



CONSCIENTIOUSNESS: A RELEVANT PERSONALITY FACTOR IN CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR

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Introduction:

Crime is an act that is deemed by statute or by the common law to be a public wrong and is therefore punishable by the state in criminal proceedings. Some crimes are serious wrongs of a moral nature, others interfere with the smooth running of the society. Crime is a complex phenomenon of social economic, psychological, environmental and other unknown factors. Criminality clusters around three main three main functions or domains –the physical, the social and the psychological.

Theories of Crime:

Several theories have been put forward to explain how criminal behaviour develops individuals. That criminals are “born and not made” was put forward by **Cesare Lombroso**. His anthropological theory stated that the criminal could be distinguished from the non-criminal by the “stigmata”. In other words, physical abnormalities such as high cheekbones, a flattened nose, or long lower jaw, etc. would be found only in criminals (Sirohi, 1992).

Ferri stated that geographical, psychological, social and economic factors besides the anthropological factors were responsible for crime (Sirohi, 1992). He also classified criminals into five categories-

- a) Insane criminals
- b) Born criminals
- c) Habitual criminals
- d) Criminals by passion, and
- e) Occasional criminals

Modern sociological theories emphasize ecology and culture as factors of crime. Repaid growth in population, unemployment, social disorganization, etc. Are all linked to crime. Significant researchers who emphasized the ecological theory are Shaw McKay (1972).

Many writers on social have proclaimed that poverty is an evil in itself and



mother of all social evils. Poverty has been held to be mainly responsible for Anti-social conduct in our country. It is stated that unemployment, poor housing, lack of every day amenities, force the young members of the family to take to Anti-social activities. In a study it was found that 80% of the delinquency. Poverty is an important factor as it develops frustration, insecurity and hostility in the young offenders. A close relationship exists between poverty and delinquency, but poverty cannot be classed as a direct cause (Pathak, 1967).

Criminals are the product of social and economic maladjustments, arising out of economic poverty, destitution, undernourishment, illiteracy, slum dwelling, etc.. The occupation of the families affords a rough indication of the social and economic status. The psychological factors, such as emotional disturbance, frustration, intra-familial tensions do not singly affect an individual behaviour. The real factor seems to be inadequate or improper socialization rather than mental disturbance (Kaldate, 1982).

Sutherland and **Cressey** (1978) introduced the Differential Association Theory, which proposes that criminal behaviour is learned and not inherited. It is learned through verbal and non- verbal communication in intimate groups and not impersonal agencies of communication.

Social learning theory explains the phases of acquisition, performance and maintenance of criminal behaviour. The acquisition phase involves the situation in which the behaviour is first learnt. The major learning processes include classical and instrumental learning and people acquire new behaviour or lose existing ones. The consequences of behaviour over a series of occasions will determine the extent to which they are maintained or diminished.

The Strain Theory of **Merton** (1957) states that if a person is thwarted in his or her efforts to realize the goals that he desires by legitimate means, he or she may attempt and achieve them by illegal methods. Therefore, lower social class individuals are more likely to engage in criminal activity to obtain these rewards.

The Social Control Theory of **Hirschi** (1969) contends that criminal behaviour is the result of the failure of conventional social groups such as the family, school or pro-social peers to bind or bond with the individual. Man must learn not to offend and the criminal has failed to develop internalized prohibition against law-breaking behaviour. Attachment, commitment, involvement and belief are key elements in this theory. These theories are mostly sociological in nature.

A four-stage model of criminal development was outlined by **Walters** and **White**, (1989). They are pre-criminal, early, advanced criminal stages followed by the criminal burnout or maturational stage. The early life tasks take place during the first four or five years of life.

a) Pre-Criminal Stage:

A pre-criminal is normally a juvenile somewhere between the ages of 10



years and 18 years. Thrill-seeking is a salient motive for the criminal activities of persons at this stage of development. In this stage they engage in a relatively large number of criminal violations, the majority of arrests occurring during this stages are for nuisance, misdemeanor and status-type offences.

b) Early Criminal Stage:

The Early Criminal Stage extends from age 18 up through mid- to late twenties. In entering the early criminal stage, the individual has made the decision to continue acting in ways that are more indicative of an adolescent level of adjustment than an adult one (Walter & White, 1989). In this stage the number of crimes decreases and the severity of individual offenses climb.

c) Advanced Criminal Stages:

This advanced stage of criminal development normally spans from the late twenties to the early forties. The act of voluntarily dropping out of crime is probably at its lowest point during this stage. The antisocial behaviour appears driven and seemingly “out of control”.

d) Criminal Burnout / Maturation Stage:

The final stage of criminal development normally begins in the early forties. This stage signals a turning point in many criminal careers and brings with it a high rate of termination, from this lifestyle.

