6<sup>th</sup> postulate states 'A person becomes delinquent because of an excess of definitions favourable to violation of law over definitions unfavourable to violation of law' (Sutherland, Cressey, & Luckenbill, 1992). Going back to the Burari Mass Suicide case, it was later found during the investigation that what seemed like a case of suicide was a ritual that went south. Among the family members, two were adolescent (Bhandari, 2018). It is difficult to imagine how such young children could indulge in such dangerous rituals. However, evidence supported that the family often performed rituals that they believed to have brought them social and economic fortune (Bhandari, 2018). The benefit of it must have glazed on to the children's lifestyle as well. This could have been the reinforcement to join the ritual.

In the second stage, which is called the conventional stage of moral development, Kohlberg's respondents reasoned as per moral and social norms. Basically at this stage, the concept of right and wrong is based on what society framed. Most late teenagers and adults are found to be in this stage (Kohlberg, 1958). So were the members of the Burari Case family. They believed that their late father and then head of the family would return to communicate and guide them by possessing his youngest son (Bhandari, 2018). Being part of a conservative Hindu household they always followed their father's guidance in every aspect of life. His instructions were their ultimate moral voice and all decisions had to be pre-approved by him. The family had seen success in several manners by obeying their father. In his absence must have felt lost. The youngest son who later in the investigation also proves to be the main perpetrator of the case had lost his voice in a life-threatening accident. He didn't speak until his father's death (Bhandari, 2018). Lost and misguided the family believed their father had returned through the youngest son when he started talking while the family was performing a ceremony for their late father. The family started obeying him just as they used to obey their father and thus started performing such rituals

The highest and the third stage of moral development which is the post-conventional stage is achieved by a small percentage of the population only. They believe right and wrong are beyond social constructs and legal frameworks. One's action must be directed toward the greater good of the universe even if it's social or legally not accepted (Kohlberg, 1958). If indeed any of the members in the Burari family were thinking from a post-conventional stage of mind, they believed they were guiding their family to a greater good. But in reality, very few individuals reach the post-conventional level of moral development so there is a higher chance none of the family members had attained that level. Psychologists have advocated the presence of 'shared psychosis' in the family which caused the behaviour (Singh & Sunny, 2018). Yet, once in a while, we might come across individuals who socially or legally deviate for the great good. For example, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose chooses his nation's freedom over his family's responsibilities. He revolted against the government and committed serious offences like impersonation, fraud and absconding.

Much like the original theory given by Kohlberg my adaptation is not absolute. What motivates an individual to incline towards crime is a complex and distinct structure for each. Age doesn't always define which stage of moral development one is functioning in. It is not necessary that an individual may move ahead in the moral development stage.

Humans are social animals, so our actions are also socially motivated. D. C. McClelland spoke of three prominent motives; achievement needs, affiliation needs and power needs. He stated that every individual is majorly driven by one of these three needs. The need for achievement is the primary motive for those individuals who like to function in optimally challenging surroundings. They prefer tasks which ensure success without too much risk yet earn appreciation for their capacity. They seek constant feedback and punctuality. They are usually uncomfortable with changing their pattern of work or any kind of situation that is too challenging (McClelland, 1965). They show a great deal of discipline in routine which makes it difficult to imagine such individuals to be antisocial. However, imagine an expert pickpocket continues to steal as he is good at his craft. He is probably applauded for his expertise by others in the same business, which gives him a sense of feedback. He might challenge himself to pickpocket in a less crowded area or an area under camera surveillance but he wouldn't risk an alternative career path like working in a factory or driving a cab.

The need for Affiliation is when one's actions are driven by the desire to be loved by everyone. These individuals are anxious about disapproval by other (McClelland, 1965). They are usually extremely pro-social in nature, however, if unreciprocated by someone of their desire they develop more anxiousness and grievance than others. In criminals, the backstory of romantic rejection or parental ignorance is quite common. This kind of unfulfilled need may lead to emotional crime or a 'crime of passion'.

McClelland's third type of motive which is, the need for power, is found among individuals who are driven by the will to lead. They are comfortable with taking risky decisions even and working alone. They do not show as much concern for others as individuals driven by affiliation or achievement needs. They would often give up a hefty salary to enjoy an authoritative position (McClelland, 1965). They might be efficient leaders, but history teaches us how far their need for power could damage if triggered. Hitler and Mussolini are at the top of the list of examples. After World War I when Germany was forced to sign the Treaty of Versailles, the entire nation was stripped of power. This was the trigger for power-hungry Hitler which led to an era of inhumanity. Domestic violence is often a result of a perpetrator with a high need for power and a victim with a high need for affiliation (Mason & Blankenship, 1987).

