

PSYCHIATRIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS IN CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR: A CLINICAL CRIMINOLOGY PERSPECTIVE

¹Hitesh Verma, ²Dr. Suman Paliwal

¹²Jagannath University

¹hellohiteshverma@gmail.com

Abstract—Criminal behaviour is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by biological, psychological, psychiatric, environmental, and social factors. Clinical criminology focuses on understanding criminal conduct through psychological and psychiatric assessment of offenders. This research examines the psychiatric and psychological determinants that contribute to criminal behaviour, including personality disorders, psychopathy, schizophrenia, depression, substance abuse, trauma, cognitive distortions, impulsivity, and emotional instability. The study also evaluates the role of neurobiological abnormalities and psychosocial influences in shaping antisocial and violent behaviour. Modern criminological research suggests that criminality cannot be explained solely through social conditions; rather, mental disorders, maladaptive personality traits, impaired cognition, and emotional dysregulation significantly increase the risk of offending. The paper further discusses forensic psychiatric assessment, rehabilitation, and treatment approaches aimed at reducing recidivism. A clinical criminology perspective helps in understanding offenders not merely as lawbreakers but as individuals influenced by complex psychological and psychiatric conditions.

Index Terms—Clinical Criminology, Criminal Behaviour, Psychiatry, Psychology, Mental Disorders, Psychopathy, Antisocial Personality Disorder, Schizophrenia, Aggression, Impulsivity, Cognitive Distortions, Substance Abuse, Forensic Psychiatry, Neurocriminology, Rehabilitation, Violent Crime, Psychological Factors, Psychiatric Factors, Criminal Psychology, Offender Behaviour

I. Introduction

Crime is a universal social phenomenon that has existed in every civilization since ancient times. Different societies and legal systems have attempted to understand the causes of criminal behaviour through various approaches including sociological, biological, psychological, and psychiatric perspectives. Traditional criminology primarily focused on external social factors such as poverty, unemployment, inequality, broken families, and peer influence as the principal causes of crime. However, modern criminological studies have increasingly emphasized the importance of psychiatric and psychological factors in understanding criminal conduct. Clinical criminology emerged as an interdisciplinary field that studies criminal behaviour through psychological, psychiatric, and medical analysis of offenders.¹

Psychiatric and psychological factors play a significant role in influencing human behaviour, emotional control, decision-making, aggression, and social interaction. Mental disorders such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, antisocial personality disorder, depression, and substance abuse disorders are frequently associated with criminal and violent behaviour under certain circumstances. Similarly, psychological traits

such as impulsivity, aggression, emotional instability, low self-control, cognitive distortions, and childhood trauma contribute substantially to antisocial and criminal conduct.² Clinical criminology seeks to examine how these mental and emotional abnormalities interact with environmental and social conditions to shape criminal behaviour.

The relationship between mental illness and crime has long been debated among criminologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, and legal scholars. Although mental illness alone does not automatically lead to criminality, certain psychiatric conditions may impair judgment, distort perception of reality, and reduce behavioural control, thereby increasing the likelihood of offending behaviour. For instance, individuals suffering from psychotic disorders may commit crimes under the influence of hallucinations or delusions, while those with antisocial personality disorder often display chronic disregard for laws and social norms.³ Psychological abnormalities may also affect moral reasoning, empathy, and emotional regulation, resulting in violent or deviant conduct.

Clinical criminology adopts a biopsychosocial approach in explaining criminal behaviour. This approach recognizes that crime results from the interaction of biological vulnerabilities, psychological characteristics, psychiatric disorders, and social influences. Neurobiological research has demonstrated that abnormalities in brain functioning, hormonal imbalance, and genetic predispositions may contribute to aggression, impulsivity, and violent tendencies.⁴ At the same time, adverse environmental conditions such as childhood abuse, neglect, poverty, substance abuse, and exposure to violence significantly influence personality development and criminal behaviour.