There are several theories that deal with psychological concepts. More important among them are Labeling Theory, Self Theories, Psychoanalytic Theory, Stimulation –seeking Theory and Rational Choice Theory.

The Labeling Theory states that when one is labeled as a criminal a negative chain of events is set into motion resulting in changes in the person’s self-concept. As a result the person is drawn to other deviants thus making the antisocial element appear to be more attractive.

The Self Theories have been put forward by several individuals (Walters, 1990) such as

- a) Wells
- b) Reckless, Dinitz and Murray,
- c) Cohen

They have emphasized that behavioural deviances stems from incongruence between the self- image and self-demands of aspirations and expectations.

The Psychoanalytic Theory states that criminality is part of man’s nature and is the result of being unable to control and sublimate antisocial drives and feelings.

Quay has proposed a theory of criminality based on the observation that many



crimes provide one with a sense of excitement and thrills (Walters, 1990).

The Rational Choice Theory of Cook points out that there are a variety of individual and personal factors that contribute to the complexity of the human decision-making process. The individual will consider and act on a criminal option only if the anticipated outcome exceeds that of not engaging in a particular criminal act. This means that the individual weighs various possibilities and selects the optimal solution.

In the field of crime certain person logical theories have been constructed. These theories suggest that criminals are almost a separate type of person from the rest of humanity. This has been found based largely on research conducted on long term prisoners whose 'disturbed personalities', may be result in their incarceration and not the cause.

According to **Eysenck** (1977) there is one dimension of personality, which has been called variously 'tough mindedness' as opposed to 'superego strength' but which we could call psychotics. The psychotic's cognitive processes are de-arranged, in greater or lesser degree, while the neurotic is usually in full possession of his mental faculties, but not in control of his emotions. There also appears an unduly large number of psychopaths, alcoholics and criminals: these would therefore appear to belong to the psychotic disorders. This appears to be True even when environmental influences appear to be ruled out. In a general terms we would expect persons with strong anti-social and criminal inclinations to be high in Psychoticism (P) high Extraversion (E) and high in Neuroticism (N) scores.

Some criminals for instance may not be anti- social in the common meaning of the term. Political prisoners are an obvious case. Homosexuality was a crime in England until recently, but is so no longer. Murderers tend to be introverted and repressed, until they suddenly break out of their shell. Also, there are certain quite large groups of criminal who are quite likely to be introverted rather than extraverted. For example there is a large group of people characterized by inadequate personality, rather dull and helps, who drift into crime not because they are anti-social complexities of modern life. These kind of people are lonely and their 'crimer' consist of smashing a shop-window, waiting to be arrested thus earning for themselves, a bed and some food, preferring prison and is comfort to the harsh actuality.

In spite of the relationship between personality and crime, we must take into consideration the objection that criminals are not a homogeneous group. In one such study of Eysenck, prisoners were specially selected by certain categories-offenders violent criminals, inadequate criminals and a "residual group". These groups differed noticeably in their scores on personality indicating that a particular direction of criminal activity is partly determined by personality.

Feldman, (1982) reports a study in which it was found that while some offenders suffer from marked psychological problems, most do not. The majority who are psychologically disturbed do not behave violently. No special link was found between



psychosis and violence. Rapists, according to the study, do not rape to obtain sexual gratification.

It appears that all offenders perhaps should not be grouped as one category, especially when trying to find out the personality characteristics of these groups. Greater clarity in concepts and definitions may be necessary.

