THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A CRIMINOLOGICAL REPORT IN UNDERSTANDING CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS TO AGGRESSIVE AND VIOLENT BEHAVIOUR: A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

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INTRODUCTION

Various Criminal Justice experts stress that the quality of forensic reports (with the view of assisting the court), reiterate information about perpetrators that are already known to the court. This means that factors such as the offender’s date of birth, family orientation, school experiences and aspects related to insight and remorse are presented to the court. However, these factors are already on file and are of no assistance to the decision-makers. This results in ineffective forensic reports where the contribution and necessity of such reports are often questioned (S v D 199 (1) SASV 122; S v Manka 433/2002, 2003 (2) SACR 515; S v Mokoena A188/2003, 2003 (2) SACR 521).

In South Africa, violent and aggressive crimes are on the increase. For this reason it is necessary to ascertain the causes of aggressive and violent behaviour (Bolowana 2004:2). Often, violent and aggressive behaviour are the result of peer victimisation. Bullying is pervasive throughout the world and it is present in rural, suburban and city environments as well as across all social strata of society. Research indicates that victims tend to become abusers later in their lives and bullying is mostly perpetrated against weaker and isolated individuals (Rapp-Paglicci, Roberts & Wodarski 2002:6-7, 247-248).

This article highlights the importance of a scientific contribution regarding forensic reports for custodial purposes. This means that criminological reports can also be utilised for custodial purposes. These reports can inform the authorities about the character of the offender, and the risks (risk to escape, self-harm and violent behaviour), and needs (such as education and employment) of offenders for management and rehabilitation purposes. This article utilises a selected case study to determine the causes of aggressive and violent behaviour. A qualitative approach is followed to analyse and scientifically explain criminal behaviour. This analysis is furthermore sustained by relevant research findings that may have a significant impact on the treatment of the offender. The assessment can furthermore be utilised as a guideline by therapists for intervention purposes.

DEFINITIONS

The following definitions, central to this research project, will be defined to clarify any possible misunderstandings regarding the concepts used in this study.

Aggressive and violent crime

Aggressive and violent crime involve the use or attempted use of violence against another person, endangering or the likeliness to endanger the life or safety of another person and inflicting or likeliness to inflict severe psychical damage to another person. The types of crimes that are to be considered as violent include murder, accessory to murder, aggravated assault, assault causing bodily harm, assault with a weapon, attempted murder, breaking and entering with the intent to commit an indictable offence, breaking and entering and committing an indictable offence, rape, conspiracy to commit murder, discharging a firearm with the intent to wound or endanger life, kidnapping, manslaughter, possession of a weapon for dangerous purposes, robbery and unlawful

**Bullying behaviour**

Bullying behaviour is also referred to as peer victimisation and it involves physical, emotional and/or verbal abuse. It constitutes an imbalance of power, a lack of concern on the part of the bully for the feelings and concerns of the victim, and a lack of compassion (Neser, Ovens, Van der Merwe & Morodi 2004:83).

Momberg and Makhanya (2004:1) refer to bullying behaviour as “power abuse among pupils.” This correlates with the view of Rapp-Paglicci et al (2002:6-7, 248) regarding bullying behaviour. According to Rapp-Paglicci et al, bullying includes the abuse of power through repeated aggressive behaviours. For the purpose of this article, bullying behaviour refers to peer victimisation and it involves physical, emotional and verbal forms of abuse. The essence of this type of crime lies in a power imbalance and the fact that it is an unfair match between the abuser and the victim.

**METHODOLOGY**

In this research project a case study (referred to as Mr. W) is analysed from a qualitative-criminological approach to determine and identify the contributory factors to criminal behaviour, as well as the triggers, high-risk situations and intervention indicators for risk management purposes. In this regard, Neuman (2000:144-145, 148) purports that qualitative research involves the interpretation of a specific social context that emphasises a “case-oriented approach”. Meaning is attached to events, natural settings and detail in order to gain insight into the case. It is argued by Weber (in Neuman 2000:70), that social science, such as Criminology, “needs to study meaningful social action, or action with a purpose.” Such a purpose may include objectives to analyse, determine and explain the origin of criminal behaviour.

