

The Role Of Mental Illness In The Commission Of Crime

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Mental Illness and Criminal Behaviour

Mental illness can be defined as a condition that not only affects the thinking of a person but moods and feelings as well. Such medical conditions may influence a person's capability to relate to other people in life and disrupt normal functions of life as well. It is related to conditions of distress and problems working in social or family activities.

Mental illness is very common nowadays. In the United States of America, approximately one in five adults has some mental illness. It constitutes up to 19% of U.S. adults. Similarly, one in 24, which makes up 4.1% of the population, has a severe mental illness. Whereas one in 12, makes up 8.5% of the population, has a substance use disorder. Mental illness can be treated as there are many individuals who are living their normal lives and performing daily activities even with their mental illness. Recovery from a mental illness is possible only if the treatment is started in the early stages and the patient plays an important role in his/her recovery ("Violence & mental health," 2017).

Mental illness is not the outcome of a single incident. There are many linked causes shown by the research that contribute to mental illness. There are some factors that lead to the development of mental illness. Some of them include genetics, lifestyle, and environment. Circumstances like stressful jobs or domestic life make a person more susceptible to such mental conditions. Similarly, being a victim of a traumatic life event or a crime also becomes responsible for the development of disturbed mental health. In some cases, the primary brain structure and biochemical processes also play a role in the emergence of mental illness ("Violence & mental health," 2017).

Mental Illness in the Criminal Justice System

The research shows that people who have some mental illness are over-represented to a larger extent in the criminal justice system of the United States of America. The exact relationship between mental illness and criminal behavior, especially violence, is still not so clear. While there are many types of research that have developed a direct link between violence and mental illness, there are some researchers that have found that severe mental illness single-handedly is not a considerable prognostic of criminal behavior. There are other important factors that are responsible for violent actions like antisocial personality, psychopathy, Neuro-cognitive brain damage, and substance misuse along with antisocial associates. Moreover, living in a frenzied and disruptive atmosphere with limited optimistic social support also leads to committing the crime ("Violence & mental health," 2017).

Even though the exact gradation of the overly represented people who have mental illness in the justice system is indeterminate, it is certain that they persist and are important. Diverse studies have utilized different descriptions of mental illness, but according to the comprehensive definition, which includes factors like antisocial behavior conditions and substance manipulation, it is stated that almost 80 – 90% of criminals have been diagnosed with a mental disorder.

One of the most common identifications is an antisocial personality disorder, and it is estimated to be comprised of 60-80% of the jail population. Additionally, some other research has established the great pervasiveness of disorders known as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FASD), developmental incapacities, squat IQ, and brain damage, both organic and attained. But these illnesses are rarely diagnosed (Prins, 2014).

Victimization, Violence, and Public Misconceptions

A report presented by “The Mental Health Commission of Canada” documented that it is imperative to recollect that the majority of the population suffering from mental health problems and ailments is not involved in committing crimes. Instead, they are more likely to be the victims of crimes rather than the perpetrators. Statistics show that most of the vicious crimes and killings are committed by people who do not have any mental problems.

Research done by Fazel and Danesh mentioned that normally, one out of seven detainees in Western countries is suffering from psychotic sicknesses and a major form of depression. Similarly, another wide-ranging research recorded that the presence of a severe psychological disorder only, without the mutual occurrence of substance-based illness, is not associated with an augmented probability of criminality or reoffending (Prins, 2014).

British Crime Survey presented a report of a survey in which it was mentioned that nearly half of the targets of vicious crimes, which makes up 47% of the proportion, were of the view that the attacker was under the impact of alcohol, and almost 17% thought that the criminal was under the effect of drugs. Similarly, one more survey was conducted, which proposed that around 30 percent of sufferers believed that their offender mugged them because he was under drugs and alcohol. On the contrary, there were only 1% of the victims were of the opinion that the ferocious incident occurred because the offender seemed to have some mental illness. Moreover, some other records show that the rate of homicides done by mentally ill people has stayed at a constant level since the 1990s (Prins, 2014).

Social Factors and the Overrepresentation of Mentally Ill Offenders

This proves the notion that the link between the commission of [crime and mental illness](#) is misleading. The researchers ignore several confounding variables which are associated with the events of

violence and crimes and are misinterpreted as mental disorders. This overrepresentation and exaggeration have built a fear among people that all mentally ill people are criminals and violent, which is not true. Mentally ill people are more violent towards themselves than others (Prins, 2014).

Although facts and research show that crimes committed by mentally ill people are relatively very low in number, it is still a fact that many prisoners in American jails are mentally ill people. Some incidents that happened in the past indicated that mental ailments might become a constant, though uncertain, risk element for the incidence of violence. Refuting that mental disorders and violence are linked to each other by any means is hypocritical and eventually counterproductive because there have been examples in the past where crimes have been committed by mentally ill people. Appalling inferences for mental patient encouragement, mental health law, and the endowment of mental health cures need not be taken from openly recognizing the likelihood of a restricted link between illness and ferocity (Prins, 2014).

The examples that constitute the crimes committed by mentally ill people include David Berkowitz, who was also known as the Son of Sam. He was found responsible for the crime spree from 1976-1977. He killed six people and was later diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. Another guy named Ed Gain was charged with the murder of many victims but was later regarded unfit for trial and prosecution because he was diagnosed with schizophrenia. He spent the remaining years of his life in a mental asylum (Prins, 2014).

Jeffery Dahmer was also a mentally ill serial killer who was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. He killed 17 people and was sentenced to a lifetime in prison. He got murdered by a fellow inmate at the end. Richard Chase killed himself in jail after he got arrested for killing six people and drinking their blood. He was also diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. Moreover, Aileen Wuornos, who died in 2002, killed seven men along the highway in Florida. She was suffering from a borderline personality disorder. She volunteered to receive a lethal injection.

Treatment Failures and Lessons from Criminal Cases

One such example includes David Gonzales, who was a TV editor and was charged with killing four people in 2009. He had paranoid schizophrenia as well and did not get proper treatment. Therefore, after getting inspired by *Nightmare on Elm Street*, he committed this murder (MacPhail, 2013).

There are certain provisions in the criminal laws for the prosecution and trial of people who are mentally ill or possess some intellectual disability. When such individuals commit any crime, get arrested, and encounter the criminal justice system, they are dealt with differently than normal criminals. The laws for mentally ill people in the criminal justice system state that the inadequacy of the mind is used as a shield against a criminal charge. These laws are used in such a way that a person who is accused of some criminal violations is arbitrated not fit to pass in a plea (MacPhail,

2013).

Moreover, they are not considered guilty of the crime because of their mental conditions. Hence, they are regarded as forensic patients who are kept in mental houses or asylums where they are treated. Many mental health courts have been established, and Court liaison services are provided, which are responsible for assessing the mental illness of a person and his/her treatment. Many states have set up mental health tribunals to evaluate the detention of forensic patients. These institutions divert people with mental illness from jails to mental hospitals where they are provided with treatment. Hence, there are many jurisdictions in the laws of the criminal justice system that can help criminals with mental illness ("Violence & mental health," 2017).

References

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