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PSYCHO-ANALYTIC THEORIES OF CRIME- PSYCHODYNAMIC APPROACH, BEHAVIORAL APPROACH TOWARDS CRIMINALITY, MENTAL DISORDER & CRIME [NEUROSIS & PSYCHOSIS]

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Abstract : In the field of Criminal Etiology, multiple factors contribute to the commission of criminal acts. These factors are not limited to individual aspects such as heredity, biological makeup, or mental health conditions; they also encompass broader social and environmental influences. This article explores the psychoanalytic theory of crime in conjunction with the behavioral approach, particularly focusing on how mental disorders—such as neurosis and psychosis—can lead to criminal behavior. Rooted in Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic framework, this theory suggests that criminal actions often stem from unconscious motivations, unresolved psychological conflicts, and formative childhood experiences. It aligns primarily with the typological school of criminology and stands in contrast to other explanatory models, such as positivism (organic deficiency theory), hereditary theory, mental deficiency theory, and the psychiatric school's emotional disturbance theory.

Keywords*: Psychoanalytical theory, mental illness, criminality, personality theory, psychiatric theory of criminal behavior.*

Introduction

According to Walter C. Reckless[1], *'Societies with lower rates of criminal activity are often characterized by isolation, low population density, limited social mobility and change, and a largely homogeneous population in terms of race and culture. These communities typically experience minimal institutional disorganization, exhibit low levels of class and social group differentiation, and follow a unified set of customs. A strong sense of social cohesion and high levels of internal control over individual behavior further contribute to maintaining order.'*

Understanding Psycho-analytical theory: This theory was originally developed by Sigmund Freud. Psychoanalysis, a distinct branch of psychiatry, focuses on personality theory and a specific model of the mind's structure. Freud's conceptualization of the mind comprising of the id, ego, and superego was later applied in the 20th century to explain criminal behavior. Building upon Freud's foundation, scholars such as Alfred Adler, David Abrahamsen, August Achiron, and Friedlander further expanded the psychoanalytic theory to deepen the understanding of criminal tendencies in human behavior.

David Abrahamsen[2] in 1952 explained crime in terms of an individual's resistance to tendencies and situations. He developed a formula: C= (T+S)/ R, where 'C' stands from Crime, 'T' for tendencies and 'S' stands for the situation, with 'R' representing resistance to impulses.

According to psychoanalytic theory, criminal behavior emerges when an individual possesses strong criminal tendencies coupled with a diminished capacity for internal resistance. David Abrahamsen[3] asserted that "*in*

[1] American criminologist, January 19, 1899 – September 20, 1988
[2] Norwegian forensic psychiatrist, June 23, 1903 – May 20, 2002
[3] Available at - https://scispace.com/pdf/violent-and-nonviolent-juvenile-offenders-an-assessment-of-

general, the causes of a child's delinquent behavior may be traced to the emotional attitudes of the parents toward the child's early instinctual expressions, as well as the manner in which the child's ego and superego develop." In essence, an individual's early life experiences play a pivotal role in shaping future behavior, particularly with respect to delinquency.

Psychoanalytic thought is grounded in three central propositions:

a. Human behavior is predominantly influenced by unconscious biological and psychological forces, such as drives or instincts.

b. Criminality arises from unresolved conflicts related to these fundamental drives.

c. Effective modification of undesirable or criminal behavior requires guiding the individual toward gaining insight into the unconscious origins of their responses, thereby fostering greater self-regulation and impulse control.

In a psychologically well-balanced individual, the *id, ego,* and *superego* operate in harmonious coordination. However, in cases involving neurotic or maladjusted individuals, this balance is disrupted. When the superego is underdeveloped or dysfunctional, repressed instincts may be released unchecked, potentially resulting in antisocial or criminal behavior.

Conflicts within the unconscious mind often generate intense feelings of guilt, which in turn produce a psychological need for punishment as a means of alleviating this guilt and re-establishing a moral equilibrium between good and evil. In such cases, the individual may engage in criminal behavior and, either consciously or unconsciously, leave evidence that facilitates detection and apprehension, thereby fulfilling the internal desire for punitive resolution.[4]

August Achiron[5] (1955: 30) was among the first scholars to apply Freud's psychoanalytic framework to the study of juvenile delinquency. He argued that anti-social behavior arises from the internal dynamics of conflicting psychic forces. Achiron identified various types of delinquents—some neurotic, some overtly aggressive and deficient in superego development, others lacking the capacity to repress instinctual impulses, and some exhibiting distorted or unmet needs for affection. Through psychoanalysis, therapists can uncover the unconscious motivations underlying such anti-social behavior and guide individuals toward socially acceptable conduct.

Alfred Adler[6], in the early twentieth century, offered a different psychoanalytic explanation of criminality, attributing it to an inferiority complex. According to Adler, individuals may engage in criminal behavior as a means of seeking attention, thereby compensating for their perceived inferiority. However, his theory has faced criticism, particularly from Hermann Mannheim[7], who argued that Adler overemphasized the rational dimension of human behavior and oversimplified the multifaceted causes of crime by reducing them to a few variables akin to a mathematical model.

