

# The Nature of Crime: Different Approaches toward the Causes of the Criminal Act

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present review is to organize the theoretical approaches toward criminal acts and provide a structured source for the use of forensic researchers. The causes of criminal actions have been studied by different disciplines to decrease crime rates and understand the nature of the criminal acts. "Crime can be easily defined as any activity publicly proscribed by the written laws of a society" (McGuire, 2004, p. 3). However crime is a complex issue, and that is why theorists have investigated the causes of the criminal act using different perspectives and explanations. These explanations can be classified into three main categories as biological, psychological and sociological. Crime theories are also categorized based on their levels and scopes, and evaluated as five levels from large scale to individual factors; (i) societal macro level theories, (ii) community or locality level theories, (iii) group and socialization influence theories, (iv) crime events and routine activities, and (v) individual-level theories. It is a fact all theories have a useful function in the literature, but they should be presented within an organized framework.

**Keywords:** crime, criminal act, crime theories, theoretical review, forensic research

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# Suçun Doğası: Cezai Eylemin Nedenlerine İlişkin Farklı Yaklaşımlar

## ÖZ

Mevcut taramanın amacı cezai eyleme ilişkin kuramsal yaklaşımları organize etmek ve adli araştırmacıların kullanımı için yapılandırılmış bir kaynak sağlamaktır. Suç oranlarını azaltmak ve cezai davranışların doğasını anlamak için cezai eylemlerin nedenleri farklı disiplinler tarafından çalışılmıştır. Toplumun yazılı hukuku tarafından alenen yasaklanmış her eylem suç olarak tanımlanabilir (McGuire, 2004). Fakat suç karmaşık bir meseledir ve bu nedenle ki kuramcılar farklı perspektifler ve açıklamalar kullanarak cezai eylemin nedenlerini araştırmıştır. Bu açıklamalar biyolojik, psikolojik ve sosyolojik olmak üzere üç temel kategoride sınıflandırılabilir. Suç kuramları aynı zamanda seviyelerine ve kapsamlarına bağlı olarak kategorize edilmekte ve büyük ölçekten bireysel faktörlere olmak üzere beş seviyede değerlendirilmektedir; (i) toplumsal makro seviyesindeki kuramlar, (ii) topluluk ya da bölge seviyesindeki kuramlar, (iii) grup ve sosyalizasyon etki kuramları, (iv) suç olayları ve rutin eylemler, ve (v) birey seviyesindeki kuramlar. Şu bir gerçektir ki tüm kuramlar literatürde faydalı bir işleve sahiptir, ancak organize edilmiş bir çerçeve içerisinde sunulmaları gerekmektedir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** suç, cezai eylem, suç kuramları, kuramsal tarama, adli araştırma

The comprehension and definition of crime is a complicated process, and that is why lots of different disciplines such as psychology, sociology, medicine, philosophy, anthropology, economics, and jurisprudence work together on crime studies. According to McGuire "crime can be easily defined as any activity publicly proscribed by the written laws of a society" (2004, p. 3). Some specific acts – theft, fraud, criminal damage – are defined as a crime; because they are prohibited by laws. However, there are complex relationships between victims, police, criminals, courts, and penal system. The perception of crime can change from society to society. Time and current conditions also shape the definition of a criminal act, and there is not a behavior which is always criminal in everywhere; because crime is a social product and socially constructed phenomenon. Therefore, society, culture, and zeitgeist decide which act is a crime.

Different perspectives are used to provide a general crime definition. The consensus, conflict, and interactionist views of crime are the most popular perspectives on crime studies (Siegel, 2006). The consensus view supports that society is an integrated structure and all people decide what will and will not be tolerated or accepted by society. Crime is an act that is not accepted by society, and "capable of being followed by criminal proceedings having one of the types of outcome (punishment, and so on) known to follow these proceedings" (Kenny, 1936, p. 16). The act must be legally forbidden, and there must be a criminal intent. Researchers claim that crimes are simply acts that are believed to be repugnant of various elements linked to society. The laws and punishments reflect beliefs, norms, opinions, and values of the large portion of society. There are strong relations among the definition of the crime, legal system, and social values. The consensus is an important part of this view; because it means the agreement among a large part of society. Siegel (2006) also suggests that consensus view is necessary for a fair legal system; because all types of people within all classes adequately involve rule or lawmaking process, and laws represent all classes.