1. **Crime:** is defined as omission which constitutes an offence and is punishable by law (New Oxford Dictionary of English, 1998). The Chamber's Twentieth Century Dictionary (1952) defines it as a violation of law especially if serious an act punishable by law.
2. **Criminal:** is a person who has committed an illegal act especially a serious one.
3. **Classification of Prisoners:**

Prisoners are generally classified on the bases of age, sex, mental health, nature of offence, whether habitual or casual etc. Casual prisoners are sub classified to (I) Star and (II) General and habitual into (1) Non-professionals and (2) Professionals. A casual prisoner is "one who is first offender and who lapses into crime not because he has a criminal mentality but on account of his surrounding, physical disability or mental deficiency". Casual prisoners, whose previous character was good, antecedents not criminal and whose crime does not indicate grave cruelty.

Non-professional habitual are those prisoners, who lapse into crime owing to their surroundings or some physical or mental defect, who are not first offenders. In the other sub category (Professional) are included all other habitual prisoners. For instance those who are men with an object, sound in mind and mostly sound in the body, often highly skilled who deliberately with eyes open prefer a life of crime and known the maneuvers necessary for that life.

Habitual Offenders:

Habitual are those who repeatedly commit crimes and earlier punishment is given to them do not make any deterrent or reformatory effect on them. According to **Dr. D.T. West**, habitual offenders may be either mentally normal human beings or mental durance.

According to Uttar Pradesh Habitual Offenders Restrictor Act, habitual offender means a person who before or after the commencement of the Act, has been sentenced to a substantive term of imprisonment, such sentence not having been set aside in appeal or revision or not less than three different occasions for any another of the offences set forth in the schedule which include offences under Chapter XII, XVI and XVII of the IPC.

The following study is to find out the relationship between personality and certain categories of prisoners.



Methodology:

Sample:

The sample consisted of forty prisoners housed in the Central Prison of Visakhapatnam. All of them were male prisoners. They belonged to two categories

- a) Repeated Offenders, and
- b) Hard core criminals

These prisoners were residents of different units such as **Kaveri, Pranahitha, Ganga, Snehasarovar and Narmada.**

The ages of the prisoners ranged from 19 years to 66 years. The number of convictions of these prisoners varied from at least one to more than eight times.

The tests used:

To assess the personality a personality questionnaire, namely the **NEO-PIR** was used. It was administered individually by the investigator to all the prisoners. The Telugu version of the questionnaire was given. Each question was read out to the prisoner. The prisoner was given several options in responding to the questions. The options were “Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree and Strongly Agree”. Only one response to each item can be given Altogether 240 items were administered to the prisoners.

Besides this, information on some socio-demographic factors was taken from the prisoners. The information that was taken included the age, socio-economic status, educational level, rural/urban – residence, caste, religion, position in the family, family occupation, number of convictions and number of under trials.

Procedure:

Prior permission was taken from Mr.Sainath Reddy, Superintendent of Central Prison, Visakhapatnam to collect the data from the prisoners. The investigator was given prior training on how the questionnaire is to be administered to the prisoners. The data was collected on a one-to-one basis. Any doubts of the prisoners were clarified by the investigator. Only the Repeated Offenders and Hard-core Criminals were tested. The socio-demographic information also was collected from the prisoner.

Analyses:

The socio-demographic information was tabulated separately for Repeated Offenders and Hard-core Criminals. The frequency data was converted into percentages.

Of the several personality dimensions of the **NEO-PIR**, only one personality dimension was selected for analysis. The Means and Standard Deviations were computed. The Means of the Repeated Offenders and Hard-core Criminals were



compared. This analysis is discussed in the result section.

Results & Discussion:

The results are discussed in two sections namely Socio-Demographic Factors of Criminals and the Personality characteristics of Criminals.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics:

The data was analysed for several socio-demographic characteristics of criminals. They were

- a) Socio-economic status
- b) Educational level
- c) Rural / Urban Residence
- d) Birth position in the family
- e) Caste
- f) Religion and
- g) Occupation

a) Socio-economic status:

The socio-economic status of criminals is given in Table-1. The frequency and percentage of prisoners in the lower, middle & upper socio-economic status is given separately for repeated offenders and hard-core criminals.

Table -1
Socio-Economic Status of Repeated Offenders and Hard-core Criminals

Socio-Economic Status	Repeated Offenders		Hard-core Criminals	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1.Low	9	45%	7	35%
2.Middle	10	50%	12	60%
3.Upper	1	5%	20	100%
Total	20	100%	20	100%

From the table it is observed that 50% of the repeated offenders come from the middle class and 45% from the lower class, very few come from the upper class. Similarly, in among the hard core criminals it is observed that 60% from the middle class while 35% come from the lower class. From these results we can conclude that most of the criminals come from the lower & middle classes.

b) Educational level:

The Educational level of the criminal is also a significant factor in their behaviour. These results are given in Table -2.