The importance of studying psychiatric and psychological factors in criminal behaviour has increased considerably in the modern criminal justice system. Courts frequently rely on forensic psychiatric assessments to determine criminal responsibility, competency to stand trial, insanity defence, and risk of future violence. Mental health professionals play a vital role in evaluating offenders and recommending treatment or rehabilitation programs. Contemporary criminal justice systems increasingly recognize that punishment alone may not effectively prevent recidivism unless underlying psychiatric and psychological issues are addressed through proper treatment and rehabilitation.⁵

This research aims to examine the major psychiatric and psychological factors associated with criminal behaviour from a clinical criminology perspective. It analyzes various mental disorders, personality traits, emotional disturbances, cognitive processes, and neurobiological influences that contribute to offending behaviour. The study also explores the role of forensic psychiatry, risk assessment, and rehabilitation in managing criminal offenders. By understanding the psychological and psychiatric dimensions of crime, society and legal institutions can develop more effective preventive and rehabilitative strategies while balancing public safety and human rights.

II. UNDERSTANDING PSYCHIATRIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS IN CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR: A CLINICAL CRIMINOLOGY PERSPECTIVE

Clinical criminology is an interdisciplinary branch of criminology that studies criminal behaviour through psychiatric, psychological, biological, and behavioural perspectives. It focuses on understanding the mental condition, personality structure, emotional functioning, and behavioural patterns of offenders. Unlike traditional criminology, which primarily emphasizes social and environmental causes of crime, clinical criminology examines the internal psychological and psychiatric conditions that may influence criminal conduct.¹

Psychiatric and psychological factors play a crucial role in shaping human behaviour, emotional responses, and decision-making abilities. Mental disorders, personality abnormalities, emotional disturbances, and cognitive impairments may significantly affect an individual's ability to control impulses, distinguish right from wrong, and adapt to social norms. Criminal behaviour often emerges from the interaction between these internal psychological conditions and external environmental influences such as poverty, abuse, peer pressure, family instability, and social deprivation.²

One of the most significant psychiatric conditions associated with criminal behaviour is Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD). Individuals suffering from ASPD typically display persistent patterns of deceitfulness, aggression, irresponsibility, impulsivity, and disregard for social rules and the rights of others. They often lack guilt or remorse for their actions and may repeatedly engage in unlawful conduct. Clinical studies suggest that a large proportion of habitual offenders and violent criminals exhibit antisocial personality traits.³ Closely related to ASPD is psychopathy, which is characterized by superficial charm, manipulation, emotional coldness, and absence of empathy. Psychopathic offenders are often involved in violent crimes, serial offences, and organized criminal activities.

Another important psychiatric factor linked to criminal behaviour is schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders. Schizophrenia is a severe mental illness involving hallucinations, delusions, disorganized thinking, and impaired perception of reality. Although most individuals with schizophrenia are not violent, untreated psychosis combined with substance abuse may increase the risk of aggressive or criminal behaviour. Certain offenders may commit violent acts under paranoid delusions or command hallucinations that distort their understanding of reality.⁴ In such cases, psychiatric evaluation becomes important for determining criminal responsibility and the applicability of the insanity defence.

Substance abuse disorders also have a strong connection with criminality. Alcohol and drugs impair judgment, reduce self-control, and increase impulsive and aggressive behaviour. Crimes such as assault, domestic violence, theft, rape, and homicide are frequently associated with intoxication or drug dependence. Substance abuse not only contributes directly to violent conduct but also indirectly increases criminal involvement through financial desperation, social disintegration, and association with criminal

groups.⁵

Psychological factors are equally important in understanding criminal behaviour. Aggression, impulsivity, emotional instability, low self-control, and cognitive distortions are common characteristics observed among offenders. Psychological theories suggest that individuals with poor impulse regulation and weak emotional control are more likely to engage in criminal activities. Cognitive distortions such as blaming the victim, denial of responsibility, and minimization of harm allow offenders to justify their unlawful behaviour and avoid feelings of guilt.⁶

Childhood trauma and adverse childhood experiences are among the strongest psychological predictors of later criminality. Physical abuse, emotional neglect, sexual violence, broken families, and exposure to domestic violence may severely affect personality development and emotional stability. Children exposed to chronic trauma often develop aggressive behaviour, conduct disorders, attachment problems, and antisocial tendencies. Social learning theory also suggests that repeated exposure to violence normalizes aggressive behaviour and increases the likelihood of criminal conduct in adulthood.⁷

Modern research in neurocriminology further highlights the role of biological and neurological abnormalities in criminal behaviour. Brain imaging studies have shown that dysfunction in the prefrontal cortex, amygdala, and limbic system may impair emotional regulation, empathy, decision-making, and impulse control. Neurochemical imbalances involving serotonin, dopamine, and cortisol have also been associated with aggression and violent tendencies.⁸ However, biological predispositions alone do not determine criminality; environmental and psychological influences remain equally important.