Babbie (2001:285) suggests that the purpose of a case study is to analyse a research subject in-depth in order to gain explanatory insights into his or her world. This means that the complexity of human behaviour, social structures (for instance, family influences) and processes (such as the influence of substance abuse) that influence criminality are illustrated in this type of analysis (Neuman 2000:32-33). Thus, a case-study research approach provides on in-depth examination of various features. For example, the contributory factors to criminality, personality traits and social and environmental influences are interpreted (interpretive social science) according to the individual’s own experience. This approach is supportive of an interactionist view whereby the offender’s interactions, interpretations of reality, definitions of right and wrong, observations and evaluations are analysed from a criminological perspective (Siegel 2003:17).

The interviewer was requested by the head of a Free State prison to assess Mr. W to outline the dangerousness that this individual poses to management, staff members and fellow inmates. Nine assessment sessions of an hour and a half each were conducted and an unstructured interview schedule and observation techniques were utilised to guide the interviewer during the interviews.

After the assessor explained the purpose of the interviews, the offender willingly cooperated and good rapport was established. Where necessary, verbatim quotations used by the offender will be utilised in this article to accentuate his perspective and experiences, and also to give the reader insight into his world.
CASE STUDY ANALYSIS OF A VIOLENT AND AGGRESSIVE OFFENDER

Mr. W is classified as a violent and aggressive offender, categorised as a maximum status prisoner, and he is imprisoned in a maximum correctional facility. He is a 29-year-old single male, who has never been married. He has no dependents and is a devoted Muslim. He is of heterosexual orientation and is currently not supportive of any political party. He speaks Tswana, Zulu, English and Afrikaans. He reports serious sleeping problems and holds that he sleeps approximately two to four hours a night. He says he thinks a lot at night – specifically about my “… gang, family … and just everything.” When asked why he does not sleep during the day as well, he replied that “I cannot sleep during the day, I’m scared … someone might attack me while I’m asleep, it has happened before, the cells are not locked during the day and it’s not safe.”

Mr. W notes that he was voluntarily tested for HIV/AIDS in 2003 and that the result was negative. He reports no medical problems and he displays various scars (mainly the result of gang fights) on his face. When not incarcerated, this individual resides with his mother and he owns no property.

Culture

Mr W is a representative of the Sotho culture and explains that it is mainly a patriarchal society where the males are the “decision-makers”, they are dominant and have power and control over the lives of the women and the children. Females are submissive, “have no say about their lives” and are the “home-makers” of the family.

In general, domestic violence is not accepted and practised and most marriages are arranged marriages (within his community). The men have to pay “labola” in the form of money, cattle, furniture or presents (such as clothes, vehicles, furniture and property) to marry their brides. Marital disputes are resolved by approaching the wife’s parents for assistance and guidance. The offender’s mother believes in, and practises witchcraft. His mother consults “sangomas” to assist the family in the “healing of personal, financial and business problems”. Furthermore, circumcision is an important practice and the precursor to “real manhood”.

Family background

Mr. W’s mother is still alive but his father passed away in 1984 (due to a mine accident). He is unsure about his parents’ qualifications and says his mother (54 years) sells beer at a small tavern in the township to earn a living. His father was a mineworker. His parents were never unemployed, have no criminal records and never abused any substances. Regarding his parents’ religion, Mr. W’s mother is a Zionist while his father was a Muslim.

Although the offender describes his family as a close-knit unit and reports no abuse or trauma in the family environment, he does not seem to know much about their lives, occupations and/or personal interests. Mr. W is the eldest of three children (from the same parents). He has a brother (25 years), and a sister (21 years). Both his siblings are unmarried, do not have any dependents, did not complete their schooling and have no criminal records. He describes his parents’ marriage as happy with no marital discord, conflict or abuse. Both his parents worked long hours and his father frequently worked night shifts. When asked to which parent he would go to if he experienced any problems, he replied that “my father, he was ‘open’ … my mother was the one who disciplined us, we couldn’t take any chances with her … she knew all our tricks!” According to Mr W the discipline was fairly meted out, but he received most of the hidings (with a wet towel) for being naughty (lying and stealing).

Mr. W indicates that there was always enough food,
clothes and adequate shelter for the family. They resided in a four-room house and never went short of anything (basic physical needs). Although none of his siblings completed their schooling, they were always encouraged to go to school. Because of his parents’ long working hours and demanding work, the children received little parental supervision, discipline and affection.

