

Introduction to Criminology

Introduction to Criminology – Study Notes

1. What Is Criminology?

Aspect	Description
Definition	The scientific study of crime, criminal behavior, and the social response to crime.
Goal	Explain why crimes occur, how societies control them, and how the criminal justice system can be improved.
Scope	Interdisciplinary: draws on sociology, psychology, law, anthropology, economics, biology, and public policy.
Key Question	<i>What causes crime and how can it be prevented?</i>

2. Historical Development

Period	Major Thinkers / Contributions
Classical Era (18th? c.)	Cesare Beccaria , <i>On Crimes and Punishments</i> – rational choice, free will, proportionate punishment.
Positivist Era (19th? c.)	Cesare Lombroso – biological determinism (“born criminals”). Enrico Ferri , Raffaele Garofalo – social and psychological factors.
Sociological Turn (Early 20th?c.)	Émile Durkheim – crime as a normal, functional part of society. Robert K. Merton – strain theory (anomie).
Mid?20th?c.	Edwin Sutherland – differential association. Travis Hirschi – social control theory.
Late 20th?c.–Present	Labeling theory, routine?activity theory, life?course criminology, critical/criminal justice studies, neuroscience & genetics.

3. Core Concepts & Terminology

Concept	Meaning	Example
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Crime	Act that violates a law and is punishable by the state.	Theft, assault, cyber?fraud.
Deviance	Behavior that diverges from social norms (may or may not be illegal).	Wearing unconventional clothing.
Criminal	Person who commits a crime (as defined legally).	Convicted burglar.
Victimology	Study of victims, their characteristics, and their relationship to offenders.	Patterns of domestic?violence victims.
Recidivism	Re?offending after a previous conviction.	Re?arrest within two years of release.
Social Control	Mechanisms (formal & informal) that regulate behavior.	Laws, family expectations, peer pressure.
Labeling	The process by which society tags individuals as “criminals,” influencing self?identity.	A teen labeled a “troublemaker” after a minor infraction.
Routine Activity Theory	Crime occurs when a motivated offender, suitable target, and lack of capable guardian converge.	A car left unlocked in a deserted parking lot.

4. Major Theoretical Perspectives

Perspective	Core Idea	Key Proponents	Typical Focus
Classical	Humans are rational actors weighing costs/benefits.	Beccaria, Bentham	Deterrence, punishment severity.
Biological/Physiological	Genetic, neurological, or physiological traits predispose individuals to crime.	Lombroso, Eysenck, Raine	Brain imaging, twin studies.
Psychological	Personality traits, learning, and mental processes shape criminal behavior.	Freud, Bandura, Mischel	Aggression, impulsivity, conditioning.