Another perspective for making a clear crime definition is the conflict view that is the opposite perspective of the consensus view. This view proposes that society is not an integrated structure, and there are different classes and advantaged and disadvantaged groups. According to the supporters of this view, wealth and power are not distributed equally within the society. This situation increases the differences among groups and causes conflict and crime. Moreover, laws tend to protect the economic, gendered, racial and political advantage and power that has been established. The Marxist theory also supports the conflict view; capitalist system created some different classes in the society such as poor, middle or powerful classes. The powerful class wants to protect or increase their advantages;

so they shape and use laws. Researchers believe that criminal justice system protects the order and the advantageous position of powerful class. A lot of cases support this belief; for example, a crime against property is more important than a crime against people, and lower classes are imprisoned for minor offenses; but powerful classes receive lesser sentences for more serious crimes (Siegel, 2006). This view says that the definition of the crime is determined by higher classes, and they decide which act is a crime.

The interactionist view is the last perspective for crime studies. This view is affected by consensus and conflict views. It supports that, an objective reality about crime definition does not exist; because each individual behaves based on their subjective interpretations of perceived reality. People evaluate their own actions and others' behaviors through social views which are learned from society. They observe the positive and negative reactions of others and understand the social reality. On the other hand, this reality can be shaped by powerful classes. The definition of crime from this view is based on the opinion of those who hold social power. Powerful people want to influence others to feel the same way. Criminals are labeled due to their negative acts against the social consensus and the social norms. According to this view, crime has not a true meaning, if society does not have a negative reaction toward it (Siegel, 2006).

### **What is Criminology?**

The word of criminology is used for the studies about the criminal act. It is the scientific procedure and investigates both social and individual criminal acts. Psychology, economics, political sciences, biology and natural sciences work together in the criminology field. Criminologists try to answer why people do not obey laws and behave like a criminal. They also deal with the social impact of any crime.

Criminology appeared in Europe between the late 1700s and the early 1800s. This discipline can be evaluated into positivist or classical approaches. According to the positivist school of thought, when a person loses his or her mental control, s/he will commit a crime. A person may lose control because of inner or outer factors. Lombroso (one of the fathers of positivist criminology) proposes (1912) that each individual has different intellectual and physical capacity, so punishments should be determined based on the person. Positivists also highlight that correction and treatments must be used for all criminals. On the other hand, based on the classical approach, each person has the ability to make a decision under any conditions; that is why a person does not lose his or her decision-making ability. Crime is committed through free will (Beccaria, 1963; Bentham, 1948). People know what they are

doing or what crime is; they can make a cost-benefit analysis. If there is an opportunity and criminal act brings more benefit than cost, they prefer to behave criminally. Moreover, the classical discipline tries to eliminate torture, and develop the criminal justice system.

The neo-classical approach followed the classical approach and made some revisions. These researchers support that person can make some irrational behaviors; because the world is imperfect, and there will always be some mistakes. Besides, in the 1920s, the Chicago school of thought emerged. Park, Burgess, and McKenzie (1984) researched some zones where people tend to be more criminally active than others. This approach analyzed criminal studies from a sociological perspective.

Contemporary criminology tries to understand the motives of criminals, and these motives can be instrumental or expressive. The instrumental motivation means that person has more incentive, outside the act itself, to behave like a criminal. This incentive should be tangible as money. On the other hand, expressive motives are different from instrumental motives; because some emotions are necessary for expressive motivation. These emotions can be anger, rage, fear, jealousy or passion. According to statistics, most of the crimes happen because of expressive motives. The person loses his or her control for a moment and then expresses a criminal act.

The main purpose of criminology is to understand the causes and consequences of the criminal act. It tries to evaluate motivations to commit a crime, and predict behavior. Moreover, it aims to improve the criminal justice system and appropriate punishment procedures. Criminologists evaluate why a person behaves like a criminal, and which punishments are appropriate or fair. Criminology tries to prevent criminal action using this information.

