



Analysis of the causes of criminal behavior of male prisoners in Iran: A case study of Kermanshah and Kurdistan provinces

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Abstract

Introduction: Criminal behavior is one of the topics that has long been the focus of researchers and specialists in behavioral sciences. The present study aims to investigate the causes of criminal behavior in male prisoners of Kermanshah and Kurdistan provinces, Iran.

Materials and Methods: The present research was a qualitative study with a content analysis type. The categories were obtained by interviewing 26 male prisoners and 10 experts and reviewing 50 articles. In addition to the interview, data and the clinical dossier of the prisoner were also considered to identify the factors contributing to criminal behavior. The sampling method in this research is purposive. Data analysis was done in 3 steps: open, central, and selective coding. The validity of the components was checked by calculating the content analysis index.

Results: The main factors influencing criminal behavior include psychological, family, cultural-social, and spiritual components.

Conclusion: The results indicate that various factors play a role in the occurrence of criminal behavior, and their identification in different cultures provides the possibility of developing an educational or therapeutic intervention.

Keywords: Criminal behavior, Prisoner, Violence

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Introduction

In addition to providing statistics about crime and criminal behavior, criminology researchers

have long been interested in understanding various biological, psychological, and social factors that explain why certain people engage

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in criminal and antisocial behavior (1). In the definition of a crime, any behavior, whether an act or an omission, which is carried out intentionally or unintentionally by a person with the ability to document and for which the law approved by the Islamic Parliament provides punishment and protective and educational measures, is considered a crime (2). There are different types of crimes, including crimes against persons, crimes against property, and crimes against society. Each of the mentioned types of crimes has different punishments, including imprisonment, fines, deprivation of rights and social benefits, and execution (3).

According to the presented statistics, 95% of the murders in the world are committed by men, which indicates the importance of paying attention to the gender variable (4). According to the announcement of the head of the organization of prisons and the provision and educational measures of the country during the year 2022, in Iran, there are more prisoners in prisons than the world average, which is a worrying statistic for officials and policymakers (5). The remarkable point about the importance of paying attention to the prisoners is that the people inside the prisons have lost their freedom and the previous social support system.

There are different approaches to explaining the causes of criminal behavior. Freud's psychoanalytic theory explained various aspects of personality from a comprehensive point of view, and after presenting it, many people tried to expand it. Freud believed that humans have an antisocial nature and that from the beginning of life, the conflict between destructive impulses and social realities puts humans in a difficult situation.

Among other people in the psychodynamic approach was Aichhorn, who explained criminal behavior with a psychoanalytical point of view, and during his investigations, he proposed the concept of hidden delinquency as the basis for the child's readiness to have a criminal lifestyle (6).

Among different approaches, behaviorism has played a very important role in explaining criminal behavior. Although the role of different viewpoints of the behaviorist approach in explaining crime cannot be ignored due to the wide range of topics, Albert Bandura's social learning theory is considered one of the most important theories for

explaining criminal behavior. In summary, Bandura believes that cognitions, behavior, and environment interact to explain, acquire, stimulate, strengthen, and maintain criminal behavior (7).

The cognitive approach, as a theory that proposed the role of the mind as the determining factor of human actions, was able to find a significant role in investigating criminal behavior, including the views in this area of Kohlberg's levels of moral transformation. The variable of self-control is an important and influential cognitive process that has been widely used in cognitive theories to explain the cognitive aspect of criminal behavior. Failure in self-control or low self-control has been proposed as one of the predictive variables among people for the occurrence of criminal behavior (8).

Among other important variables that have received less attention in predicting criminal behavior is ego depletion. In the definition of this concept, self-absorption or low self-control power impacts on performing various mental tasks, including decision-making. In a person with low self-control, the level of impulsivity and risky behaviors without prior planning increases, and finally, it leads to criminal behavior (9).

The approach of personality traits and theoreticians who consider personality and its components as the basis of criminal behavior are mostly associated with the name of Eysenck. Eysenck, as one of the pioneers in the field of personality psychology, has shown that the dimension of psychopathy can predict antisocial and delinquency behaviors (10). Antisocial personality is defined as a personality disorder that is characterized by a set of personality traits and behavioral patterns in emotional, interpersonal, lifestyle, and behavioral domains (11).

Along with different approaches to explaining criminal behavior, one of the approaches that has received serious attention is the neurobiological approach in this field. According to the results of some studies, finding the root causes of the underlying causes of criminal behavior has a special delicacy concerning the complexities of the human nervous system.