Table -2
Educational Level of Repeated Offenders and Hard-core Criminals

Educational Level	Repeated Offenders		Hard-core Criminals	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1. Illiterates	6	30%	1	5%
2. Below 10 th class	13	65%	7	35%
3. Above 10 th class	1	5%	12	60%
Total	20	100	20	100

It is observed that in the case of repeated offenders that 65% are those who have not completed the 10th class while the other 30% are total illiterates. Surprisingly the results on the hard-core criminals are quite different. Sixty percent of the hard-core criminals were those who had studied beyond the 10th class. Thirty five percent had studied below the 10th class. There fore it appears that the nature of the crime may have some relationship with the level of education.

Hard-core criminals are usually convicted for murder, edacity, rape and serious offences. Such offences require planning, knowledge etc. all of, which can be obtained by education. On the other hand repeated offenders who are usually involved in less serious offences such as pick pocketing, fights, thefts etc. may not require a high level of education for executing this offences.

c) Residence:

In Table -3 the residence of the criminals is analyzed for these two groups. In the case of repeated offenders a larger percentage, namely 60% come from rural background while the other 40% come from the urban background. These results are given below in Table -3.

Table - 3
Rural / Urban – Residence of Repeated Offenders and Hard-core Criminals

Residence	Repeated Offenders		Hard-core Criminals	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1. Rural	12	60%	9	45%
2. Urban	8	40%	11	55%
Total	20	100%	20	100%

In the case of hard core criminals it is observed that they come from both rural and urban background in all most equal ratios.

d) Birth Position in the family:

The question of whether birth position in the family is important in producing a criminal was also analyzed. The results are given in Table -4.

Table - 4
Birth Position in the Family of Repeated Offenders and Hard-core Criminals

Birth Position in the family	Repeated Offenders		Hard-core Criminals	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1. First Born	6	30%	7	35%
2. Middle Born	7	35%	10	50%
3. Last Born	7	35%	3	15%
Total	20	100%	20	100%



The criminals were classified as first born, middle born or last born. Middle born includes all birth positions other than first and last. In the case of repeated offenders there is an almost equal distribution of first, middle and last-born criminals. However, in the case of hard-core criminal's at least 50% were middle born children. The next largest category is the first born children. Very few last born were hard core criminals.

e) Caste:

The possibility of caste factor being related to criminal behaviour was analyzed. The results are given in Table – 5.

Table – 5
Caste of Repeated Offenders and Hard –core Criminals

Caste	Repeated Offenders		Hard-core Criminals	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1.OC	5	25%	7	35%
2.BC	10	50%	10	50%
3.SC / ST	5	25%	3	15%
Total	20	100	20	100%

The castes were broadly classified as Other Caste (OC), Backward Caste (BC) and Schedule Caste / Schedule Tribe (SC / ST).

In the case of repeated offenders BC's were found to be the predominant caste among the repeated offenders. A similar finding is also seen in the case of hard core criminals. The other 50% of the repeated offenders come equally from the OC's and SC's / ST's. However in the case of the hard core criminals a large percentage come from the OC's. Very few come from the SC's / ST's caste.

f) Religion:

The religion of the criminals was also taken to find out if religion has anything to do with criminal behaviour.

Table – 6
Religion of Repeated Criminals and Hard –core Criminals

Religion	Repeated Criminals		Hard-core Criminals	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1.Hindu	15	75%	15	75%
2.Christian	5	25%	4	20%
3.Muslim	-	-	1	5%
Total	20	100%	20	100%

Seventy-five percent of criminals, whether they are repeated offenders or hard-core criminals are from Hindu religious background. Twenty percent come from the Christian background. Only 5% come from Muslim background.

g) Occupation:

The Occupation of the criminal was categorized as Employees, Agricultural or Business. These results are given in Table -7.



Table – 7
Occupation of Repeated Offenders and Hard-core Criminals

Occupation	Repeated Offenders		Hard-core Criminals	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1.Employee	4	20%	8	40%
2.Agriculture	12	60%	6	30%
3.Business	4	20%	6	30%
Total	20	100%	20	100%

From the results it is observed for most of the repeated offenders, belonged to the Agricultural occupation category. The remaining 40% were divided equally between the Business and Employee categories.

