

Perception of Criminal by Society

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Abstract

A criminal is an individual who commits a offence towards the social norms or laws established. However, it does not define who is an criminal, the ethical constraints and framework affecting him/her, the causes for committing the crime etc. This paper was motivated to understand the general level of perception a society holds towards a criminal. How it defines a criminal, the various characteristics it associates with a criminal, the crimes which the society thinks are more likely to be committed, factors influencing crime and criminal behavior etc. The general sense of crime and criminal is vaguely defined by society and therefore, this research tries to understand this perception which the society holds.

Keywords: Criminal, Society, Crime, Criminal behavior, discrimination.

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I. Introduction

A criminal is an individual who commits a crime. However, this meaning of the word ‘criminal’ does not tell us about anything relating to a crime or criminal. A crime is simply the breach or violation of the legal or social norm, the criminal is, of course, the individual who has committed such acts of breach.

Every society views a criminal as a disruption to the normal functioning of a society and rightly so, as it causes dissatisfaction and feeling of hatred starts hindering the relations and harmony of a society.

Punishments to offenders is a common way to rectify the offence of the person and subdue the negative feelings of the affected person. However, many a times the person feels that the punishment is not at an appropriate level and try to execute their own punishment they deem appropriate.

Objectives

Sr. no.	Particulars
1.	To understand how a society understands the concept of ‘criminal’.
2.	To study the various factors influencing the understanding of crime and criminal.
3.	To understand how society treats a criminal.

II. Research Methodology

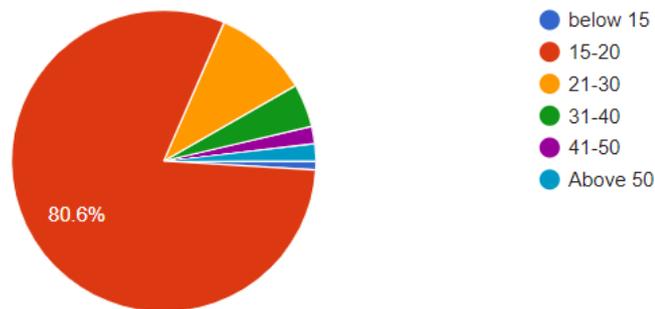
Research type	Descriptive
Scope of research	Nashik
Data Collection	Primary source: Google form questionnaire and face to face interview with respondents Secondary Source: Research paper from various online journals & books
Study of Population	People located in Nashik
Sample Size	108 online respondents and 40 interviews.
Sampling Techniques	Purposive
Tools for Data analysis	Pie chart & Bar graph

A survey was conducted through online questionnaire as well as face to face interview. The questions were related to- who is a criminal, what are the crime they commit, the factors that influence the tendency to commit a crime, the age group of criminals etc.

III. Data Analysis & Interpretation

Your Age

108 responses



A total of 108 responses were collected through the online questionnaire. The data collected from their responses will be used to draw interpretations. The majority of the respondents were obtained from an age group of 15-20. However, efforts were made to collect responses from all age groups. It was done so that their perception are also understood and so that the data incorporated every opinion.

The following are the questions which were asked from the respondents: -

1. Who is an Criminal

Who do you think is a criminal?

Copy

108 responses



The question was 'who do you think is a criminal'.

The options which were given were: -

- a. Someone who does something against law
- b. Someone who does something against social norms
- c. Someone who causes harm to someone else or property

Results:

The majority of the people selected option (a) with 55.6%. The second most selected option was (c) with 25.6% and third was option (b) with 10.2%. The rest of the responses were either entered as all of the above or combination of two options.

Interpretation:

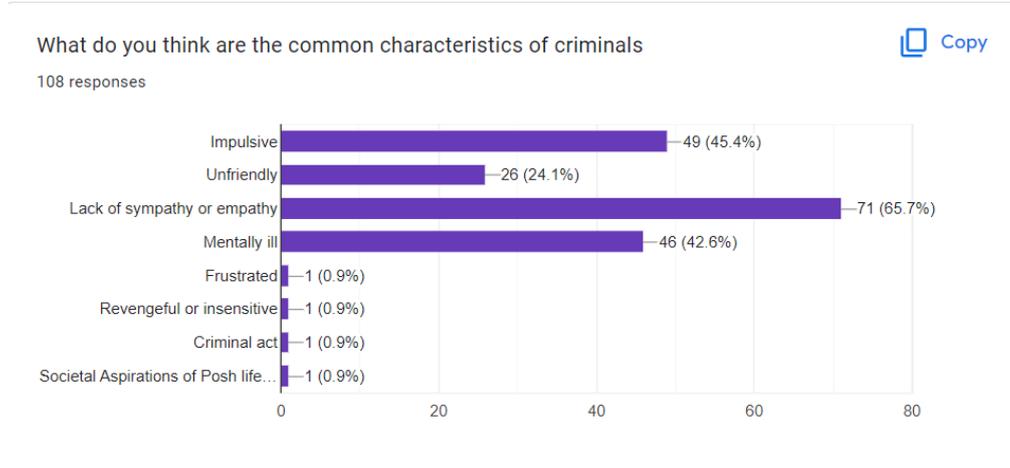
The question helped to understand that the majority of the people believe that a criminal is defined by the legal system. People believe that crime and criminal behavior is stated in the legal system of a country and therefore,

the formal authority is responsible for establishing the rules and consequences for the behavior to be considered criminal.