The analysis of issues in this area of human behavior should be analyzed with a deep look, for example, depression with low levels of dopamine, which is an important

neurotransmitter in the reward system of the human brain, and when a person is in a depressed mood, by engaging in impulsive and risky behaviors, it leads to an increase in dopamine in the nervous system, so it was mentioned as one of the components that motivate a person to engage in criminal acts to reduce the symptoms of depression temporarily (12). The sociological approach to explaining the causes of criminal behavior is based on studying the individual in the context of society. Durkheim investigated the factors of the emergence and occurrence of crimes in the context of social environment and believes that crime is a normal phenomenon in society and should not be considered a strange or unusual social phenomenon. According to this opinion, every society has criminals, and no society is

free from crime and criminals. From the point of view of this great sociologist, crime, and delinquency are among the factors of public health and are an inseparable part of every healthy society.

Exceptional reasons or causes do not affect the type of crimes because crimes are caused by the civilization and culture of each society and arise from its cultural situation (13).

According to the mentioned issues, the present study was conducted to study the causes of criminal behavior from the perspective of male prisoners with violent crimes in two central prisons of Kermanshah and Kurdistan provinces. Figure 1 summarizes the integrated approach model to explain the theoretical basis of criminal behavior.

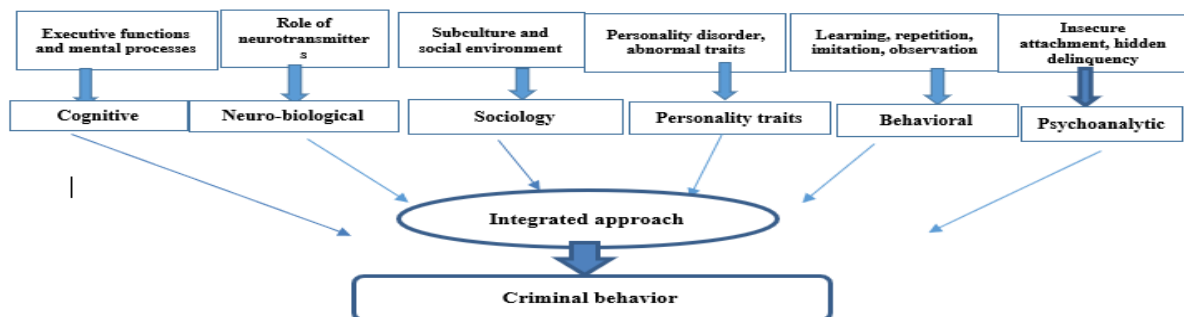


Figure 1. Integrated approach model to explain the theoretical basis of criminal behavior

Materials and Methods

The research team carried out three steps. In the first step of this research, Persian articles related to the topic and indexed from 2009 to 2021 were reviewed. Sources and final texts were coded according to the conventional content analysis method. The steps of this method include: 1. Identifying the desired information and repeated review to find a proper understanding of all cases; 2. Extracting semantic units and classifying them as compact/open-coded units, 3. Summary and grouping of compact units.

As subcategories and inserting labels for them; 4. Sorting the subcategories in the form of smaller categories based on the similarities and differences in the subcategories and finally choosing the appropriate titles; 5. Integration of classes based on repeated examination and comparison of classes and reaching the main themes, and 6. Choosing the appropriate title with the label of criminal behavior for the main factors. Experts with experience and expertise in qualitative research methods were requested

to review the texts and initial coding to validate the coding method at each stage. Therefore, various sources were used to validate the study. In the second stage, the research under the interpretive paradigm was done using the content analysis method.

In this research method, the researcher seeks to understand the meaning of the obtained data and open and central coding. Considering the nature of the qualitative method, the researcher tries to represent the phenomenon under study from the perspective of the actors (imprisoned men with serious and violent crimes) without mental assumptions. After conducting interviews with prisoners, in the third stage, interviews were conducted with specialists in criminal behavior; the opinions of experts and specialists whose demographic information is presented in Table 1 were collected. In this method, after explaining the topic and the process of content analysis, opinions of expert members were obtained. After this stage, to increase the credibility of the findings, the content validity index was used to evaluate the

content validity of the expert's opinion. This index shows the convergence of experts in a specialized field. In this context, according to the existence of 10 experts, the minimum

accepted value for the index is based on the Lavshé table, and the content validity index is equal to 79%.

