

The relationship of criminology to various other disciplines.

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Abstract

Viewed from a legal perspective, the term crime refers to individual criminal actions and the societal response to those actions. By comparison, the field of criminology incorporates and examines broader knowledge about crime and criminals. For example, criminologists have attempted to understand why some people are more or less likely to engage in criminal or delinquent behaviour.

Keywords: Criminal actions, Criminology, Delinquent behaviour.

Introduction

Criminologists have also examined and attempted to explain differences in crime rates and the criminal code between societies and changes in rates and laws over time. Many criminologists consider themselves to be neutral public policy experts, gathering facts for various governmental officials responsible for drawing policy conclusions. However, some criminologists—like their counterparts in such fields as the atomic and nuclear sciences—maintain that scientists must shoulder responsibility for the moral and political consequences of their research. Thus, some criminologists have actively campaigned against capital punishment and have advocated in favour of various legal reforms [1].

Criminologists who oppose this activist role contend that the findings of criminological research must be weighed along with political, social, religious, and moral arguments, a task best left to political bodies. Not denying the right of criminologists to express their opinions as ordinary citizens and voters, this view nonetheless maintains that a government by popular will is less dangerous than a government by experts. In the last decades of the 20th century, criminology grew to encompass a number of specialized study areas [2].

One of these was criminalistics, or scientific crime detection, which involves such measures as photography, toxicology, fingerprint study, and DNA evidence. It had previously been excluded from criminology because of its focus on particular criminal actions rather than on the broader knowledge about crime and criminals [3]. Criminology further expanded its reach by devoting significant attention to victimology, or the study of the victims of crime, the relationships between victims and criminals, and the role of victims in the criminal events themselves. Criminal justice has also emerged as a separate but closely related academic field, focusing on the structure and functioning of criminal justice agencies including the police, courts, corrections, and juvenile agencies—rather than on explanations of crime[4].

The most common data used in criminological research are official statistics, which are collected as part of the operation of criminal justice agencies. For example, police collect data on the crimes they know about and on the people they arrest for committing those crimes; courts collect data on the cases that are brought to them and on the outcomes of those cases, including convictions; and prisons and jails, as well as probation and parole agencies, collect data on the people under their jurisdiction. In all cases the usefulness of official criminal statistics depends on human factors such as the willingness of private individuals to report criminal events to the police, of the police to officially respond to the criminal event, and of court officials to prosecute the case. Because these decisions depend on a variety of factors—including whether the criminal laws at issue are popular or unpopular, whether the criminal event occurs in a high-crime or low-crime area, and whether the victim or offender is a member of a minority group—they are not very reliable as a measure of the amount of crime in a society or of changes in the amount of crime over time.

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