Niccolo Machiavelli gave some advice to rulers to maintain power. The term 'Machiavellianism' is coned from the same. It involves manipulating and exploiting others. Machiavels show low remorse for their wrong actions and lack empathy towards others (Morgan, King, Weisz, & Schopler, 1993). These are also the same traits seen among psychopaths who have a high risk of developing into hardened criminals.

Although the three social needs stated by McClelland does imply several individuals who deviate from the legal framework but when discussing criminal motive we must not leave out a few other needs. Henry A. Murray gave 24 psychogenic needs among which criminal motives are primarily driven by a high need for acquisition, retention, avoidance, dominance, aggression and defence (Murray, 1938). According to Sigmund Freud need for aggression, is a derivative of the life force, 'Thanos'. Freud specified two types of energy, namely 'Eros' and 'Thanos'. The former is the energy that harvests within us and reflects as pleasure-giving activities while the latter is destructive in nature. The need for aggression is why phenomena like war, arguments and pain are inevitable in the Human race. Murder, rape, assault and most crimes are manifestations of the need for aggression (Freud, Freud, Strachey, Strachey, & Walker, 1955).

Dollard and Miller framed the frustration-aggression hypothesis which states that when an individual is unable to attain their goal it causes aggression (1958). This can be the motive behind a large number of crimes. Let us revisit the Burari case. The proponent was studied to be a shy and unfollowed adult member of the family during his father's lifetime. He was lanky and lack vigour that so couldn't achieve an authoritative position. He had made several attempts to prove himself but his situation and health failed him. It was clear that he had a desire to be respected and looked upon. Unable to be in that position he might have developed frustration which eventually manifested in pathological aggression (Bhandari, 2018).

Frustration is mainly caused due to environmental factors, individual pathologies or conflict of motives (Morgan, King, Weisz, & Schopler, 1993). It is a common phenomenon that our environment is resistant to our goals. This includes the geographical, social and cultural environment. From regularly fighting traffic to choosing a spouse against pre-approved standards of society's environment often obstructs our goals and desires. While some individuals can deal with such obstruction efficiently, others fail and suffer frustration. Chronic frustration may lead an individual to choose a path of crime. Studies have shown that petty thieves are mostly victims of their society. Coming from an economically lower background they cannot afford education or skill training. Thus they are unable to get a decent job. Succumbed to hunger and family responsibilities they start stealing. Kohlberg in his study uses Heinz's Dilemma which is a story about a man, Heinz whose wife is dying of cancer may steal an overpriced drug to save her life as he didn't have the money (Kohlberg, 1958). The proponent in the Burari case during his struggle to set up a business was targeted by rivals. They had set his factory on fire risking his own life as well. He survived but stopped speaking after this incident (Bhandari, 2018). On different levels of magnitude, such obstruction from the surroundings resisted his motion towards his goal which was to reach a position where his family would look up to him. Frustrations accumulated over time due to repeated setbacks which developed into aggression.

The alone environment is insufficient to explain how an individual gets so frustrated that they can take drastic measures like instigating his family into a fatal ritual. His inadequacies such as ill-health, lack of debonair and robustness as a businessman also led him to frustration. The majority of criminals are found to have had some kind of personal inadequacies, either physical or psychological. In the infamous 'Nibhaya Case' the main perpetrator was found to have a damaged limb and a broken marriage (Dixit, 2020). Chandrakant Jha, a serial killer in his statement revealed that he was unable to defend himself in a near-death experience. It left him with a massive scar across his chest (Sood, 2022). Obstruction due to deformities and disabilities are major sources of frustration in daily life. Such individual usually develops compensatory behaviour to deal with it. Freud called the mechanism 'catharsis' (1963). For some individuals unfortunately the mechanism manifests in an antisocial action.

Conflicts occur when the expression of motives faces interference. An approach-approach conflict is when there is a choice between two positive goals (Morgan, King, Weisz, & Schopler, 1993). Although this is the least frustrating causing conflict, especially among criminals yet we all know the phrase 'never to sail on two boats,

Avoidance- avoidance conflict is when there are two goals and both are negative and unavoidable (Morgan, King, Weisz, & Schopler, 1993). It is common when an individual cannot afford basic requirements

for living such as food, and shelter but also runs the risk of getting caught by police for stealing. These kind of conflicts are probably the most frustrating arising in nature and subsequently leads to a lot of aggression.