Similarly, the claim that individuals commit crimes due to an unconscious desire for punishment—stemming from guilt—is not universally accepted. In some instances, individuals commit a crime, experience guilt, and are then punished, which may indeed offer psychological atonement. However, such post hoc interpretations challenge the predictive power of psychogenic theories.

Thus, several critiques have been raised against psychogenic explanations of criminal behavior—spanning *psychological*, *psychiatric*, and *psychoanalytic* models—highlighting their limitations in capturing the complexity of criminal motivation. These are :-

a) These theories exhibit methodological and scientific reasoning flaws. A central issue is the dualistic fallacy—the erroneous assumption that the population can be divided into two mutually exclusive categories: criminals and non-criminals, each exhibiting distinct and separable forms of behavior. In reality, criminal behavior is a subset of human behavior and cannot be rigidly distinguished from non-criminal actions in such binary terms.

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[4] George Vold, 1968: 93

[5] Austrian educator and psychoanalyst, July 27, 1878 – October 13, 1949

[6] Austrian medical doctor, psychotherapist, and founder of the school of individual psychology, February , 7, 1870-May , 28, 1937

[7] German Criminologist, 1889—1974 , Comparative Criminology, 1917: 331

b) The theoretical constructs—such as the id, ego, superego, and the unconscious—lack clear operational definitions, making empirical validation and systematic study difficult.

c) The use of projective techniques, such as free association or dream analysis, introduces significant subjectivity, as interpretations heavily rely on the analyst's personal judgment rather than standardized or replicable measures.

d) Much of the research supporting these theories is based on limited sample sizes and often lacks adequately matched control groups, thereby reducing the reliability and generalizability of the findings.

e) As long as the focus remains on the individual, the psychoanalytic approach cannot yield generalizable conclusions about broader behavioral patterns. Individualistic interpretations, while potentially insightful, are insufficient for forming valid generalizations applicable to larger populations.

Psychogenic theories of crime primarily attribute criminal behavior to internal personality defects or psychological dysfunctions within the individual. The psychological perspective emphasizes cognitive limitations, such as feeble-mindedness or a low Intelligence Quotient (IQ). The psychiatric approach focuses on the presence of mental disorders as contributing factors. Meanwhile, the psychoanalytic theory—rooted in Freudian thought—explores the role of an underdeveloped ego, unresolved internal drives and instincts, guilt feelings, and inferiority complexes in shaping criminal tendencies. Within this framework, the *id* represents the individual's primal instincts and desires, while the *superego* functions as the internalized moral conscience and source of normative pressure.

Mental Disorder & Criminality:- According to Siddique[8], offenders may be categorized based on their mental condition as either mentally normal or abnormal. Among those deemed abnormal, variations exist in both the degree and nature of their psychological disturbances, allowing for further sub-classification. These include psychotics, neurotics, psychopaths, and individuals with mental deficiencies. Psychotic offenders, in particular, can be further divided into two distinct categories: those with *organic psychoses*—stemming from identifiable physiological or neurological causes—and those with *functional psychoses*-where no clear organic basis is present.

a) Organic Psychotics and Nature of Crime:-

A. *General Paralyses of insane*, This condition is characterized by a progressive deterioration of behaviour. Initially, the individual may exhibit unusually open, inappropriate, or silly behaviour, which gradually worsens over time, potentially leading to criminal acts.
B. *Traumatic psychotics* Arising from accidental injuries, traumatic psychosis can result in heightened states of excitement or agitation. Such psychological disturbances may, in certain instances, contribute to criminal behaviour.
C. *Encephalitis Lathargica*, Commonly referred to as "*sleeping sickness*," this condition typically affects young children following episodes of high fever. It can result in neurological and behavioural abnormalities that may predispose individuals to deviant behaviour.
D. *Puerperal Insanity*, This form of mental disturbance occurs in the postnatal period and may be triggered by psychological stressors such as guilt related to early or illegitimate pregnancy, or socioeconomic hardship. Individuals suffering from this condition have been associated with offenses such as infanticide or minor theft.
E. *Epilepsy*, In some cases, epilepsy may be linked to sudden and uncontrollable emotional outbursts, including intense rage or aggression, which may result in the commission of violent or impulsive crimes.

William Healy[9], disagreeing with his colleagues stated that juvenile delinquency is caused by defective organism or anatomical factors, he emphasized personality defects and disorders or psychogenic traits as the cause of crime.

b) *Functional Psychosis and Nature of Crime:-*

A. *Paranoia*, In this condition, the individual may perceive themselves as being relentlessly persecuted by real or imagined enemies, leading them to believe that the only solution is to eliminate their perceived adversary.