Table 1. The demographic information of the specialists

Academic Degree	Gender
Ph.D. in psychology	Male
Ph.D. in counselling	Male
Ph.D. in criminal law and criminology	Female
Ph.D. in sociology	Male
Ph.D. in clinical psychology	Male
Ph.D. in psychology	Male
Ph.D. in counselling	Male
Psychiatrist	Male
Ph.D. in clinical psychology	Male
Ph.D. in psychology	Male

Research instruments

Interview questions with the opinions of professors and experts and based on the reference scientific books in the field of the interview, including the principles of clinical interview based on DSM-5, volume one: basic principles (14), after explaining the conditions and answering the doubts and questions of the participants in the meetings and after building trust in them, the interviews were conducted.

The analysis was done manually, without software, while collecting the data. Open, central, and selective coding was used to analyze the data. In this method, conceptualization and categorization were first

done. The sentences were divided into specific components and then named in the conceptualization. In the next step, the concepts were divided into four main psychological, social, family, and spiritual factors and concepts in each of these classes. Took place in the open coding phase, 200 codes were extracted and counted, and in the next phase, these concepts were placed in the following four categories. The coding and content analysis process is shown in Figure 2. Table 2 shows an example of the data coding process and attempts to explain in detail the process of extracting one of the categories.

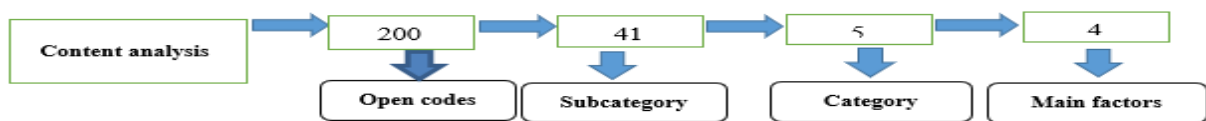


Figure 2. The coding and content analysis process

Table 2. An example of the data coding process

Category	Subcategory	Open codes
Childhood problems	Lack of supervision by parents and lack of empathy with children, addiction of both or one of the parents and corporal punishment, dissatisfaction with the family situation.	Not having dialogue and empathy with parents, not being able to share problems, secrets, and plans with parents, not understanding problems from parents, wishing to be born in another family, being upset with parents, not monitoring parents' educational and behavioral status.
		Repeated beating and physical and emotional abuse of children by parents, observation of drug use by parents, lack of knowledge of children's presence in an environment other than home

Results

The age of the participants was between 25 and 40 years old. Demographic findings bring interesting information as follows:

Regarding education level, 69.2% had an undergraduate degree, 23.1% had a diploma, and 7.7% had a bachelor's degree. Marital status showed that 76.9% were single, 15.4% were divorced, and 7.7% were married. They had no job. In the variable of bad history, 96.2% had

previous records of arrest and conviction for other crimes, and 3.8% had no previous record. In terms of addiction, 97% had previous and current addiction, and 3% had no addiction. Economically, 95% had no specific income, and 5% received monthly or occasional payments from their family members.

Table 3 presents the classes extracted from the opinions and views of male prisoners about the factors of criminal behavior.

Table 3. Classes extracted from the opinions and views of male prisoners

The main factors	Category	Subcategory
Psychological	Mental disorders and problems	Symptoms of dysfunction in executive functions depression Insecure attachment style High risk-taking and excitement Difficulty regulating emotions Self-absorption or low self-control Low self-esteem Showing off Inability to manage anger Intolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity Weakness in emotional intelligence and lack of emotional self-awareness Narcissism and self-centeredness Symptoms of borderline personality disorder Symptoms of antisocial personality disorder
Psychological	Childhood problems	Lack of supervision by parents and lack of empathy with children, addiction of both or one of the parents and corporal punishment, dissatisfaction with the family situation
Family	Conflicts in family	The presence of many conflicts among family members, lack of effective communication skills, the presence of a delinquent member in the family, family financial problems, a broken and troubled family, and the presence of marital infidelity.
Cultural-social	Social environment and existing subcultures	Living in marginal areas, making friends among the people present in the place of residence and the existence of friends, illogical beliefs such as considering criminal activities as valuable in some urban areas, low education of parents, dropping out of education, lack of healthy leisure time, and the existence of criminal gangs with material attractions, the availability of substances and the presence of substance addicts, lack of jobs and unemployment, the prison environment
Spiritual	Weakness of beliefs and lack of spirituality	Weakness in religious and religious beliefs, lack of restraint towards morals and weak conscience, lack of recognition of moral qualities, lack of commitment to religious rules, sense of emptiness and meaninglessness

