The following work aims to provide you with an introduction to various aspects of the Criminology course. Please read the material provided (you can highlight and/or annotate the document as you go through) and complete the questions and tasks throughout the document.

Please bring this work with you to your first Criminology lesson on Tuesday 9th September 2025

**What is Criminology?**

Criminology is an interdisciplinary social science that combines content regarding crime from sociology, psychology, law and politics.

**Crime or Deviance?** The concepts of crime and deviance are often used interchangeably, suggesting that people may regard them as the same thing. However, in criminology it is essential that we can discuss and identify the distinct difference between the two terms.

**Newburn (2007) defines criminology as:**

**The study of crime**

**The study of those who commit crime**

**The study of the criminal justice system and penal systems**

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**Defining Crime**

The term crime is not easy to define, in Criminology we explain the meaning of the word through various definitions, and you are required to know two of these:

**1.** **The social definition** - *Crime is any act so identified by groups in society*

The social definition of crime suggests that an act is only labelled as a crime if society decides that the act is criminal.

This definition of crime focuses predominantly on the social reaction and the actual process of criminalisation as opposed to the behaviour and the individual. This definition of crime is conditional and can change over time and between societies.

For example views regarding sexual conduct in the UK have changed, in the past consensual sex between men was prohibited, this is now accepted and legal in the UK but is still labelled as criminal in other countries across the world.

It is important to acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses of the social constructionist definition of crime; whilst ensuring that the definition of crime is always up to date and acknowledges the fluidity of society, this definition could lead to a lack of consensus (agreement) in society.

**2. The legal definition –** *Crime is an act that is against written law*

In the UK the legal system defines a crime as any act that breaks the law and can result in formal punishments, set by the judiciary.

In law a crime must have two elements:

**Actus reus** = is the physical ‘doing’ part of the crime and committing a guilty act, this can be physically acting (causation) or failing to act (omissions).

**Mens rea** = is the intention for the crime.

*For example, if Keith takes a knife and purposely stabs Alan in the chest multiple times and kills him, he has committed the actus reus (murder) and has the mens rea (intent to kill).*

However, in instances of defence, such as self-defence, infancy, insanity etc. even if both parts of the law are present a person may not be found guilty.

Again, it is important to acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses of the legal definition of crime, it allows for crime to be easily understood and identified due to its fixed certainty, however it responds slowly to social developments (e.g. cyber-crime) and still differs across location for example jaywalking is illegal in Australia but not here in the UK.

**So … whether an action is criminal depends on:**

Time

Place

Situation

Culture

**We call this the social construction of crime**

**TASK 1:**

Research how laws change due to time, place situation and culture.

Select one example from how laws change due to time, one example of how laws change due to place, one example of how laws change due to situation and one example of how laws change according to culture to. **Write a paragraph for each example that explains how perceptions of crime, definitions of crime and punishments for crime, change according to time, place, situation and culture.**

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**Defining Deviance**

Deviance is a term that should be used when describing **an act or behaviour that goes against societal norms.** Deviance is any behaviour that would receive a critical reaction or disapproval from a specific group or the society in which it is carried out. There are no written rules (or laws) regarding what is or is not deemed socially acceptable, meaning that like crime, the concept of deviance is complex and will vary depending upon the time, place situation and culture – referred to as **situational deviance.**

Norms, moral codes and values are what distinguish deviant behaviour in a society.

**Norms** are social expectations in a society that guide behaviour and explain why people behave in the way that they do. E.g. In the UK it is the norm to eat with a knife and fork, however in India it is customary to eat using your hands.

**Moral codes** define what is regarded as good behaviour. Breaking a moral code would be considered as serious in society and could even cross the boundary of committing a crime, such as burglary.

**Values** are ideas or beliefs about general principles or goals within a society or culture, they are things that we deem to be important for example the value of ‘honesty’, ‘respect’, ‘fairness’ and equality.

**Forms of Deviance**

It tends to be assumed that "deviant behaviour" is somehow always behaviour that is generally frowned upon by people in a society or viewed as negatively, that is not necessarily always the case. We can categorise various basic forms of rule-breaking behaviour in terms of three basic ideas:

1. **Admired Behaviour** - An example of deviance that might be considered as "good" or "admirable" behaviour (whilst also breaking social norms) might be something like heroism - the saving of the life of another person whilst putting your own life in great danger.

2. **Odd Behaviour** - This form of deviance ranges from such things as outlandish modes of dress, through mildly eccentric forms of behaviour (the person who shares their house with 50 cats, for example). The behaviour is not criminal but somewhat differs to ‘normal’ behaviour.

3. **Bad Behaviour** - This category of deviant behaviour tends to be restricted to law-breaking or criminal behaviour that in some way is seen as being something more than odd or out of the ordinary, for example assault.

It is not uncommon for behaviour to overlap in the categories of deviance. Some behaviour may be deemed as both odd and bad for example exposing yourself in public.

It is important to remember that these boundaries are blurred and that some acts may be deviant and not criminal, some acts are criminal but not necessarily deviant and some acts would be classified as both criminal and deviant.

**TASK 2: Decide whether the following acts are Criminal, Deviant or Both:**

Using the information in the table below, write a short explanation of each crime, acknowledging whether you think the crime can indeed be defined as criminal, deviant or both. Justify your explanations with material from the table and elsewhere, e.g. names of laws [legislation] that might have been broken etc

1. Moral crime
2. State crime
3. Honour crime

**Different Types of Crime**

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| **Type of crime** | **Criminal offences** | **Types of victim** | **Types of offender** | **Level of public awareness** |
| Moral crimes | Committed against the normal standard of morality in society  E.g. underage  drinking, assisted suicide, illegal gambling, illegal drug use, prostitution and vagrancy | Moral crimes are sometimes regarded as being victimless  However, arguably the offender and the victim can be the same person, for example under-age drinking | The offenders of moral crimes differ depending on the type of crime committed  As stated before, the offender can be the same person as the victim  It is important to acknowledge however that some people may commit a moral crime due to a difficult situation, for example a homeless person cannot do anything other than commit a crime of vagrancy | A lot of moral crimes are hidden, for example drug use may not be widely discussed within the family  In addition to the point made above, if the crime is known a family or the public may not report the crime to the police due to sympathy.  The victim may receive help as oppose to a conviction for example giving a homeless person money rather than reporting them to the police |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Type of crime** | **Criminal offences** | **Types of victim** | **Types of offender** | **Level of public awareness** |
| **State crimes** | Carried out by (or by the order of) the state or state agencies  E.g. genocide, war crimes, torture and imprisonment without trial | Citizens from a different country to the government committing the crime  Those with a different political or religious view  point to the government | The government High ranking personnel working for government agencies | High due to the extremity and seriousness of the crime  High levels of media reporting in society heightens the awareness |
| **Honour crime** | Honour crimes are punishments for causing issues or bringing shame to a family  E.g. Murder, beatings, acid attacks, abductions and mutilations | Usually, the victims of honour crimes are females within the family  Commonly it is the Asian community that are associated with honour crimes | The offender is usually a male from the same family as the female victim  As stated previously, usually Asian communities are associated with honour crimes | Honour crimes have a low level of public awareness, this may be due to a difference in culture and lack of understanding  Within societies where honour crimes are deemed acceptable the community will support the crime and regard it as appropriate retaliation to the shameful behaviour  Due to the acceptance within communities, it is unlikely that the crimes are widely reported, hence the unfamiliarity and lack of awareness of this type of crime |