People who believe that someone who causes harm to another or property is criminal understand it in a physical or mental sense where someone obstructs another's way of life.

People who believe that someone who does something against social norms is a criminal understand it in a social setting where society defines its members, the roles associated and the behavior expected. Someone who derails from the social norms is therefore, offender, outsider, or criminal.

2. Common characteristics of Criminal



The questions was 'What do you think are the common characteristics of criminals'.

The options which were given were: -

- a. Impulsive
- b. Unfriendly
- c. Lack of sympathy or empathy
- d. Mentally ill

Results:

The majority of the people selected option (c) with 65.7% (71 votes). The second most selected option was (a) with 45.4% (49 votes), third was option (d) with 42.6% (46 votes) and the option (b) with 24.1% (26 votes). The rest of the responses were mental frustration, discrimination insensitive.

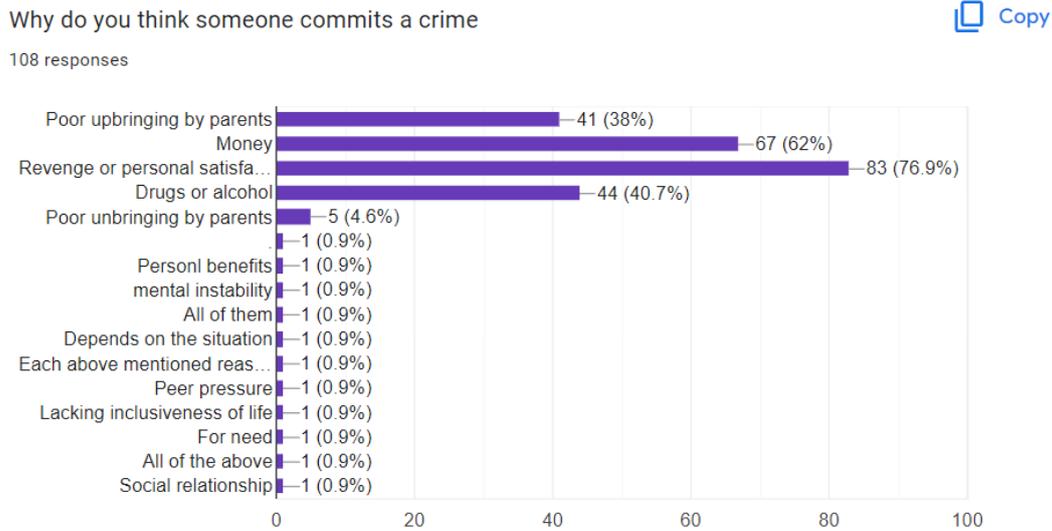
Interpretation:

The question helped to understand that majority of the people believe that lack of sympathy or empathy towards another person is the most common characteristic of a criminal. The reason being that mostly people believe that people with a cold personality are likely to commit a crime.

People who are impulsive quickly turn towards violence leading to verbal, mental or physical abuse therefore, the prevalent believe. People who are mentally ill are generally perceived to commit crimes as they lack awareness, understanding and consequences.

People who are unfriendly, who show tendency towards isolation, depression or avoidance are perceived as criminal minded due to their separation from society and disregard towards others.

3. Why someone commits a crime



The questions was ‘Why do you think someone commits a crime’.

The options which were given were: -

- a. Poor upbringing by parents
- b. Money
- c. Revenge or personal satisfaction
- d. Drugs or alcohol

Results:

The majority of the people selected option (c) with 76.9% (83 votes). The second most selected option was (b) with 62% (67 votes), third was option (a) with 42.6% (46 votes) and the option (d) with 40.7% (44 votes). The rest of the options were peer pressure, lack of direction in life, mental instability.

Interpretation:

The question helped to understand that majority of the people believe that revenge or personal satisfaction is the main reason behind someone committing a crime. Since, a lot of crimes are committed for personal motives or vengeance like dissatisfaction towards an individual, hatred or for the pleasure of it.

Today, money has high importance in every economy and society. People who have less of it or think that they have less of it are more likely to steal it from others. The above being the rationale behind money being the reason for committing a crime.

Children who are negated, abused, or dominated by their parents in their upbringing are generally not confident in themselves and thus, look for social validation elsewhere. Poor upbringing leads to a negative personality and outlook being formed in the individual. The individual commits a crime due dulled sense of right and wrong.

Drugs and alcohol are perceived negatively due to their effect to dull the senses of the body. Media reporting’s, discussions amongst people, and personal experience from a event solidifies the image of drugs or alcohol increasing the tendency of an person to commit a crime.

