

The Nature of Crime

Causes of Crime:

- Prior to the 18th century –causes of crime based on religion or superstition
- During the 18th century **Classical theory** argued that we act as morally independent beings arriving at decisions about our behaviour through rational thought.
 - Ignored factors beyond an individual's control, such as poverty, mental disorder, intelligence
- Later, the **Positivist school** used science to study crime and its causes
 - employed statistical analysis and biology (brain, hormones, genes)
 - since biological factors were at the root of crime, they (the Positivist) believed treatment was needed rather than punishment
- **Psychological theories**
 - repressed memories and feelings of guilt tied to desire for punishment
 - personality traits may be linked to criminal behaviour
- **Sociological theories**
 - Include struggles for power by social groups, lack of social cohesion, inability for people to achieve their goals, weak social bonds

No single theory can explain the causes of crime!

However research has identified a number of factors that are related to criminal conduct. These are not causes of crime but are often found in correlation to crimes

A large and recent study identified basic factors that are highly correlated with criminal activity. These are:

- **Age** –the peak period is 15-18
- **Gender**- males are much more likely to commit crimes
- **Poverty**- often associated with financial stress, marital problems and lack of opportunities and necessities

Other social factors are:

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| ▪ Parent criminality | ▪ Unstable work record |
| ▪ Inconsistent and uncaring parenting | ▪ Living in public housing |
| ▪ Family violence | ▪ Unstable relationship with life partner |
| ▪ associating with delinquent friends | ▪ Alcohol and drug abuse |
| ▪ gangs | ▪ Television viewing |
| ▪ poor educational performance | ▪ Diet |

Although impossible to prove that such factors cause crime, we nevertheless are certain enough about their influence to establish social programs that target factors such as poverty, drop-out rates, and alcoholism and drug addiction

Cause may come into play when determining sentencing (mitigating and aggravating circumstances)