Multiple approach-avoidance conflicts are when several goals with both positive and negative outcomes lie ahead (Morgan, King, Weisz, & Schopler, 1993). In the case of Heinz's Dilemma if he had stolen the medicine he could save his wife's life but he would be committing a federal offence (Kohlberg, 1958). On the other hand, if he didn't steal the medicine he would lose his wife but would not have committed a crime. Life is usually met with these kinds of situations. Rational Choice Theory gives a logical solution-seeking behaviour in such a situation. It states that one commits a crime when he or she weighs the benefit of committing the crime to be more than the loss of it (Akers, 2011). For example, several studies show prison population increases during winters. A prisoner who was a vagabond finds the regular food, shelter and warmth of prison a benefit over living on the cold streets. They commit a petty crimes and surrender on purpose (Lama, 2019). Similar situations are found among some pregnant women. This highlights the fact that punishment is subjective to individuals. The modern correctional system must implement this factor for effective rehabilitation.

Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a skeleton for motivation psychology. This theory states that our behaviour is motivated by physiological and psychological needs. As one level of need is gratified a more complex higher level need is generated. Human needs or behaviour motive progress from basic to complex. This theory is originally devised to understand organizational behaviour and the general psychology of motivation (Maslow, 1958). Improvising with the support of Sutherland's statement regarding learning criminal behaviour, which states criminal behaviour is learned the same way one learns non-criminal behaviour (Sutherland, Cressey, & Luckenbill, 1992), we may apply the need hierarchy model to understand criminal motives as well.

Based on the model of the hierarchy of needs lies physiological needs; hunger, thirst and sex (Maslow, 1958). It is evident how hunger can drive an individual to commit a crime but it is interesting to know that thirst and unfulfilled sexual drive can also nourish criminal intentions. They cause disbalance in hormones and hyperthermia which causes aggression and irritability in humans. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century rarely do we come across situations where one faces such chronic hunger or thirst to alter the individual's biochemistry. The relation between lack of physiological need and aggression is more justified for lower primates and other animals than for humans living in a civilized society.

On the second level are safety needs. An individual whose physiological needs are satisfied is driven toward the security (Maslow, 1958). It is well established that insecurity in some form often causes crime. For example, no thief ever steals the bare minimum required for his survival. The additional amount is to put their insecurity to rest. Money and property is the most lucrative target for criminals driven by safety needs. From pickpockets to well-established CEOs who indulge in white-collar crimes money is a provider of security. Interestingly, an individual stealing money for safety needs often becomes a victim of a loop. They initially steal to feel secure but after possessing the illegal asset they feel unsafe. They fear others may get to know and complain. To ensure others don't do so, they need to gain their confidence by bribe or in kind. They

require more money to do either and end up stealing again. This goes on and if the loop is unbroken stealing may turn into a compulsion for the person.

The next level is belongingness need or needs to be loved (Maslow, 1958). Often parental disapproval or romantic rejection or betrayal are found to be the root cause of the development of an anti-social personality. For example, some men who are rejected by an attractive woman act out violently. Usually the aim for that feature in the woman which she takes pride in or which he desires. This may include defacing her with acid or threatening her chastity by molesting her. Recently a large number of false workplace harassment cases have also been registered with a similar motive. Parental rejection leads to more complicated personality deformation. It ingrains into the individual's personality and it is very difficult to trace thus rehabilitation is also tough. However, infamous cases which are either studied by forensic psychologists or documented in some form bring the parental relationship into the light. Serial killer Chandrakant Jha's acquaintances reveal the absence of his parents during his growth years (Sood, 2022).

On gratification of belongingness, need develops esteem need (Maslow, 1958). The desire to be respected and looked upon. In an example stated the earlier unsatisfied need for esteem could have been a motive behind the perpetrator of the Burari case. 'Esteem' is a subjective concept. To some it means having a good job, healthy family relations and peaceful neighbour relations, while others derive self-esteem from the ability to control and be feared. The latter motive gives birth to gang stars. It is easy to identify such a motive. Young adults who idolize gang leaders such as Dawood Ibrahim, Chhota Rajan or Lawrence Bishnoi show a sign of a high need for esteem. Such individuals may prove to be effective leaders if put on the right track but intervention must be at an early age.

Finally, highest on the hierarchy model comes self – actualization needs. Maslow defines self-actualization as motivation to attain one's complete potential. Such individuals are creative, autonomous, objective, accepting of themselves and concerned about humanity. Maslow identified Mahatma Gandhi to be a self-actualized (Maslow, 1958) but from a legal point of view, he disobeyed the government and served his time in prison as well. Much like the general population, an offender with the motive of self-actualization is extremely rare.