### **Crime Theories**

Criminology attempts to discover the causes of crime and uses some theories to understand the criminal action. Some criminologists emphasize individual or personal factors. For example, the selfishness of person is one of the main factors. People will act in their own interests without being concerned over the impact of this on others; "they will almost certainly break the law if they can" (Rock, 2012, p. 49). Besides, some researchers support that crime is a consciously planned action (classical approach), and people evaluate both advantages and disadvantages of their actions. Moreover, biological and psychological factors also may increase criminality. In addition, it is a fact that crime is a social product; that is why social and environmental conditions may affect the criminal act.

## **Biological explanations of the criminal act**

Some researchers claim that people can commit a crime because of the genes that they have inherited, or some disorders cause the acting criminally such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). This disorder reduces the activity of the brain, and people cannot control their behaviors, and cannot realize the consequences of their acts. Moreover, some criminologists say that criminal act is still a behavior and all our behaviors, thoughts or feelings are rooted in our biology; that is why biological explanations and theories can be useful to understand the causes of a criminal act (Tooby & Cosmides, 1992).

In the 1950s, biological explanations are used to justify the discriminatory policy. For example, black children were not successful at school, and they were defined as less intelligent because of their biological differences; so they were evaluated as potential criminals (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). The social, economic and political factors were not overrated. The misuse of biological explanations increased prejudices of people about the relationship between biology and committing a crime, but still there is a growing support for the recognition of the key role of biology in understanding human behaviors (Raine, 2002).

Most of the biological theories are concerned with genetics. In 1876, Lombroso (an Italian army doctor) created one of the first modern biological theories of crime. Through physical measurements, he collected some information from Italian prisoners and non-criminal military personnel. He claimed that criminals have some common genetic features, and they do not complete their biological development fully. Moreover, according to this view, criminals have some physical abnormalities such as large jaws, high cheekbones, large ears, long arms, thick skulls and extra nipples, toes or fingers. If a person has five or more of these qualities, s/he can be a criminal. Lombroso supports that about %40 of all criminals becomes an offender because of their biological characteristics. In addition, Goring (1913) highlighted that there is a relationship between low intelligence and criminal act.

Sheldon (1942) created other important biological theory and searched the relationship between body shape (somatype) and personality. He analyzed different body shapes and about 650 personality traits. He concluded that there are main body shapes which are associated with particular personal characteristics such as the ectomorph (thin, wiry frame) is introverted and restrained; the endomorph (heavy, rounded) is sociable and relaxed; the mesomorph (solid, muscular frame) is aggressive and adventurous. Glueck and Glueck (1950) worked with 500 male criminals and found same results with Sheldon. On the other hand, West and

Farrington (1973), and Wadsworth (1979) did not find any relationship between crime and body shape.

Some researchers say that genes, chromosomes and neurotransmitters may affect the behaviors of a person, and cause a criminal act. Jacobs, Brunton, Melville, Brittain, and McClellmont (1965) claimed that XYY chromosome causes aggressive behaviors, and most of the murderers have an extra Y chromosome. However, some researchers (e.g., Hollin, 1989) could not find a significant correlation between the XYY chromosome and the criminal act.

On the other hand, Lange (1931) studied with monozygotic (MZ) and dizygotic (DZ) twins and tried to understand the effect of genes. When the behaviors of twins are compared, the behavioral similarity of monozygotic twins was about %77; but for dizygotic twins, its rate was only %12. The sample of this research was very small, so other researchers analyzed this assumption with thousands of twins, and they found a small difference between monozygotic and dizygotic twins. Besides, the environment can be more important than genetics to determine the criminal act. It is called epigenetic modification; according to Cadoret, Yates, Troughton, Woodworth, and Stewart (1995), life conditions and environment of people may shape their behaviors directly.