According to the findings in Table 3 obtained through interviews, the interviewees from the country's two western provinces pointed to common and different factors. Examining the contents in the four categories in Table 3 shows the mutual effects and interaction of different components in psychological, family, cultural-social, and spiritual dimensions. We can see a repeated defective cycle of variables that play a role in the aggravation and repetition of abnormal behaviors and committing crimes. The categories of mental disorders and problems and childhood problems under the

psychological factor, family conflicts and conflicts as a subset of the family factor, social environment and existing subcultures as a social factor, and finally, weak religious beliefs and lack of spirituality as a subset of the spiritual factor explain the occurrence of criminal behavior.

Discussion

The current research used a qualitative method to examine the factors affecting criminal behavior in male prisoners. The influencing factors were divided into four categories:

psychological, family, social, and spiritual. In the field of psychological causes affecting criminal behavior, the findings from the interview indicated the existence of a disorder in the executive functions of male prisoners, which is in line with Norman et al.'s study on 64 subjects, including 47 men and 17 women with a 6-month sentence. These prisoners completed the Executive Function Behavior Rating Inventory for adults. The results showed that subjects who followed the issued rules more, obtained better executive functions than those who were weak in following the rules (15). Depression was another component that was mentioned in the tendency to commit criminal acts by some prisoners, which is in line with Anderson's research that concluded a relationship between depression and the incidence of criminal behavior in the future among young people (16). High risk-taking and sensation seeking were among the components that were mostly mentioned among the interviewees, and these components were also mentioned in the research by Molero Jurado et al. They assessed 822 students aged 13-18 through the State Impulsivity Scale and the Sensation-Seeking Scale. Lack of ability to regulate emotions was suggested as a reason for anger and aggression among prisoners (17).

Also, Gharibpour et al. proposed emotional dysfunction as one of the risk factors for the occurrence of aggressive behavior. They studied 150 male prisoners with intermittent explosive anger disorder and 169 prisoners without intermittent explosive disorder at Rasht Central Prison. The research instrument included the structured clinical interview of DSM-5, questionnaires of Intermittent Explosive Anger Disorder (IED-SQ), Aggression (AQ), Emotional Deficiency (TAS) and Impulsive Behavior Scale (IBS). The results showed that the mean scores of emotional inadequacy, negative anxiety, and aggression in prisoners with intermittent explosive anger disorder were significantly higher than in prisoners without intermittent explosive anger disorder (18). In Karmi and Sharifi's study among male prisoners in Kermanshah, Kurdistan, and Ilam prisons, the results indicated that lack of control or weak control of behavior among male prisoners with violent crimes was one of the factors of occurrence, repetition, and aggravation of criminal behaviors (19). This finding is in line with the results of the present study. Low self-control leads to many incoherent, non-

normative, and criminal behaviors among people. The role of self-control among teenagers who engage in delinquent activities in cyberspace indicates the important role of this variable (20). The results of the present research also indicated that the low level of self-control plays a significant role in the occurrence of delinquent behaviors. The inability to manage anger was due to the inability to tolerate failure, which was another factor that the prisoners raised, and it was in line with the results of Potard et al. In this study, intolerance of failure and inability to manage anger were related to the occurrence of bullying behaviors. Adults fail to tolerate failure at a younger age are more likely to show criminal behavior in the future. Intolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity were related to low endurance among prisoners (21). In this line, Hatami et al. and Sadeh et al. found that high intolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity were related to aggressive, problematic, impulsive, and risky behaviors (22,23). Weakness in emotional intelligence and lack of emotional self-awareness were studied as the factors in the occurrence of criminal behavior; in other words, lack of understanding of other's point of view, low empathy, and lack of self-expression skills are among the components of emotional intelligence that are presented in the interviewees. This finding is in line with the results of Zarghani et al.'s study (24) and Sharma et al.'s study (25).

Sharma et al. found that all convicted criminals had significantly lower emotional intelligence than normal people. The presence of signs of narcissism and self-centeredness were among the characteristics that the prisoners investigated in their speech and expression of their experiences; having exaggerated feelings and thoughts about themselves has been mentioned in many researches (25). Also, Barry et al. concluded that narcissism was related to the incidence of criminal behavior. Brugués Català et al. revealed that the variable of narcissism was a predictor of the repetition of criminal behavior among male and female prisoners. The presence of symptoms of borderline personality disorder and antisocial personality in prisoners is one of the cases that require the attention of specialists, and it can be inferred from the topics that the interviewees inflicted injuries and behaviors on their victims (26,27).

