Etiopathogenetic theories of criminal behaviour

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Based on the relevant literature, the present study attempts to identify the extent to which biological or other factors account for criminal behaviour. Though the belief that single genetic defects produce criminal behaviour is untenable, behaviour is regarded as an emergent function of physical systems and brain activity which provides the causal (generative) mechanisms for it and constrains its form. Individuals inherit personality characteristics from their ancestors which make them vulnerable to committing crime under certain circumstances. These characteristics include the social and temperament traits of traditional personality research, but personal variables also encompass competencies, values, beliefs and goals emerging from the individual's history, which mediate the effects of new experiences. Psychological theories focus on internal factors mediating deviant development, such as failures of parents, teachers and significant others to transmit socially acceptable behavioural patterns during the socialization process, and individual differences in attitudes, values and beliefs between offenders and non-offenders. Social and environmental theories of crime seek to identify causes in social structures and cultural factors. The trimodal theory provides an explanation of human behaviour as based on three different modes: the biological, the psychological (cognitive) and that of reflexive awareness - that is the conscious choice of the individual to adopt certain behaviour patterns. This view argues for the multifactorial nature of causality of crime, and is in accordance with current genetic theory which asserts that observed differences among individuals are a joint product of genetic and environmental variation. The genetic endowment - the biological factor - is the first step of any causal sequence leading to a particular behaviour. Individuals carry this genetic endowment with them in their interactions with the social environment, they react to stimulations from this environment according to their endowment and others react to them according to those individual characteristics they bring to the situation. From this point of view, biological, psychological and social explanations are not just compatible; they are in some ways closely connected and complementary.

Key words: genetics, criminal behaviour, biological factors, congnitive factors, social factors.

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