In the 1980s, the effect of 5-HTTLPR gene was analyzed; because this gene is responsible for serotonin hormone, and may be associated with violent behavior in male criminals. Virkkunen, Nuutila, Goodwin, and Linnoila (1987) found that violent criminals have less serotonin hormone. Mann, Arango, and Underwood (1990) researched this assumption experimentally, analyzed the serotonin level in the brain, and found similar findings. Besides, some evidences were found about dopamine, and researchers suggested that dopamine increases aggressive behaviors. Ferrari, van Erp, Tomatzky, and Miczek (2003) concluded experimentally that dopamine and low serotonin hormone increase criminal acts.

Moreover, the brain was investigated to predict criminal acts. Raine, Buchsbaum, and LaCasse (1997) compared brain activities of criminal and non-criminal people. They found reduced activity on both sides of the prefrontal cortex and in the amygdala, thalamus, and hippocampus of criminal people. Also, in the thalamus and hippocampus of criminals, there was a difference in lateralization. The right hemisphere of criminal people was more active than the left; but for non-criminal people, both sides of the thalamus worked equally, and left side of the hippocampus was more active than the right. Briefly, the effectiveness of biological

explanations cannot be rejected; because the biological perspectives for criminal acts support the success of psychological and sociological views.

### **Psychological explanations of the criminal act**

Through the collaboration of psychology and criminology, new fields appeared such as forensic psychology, legal psychology, and criminological psychology. Criminologists try to understand the causes of a criminal act, and psychology-based researchers analyze the effects of individual differences, personality characteristics and psychological factors on criminal acts. That is why lots of psychological theories were created to explain the behaviors of offenders.

Psychodynamic trait theory was developed by Sigmund Freud in the late 1800s and has become an effective approach in the history of crime studies (Siegel, 2005). According to Freud, the childhood experiences shape the future interpersonal relationships of people. Id, ego, and super-ego influence behaviors. The id is the primitive part of our make-up and controls our need for food, sex, sleep and other basic instincts. The ego controls id by setting up boundaries. Through the super-ego, people judge the situation, and it reflects morality and rules of the society. This perspective supports that criminals have id-dominated personalities. If ego does not control id, the person will behave based on primitive motives, and it may cause criminal actions (Siegel, 2005). These people have some social and communication problems, and they cannot control their actions. Moreover, some psychoanalytical researchers believe that many criminals are driven by an unconscious need to be punished for previous sins. These people cannot develop appropriate psychological defense mechanisms, and cannot control their feelings (Siegel, 2005).

Criminologists also aimed to explore the effects of empathy and altruism. Empathy is emotional and cognitive ability to understand the feelings and distress of others. Altruism is an active concern for the others' well-being. Researchers proved that the lower level of empathy and altruism causes more antisocial behaviors and criminal actions. Moreover, impulsiveness and negative emotionality are other effective personality traits. Impulsive people behave without thinking enough about the consequences of their actions. People, who have negative emotionality trait, cannot control their behaviors. They are nervous, and have high anxiety; that is why they give overreaction to other people. Therefore, impulsiveness and negative emotionality may increase criminal acts.

Lawrence Kohlberg (1958) developed the cognitive development theory. It is about the development of moral reasoning, and he supported that people organize their thoughts about morality or laws, and these thoughts can be used as significant

predictors of criminal actions. According to Kohlberg, people pass from three stages for moral reasoning development. The first step is the pre-conventional level (during middle childhood), and moral reasoning is based on obedience and avoiding punishment. Then person passes the second level that is the conventional level of moral development. During the end of middle childhood, moral reasoning is based on the expectations of their family and significant people for them. The last step is the post-conventional level of moral reasoning, and people are able to go beyond social conventions. Theory supports the value of laws and social system that are defined based on these steps. If there is a problem during these levels or person does not complete three steps successfully, s/he can prefer criminal activity.

Learning theory also is used to predict criminal acts. Behavioral psychology claims that people learn their behaviors through rewards, punishments or other people. According to the differential association theory, criminal action is a behavior, and it can be learned like other behaviors. People can learn moral or criminal acts with classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and modeling. Classical conditioning is a learning process and happens because of pairing a reliable stimulus with a response. In the operant learning, the behavior is learned with reinforcements and punishments. Therefore, the criminal act may increase with reinforcements or decrease with punishments. Rewards and punishments define the causes of criminal activity, and who will be a criminal.

