

FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY FOR PREVENTION OF CRIME AND REHABILITATION OF OFFENDERS: PUBLIC HEALTH PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

Forensic psychology is an emerging field in India. It offers psychological theories, behavioural research and the scientific methodological tools for crime investigation, and advice the police, courts or prison and probation services. It also assesses and addresses mental illness of criminals, and extensively engages in research. Apart from these, forensic psychology discipline has potential role in prevention of crime, rehabilitation and reintegration of criminals to the society. Authors discuss role of forensic psychology in prevention of crime, treatment of mental illness, rehabilitation & reintegration of the criminals in the society. Along with criminals, addressing victims' psychological issues are equally important and their role in the Juvenile Justice Settings as well is critical. Criminal justice system in India would benefit from opening up more domains to forensic psychologists and using their expertise across various domains not limited to crime investigation but also prevention and rehabilitation, which requires their interventions at community level. The need of the hour is developing functional eco-system with the justice system where forensic psychologists' knowledge and skills can be utilized for prevention of crime at community level as well.

Keywords: criminal justice, justice system, forensic psychology, criminal justice from public health perspective

INTRODUCTION

Forensic psychology is defined broadly as the research and application of psychological knowledge to the legal system (Ainsworth, 2000). Bartol and Bartol define Forensic psychology as; (i) research endeavor that examines aspects of human behaviour directly related to the legal process and (ii) the professional practice of psychology within, or in consultation with a legal system that which embraces both civil and criminal law (2008).

Forensic psychology is emerging discipline within Forensic Sciences in India. According to the Indian Evidence Act 1872, section 45, forensic psychologists and psychiatrists lend their expertise to solving in criminal investigations (Indian Evidence Act 1872, Government of India). They play crucial role at Forensic Science Laboratory in answering who, when, where, what, why and how of the crime (Hyderabadwalla, 2018). It has been recognized as an applied psychology discipline for detection of crime, intervention and rehabilitation of crime victims (Vaya, 2015). However, currently forensic psychology focuses more on crime investigation and rehabilitation of crime victims are less prioritized. Prevention of crime is one of the objectives of criminal law (Government of India). India has progressed from conducting narco analysis (1987) to interview and assess criminals; there is still considerable scope for development. Criminal justice system in India would benefit from opening up more domains to forensic psychologists and using their expertise across various domains not limited to crime investigation but also prevention and rehabilitation, which requires their interventions at community level. This paper presents scenario of forensic psychology in developed countries and India; and discusses prospect of forensic psychology in India from public health perspective.

FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY IN DEVELOPED COUNTRIES: GLOBAL SCENARIO

Forensic psychologists are an integral part of criminal investigation, and prison systems in developed countries like the USA, UK and Australia. They are focus on understanding why such behaviors occur as well as help

minimize and prevent such crimes (Carson & Bull, 2003; Wrigthsman, 2001). Their roles include developing profiles of criminals, expert witnesses in courts, suspect interrogations, psychological profiling of criminals and crimes, rehabilitation and counselling victims (Ainsworth, 2000). Various forensic psychology assessments are used in developed countries such as Polygraph or Lie Detector, Psychological Stress Evaluator, and so (Carson & Bull, 2003; Wrigthsman, 2001). These facilitate criminal investigations, and assist court in criminal proceedings. Mental health issues are adequately addressed. Forensic psychologists conduct objective interviews of offenders, and then refer to mental health professionals such as clinical psychologist or a psychiatrist. Further, forensic psychologists are equipped with the legal framework of their respective country and which enables them to effectively assist courts. Forensic psychologists work in various settings from court system to law enforcement agencies, correctional institutions and medical treatment facilities. They are recognized as integral part of the multidisciplinary team and work collaboratively. Such eco-system perhaps aid in fast-tracking investigations, address mental health of criminals, and victim counselling.

FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY IN INDIA: NATIONAL SCENARIO

The supreme court of India, in 2010, allowed Narco analysis, Lie detection and Brain Electrical Oscillation Signature (BEOS) profiling for criminal investigation with informed consent (Hyderabadwalla, 2018). Psychological assessments conducted under Forensic Science Laboratories are Polygraph, Narco Analysis, BEOS, Layered Voice Analysis, Statement Analysis, Forensic Hypnosis, Psychological Autopsy, Forensic Psychological Assessment and Suspect Detection System (Veeraraghavan, 2009; Vaya, 2015). Furthermore, psychological profiling is also now recognized as promising technique in crime investigation, which is a collection of data such as crime scenes, medical history, police records, witness statements, suspect narration and psychological findings based on interviews (Acharya, 2015).

Forensic psychologists assimilate data on types of crimes and criminals to create behavioural profiles for crimes (Nanda, & Tewari, 2000; Tewari, & Ravikumar, 2000). However, these initiatives are preliminary stages. Profiling of crimes and criminals can facilitate developing behavioural pattern of crimes which can potentially improve both efficiency and accuracy of crime investigation.

Indian forensic laboratories are also working on the establishment of Forensic Psychology labs in all the states for better psychological forensic investigation including latest technologies like Micro-Expressions, Eye-Tracking and Social networking software to detect and track online terrorism.

PROSPECTS OF FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY IN INDIA

Apart from investigative roles of forensic psychologists discussed, their role in prison systems and juvenile justice settings is also imperative. Indian prisons and juvenile justice settings fall behind significantly in offender interviewing, rehabilitation after sentencing and correction practices for juveniles.

Prisons are overcrowded and recidivism rate among criminals and juvenile offenders in India is 7.2 (NCRB, 2018), which is a matter of concern. Recidivism is repeating crime after completing the sentence. The role of forensic psychologists becomes important to understand the perpetrators' mind sets, guide them through their issues, identify and facilitate treatment of mental morbidities.

Health issues especially mental health is inadequately addressed in prisons and juvenile justice settings. Forensic psychologists may be required to prepare first-time offenders (adults as well as juveniles) for their life in prison dealing with groupism, potential threat to life or other forms of bullying by cynical criminals (Karandikar, 2017). These aspects may lead to distress, which eventually result in any kind of mental morbidities. A literature review published in the Lancet journal highlight prevalence of personality disorders, depression, and schizophrenia and substance dependence among prisoners (Fezel et al, 2016). Indian studies also indicate physical and mental health issues among prisoners (Sinha, 2010; Kumar & Daria, 2013). Similarly considerable proportion of juvenile offenders suffers from mental morbidities (Rijo et al, 2016; Jacob et al, 2014; Snehil et al, 2020).

In such context, forensic psychologists can help inmates deal with stress, adapt to prison life in a healthier manner and provide psychological first-aid. Interventions dealing with mental illnesses affecting offenders have been found to be effective in reducing psychiatric recidivism (Morgan, 2012).

Another aspect of crime that often gets overlooked is the victim's counseling. Many victims undergo tremendous trauma which make them vulnerable to mental morbidities. In cases of sexual abuse, victims are subjected to rigorous medical examinations and interrogations, which may further take a toll on their mental health. In such instances, forensic psychologists can primarily ease their pain, prepare them for the procedures

to follow, and help them overcome trauma. Further, they can empower the victims in unconditional self-acceptance and facilitate rehabilitation and re-integration back in the family and society.

WAY FORWARD

An effective standard operating procedure and standardized guidelines need to be formed for the smooth functioning of the forensic psychologists within justice system. Forensic Psychology curriculum of graduate and post-graduate can include criminal investigation, criminal rehabilitation, basic counselling to provide psychological first-aid and referral for specialist mental healthcare. Skills-based continuing education on forensic psychology will help accelerate the efficiency of students and professionals. Children in schools and colleges also require broad spectrum assessment of psycho-neuro-forensic assessment for diagnosis of criminal thinking and intervention at school level to prevent future crimes. Indeed, the country's criminal investigation and correction processes would benefit from opening up more domains of forensic psychology. The need of the hour is developing functional eco-system with the justice system where forensic psychologists' knowledge and skills can be utilized optimally with the help of other professionals.

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