School experience

Mr W had serious school adjustment problems and found it difficult to function “outside” his family environment. As a child, he was extremely shy and withdrawn, struggled to communicate with others (he says “I never talked much”) and never had many friends. He participated in soccer and chess, and enjoyed English and History as subjects (because he liked the teachers).

Because of his shyness, the “bigger boys” at school picked on him and severely bullied, teased, humiliated and abused him. They took his money and food, teased and belittled him, and victimised him physically and emotionally. This had a profound effect on his school achievement and personality - it left several emotional scars and insecurities. As a result of this he played truant (regularly missed classes), became involved in fights at school, committed in petty crime (stealing from his mother and lying to his parents), became aggressive, started abusing alcohol at the age of eight years, and joined a street gang, The Firm (affiliated with the 28's prison gang), at the age of ten years.

During this time (between the ages of 8 and 15) he would, whenever he had the opportunity, abuse alcohol. His parents were not aware of his alcohol and personal problems (extreme shyness and communication difficulties). During this period Mr W experienced feelings of isolation, hatred, anger, powerlessness and helplessness – this created severe stress and promoted his violent and aggressive behaviour. He submits that he joined The Firm because “… they were tough, aggressive, strong, and mean - everybody knew not to mess with them.”

The gang provided him with a “tough image”, protection, assistance (to fight those who bullied him), status, respect and fear among his peers. His “job” in the gang was to sell Mandrax. The result was that the victim became the “abuser”. Mr. W started to bully other vulnerable children, he mentions that “… I felt good and in control”, and he derived pleasure from bullying little children. He also started to be cruel towards animals. He holds that he taught his dogs to be aggressive and to attack strangers – this he accomplished by hitting them with towels and sticks. He reports regular fights with the neighbour’s children (this started at approximately at age of 5 or 6 years). Recollecting this, the offender acknowledged that he became the “abuser” to show others his toughness and to protect himself from further abuse.

Due to Mr. W’s truant behaviour, inconsistent school attendance, and violent and aggressive behaviour at school, he was expelled at the age of 15 years. He subsequently left school and spent most of his time with either the gang or at his uncle’s tavern (where he sold beer).

Criminality and associated factors

Mr. W was incarcerated for the first time at the age of 17 or 18 years. He is a second offender and committed murder in both instances. He holds that with his first offence (1993), he was under the influence of alcohol, and became involved in a quarrel where he stabbed the victim to death. He received a five-year imprisonment sentence for this offence. During his incarceration he committed another murder for which he received an effective 20-year prison sentence. The motives for his crimes appear to be aggression, anger, hatred and revenge.
During his first sentence he was detained among adult offenders because there was not separate detention facilities for juvenile and adult offenders at the time. During this imprisonment he was severely and repeatedly sodomised and raped by adults. He later learned that these individuals were representatives of the 26’s gang. He states that “I cannot remember how many times I was raped … but it happened many times.” When asked to recollect his feelings and emotions at the time, he said that “I felt bad ... I didn’t know those things (rape) at the time, it changed my mind(set), I always felt ashamed and dirty … and from then on I just wanted to take revenge.” He cites that he never reported the abuse, as he was afraid that they (the abusers) might target him for further abuse. When the abuse did not stop, he eventually told the then major (at the prison) about this but nothing came of it. Mr W indicates that he has never revealed or admitted this (the rapes) to anyone.

While at this prison, the offender was further victimised by members of the 26’s gang. He states that after visits the gang robbed him of his money and goods (food and toiletries that he received from his mother). This angered him more and after another such an incident he stabbed a 26’s gang member to death (his second murder). As a result of this he decided to join the 28’s gang for protection and to take revenge on the 26’s gang for the abuse. Later on he requested to be transferred to another prison to be closer to his family and to disassociate himself from the abusers.

**Support structure**

Mr W never really had an adequate support structure. During his childhood, his parents were too occupied with their own lives and occupations to adequately support him. In prison, he has had limited contact with his family. He says that his mother and sister visit him, that he speaks to his mother on the phone and he tries to communicate (in writing) with his other siblings, but they never reply to his letters.