### **Sociological explanations of the criminal act**

The environmental factors (including physical, social, economic, cultural and political environments) may shape behaviors of people. Poor physical, social and family environments may strengthen the intention toward criminal acts. Living in poverty, lack of social support and negative family experiences may increase the possibility of crime. Moreover, unemployment and education levels are other risk factors for a criminal act. There may be a direct relationship between unemployment and crime rate. Crime may be the consequence of defective social structure, and people may learn criminal actions because of the socialization. All of these conditions caused the creation of sociological theories to understand the criminal acts.

The strain theory (Merton, 1938) is one of the socio-structural perspectives. According to this view, social structure within the society can cause criminal acts. When people experience with strain or stress, they can behave like a criminal to reduce and escape from negative feelings. If there are different levels and classes in the society, and these classes are not equal and fair, some people may feel stress and anger (Cohen, 1955). Societies' goals such as achievement may be available for only

some classes. Therefore, disadvantaged people tend to express their feelings in different ways such as crime, suicide, alcoholism. Based on general strain theory (Agnew, 1992), two general categories of strain can contribute to crime; others prevent you from achieving your goals, and others take things you value or present you with negative and noxious stimuli. These goals can be money, status and for adolescents the autonomy from adults (Agnew, 1992). If there is a limited possibility to achieve these goals, people can commit a crime and tend to use some illegal ways.

The social learning theory of Bandura (1977) also can explain criminal activities. Through observing others' behaviors, people can learn this action. Family, friends, and media can shape behaviors of people. Some theorists claim that if there is a criminal in the family or close friend group of a person, s/he can behave like a criminal or if a child watches aggressive programs too much on television, s/he can indicate criminal acts. This situation can be explained by social learning theory. Therefore, family characteristics, child-rearing practices, parental criminality, peer influences, unemployment and school characteristics are some of other factors which may predict the criminal act.

Control theory is one of the other sociological theories of crime, and it is different from strain or social learning theories. Both strain theory and social learning theory analyze factors which push a person to commit a crime, but control theory uses an opposite perspective. It tries to understand why people conform or obey rules. According to the control theory, crime does not require any specific explanation. People know that they can reach their goals easily via criminal acts, or steal money is easier than earning money. That is why theory focuses on the question of why people do not commit a crime. Controls and restraints prevent to commit a crime, but the importance of controls can change from person to person. Some people are free to engage in crime than others.

Besides, based on the integrated control theory, there are three main types of control as direct control, stake in conformity and internal control. Direct control is performed by family, school officials, co-workers, neighborhood residents or police. They set rules, monitor behaviors, and sanction crime. For example, family members define rules, prohibit criminal acts, and limit the opportunity of crime. Also, family members observe and monitor the behaviors of their children to ensure that they do not engage in crime. Then, if there is a crime, the family punishes this behavior.

Moreover, the strong emotional attachment to conventional others (including family members, teachers) and actual or anticipated investment in conventional society (getting an education, building up a business) decrease the possibility of a

criminal act, and it is called as a stake in conformity. Also, internal control can be effective. It is a function of beliefs about crime and level of self-control. If a person believes that crime is a bad and negative behavior, s/he will not commit a crime whereas if a person has low self-control, s/he will have impulsive, insensitive, risky behaviors, and these will increase criminal actions.

In addition, the reactions of police or other official agencies to crime affect criminal activities, and this opinion developed labeling theory. According to this theory, official efforts can increase the possibility of crime. Individuals, who are arrested or punished, are labeled as criminals. Other people believe that a criminal is always criminal, and s/he commits a crime again and again. This thought increases the level of strain of criminal people and decreases their stake in conformity. Labeling theory was popular during the 1960s and 1970s. Although some researches have decreased the importance of this theory, it still is one of the frequently used approaches. Criminologists support that labeling is not only performed by official agencies, also family, teachers and peer groups can label a person like a criminal. It is called informal labeling and strengthens criminal actions.