[8] Available at - Ahmas Siddiqui, Criminology & penology 98 (Eastern Book Company, Lucknow 6th Edn, 2015)
[9] American psychiatrist and criminologist, January 20, 1869 – March 15, 1963

B. *Maniac Depression Psychosis,* Individuals with this disorder experience alternating periods of extreme elation, excitement, and deep depression. During episodes of mania, they may engage in behaviors such as petty theft or other minor crimes.
C. *Schizophrenia,* In cases of schizophrenia, the individual may withdraw from society, experiencing feelings of detachment and disconnection. This sense of alienation can contribute to the commission of serious and violent crimes.

Similarly, other types of mental disorders have been identified as potential causal factors of criminal behavior. It is important to note that legal and mental insanity can serve as a defense in the legal system; however, only certain types of insanity are recognized as valid defense. The burden of proof rests with the individual claiming such a defense. When evaluating mental disorders in relation to delinquency, studies estimate that only 1.5% to 2.0% of criminals are psychotic, with schizophrenia being the most prevalent condition among these offenders. [10]

Dollard's Frustration-aggression hypothesis[11]:- According to this hypothesis, aggressive behavior is a natural and predictable response to frustration. An individual experiences frustration when the achievement of a desired goal is obstructed. In such cases, the person may engage in aggressive behavior aimed at removing or destroying the source of frustration. In some instances, aggression may become self-sustaining, manifesting as pointless hostility or destructive tendencies. This hypothesis remains highly relevant in contemporary society, where frustration often drives individuals to engage in aggressive actions.

Freud, in his scapegoat theory, proposed that when a person is denied the satisfaction of their needs, they are likely to resort to aggression. However, the individual responsible for the frustration—often a figure of power, such as politicians—tends not to be the target of hostility. Instead, this aggression is redirected towards a scapegoat, typically an innocent and vulnerable group, such as ethnic minorities or lower castes. As the underlying cause of frustration remains unaddressed, the hostility continues to be perpetuated.

Thus, from a psychodynamic perspective, criminal behavior is viewed as a product of internal mental conflicts that result in dysfunctional, irrational, or socially unacceptable actions. Psychologists conceptualize crime as a learned behavior, acquired through an individual's interactions with others over time.

Statistics: Psychogenic traits are shaped by a range of life experiences, spanning from childhood to adulthood, and primarily stem from emotional interactions. Over time, these traits evolve into the core aspects of an individual's personality. In 1935, Healy and Bronner[12] articulated a theory based on case studies of 1,953 delinquents across three cities. They proposed that delinquency is purposive behavior that emerges when children experience frustration in their efforts to satisfy fundamental needs, such as the desire for secure social relationships both within and outside the family, the need for recognition, and the quest for autonomy, among others. Their study revealed that delinquents exhibited a higher frequency of personality defects and disorders, including issues such as illness, neuroses, food idiosyncrasies, dislike of school, and an excessive fondness for movies. Henry's explanation runs like this:

'Frustration experienced by an individual leads to emotional distress, and the restoration of personality equilibrium requires the alleviation of such discomfort. This pain is often mitigated through substitute behaviors, such as delinquent actions. To effectively treat the individual, a comprehensive assessment is necessary, encompassing physical, mental, sociological, and psychiatric evaluations. This approach represents the case study method at its most advanced form.'

A study conducted between 1931 and 1925 on 10,000 felons in New York revealed that only 1.5% were psychotic, 6.9% were neurotic-psychotic, 6.9% were psychopathic, and 2.4% were classified as feeble-minded. Similarly, Paul Schilder's[13] study in 1937 at New York found that 83.8% of offenders were psychologically normal. Additionally, Durham's[14] study of 500 male patients at an Illinois hospital indicated

[10] The individual Delinquent, 1915, a psychiatrist in Chicago
[11] (Dollard & Miller, 1939), Available at - https://www.simplypsychology.org/frustration-aggression-hypothesis.html
[12] Available at - https://open.bu.edu/bitstream/2144/7386/1/maladjustmentdel00daly.pdf
[13] Journal of criminal psychopathology, October, 1940: 152
[14] 1939 : 352-61

that schizophrenia played a negligible role in the causation of criminal behavior. Collectively, these studies suggest that the psychiatric theory of criminality is untenable.[15]

Other deficiencies, different from the serious methodological errors, have also been pointed out in Healy's researches:-

a) His samples were small and unrepresentative.
b) His terms were either not defined or vaguely defined, for example, *normal emotional control*, *good living conditions*, *stable home*, etc. How are these factors to be measured?
c) Research failed to explain why some children who had the traits believed to be characteristics of delinquents didn't become delinquents and why some children who didn't have those traits become delinquents.
d) They don't explain why one sibling becomes a delinquent and the other doesn't.

Therefore, conclusively, it is found that such psychiatric theory, psychoanalytical approach to criminal behavior, mental defects and infirmities leading to criminality and other psychodynamic theories stands rejected.

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[15] Bromberg and Thompson, 1939: 70-89