III. CONCEPT OF PSYCHIATRIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS IN CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR: A CLINICAL CRIMINOLOGY PERSPECTIVE

The concept of psychiatric and psychological factors in criminal behaviour is an important area of study within clinical criminology. It focuses on understanding how mental disorders, personality traits, emotional disturbances, cognitive processes, and behavioural abnormalities influence an individual's tendency to engage in criminal conduct. Clinical criminology examines crime not merely as a legal violation but as behaviour that may be associated with underlying psychiatric conditions, psychological conflicts, emotional instability, or maladaptive personality development.

Psychiatric factors refer to mental illnesses and clinical disorders that affect a person's thinking, emotions, perception, and behaviour. These disorders may impair judgment, weaken impulse control, distort perception of reality, and reduce an individual's ability to conform to social and legal norms. Conditions such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression, substance use disorder, antisocial personality disorder, and psychopathy are frequently studied in relation to criminal behaviour. Clinical criminologists attempt to

understand whether such mental disorders directly or indirectly contribute to aggression, violence, impulsive acts, or other criminal activities.

Psychological factors, on the other hand, relate to behavioural tendencies, emotional functioning, personality characteristics, attitudes, and cognitive processes that shape human conduct. Psychological influences such as aggression, frustration, impulsivity, low self-control, emotional instability, cognitive distortions, and lack of empathy are often associated with criminal behaviour. Psychological theories suggest that criminal conduct may develop through learned behaviour, unresolved emotional conflicts, traumatic experiences, or defective personality development.

The clinical criminology perspective emphasizes that criminal behaviour is usually the result of multiple interacting factors rather than a single cause. It adopts a biopsychosocial approach, according to which biological predispositions, psychiatric disorders, psychological abnormalities, and environmental influences together contribute to criminality. For example, an individual with aggressive personality traits and childhood trauma may become more vulnerable to criminal behaviour when exposed to poverty, violence, substance abuse, or negative peer influence.

IV. PSYCHIATRIC FACTORS IN CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR

Psychiatric factors play a significant role in understanding criminal behaviour from the perspective of clinical criminology. Psychiatry studies mental disorders, emotional disturbances, behavioural abnormalities, and cognitive impairments that may influence human conduct. Certain psychiatric conditions may impair judgment, reduce impulse control, distort perception of reality, and increase aggressive or antisocial tendencies. Although mental illness alone does not necessarily lead to criminality, psychiatric disorders may increase the risk of offending behaviour when combined with social, environmental, and psychological influences.¹

One of the most important psychiatric conditions associated with criminal behaviour is Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD). Individuals suffering from ASPD exhibit persistent patterns of deceitfulness, impulsivity, aggression, irresponsibility, and disregard for social norms and the rights of others. They frequently engage in unlawful activities without feelings of guilt or remorse. Clinical studies have shown that a significant proportion of habitual offenders and violent criminals possess antisocial personality traits.² Such individuals often display manipulative behaviour, emotional insensitivity, and a tendency toward repeated criminal acts.

Psychopathy is another major psychiatric factor related to criminal conduct. Psychopathy is considered a severe form of antisocial personality characterized by superficial charm, emotional coldness, lack of empathy, manipulation, and absence of remorse. Psychopathic offenders are commonly associated with violent crimes, serial offences, organized criminal activities, and recidivism.³ Unlike ordinary offenders, psychopaths often commit crimes in a calculated and unemotional manner. Their inability to experience guilt or emotional attachment makes rehabilitation particularly difficult.

Schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders are also important psychiatric factors in criminal behaviour. Schizophrenia is a serious mental disorder involving hallucinations, delusions, disorganized thinking, and impaired perception of reality. Most individuals with schizophrenia are not violent; however, untreated psychosis combined with substance abuse or extreme stress may increase the likelihood of violent behaviour.⁴ Some offenders commit crimes under the influence of paranoid delusions or command hallucinations that distort their understanding of reality. In such cases, forensic psychiatric evaluation becomes essential in determining criminal responsibility and the applicability of the insanity defence.

V. CHALLENGES IN CLINICAL CRIMINOLOGY

Clinical criminology plays an important role in understanding criminal behaviour through psychiatric, psychological, biological, and behavioural perspectives. It contributes significantly to offender assessment, rehabilitation, and criminal justice administration. However, despite its growing importance, clinical criminology faces several practical, ethical, legal, and scientific challenges. These challenges affect the accuracy of psychiatric evaluation, treatment of offenders, prediction of violent behaviour, and implementation of rehabilitation programs within criminal justice systems.

One of the major challenges in clinical criminology is the difficulty in establishing a clear relationship between mental illness and criminal behaviour. Although certain psychiatric disorders are associated with aggression or antisocial tendencies, most individuals suffering from mental illness are not criminals. Similarly, many offenders do not suffer from psychiatric disorders. Overgeneralizing the connection between mental illness and crime may lead to social stigma, discrimination, and negative stereotypes against psychiatric patients. Clinical criminologists must therefore carefully distinguish between mental illness as a contributing factor and mental illness as a direct cause of crime.

Another major challenge is the accurate diagnosis of psychiatric and psychological disorders among offenders. Criminals may exaggerate, conceal, or manipulate symptoms during psychiatric evaluation to avoid punishment or gain legal advantages such as the insanity defence. Some offenders pretend to suffer from mental illness, a phenomenon known as malingering, which creates difficulties for forensic psychiatrists and psychologists. Differentiating genuine psychiatric disorders from fabricated symptoms requires specialized assessment methods and professional expertise.

Predicting violent and criminal behaviour is also one of the most difficult challenges in clinical criminology. Although psychiatric assessments and psychological risk evaluations can identify potential risk factors, accurately predicting future violent acts remains uncertain. Human behaviour is influenced by numerous biological, psychological, social, and environmental variables that cannot always be measured precisely. False predictions may lead either to unnecessary restrictions on individuals or failure to prevent dangerous conduct.

VI. REHABILITATION AND TREATMENT

Rehabilitation and treatment are essential components of clinical criminology and modern criminal justice systems. Unlike traditional punitive approaches that focus primarily on punishment, clinical criminology emphasizes understanding the psychological and psychiatric causes of criminal behaviour and addressing them through scientific treatment and rehabilitation programs. The main objective of rehabilitation is to reform offenders, reduce recidivism, improve mental health, and facilitate successful reintegration into society.

Clinical criminology recognizes that many offenders suffer from psychiatric disorders, emotional disturbances, personality abnormalities, substance abuse problems, or maladaptive behavioural patterns that contribute to criminal conduct. Merely punishing such individuals without addressing the underlying causes of their behaviour often fails to prevent future offending. Therefore, rehabilitation aims to identify and treat the psychological, emotional, and psychiatric factors associated with criminality.

VII. CONCLUSION

Psychiatric and psychological factors play a crucial role in understanding criminal behaviour from the perspective of clinical criminology. Criminal conduct cannot be explained solely through social or economic conditions, as human behaviour is deeply influenced by mental health, emotional stability, personality development, cognitive functioning, and environmental experiences. Clinical criminology provides an interdisciplinary approach that combines psychiatry, psychology, criminology, neuroscience, and behavioural sciences to examine the causes of criminality in a more scientific and comprehensive manner.

The study of psychiatric factors reveals that mental disorders such as antisocial personality disorder, psychopathy, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and substance use disorders may significantly affect judgment, emotional regulation, impulse control, and perception of reality. These psychiatric conditions may increase the likelihood of aggressive, violent, impulsive, or antisocial behaviour, especially when combined with adverse environmental influences. However, it is equally important to recognize that mental illness alone does not automatically lead to criminality, and most mentally ill individuals are not criminals.

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