

Are The Mentally Ill More Prone To Commit Criminal Activities?

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ABSTRACT

Public opinion surveys show that people across the globe believe that mental disorder and crime go hand in hand - a misconception revived and propagated mostly by the media. This paper aims to review the current literature so as to better visualize the yet unsettled proposition of crime and mental disorder. Certain psychiatric conditions do increase a person's risk of committing a crime. Research suggests that persons with mental illness may be more prone to violence if they do not receive adequate treatment, are actively experiencing delusions, or have long-standing paranoia. Such patients are often under the influence of their psychiatric illness such as command hallucinations. In some cases, however, criminals with mental disorders are fully aware of their wrongdoings. In these cases, they must be held fully accountable for their actions. In conclusion, the connection between mental disorders and crime solely varies from person to person. There are cases in which the person is experiencing severe paranoia in which they are not aware of their actions, and there are also cases in which the person commits a crime solely due to personal misconduct or pure wrongdoings and blames it on their background of mental disorders.

Keywords: *crime, mental illnesses,*

Subject: Psychology

INTRODUCTION

While the renewed focus and media attention on the importance of psychological state in the aftermath of tragedies is a positive development, the connection between mental illness and criminality is too often conflated. The favored belief that mentally ill people are more likely to conduct crimes is rooted in the media portrayal of criminals as “crazy” individuals. This is added by the general public perspective that mentally ill people are “crazy” and are not conscious of their actions and wrongdoings. However, a debated reality is that this is often not necessarily true. The term ‘mental illnesses’ encompass a broad range of conditions like depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and psychotic disorders. These conditions have an outsized impact on an individual's emotions and the way they interact within the community. Ultimately, labeling people suffering from serious health conditions as ‘violent’ or ‘dangerous’ only leaves them feeling more isolated from the community and ignores the fact that ‘mental illness’ is a sweeping term covering a range of conditions where patients respond to their illnesses differently. The Institute of Health and Welfare reported that in 2018 40% of prisoners identified as having previously been diagnosed with a mental disease. Other statistics show that approximately 1 in 5 people with mental illnesses will inherit contact with the criminal justice system at least once in their life, and a 2013 study concluded that 1 in 3 adults in their 20s – 30s with psychiatric illness had been arrested during a 10-year period. While there's no direct causal link between having a mental health condition and committing a crime, these statistics make it clear that those with mental illnesses are over-represented within the criminal justice system. This puts a big burden on the entire system and undermines society's ability to limit criminality.

METHODS

Types of Mental Disorders that could be linked with crime

Data was extracted from 21,424 pre-trial forensic psychiatric reports made between 2000 and 2006 within the Netherlands. They compared the prevalence of axis I disorders, personality disorders, intellectual functioning and drug abuse in defendants charged with a range of crimes (homicide, attempted/threatened homicide, assault, battery, rape, sexual crimes, arson and/or property crimes) using chi-square tests. Relationships with diminished accountability, reflecting an immediate

relationship with underlying mental disorder, were calculated using multivariate regression models, adjusted for age, gender, ethnicity and history of judicial contact.

Opposing Arguments: Mental Illnesses is not usually linked to crime

In a study of crimes committed by people with serious mental disorders, only 7.5 percent were directly associated with symptoms of mental illness, consistent with new research published by the American Psychological Association.

Researchers analyzed 429 crimes committed by 143 offenders with three major sorts of mental illness and found that 3 percent of their crimes were directly related to symptoms of major depression, 4 percent to symptoms of schizophrenia disorders and 10 percent to symptoms of manic depression. The study was conducted with former defendants of a psychological state court in Minneapolis. The participants completed a two-hour interview about their criminal history and psychological state symptoms, covering a mean of 15 years.

Case Analysis: Kelsey Patterson

Theoretical statements were extracted from the analysis of the case of Kelsey Patterson. The case of Kelsey Patterson, who was executed in 2004, is one among the most compelling examples of what can happen when the mental health system fails to provide adequate care and in doing so, puts the general public at risk. For nearly two decades, Patterson struggled with paranoid type schizophrenia. His severe delusions and elaborate conspiracy theories led him to commit several irrational and motiveless assaults. Yet rather than investing resources in a long-term treatment plan, the state of Texas largely left Patterson to his own devices, until at some point his mental illness pushed him to the point of no return.