From the past to the present, there has been extensive research and theoretical background

about the occurrence of criminal behavior in people with personality disorders, especially the mentioned disorders. The studies of Arasteh and Sharifi Saez and Mundt and Baggio in line with these results (28,29). The central role of borderline personality disorder in imprisoned people is well pointed out in Mundt and Baggio's research (29). The family has a very important role in influencing the future of people. The findings of the present research indicate the deficiency and insufficiency in the role of the family to create a safe and healthy environment in every way as an important and dangerous institution in preventing the occurrence and appearance of abnormal behavior. Mohammadi et al. (30), Dastranj and Dyanat (31), Ebrahimi et al. (32), and Parhodeh (33) indicated the importance of the role of the family in the tendency to criminal behavior. The social factors inferred from the point of view of male prisoners in the occurrence of criminal behavior include things such as living in marginal areas, making friends among the people present in the place of residence and the presence of unscrupulous friends, considering criminal activities as valuable in some urban areas, low education. The parents dropped out of school due to poor economic conditions, which aligns with Poorsina et al.'s results (34). According to the studies, the lack of specialized job skills before and after entering prison was one of the issues in the majority of the interviews. According to the experts' opinions, the development of skills, vocational and technical training among prisoners, along with any therapeutic interventions, can help to rehabilitate this group and prevent them from returning to criminal and abnormal behaviors, which is based on the results obtained by Ebrahimi and Chakarzehy (35), and Hosseini-nejad et al. (36). In the spiritual dimension, cases of weakness in religious beliefs, lack of restraint towards morals and a weak conscience, lack of recognition of moral qualities, lack of commitment to religious rules, and feelings of emptiness and meaninglessness played a role in criminal behavior. These results consistent with the Khosroshahi and Javadi Hossein Abadi's study (37) and Sharifinia's study (38). Two major limitations of the current research are mentioned. The limitation of the sample to men and the number of provinces under study. Among the research proposals, it can be mentioned that future research should be directed toward using neuropsychological measurement instruments. It

is suggested to carry out research in the field of influencing factors in other regions and cities to investigate the role of the cultural component, as well as detailed studies in the field of cognitive neuroscience by specialists in this field of science to provide a more accurate picture of the neurological infrastructure of criminal behavior. Also, research on women and other cities and cultures can yield more reliable results. It is also suggested that this research be done on other mental disorders as well.

Conclusion

In this research, four classes of influencing factors (psychological, family, social, and spiritual) in the occurrence of criminal behavior were obtained based on interviews with male prisoners of violent crimes.

These four categories of different factors are interwoven in one model and directly and indirectly caused criminal behavior in male prisoners in two western provinces of the country. The investigation of these dimensions and their intensity and weakness can be different in other places, so it is recommended that the results of this research be examined carefully.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The principles of professional ethics in the research, such as voluntary participation, the right to withdraw from the research, non-disclosure of information, and respect for privacy, were observed during the interview process. Confidentiality, informed consent, and good communication with the interviewees were also observed. Before conducting the research, implementation permission was obtained from the Organization of Prisons and the country's security and educational measures, and the ethics committee of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad has approved the research.

Code of Ethics

IR.UM.REC.1402.079.

Authors' Contributions

This article is an extract from the first author's doctoral dissertation (Kasra Sharifi). The first author was involved in implementing the research strategy, such as obtaining the necessary permits, collecting the necessary research data, conducting interviews with prisoners and experts, translating the article into English, and analyzing the interviews. The second author (Bahram Ali Ghanbari Hashem Abadi) played a role in these cases, proposing the title of the research, designing the different stages of the research from the perspective of research methodology, providing the names of psychological specialists and expert advice in the field of criminal psychology, compiling and

designing qualitative interviews, introducing, collecting and referencing reliable scientific sources, editing the article and analyzing the texts. The third author (Mohammad Javad Asghari Ebrahimabad) had a role in providing advisory and corrective points to the first author, proposing a qualitative research method for collecting and summarizing and summarizing texts from books and articles, presenting and introducing the names of specialists in the field of criminal psychology and counselors working in prisons, introducing similar researches. He also played a significant role in the analysis of qualitative data from interviews and coding principles.

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