

# The Intersection of Mental Health and Criminal Behaviour: Forensic Psychology Insights

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## Introduction

The intersection of mental health and criminal behaviour is a complex and multifaceted area of study within forensic psychology. Understanding this intersection is critical for both legal and psychological professionals as it helps to elucidate the ways in which mental health issues can influence criminal behaviour and informs strategies for prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation. Forensic psychology, which applies psychological principles within legal contexts, offers valuable insights into how mental health disorders can contribute to criminal actions and how these insights can be used to inform legal decisions and treatment plans. Mental health issues are increasingly recognized as significant factors in the criminal justice system. Individuals with mental health disorders are often overrepresented in the justice system, highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of the relationship between mental illness and criminal behaviour. This exploration involves examining how various mental health conditions can predispose individuals to criminal behaviour, how the criminal justice system responds to these individuals, and how forensic psychological assessments can inform legal and therapeutic interventions. By examining these aspects, the essay aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how mental health intersects with criminal behaviour and how forensic psychology contributes to addressing these challenges [1].

## Description

Mental health disorders can significantly impact an individual's behaviour, including their likelihood of engaging in criminal activities. Forensic psychology seeks to understand this relationship by examining various mental health conditions and their potential influence on criminal behaviour. Psychotic disorders, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder with psychotic features, can profoundly affect an individual's perception of reality. Symptoms such as delusions, hallucinations, and disorganized thinking may impair judgment and increase the likelihood of engaging in criminal behaviour. For instance, a person experiencing paranoid delusions might commit a violent act in self-defense or preemptively against perceived threats. Forensic psychologists assess the extent to which these symptoms influence criminal behaviour and consider whether mental illness was a significant factor at the time of the offense. Mood disorders, including major depressive disorder and bipolar disorder, can also intersect with criminal behaviour. Depression, characterized by severe mood disturbances, can lead to impulsive actions or suicidal behaviour, which might result in criminal acts such as self-harm or property damage [2].

Bipolar disorder, with its episodes of mania and depression, can result in erratic behaviour and poor decision-making, potentially leading to criminal actions. Forensic psychologists evaluate the impact of mood disorders on criminal behaviour and assess the need for mental health treatment

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Received: 01 August, 2024, Manuscript No. jmt-24-145876; Editor Assigned: 03 August, 2024, PreQC No. P-145876; Reviewed: 17 August, 2024, QC No. Q-145876; Revised: 22 August, 2024, Manuscript No. R-145876; Published: 29 August, 2024, DOI: 10.37421/2471-271X.2024.10.311

versus legal penalties. Personality disorders, such as Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD) and Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), are frequently examined within forensic psychology. ASPD is characterized by a persistent pattern of disregard for others' rights and social norms, which can manifest in criminal behaviour. Individuals with BPD may exhibit impulsive behaviour and emotional instability, which can also lead to criminal actions. Forensic psychologists assess how these personality disorders influence criminal behaviour and contribute to understanding the individual's psychological profile. Substance use disorders often co-occur with other mental health conditions and can significantly impact criminal behaviour [3].

The effects of substance abuse, such as impaired judgment and increased aggression, can lead to criminal acts including drug offenses, theft, and violence. Forensic psychologists evaluate the role of substance use in the context of criminal behaviour and consider how addressing substance abuse issues might influence legal outcomes and rehabilitation efforts. Forensic psychological assessments are crucial in understanding the intersection of mental health and criminal behaviour. These assessments help to determine the presence of mental health disorders, evaluate their impact on behaviour, and inform legal decisions. Competency evaluations assess whether an individual is mentally competent to stand trial. Forensic psychologists use standardized tools and interviews to assess competency and determine whether mental health conditions are affecting the individual's ability to participate in the legal process. The insanity defense is based on the premise that individuals should not be held criminally responsible for actions committed while suffering from severe mental illness [4].

Forensic psychologists conduct evaluations to determine whether a defendant meets the criteria for an insanity defense, assessing whether mental illness impaired their ability to understand the nature of their actions or conform to the law at the time of the offense. Risk assessments evaluate the likelihood of an individual committing future criminal acts. Forensic psychologists use various tools to assess risk factors, including mental health conditions, historical behaviour patterns, and environmental influences. These assessments inform decisions about sentencing, parole, and treatment, aiming to balance public safety with the needs of the individual. Forensic psychologists play a role in recommending and designing treatment and rehabilitation plans for individuals with mental health disorders who have committed crimes. Forensic psychologists must navigate the limits of confidentiality, particularly when their assessments are used in legal proceedings. Clear communication about the limits of confidentiality is crucial to ensure that individuals understand the potential implications of their involvement in the assessment process [5].

## Conclusion

The intersection of mental health and criminal behaviour is a complex and critical area of study within forensic psychology. Understanding how mental health conditions influence criminal behaviour, and how forensic psychological assessments can inform legal and therapeutic interventions, is essential for promoting justice and supporting effective rehabilitation. Forensic psychologists play a vital role in evaluating mental health conditions, informing legal decisions, and recommending treatment plans that address the underlying issues contributing to criminal behaviour. Navigating the ethical and legal implications of forensic psychological assessments requires careful consideration and adherence to professional standards. By balancing effective assessment with ethical responsibilities, forensic psychologists contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between mental health

and criminal behaviour, ultimately supporting fair and effective legal and therapeutic outcomes. As forensic psychology continues to evolve, ongoing research and attention to ethical practice will be essential in addressing the challenges at the intersection of mental health and criminal behaviour.

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**How to cite this article:** Nunes, Cristina. "The Intersection of Mental Health and Criminal Behaviour: Forensic Psychology Insights." *J Ment Disord Treat* 10 (2024): 311.