Key Issues in This Case:

- Diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia in 1981
- History of hospitalizations and incarceration
- Danger to others when not being treated or taking medication
- Found incompetent to stand trial and deemed insane in prior assaults
- Severe delusions and conspiracy theories prevented him from assisting his attorneys or cooperating with mental health professionals
- Believed he had a “permanent stay of execution”

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The types of Mental Disorders that could be linked with crime

According to the pre-trial forensic psychiatric reports made between 2000 and 2006 in the Netherlands, arson had the strongest relationship with mental disorders in their sample, followed by assaults and then homicidal attempts or threats. Sexual and property crimes had the weakest relationship with diminished or absent accountability. Diminished accountability had the strongest relationship with psychotic disorders, followed by organic psychosyndrome and developmental disorders, whereas other axis I disorders, personality disorders or an IQ score of <85 points were only moderately related. These relationships varied little according to the type of crime, although tended to be weaker for defendants in property crimes. Cannabis and hard drugs were significantly associated with decreased accountability only in respect of arson.

Research concluded that disorders are related to all types of crimes but especially to arson, battery and homicidal attempts or threats, with a court finding of diminished accountability providing some validation for perceived links between the disorder and crime in this study. Moreover, psychiatric assessment is likely to be the most useful for defendants under charges of arson, assault or attempted homicide, as these groups are most likely to suffer from a psychiatric disorder related to the alleged offense.

Opposing Arguments: Mental Illnesses is not usually linked to crime

The study didn't find any predictable patterns linking criminal conduct and mental illness symptoms over time. According to the research, two-thirds of the offenders who had committed crimes directly related to their mental illness symptoms also had committed unrelated crimes for other reasons, such as poverty, unemployment, homelessness and substance abuse.

In addition to interviews with offenders, the researchers reviewed criminal history and social worker files to help rate crimes based on their association with symptoms of schizophrenia disorders (hallucinations and delusions), bipolar disorder (impulsivity and risk-taking behavior) or major depression (hopelessness and suicidal thoughts). The ratings were: no relationship between mental illness symptoms and the crime, mostly unrelated, mostly related or directly related.

A crime could be rated as mostly unrelated or mostly related to mental illness symptoms if those symptoms contributed to the cause of the crime but weren't solely responsible for it. For example, an offender with schizophrenia who was agitated because he heard voices earlier in the day later got into a bar fight, but he wasn't hearing voices at the time of the altercation, so the crime was categorized as mostly related.

Case Analysis: Kelsey Patterson

Kelsey Patterson spent much of the 1980s in-and-out of mental hospitals in Texas. No one questioned that he had a severe mental illness – paranoid schizophrenia – that often caused him to become violent. In 1980, he shot and seriously wounded a co-worker. Patterson believed his food was being poisoned by the man even though they'd only met that morning. Three years later, Patterson wounded another man during a delusional assault. In 1986, Patterson assaulted yet a third victim. Finally, on September 25, 1992, just days after his brother had tried unsuccessfully to get him committed to a psychiatric facility, Patterson fatally shot a businessman and his secretary. He then put his gun down, stripped to his socks, and paced, shouting incomprehensibly until the police arrived.

There was no doubt that Patterson had committed two murders. There was no doubt that he had a severe mental illness and was delusional at the time of the murders. This raises the question of whether he could be held accountable for his actions because he was legally “insane”. Most people believe that if someone is “insane” when they commit a crime, they cannot be held accountable for their actions. But the legal system always has had trouble dealing with persons with mental illnesses and the Patterson case is an ideal example. This raises another question of whether Patterson could understand that what he had just done - committed murder - was wrong.

Psychiatrists for the prosecution testified that Patterson did understand that murder was wrong when he committed the killings — so a Texas judge ruled that Patterson could be found guilty and given a death sentence. In only the second time in its history, the Texas Board of Pardon and Paroles sent a recommendation to the Texas governor asking that Patterson's life be spared. By a 5-to-1 vote, the panel said Patterson deserved mercy because he was simply too sick to be punished.

In this case, we can conclude that the root of his criminal behaviors were his mental illnesses, thus proving that the mentally ill are more prone to crime. Although Patterson did experience a series of mental disorders, there was no doubt that he was aware of his actions and that his actions were wrong.

CONCLUSION

There is a vast range of mental health issues that can affect a person, in many different ways. One in four people are said to experience mental health problems at some point, but 25% of the population haven't killed someone or committed a violent crime (UN, 2019). Therefore, saying someone who committed a violent crime had a mental illness is so vague as to be essentially meaningless. Maybe a violent offender does have mental health issues in their past, but it's like saying they have brown hair, or owned a Mazda, or ate pork. It may be true, but it doesn't mean it's a factor, or a direct cause of their behavior. Moreover, the majority of individuals in society, even trial judges, stand by the propaganda that criminals with mental disorders are not responsible for their wrongdoings and need to be granted mercy (Hulathduwa, 2017).

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