Most of the recent sociological theories focus on the larger social environment such as communities or societies. Researchers try to understand why some societies have higher crime rates than others. This question developed the social disorganization theory. It focuses on the characteristics of these societies which have high crime rates. Social disorganization is defined as an inability of community members to achieve shared values (Bursik, 1988). These societies have poor life standards and limited resource (e.g., money, education). Negative conditions strengthen lower attachments to the community and increase the conformity problems. In addition residential instability, ethnic diversity, family disruption, economic status, population density and proximity to urban areas affect crime rates directly (Kornhauser, 1978; Sampson & Groves, 1989). These situations may prevent the integration of people, and increase criminal acts.

Marxist and feminist theories also are mostly used to understand criminal acts. Marxist theorists explain criminal acts based on class differences and propose that lower classes or unemployed people may commit crime easily; because these people may believe that they cannot reach their goals through legal ways. In addition, because of the limitations and strains, people behave like a criminal to resist the rules of society. Besides, feminist theories evaluate gender differences to understand the causes of criminal acts. Theory tries to answer why males are more involved in most forms of crime. According to feminist theorists, males and females are different from each other in social learning and control processes. For example,

the socialization of females is passive, and they give importance to the needs of others more. Females have a stronger attachment to society; so they indicate less criminal actions than males.

### **Extra theories to understand the criminal act**

Researchers also analyzed the criminal act as a personal choice, and this choice is based on rationality. Because of these opinions, during the 1970s and 1980s, the criminal decision-making process was overrated, and the rational choice theory appeared. Based on this view; the human being is a rational actor, rationality involves an evaluation process (including cost and benefit analysis), and people choose all behaviors freely. It means that before a person chooses to commit a crime, s/he evaluates his or her own personal situation (e.g., need for money, personal values). S/he analyzes the risk of criminal acts, the seriousness of punishment, the immediate need for criminal gain, the value of the criminal enterprise and other situational factors such as the position of the target, effectiveness of police or neighbors (Siegel, 2005).

Theorists tried to find how criminal actions can be less attractive for potential criminals. Powerful legal system and target hardening may decrease crime rates. Especially, the effectiveness of laws and punishments decreases criminal actions. People must fear from committing a crime. When they evaluate costs and benefits of criminal acts, if costs are larger than benefits, people may not prefer criminal actions. There is a direct relationship between the fairness of punishments and crime rates. The fair legal system shapes the decision-making process of potential criminals positively.

As stated before, the rational choice theory proposes that crime is a calculated and deliberate action, and all types of crime are committed based on rational decision-making process to improve personal benefit. However, this theory may explain better instrumental crimes rather than expressive crimes. Instrumental crimes may involve rational thinking and plan such as tax evasion, traffic violations, drunk driving, and corporate crime; but expressive crimes include emotion, and a person cannot think rationally during committing a crime. These people do not think consequences of their criminal acts, and that is why punishments may not be effective to prevent expressive crimes. Besides, routine activity theory is one of the sub-theories of rational choice theory, and it provides simple and powerful insight into the causes of crime. According to this view, crime depends on available opportunities (Felson & Cohen, 1980). If the target is not protected enough or if the reward is valuable, crime may happen; so, crime just needs an opportunity. Routine activity theory has three aspects as a motivated offender, a suitable target and the

lack of a capable guardian. Based on the theory, influential people in the lives of potential criminals affect their behaviors. For children, they can be parents, teachers, close relatives, peers whereas, for adults, these people are partners, close friends, family, and children. If influential people (handlers) are weak or absent, crime will be possible. Controllers or guardians also play an important role in the theory. They try to protect potential victims from a crime. Police, and security guards are formal guardians; but parents, neighbors, and friends are informal guardians. Strong guardians may decrease the possibility of crime. This theory is used to explain the rise of crime during the 1960s. In the 1960s, females participated in the labor market, and homes were left without a capable guardian. Also, traditional neighborhood decreased, and the number of big cities increased. Parents lost the power over their children. All of them decreased the effectiveness of handlers and guardians. People found a lot of opportunities to commit a crime, and this situation motivated them.