**Aggressive and violent behaviour**

Mr. W has a history of displaying violent and aggressive behaviour. This started at pre-school (5 to 6 years) when he had regular fights with their neighbours’ children. His peer victimisation (bullying behaviour) enhanced his aggressive tendencies, he became cruel towards animals, was expelled from school (for aggressive behaviour, among others), and he participated in violent gang activities (fights and the bullying of non-gang members). The offender’s behaviour progressed to committing two serious aggressive crimes, and while in prison, he was also involved in gang fights.

The offender’s childhood exposure to violent and aggressive behaviour, aggressive role models (negative and aggressive peers), and interaction with aggressive and violent others (peers), desensitised him into accepting violence and aggression as methods to resolve conflict. Exposure to, and witnessing of violence and maladaptive behaviours on a daily basis, reinforces violent and aggressive behaviour in children as a method to resolve conflict (Naidu 2004:1-2; Rapp-Paglicci et al 2002:7, 91-92).

Research affirms that children who are exposed to violent and aggressive behaviour are four times more likely to suffer from psychological problems such as anxiety and aggression problems (Ponce, Williams & Allen 2004:98; Rapp-Paglicci et al 2002:56-57). Serious physical, psychological and social consequences accrue as a result of exposure to violence. Factors that influence the acceptance of violent and aggressive behaviour are early childhood experiences, exposure to violence and attitudes conducive to the acceptance of violent and aggressive behaviour (Ponce et al 2004:97-98).

Research furthermore demonstrates that experiencing, witnessing and internalising violence increases the chance of becoming a perpetrator of violent crime.
Such individuals learn at an early age that violence is a routine feature of everyday life either within their family of origin or within their local community (Naidu 2004:1-2; Ponce et al 2004:98; Rapp-Paglicci et al 2002:74-75, 81). Chronic rates of community violence (such as assault, aggravated assault, rape, robbery and murder) within the immediate neighbourhood also reinforce the notion that violent and aggressive behaviour are acceptable ways to resolve conflict (Rapp-Paglicci et al 2002:74, 129).

Gang involvement

Mr W joined the 28’s gang in 1994 and he holds the position of a “general”. He says that this means that the “last words (decisions) are in his hands”. This position represents power, status, fear and respect. He speaks “gang language” and calls his friends his “bra’s”. He joined the gang to alleviate his feelings of hatred and isolation, for protection (against the 26’s), attention, acceptance, to oppose prison authority (who could never protect him), support, extra food, luxuries (such as cigarettes) and to fight the unfair treatment of prisoners.

Gang membership is an important aspect of his life. He enjoys the status, power and luxuries attached to his position. To illustrate this he indicates that “I do not get visits, but I always have money, extra food … and I do not work. I short nothing, I’m well looked after, I just sit … I’m the General.” The gang is his support structure and family in prison. Mr. W maintains that his life is constantly in danger (due to his position in the gang). He says “ …you have to watch your back, you can never really relax, you walk with the ‘secrets’ of the gang.” He states that he will always protect his gang members and stand up for them, as “… we will always stand together … prisoners must ensure their own safety … because management cannot help us.”

Gang involvement and involvement in criminality provide fulfilment for the important needs of the offender – those that were not met during his childhood (such as respect, recognition, acknowledgement, attention, a sense of belonging and acceptance). Research suggests that gangs become new homes for victims who are exposed to limited schooling and dysfunctional families – that is, gangs are substitutes for the functions and role (support, security, attention, love, recognition, a sense of belonging) of the family (Alexander 2000:303-306; Bartollas 2003:304-305, 314-315; Cullen & Agnew 2003:186-217; Eitle, Gunkel, & Gundy 2004:95-97; Sheley 2000:350, 357, 362; Siegel 2004:192, 196-197, 284).

Education, employment and leisure activities

Mr W obtained a Std. 8 qualification and is currently furthering his schooling. He has never been employed in the formal sector and does not possess any practical or formal training and qualifications. He claims that at one stage he really wanted to join the military to become a professional soldier. He does not seem to be particularly interested in work. He would like to have a “nice” job where he can “deal” with people. The offender furthermore indicates that he would like to own and/or drive his own taxi and liquor tavern.