Undoubtedly the major criticisms of Maslow's need hierarchy model also apply to criminal motives as well. Maslow stated lower level needs must be satisfied to develop higher level needs. However, from the hunger strike by Mahatma Gandhi to a real-life Heinz dilemma case in Beirut where a sister robbed a bank to save her sister from cancer (CBS News, 2022). She put her need for love above her need for safety. A large number of exceptions can be found that defy Maslow's hierarchy in real-life (Winter, 2014).

Condensing and improvising Maslow's model Clayton Alderfer developed the ERG Theory. This theory consists of three types of motives; existence, relatedness and growth need. Alderfer states that an individual can be motivated by multiple levels of need at the same time and the importance of one type of need can exceed the other according to the situation. The most concrete and common are the existential needs followed by relatedness and growth needs. Existential needs are our physiological needs like hunger and thirst and our psychological needs like security. Relatedness is the need for love and relationships. Growth needs

are one's desire to reach their maximum potential (Alderfer, 1969). In congruence with this theory criminal motive is mostly derived from existential needs, like hunger, insecurity, rejection etc.

Few criminals have been studied to be biologically predisposed to excess aggression and insensitivity. Lack of empathy, remorse and excess aggression are traits of a psychopath. When exposed to an anti-social environment, these individuals easily take up crime (Gutmann, 2008). Brain structures mainly the prefrontal cortex and amygdala have been studied to be different among psychopaths (Pera-Guardiola, et al., 2016; Yand, Raine, Colletti, Toga, & Narr, 2010). A neurologist also suggests their endocrine-nervous system also functions differently (Laakso, et al., 2001). The drive theory that is generally applicable to basic needs like hunger in the general population seems to apply to psychopaths to some extent for explaining crime motives. Several criminals who may fall into this category like Chandrakant Jha (Sood, 2022), Surinder Koli (Vaidyanathan, 2014), and Cyanide Mohan (Varma, 2020) have confessed they feel a biological urge to commit the crime at an interval.

Optimal Level Theory states behaviour is motivated towards maintaining homeostasis. We drink water, eat, sleep, sweat, wear warm clothes, and procreate to maintain balance in our system (Morgan, King, Weisz, & Schopler, 1993). Psychopaths' motives toward crime also seem to function similarly. They have reported feeling internal arousal which could only be satisfied by committing a crime (Brogaard, 2019). The motivational cycle states that a 'drive' is initiated by bodily need and environmental stimulation which is goal-directed. When the goal is achieved the aroused state of the body due to the drive is relieved until the next time the body is aroused biologically or stimulated by an environmental cue. Then the cycle repeats. Such criminals are difficult to catch as they follow a pattern of crime they are usually so well practised they do not leave traces. They are also very proficient at what they do. They have a strong rationale for their action which makes rehabilitation difficult as well. Fortunately, their proportion in the population is very low. It must also be noted that people who are born with a biological predisposition to psychopathology usually require environmental nurturing to manifest the trait. However, the factors that cause the biological predisposition at a prenatal stage may be the environmental trigger as well. Environmental nurture here suggests the opportunity to learn anti-social behaviour, a triggering factor and producing the feeling of need for vengeance, justification for crime and reinforcement to continue.

Motivation has been studied from a different perspective by different psychologists, but it seems to be a complex and unique phenomenon for each individual. Biological, social and cognitive factors interplay and manifests in form of behaviour. Crime has been a social evil probably since the existence of the human race. Quite naturally crime and criminal behaviour is also dynamic and evolving. A linear model to define the motive behind a crime is unpractical and insufficient. In most cases, a multi-dimensional model usually functions. In this article, certain common examples like the Burari Death Case or Chandrakant Jha have been discussed under different theories. This itself states how different motives can interplay simultaneously in criminal behaviour. While some theories may explain how a factor may immediately have triggered the behaviour other theories state how chronic exposure to certain situations develops a motive eventually. It must also be considered that motives are subjective and unique to every individual. Two brothers who are raised in the same environment and have similar genetics, one may choose to work even for a minimum wage while

the other may start robbing. Understanding motive behind crime doesn't necessarily help predict criminal behaviour. However, it can be very useful in correctional setup. Mahatma Gandhi said 'Crime is the outcome of a diseased mind and jail must have an environment of a hospital for treatment and care' (1947). By identifying the motives that cause deviation correction programs can be planned for meaningful sentencing.

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