Another perspective is the life course theory. During the 1960s, theorists evaluated lives of people in structural, social and cultural contexts. This theory analyzes the life history of individuals and tries to understand how early or important events affect their future decisions and behaviors. Trajectories and transitions are two main concepts of theory. Trajectories involve long-term patterns of events as family history whereas transitions are short-term events as parenthood, marriage or divorce. Turning points are major transitions that cause a sharp change in the life course of person (Elder, 1985). This change may influence the attitudes of people toward the criminal act. Criminal actions cannot be understood with limited dimensions. Reasons of crime can be hidden in the context of life. If the context is analyzed and negative points are found, the possibility of criminal acts may decrease.

### **The Levels of the Criminal Act Explanations**

A Huge number of factors affects criminal acts directly and indirectly. Theories focus on different aspects of the criminal action and aim to explain the causes of crime with different views and reasons. In order to prevent the chaos in the literature, some researchers tended to classify these theories. Bernard and Snipes (1996) classified theories into two main categories as individual-difference and structure-process theories. Besides, according to McGuire (2004), crime theories can be divided into five different and interconnected levels as societal macro level theories, community or locality level theories, group and socialization influence theories, crime events and routine activities and lastly, individual level theories. They move from the large-scale, society-wide "macrocosmic" level to the "microcosm" of the individual person.

In the societal macro level, crime is evaluated as a large-scale social phenomenon. There are different groups in the society such as advantaged and disadvantaged groups, majority and minority, powerful and poor classes, males and females. These groups may behave based on their self-interests, and criminal acts may be preferred to reach their own goals. Moreover, unfair social systems and unequal distributions of power in the society may increase the possibility of criminal action. Conflict theory, strain theory, sociological control theory, Marxist and feminist theories are evaluated within this category.

The second group is community or locality level theories. In this level, crime is analyzed according to a geographical location within societies. Criminologists try to understand why crime rates are high in some places and cities of society. The conditions or characteristics of places (e.g., unemployment rate, poor life standards) may cause criminal actions. Environmental theories and differential opportunity theory can be examples of this category.

In the group and socialization influence level, theorists analyzed why some people commit a crime and others do not prefer criminal action in the same location. They support that smaller proximate units shape people's activities. These units can be family and peer groups. They play an important role in the social learning process. Through socialization process, people learn their roles in society. If a criminal act is favorable in family and peer group, the possibility of criminal action will increase. Moreover, in order to have a high status in their group, teenagers can behave like a criminal. Sub-cultural delinquency theory, differential association theory, and social learning theory are some well-known examples of this level.

Crime events and routine activities is the fourth level category. In this level, the criminal event is evaluated in detail. Criminologists believe that criminal event is not only the overt behavior of offender; it also has different motivations, processes, and factors. Opportunities, a suitable target, weak or ineffective guardians and handlers cause criminal activity. Moreover, costs and benefits of crime affect the possibility of criminal action. Routine activity theory and rational choice theory are found in this category.

The last category is individual level theories. In this view, intra-individual factors influence criminal actions. These factors can be biological or psychological. For example, genes, brain, body shape, chromosomes, hormones, neurotransmitters, traits, thoughts, emotions, and self-control level of a person influence their behaviors. Psychological control theories, cognitive social learning theory and biological theories are some examples of this category.

## Conclusion

The causes of the criminal act have been discussed by various scientific disciplines. Researchers tended to rationalize the question of "why people commit a crime" using different theoretical perspectives; because there are numerous factors which influence individuals and their decisions toward the choice of the criminal act. The current review aimed to present different theoretical approaches toward the criminal act within a harmony, and provide a structured source for forensic researchers.

The limitations of the current article should be taken into consideration. The paper includes a small part of the theoretical approaches which predict the criminal act. The content of the article should be enriched with new theories in the further studies; because the related literature needs a comprehensive review on the issue of criminal act. Secondly, all of these theories focus on different points of the criminal act. Researchers should try to understand the reasons of the criminal act within a holistic view. Independently proposed factors and theoretical perspectives may be highly related with each other and may be complementary in the criminal action process. That is why the usage of different theories and focusing on different factors within an integrative view may provide a better insight to predict criminal acts.

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