**CRIME**

The word crime is derived from Latin word *crimen* which means offense. Numerous social scientists have offered definitions of crime. These definitions are as follows;

**Edwin H. Sutherland**, an American criminologist of the mid-20th century, suggested that “the essential characteristics of crime is that it is the behavior which is prohibited by the state and against which the state may react”.

**Black’s Law dictionary** defined crime as “a positive or negative act in violation of the penal law; an offense against the state”.

In the field of **criminal justice**, it is defined simply as “an act or omission prohibited by law”.

**Mortimer J. Adler** defined crime as “behavior which is prohibited by the criminal code”.

A lawyer and sociologist **Paul W. Tappan** has offered a definition of crime that does mark its major boundaries. According to him crime is “an intentional act or omission in violation of criminal law, committed without justification and sanctioned by the state as a felony or misdemeanor”.

This definition of crime stressed upon act or omission. A person cannot be punished for his or her thoughts. Thus, for there to be a crime, there must be an act. A person may wish to commit a crime, or think of committing a crime, but the crime does not occur until the action is taken place. By contrast, however there are circumstances in which plaining to commit a crime is a criminal act but it must involve two or more people. Abetting is also considered as a crime. Abettor is an individual who plan a crime but is not present in the time of committing crime. The abettor is also called accessory before the fact.

Furthermore, for an act or omission to be a crime, the requires the presence of criminal intent. The notion of criminal intent suggests that the person is aware of what is right and what is wrong under the law and intends to violate the law. Criminal intent is of two types i.e. specific and general. Specific intent is present when the circumstances of the crime show that the offender must have consciously desired the prohibited result. Similarly, the crime of burglary reflects the notion of specific intent because the burglar consciously desires the prohibited result. By contrast, consider the case of a man outraged by his neighbor’s barking dog. He expresses his disapproval by warning the neighbor that if the dog is not quitted, he will shoot the dog. When the threat is ignored and the dog continues to bark, the angry man fires three shoots through his neighbor’s window, intending to kill the dog. Instead one of the bullet kills his neighbor. Although specific intent is not present in this case but general is. General intent refers to conscious wrongdoing from which a prohibited result stems, even in the absence of a desire for that particular result. Furthermore, for an act or omission to be a crime, not only must there be a criminal intent, but the behavior must be in violation of the criminal law.

Like definitions, crime is subject to a variety of interpretations. For the scholar, crime can be a drama, a conflict between good and bad, like those portrayed in Greek tragedies. To a researcher, crime is a case study. To the moralist and reformer, crime is a manifestation of spiritual depravity. To the reporter, it is news. To the detective it means work, to the thief it is a business, and to the victim it suggests fear and loss. But to most individuals, crime is no more than the violation of a generally accepted set of rules that are devised by the state.

Crime varies culturally and geographically. Many activities are considered crime in some jurisdictions but not in others, and in some nations but not in others. There are certain acts which are once viewed as crimes but are no longer considered as such, and some behaviors that many people consider normal and common are defined as criminal under the law.

**The concept of crime**

Professional criminologists usually align themselves with one of several schools of thought, or perspectives. Each of these perspectives maintains its own view of what constitutes criminal behavior and what causes people to engage in criminality. A criminologist’s choice of orientation or perspective depends, in part, on his or her definition of crime. The three most common concepts of crime used by criminologists are the consensus view, the conflict view, and the interactionist view.

**Consensus view of crime**

According to the consensus view, crimes are behaviors that all elements of society consider repugnant. The rich and powerful as well as the poor and indigent are believed to agree on which behaviors are so repugnant that they should be outlawed and criminalized. Therefore, the criminal law the written code that defines crimes and their punishments reflects the values, beliefs, and opinions of society’s mainstream. The term “consensus” implies general agreement among a majority of citizens on what behaviors should be prohibited by criminal law and hence be viewed as crimes. This approach to crime implies that it is a function of the beliefs, morality, and rules inherent in Western civilization. Ideally, the laws apply equally to all members of society, and their effects are not restricted to any single element of society. More specifically in consensus view, (1) The law deﬁnes crime (2) agreement exists on outlawed behavior and (3) Laws apply to all citizens equally.

**Conflict view of crime**

Although most practicing criminologists accept the consensus model of crime, others take a more political orientation toward its content. The conflict view depicts society as a collection of diverse groups such as owners, workers, professionals, and students who are in constant and continuing conflict. Groups able to assert their political power use the law and the criminal justice system to advance their economic and social position. Criminal laws, therefore, are viewed as created to protect the haves from the have-nots. Conflict criminologists often contrast the harsh penalties inflicted on the poor for their “street crimes” (burglary, robbery, and larceny) with the minor penalties the wealthy receive for their white-collar crimes (securities violations and other illegal business practices). Whereas the poor go to prison for minor law violations, the wealthy are given lenient sentences for even serious breaches of law.

The conflict view is summarized in the following four points. (1) The law is a tool of the ruling class (2) Crime is a politically deﬁned concept (3) “Real crimes” such as racism, sexism, and classism are not outlawed and (4) the law is used to control the underclass.

**Interactionist view of crime**

According to the interactionist view, the definition of crime reflects the preferences and opinions of people who hold social power in a particular legal jurisdiction. These people use their influence to impose their definition of right and wrong on the rest of the population. They maintain their power by stigmatizing or labeling people who fall outside their definition of right and wrong. Criminals therefore are individuals that society labels as outcasts or deviants because they have violated social rules. In a classic statement, sociologist Howard Becker argued, “The deviant is one to whom that label has successfully been applied; deviant behavior is behavior people so label.” Crimes are outlawed behaviors because society defines them that way, not because they are inherently evil or immoral acts. Interactionists see criminal law as conforming to the beliefs of “moral crusaders,” or moral entrepreneurs, who use their influence to shape the legal process as they see fit. Laws against pornography, prostitution, and drugs are believed to be motivated more by moral crusades than by capitalist sensibilities. Consequently, interactionists are concerned with shifting moral and legal standards. The interactionist view can be better explained as (1) Moral entrepreneurs deﬁne crime (2) acts become crimes because society deﬁnes them that way and (3) criminal labels are life-transforming events.

Because of their diverse perspectives, criminologists have taken a variety of approaches in explaining crime’s causes and suggesting methods for its control. Considering these differences, we can take elements from each school of thought to formulate an integrated definition of crime: “Crime” is a violation of societal rules of behavior as interpreted and expressed by the criminal law, which reflects public opinion, traditional values, and the viewpoint of people currently holding social and political power. Individuals who violate these rules are subject to sanctions by state authority, social stigma, and loss of status.

This definition combines the consensus view that the criminal law defines crimes, the conflict perspective’s emphasis on political power and control, and the interactionist concept of stigma. Thus, crime as defined here is a political, social, and economic function of modern life. No matter which definition of crime we embrace, criminal behavior is tied to the criminal law. It is therefore important for all criminologists to have some understanding of the development of criminal law, its objectives, its elements, and how it evolves.