His lack of interest in formal employment is associated with his gang involvement and his position in the gang where he enjoys status and does not have to work for luxuries. He wants to maintain the same level of status, power and respect that he enjoys inside the prison. The offender shows interest in obtaining certificates in woodwork and computers that might be regarded as valuable by the parole board (it would show that he has improved himself in prison). Mr. W participates in soccer, chess and pool during his leisure time and likes to listen to the radio (country music). He tries to exercise in the gym on a weekly basis.
**Previous treatment**

The offender reports that he never used the psychological services at the Department of Correctional Services. He indicates that he attended an intake programme at the current prison. He expresses the need to be exposed to psychological services, but states that “I must (be able to) trust that person with my history and all the bad stuff …”.

**Substance abuse**

Mr. W has a record of alcohol abuse. He notes he never used and/or abused any drugs because he felt more in control with alcohol. When asked about Mandrax, he replied that he only sold it and noticed the effect that this drug had on its users (drowsiness) and that it scared him.

According to Bartollas (2003:343-344), youths in disorganised areas that experience doubt, hopelessness and uncertainty on a daily basis, are encouraged to find ways to seek solace and relief from their disappointments and pain. Drug and alcohol abuse is an immediate fix for their problems – it becomes a coping mechanism to handle their problems. Research demonstrates a strong relationship between substance abuse, violent and aggressive behaviour, negative peer influence and criminal behaviour (Benett & Holloway 2004:305, 307-309; Schmalleger 2003:80, 112).

**Personality and cognitive functioning**

Mr W struggles to communicate, expresses himself poorly, and found it difficult at times to understand the interviewer. He displays limited social and interpersonal skills, is extremely shy and withdrawn, lacks self-confidence and has a low self-esteem. This is in contrast with his position and functioning in the gang.

He states that he accepts responsibility for his crimes and he does not rationalise or justify his behaviour and criminal involvement. He understands the consequences of his actions, but he acts “at the spur of the moment” and lacks the necessary self-control. He displays poor self-management strategies, tends to be impulsive and irrational (specifically when provoked or when he is angry). In this regard he states that “… sometimes I think I should have acted differently, but at the time I was just so cross.”

He has a low impulse control, lacks patience, finds it difficult to delay gratification, does not explore all his options when he is angry, does not think things through and displays rigid and inflexible thinking patterns. Mr. W finds it difficult to solve problems – and this seem to stress him out. He does not handle stress well and as a result of this he experiences sleeping problems. He does not have the ability to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships. He seems to be scared of intimate relationships and shows no interest in intimacy (with a male or a female partner). This might be the result of his sexual victimisation (sodomy and rape) in prison.

Mr W exhibits victim empathy deficits. This is evident in how much he enjoys hurting other people (sadistic tendency) and it might also be linked to his own peer victimisation (bullying). Regarding his attitude, he displays pro-criminal attitudes and is not motivated to change. He is susceptible to group pressure and peer influences and has a poor support structure. Mr. W’s friends are mostly criminal associates and he lacks contact with non-criminal others. He is loyal to his gang and this is his “survival mechanism” in prison.

Mr. W displays a history of alcohol abuse and uncontrollable and violent behaviour. As a result of the bullying and prison rapes, he experiences severe feelings of betrayal, hatred, anger, hostility, aggressiveness and revenge. He does not know how to cope with these unresolved feelings and emotions. The
individual has a reputation in prison of being aggressive, he says that his fellow inmates are scared of him and that this “… makes me crazy!” There seems to be no history of suicide attempts, suicide thoughts or hostage-taking.

**Contributory factors to criminal behaviour**

Childhood influences such as a lack of adequate discipline and supervision; a lack of attention; peer victimisation (bullying); social isolation; and an inadequate support structure contributed to this individual’s involvement in crime. Personal factors that played a vital role in Mr. W’s criminality are, a lack of power and control; uncontrollable aggression; alcohol abuse; feelings of revenge; impulsive and irrational behaviour; vulnerability; immediate gratification; a low self-esteem; extreme shyness; poor problem-solving skills; a lack of coping mechanisms and feelings of anger, hatred, hostility, helplessness and powerlessness. Furthermore, peer pressure, gang influences and gang involvement, the support of violent and aggressive behaviour, and sodomy and rape, contributed to the offender’s involvement in crime and aggressive behaviour.

**Triggers for violent, aggressive and criminal behaviour**

The prison environment is an enclosed culture where a prisoner’s world is very “small” and everything concerning his or her everyday functioning (reputation, status and privileges) matter. This means that they may perceive any infringements or disruptions as major threats.