In the case of hard-core criminals it is observed that 40% were Employees, while the other 60% were divided equally among the Agriculture and Business category.

From these results, the profile of the repeated offenders seems to be somewhat different from the hardcore criminals in terms of socio-demographic characteristics.

The repeated offenders come typically from a middle or low class and most likely have not completed 10th class in education. His background is most likely like rural coming from the background class and perhaps most likely Hindu in religion. His rural background mostly indicates his occupation is agricultural. He could be either first born, middle or last born indicating birth order does not seem to play a role.

The hard-core criminals are likely to come from a middle class background and most probably had education beyond the 10th class. He could be either from rural or urban background. His caste is mostly likely to be background and religion to be Hindu. It also appears that he is an Employee rather than being in business or doing agriculture. Most of the hard-core criminals seem to be middle born children.

h) Personality:

The control of impulses is an important aspect of the personality of the criminal. Conscientiousness is a personality dimension that deals with the ability to resist impulses and temptations. It also includes the active process of planning, organizing and carrying out tasks. This dimension includes several sub categories such as competence, order, Dutifulness, achievement striving and self-discipline.



Table – 8
Conscientiousness: Means & Standard Deviations of Repeated Offenders and Hard-core Criminals

	Personality Dimensions	Repeated offenders		Hard-core Criminals
		Mean	S.D	
C 1	Competence	Mean	17.50	19.40
		S.D	3.91	4.61
C2	Order	Mean	16.45	12.55
		S.D	3.08	5.59
C3	Dutifulness	Mean	15.5	19.15
		S.D	3.34	2.81
C4	Achievement Striving	Mean	16.90	15.35
		S.D	4.76	3.69
C5	Self Discipline	Mean	16.85	21.90
		S.D	3.96	3.16
C6	Deliberation	Mean	16.0	17.95
		S.D	4.53	4.12
C7	Conscientiousness	Mean	99.15	105.70
		S.D	10.58	9.38

The means on conscientiousness obtained by repeated offenders and hard-core criminals is much lower than the score expected by the normal male. This means that the capacity to control impulses and resist temptations is much lower than normal. Hence they resort to crime. The Repeated Offender has an even poorer capacity to resist his impulses compared to the Hard-Core Criminal.

From the subcategories it is observed in the Repeated Offender that only in the characteristics of Order and Deliberation. They are like the average male. In all other characteristics such as competence, dutifulness, achievement striving and self-discipline they have lower scores than average male. This means that the Repeated Offender feels and accepts that his abilities are poor and is ill-prepared to deal with life. They do not adhere to ethical principles, and are undependable and unreliable. They lack ambition and seem aim less and are perfectly content with low levels of achievement. Their self-discipline is also very poor indicating poor self-control. They cannot resist doing things impulsively and have no motivation.

The hard-core criminal has a slightly different set of personality characteristics. The hard-core criminal has better self-discipline and self-control and is not so impulsive and he also does not act spontaneously. He is more continues in his approach than the repeated offender. However, like the repeated offender, he feels that his abilities are poor and that he is unprepared to deal with life. They are more unorganized and unmethodical than repeated offenders. They are also undependable and unreliable. Lack of ambition and aimlessness are other characteristics that they share with the repeated offenders.

Thus the personality characteristic of conscientiousness manifests itself differently



in different types of criminals.

Conclusion

Some socio-demographic factor like place of residence, religion, caste, birth position in the family, occupation etc., seems to be relevant to criminal behaviour. Conscientiousness at higher level consists of many variables like competence, order, dutifulness, achievements, striving and self-discipline. Conscientiousness is a personality dimension that deals with the ability to resist impulses and temptations.

The Repeated Offender has an even poorer capacity to resist his impulses compared to the hard-core criminal. This study concludes that Repeated Offender feels and accepts that his abilities are poor and is ill prepared to deal with life. The hard-core criminal has better self-discipline and self-control than Repeated Offenders. Hard-core criminals are more unorganized and unmethodical than Repeated Offenders. Thus the personality characteristic conscientiousness share other characteristics such as aimlessness and lack of ambition.

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