Possible antecedents that might trigger violent and/or aggressive behaviour within this individual include a lack of self-control, powerlessness and irrational behaviour. Factors such as stress (e.g. a lack of contact with family), involvement in gang fights, social isolation, frustration, anger and judgmental and rude behaviour towards inmates, might trigger him to become aggressive and violent. Attempted rape and/or sodomy, bullying behaviour, perceived threats (his position in the gang) and challenging behaviour might also trigger violent and aggressive behaviour within this individual. In this regard, he mentions that he hates it when people “look at me in a funny way … it makes me crazy.”

Other factors that might play a role in violent and aggressive behaviour include uncertainty (regarding his future, family and privileges), revelations about own victimisation (rape), negative gossip and disloyalty to his gang, pressure to perform, and an inability to meet expectations as well as a lack of safety and security.

**High-risk situations**

High-risk situations such as situations where Mr W might not have self-control; gossip, critique and disloyalty against his gang (as he will always defend them); idleness and a lack of positive and uplifting stimulation; personal vulnerability; threats and bullying behaviour; attempts to sexually abuse/sodomise him; belittling and humiliation; challenging behaviour; long periods of isolation from the normal prison community; and a lack of contact with his family, should be avoided in order to stabilise the offender’s behaviour. Regarding access to his family, he states that “I have a right to see my family and to have access to them … it is too far for them to visit me. Visits from my family keeps me alive”.

**Explanation of criminal conduct**

There is a clear link between emotional disarray and peer victimisation (Smit 2003:84-85). Mr. W has been a victim of bullying in school and at prison. As a result of this he developed a low self-esteem, suffered from humiliation and shame and experienced feelings of isolation, depression, social withdrawal and rejection. He lost interest in school and his academic
performance was poor. Smith (2003:84-85) claims that being bullied may lead to problems that can be carried into adulthood, and that bullying victims develop an inability to form and maintain positive relationships.

There is furthermore a strong correlation between bullying victimisation and subsequent involvement in violent, aggressive and criminal behaviour (Smith 2003:85). This is evident in Mr. W’s involvement in cruelty to animals, his persistent violent and aggressive behaviour at school and his crimes. Often the victim becomes the abuser. According to research (Neser, Ovens, Van der Merwe & Morodi 2003:128; Rapp-Paglicci et al 2002:249; Smith 2003:82-83), bullying results in an imbalance of power and those who engage in this deviant practice (the abusers) often display the following characteristics:

- A need to feel powerful and in control (to win).
- A poor self-esteem.
- Limited feelings of being loved.
- A lack of significant and meaningful others in their lives.
- A need to dominate and subdue victims.
- Satisfaction from inflicting injury and suffering of others.
- Hot-tempered, easily angered, impulsive, and low frustration tolerance.
- Aggressive and deviant behaviour.
- Are quick to anger and quicker to use force to resolve their problems.
- A lack of victim empathy.
- Seldom express remorse for their actions.
- Anti-social behaviour at a relatively early age (such as cruelty to animals).
- Social isolation.

Factors that contribute to bullying behaviour include social isolation, being different (shyness) and being a vulnerable target such as lacking assertiveness (Neser et al 2004:84). According to Rapp-Paglicci et al (2002:7, 249-250), victims of bullying behaviour often become bullies themselves. These individuals are at risk for continuing difficulties into adulthood, especially in the form of criminality and violent and aggressive behaviour. A common denominator among bullies appears to be their inclination to see hostile intent in the actions of others, they tend to be less likely to recognise prosocial responses to problematic situations and see no alternatives to aggression (Rapp-Paglicci et al 2002:249).

Neser et al (2003:127) concede that bullies are often individuals who have been bullied or abused themselves, and that they experience life situations they cannot cope with, which leave them feeling helpless and out of control. They have poor social skills, cannot meet school expectations, abuse alcohol, show poor school adjustment and become socially isolated. Other effects of bullying include chronic absenteeism, low self-esteem, reduced academic performance, increased anxiety, loneliness and social isolation, a decision to drop out of school, and suicide behaviour (Rapp-Paglicci et al 2002:247). Abusers bully to feel competent and successful, to control others, and to gain relief from their own feelings of powerlessness. Such characteristics promote gang involvement and criminality because the victims want to “to get even” with their own abusers (Neser et al 2003:128; Neser et al 2004:83-84).

Other aspects that contributed to this individual’s criminality include a lack of parental discipline; supervision and affection; alcohol abuse, truant behaviour; limited education, antisocial lifestyle; criminal associations and gang involvement. The correlations between these factors and criminality are well illustrated in various criminological theories (Fields & McNamara 2003:63-64; Siegel 2004:199, 100, 217, 285).

The following selected theories and supported research findings specifically address the aetiology and origin of Mr. W’s involvement in criminality.
Onset of criminal behaviour


Bolowana (2004:2) posits that often violent and aggressive offenders are, “... exposed to a life where violence has become an aspect of their lives. The family structure is fragmented and broken, and the children carry anger and take it out on society.” The deeper the roots of childhood maladjustment, the smaller the chance of adult adjustment, and children who are antisocial early in life are the most likely to continue their offending careers into adulthood (Heck & Walsh 2000:178-181; Kamsner & McCabe 2000:1247, 1253; Kear-Colwell & Boer 2000:594-595).

Other personal, social and environmental influences

The offender’s lifestyle was furthermore influenced by dropping out of school, a limited education, negative peer relations, substance abuse, unemployment, residence in high-crime and disorganised areas that act as important “pushes” and “pulls” into criminal behaviour (Curran & Renzetti 2001:101; Rapp-Paglicci et al 2002:73, 81; Sacco & Kennedy 2002:82-83, 87; Schmalleger 2003:112-113, 117-118). In addition, Cox (2004:2) and Thompson (2004:6) cite that unemployment and substance abuse (especially alcohol abuse), are common among the South African prison population and these factors contribute to the country’s high rate of violent crimes.

Aggressive and violent behaviour

Research indicates that aggressive behaviour is learned behaviour and behaviour that is learned can be “unlearned” (Bartol 1999:183; Schmalleger 2003:116; Siegel 2004:216, 221, 285, 325). The conditions most conducive to the learning of aggression in Mr. W’s life were:

- Opportunities (interaction with nuclear family and association with aggressive peers) to observe aggression.
- Reinforcement for his own aggression (where such behaviour is accepted, promoted and expected).
- Personal victimisation (the victim of physical abuse).

Furthermore, when a child’s imitative behaviour is reinforced or rewarded (by antisocial associations) by praise and encouragement from significant models, the probability that the behaviour will occur in the future is increased. In this instance, Mr. W’s violent and aggressive behaviour was shaped and influenced by his own victimisation and his association with a negative and aggressive peer group.

The offender’s display of violent and aggressive behaviour as a means of conflict resolution and communication can be explained by Bandura’s social learning theory. This theory highlights how a child exposed to violence (at home) at a young age may at a later stay display aggressive or violent behaviour, and that the “learned” behaviour is then perceived as “normal” behaviour (Fields & McNamara 2003:63; Rapp-Paglicci et al 2002:132; Reid 2003:105-106). Bandura argues that people are not born with the ability to act violently, but that they learn to be aggressive through their life experiences. These experiences include personally observing others acting aggressively to achieve some goal, or observing people being rewarded for violent acts, a process called modelling or observational learning. Thus,
people learn to act aggressively when, as children, they model their behaviour after the violent acts of adults and later in life, these violent behaviour patterns persist in social relationships (Bartol 1999:183; Fields & McNamara 2003:63-64; Reid 2003:105-106; Siegel 2004:156).

The Differential Association Theory of Edwin Sutherland also explains how violent and aggressive behaviour is learned behaviour (Bezuidenhout & Joubert 2003:91; Curran & Renzetti 2001:137-138; Siegel 2004:219-220). According to Sutherland, criminal and violent behaviour is learned through immediate interaction with significant others and peers. This interaction process includes the necessary techniques, drives, motives, rationalisations and attitudes. Definitions favourable to illegal and antisocial behaviour is learned and individuals become criminal as a result of an excess of definitions favourable to criminal behaviour. However, the frequency, duration, priority and intensity of such exposure determine the degree to which an individual will become criminal and accept unconventional values.

This theory highlights how Mr. W was exposed to, associated and interacted with aggressive, violent and criminal peers. Mr W learned through association that aggressive behaviour results in peer acceptance, a sense of belonging, acknowledgement, attention and support. Mr. W realised that to survive (financially and emotionally), and to be feared and respected by his peers, he had to belong to a negative and criminal subculture. As a result of this, substance abuse became a coping mechanism (in order not to feel guilty and ashamed). In his view he gained respect and status within the community by being involved in a negative subculture and criminality.

A comprehensive explanation of criminal behaviour

Elliott, Ageton and Canter’s Integrated theory incorporates various aspects of different theories to explain involvement in criminal behaviour from an integrated perspective. The theory of Elliot et al. combined aspects of the following (Cullen & Agnew 2003:485, 489, 503):

- Strain: This aspect is derived from Merton’s Anomie theory and suggests that individuals experience strain due to a lack of conventional opportunities, coupled with a desire for success. According to this principle, Mr. W experienced strain because of his limited educational achievement and limited employment opportunities. As a result of this he resorted to a negative peer group that committed crime to survive economically.

- Social control: This principle is linked to Hirschi’s Social Control theory. According to this theory, Mr. W became involved in aggressive and criminal behaviour due to a lack of meaningful and law-abiding attachment, commitment, involvement and belief in conventional others and society.

- Differential association/social learning: This highlights Sutherland’s Learning theory and stipulates that personal exposure to, interaction, communication and association with aggressive and criminal others increased the offender’s involvement in violent and aggressive behaviour and criminality.

According to Elliot et al, two major pathways to delinquency exist, namely 1) low social control that increases the likelihood of association with peers, which in turn increases the likelihood of delinquency; and 2) strain reduces one’s level of control, which in turn increases the likelihood of association with delinquent peers and thereby delinquency (Bezuidenhout & Joubert 2003:108; Cullen & Agnew 2003:485, 489, 503).

This integrated theory explains that Mr. W’s lack of
social control (commitment, involvement and belief in conventional others), and strain experienced due to his personal victimisation and factors such as dropping out of school, limited school achievement, substance abuse and unemployment, increased his likelihood to resort to a negative subculture, which in turn reinforced his involvement in aggressive behaviour and criminality.

**Indicators for intervention**

Indicators for purposeful intervention include the addressing of the offender’s peer victimisation; rape, sodomy and related post-traumatic stress symptoms; substance abuse at an early age; extreme shyness; isolation (lack of friends, communication difficulties); a lack of power and control; a lack of self-confidence; impulsive and irrational behaviour; immediate gratification; a low self-esteem; peer pressure and influences; gang involvement (address the reasons for his gang involvement and empower him to substitute it with conforming alternatives); a lack of self-control and a lack of interest in education, treatment and development.

Custodial staff and therapists should utilise psychological evaluations (for instance, MMPI, Rorschach) to determine a possible antisocial personality disorder, and/or severe aggressive and abusive tendencies within this individual. They should also replace the offender’s need for power and control (that is derived from bullying and gang activities) with meaningful other options. Mr. W should be assisted to develop social and interpersonal skills and his feelings of anger, helplessness, hostility and powerlessness should be addressed.

This individual will not benefit from group therapy because of too many personal issues (such as, bullying and rape) that need to be addressed before he can adapt in a group setting. Mr. W is furthermore sceptical about group therapy, and that “… these programmes that they (the prison) have … where they put different gang members together in one room, it does not work, it creates tension and stories and more gang fights. It creates opportunities to attack other gang members. I avoid those programmes … it is too dangerous.”

Effective therapy should include strategies that will empower the offender to understand the effect and contribution of peer victimisation to his behaviour. He should furthermore be made to understand the origin of his aggressiveness and the effect it has on his life. Mr. W will benefit from individual psychological counselling in order to address his rape trauma. Mr W should also learn that the display of aggressive behaviour is not synonymous to power and control.

**CONCLUSION**

This article evaluates the contribution of criminological forensic reports for custodial purposes. Criminological analysis for custodial purposes contributes to a better understanding of the character of the offender, his personal background, contributory factors to his criminal behaviour, triggers, high-risk situations and provides therapists with indicators for the effective management and rehabilitation of offenders.

This report stresses that long-term offenders can be assessed for effective management and intervention purposes. From this report it is evident that criminological forensic reports can be utilised for both pre-sentence and custodial purposes. This new application would open up the scope for criminologists in practice to have an opportunity to apply theory to practice (within the correctional system).

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