Bad company from peers, mental instability and lack of direction in life are also associated reasons to commit a crime. Peers influence each other’s behaviour, mental instability in a person makes it harder to distinguish expected behaviour and actual behaviour and aimlessness in life leads taking extreme measures to show one’s worth.

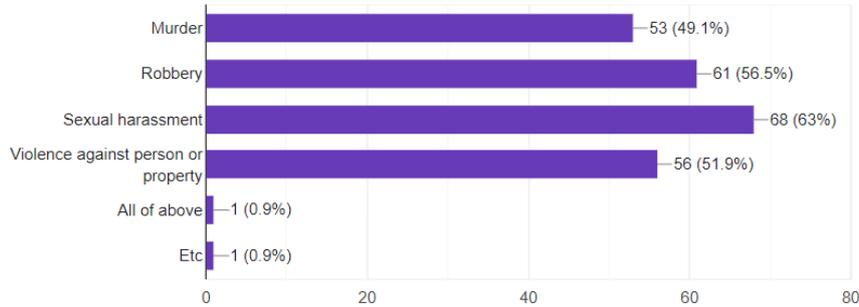
It was observed during the interview as well as in the questionnaire phase that all people have relative fixed view about their opinion.

4. Types of crime likely to be committed



What types of crimes do you think are more likely to be committed

108 responses



The questions was ‘Why do you think someone commits a crime’.

The options which were given were: -

- a. Murder
- b. Robbery
- c. Sexual harassment
- d. Violence against person or property

Results:

The majority of the people selected option (c) with 63% (68 votes). The second most selected option was (b) with 56.5% (61 votes), third was option (d) with 51.9% (56 votes) and the option (a) with 49.1% (53 votes).

Interpretation:

Most of the people believe that sexual harassment is most commonly committed crime. The reason can be due to personal observation, media reporting’s, influence due to movies or television shows etc.

Robbery means thief of something of value, therefore stealing from other people is believe to be a crime committed widely. It can due to physically stealing from people as well as cyber crime due increase in the use of computer applications that being increasing over the years.

Kidnapping, illegal takeover of land, physical or verbal abuse etc. are the acts of violence some people tend to commit. Depriving an individual of something or harming a person or thing or suppressing another person are the foams in which a person can be harmed.

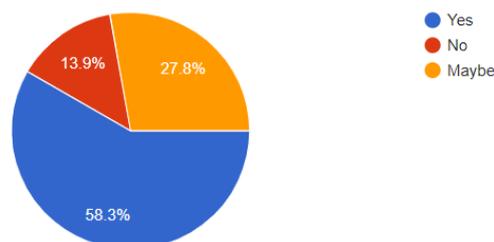
The rationale behind murder goes like this: it carries severe consequences for the person who commits it. Taking another person’s life is considered an act of grave offense in every society and country. The punishments are also strict as well as the future prospects are limited for the person who commits such an act. Thus, a person tries to refrain from killing in a sane mind.

5. Can anyone commit a crime



Do you think anyone can commit a crime

108 responses



The questions was ‘Do you think anyone can commit a crime’.

The options which were given were: -

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Maybe

Results:

The 58.3% of people selected option (a). 27.8% of the people selected option (c). The rest of the 13.9% people selected option (b).

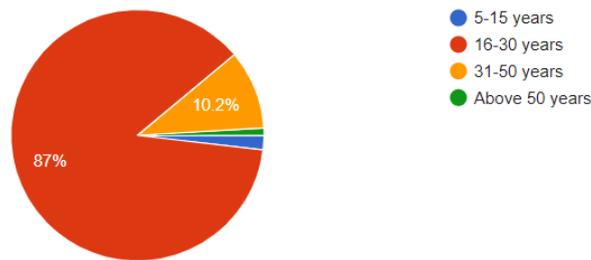
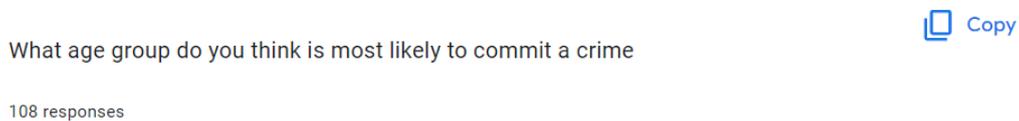
Interpretation:

The majority of the people believe that anyone is capable of committing a crime. The decision can be influenced by a wide range of social, cultural, economic, and psychological factors. Many people who engage in criminal behavior may do so as a result of systemic inequalities, lack of resources, mental health issues, addiction, or a host of other factors.

People who remain indecisive regarding anyone’s capability to commit a crime feel that every person has some level of conciseness and thus, will think before they engage themselves in some form of crime.

People who believe that not everyone can commit a crime maintain an opinion that only a specific group of people or people of specific traits or characteristics are the one’s who commit a crime.

6. Age group likely to commit a crime



The questions was ‘What age group do you think is most likely to commit a crime’.

The options which were given were: -

- a. 5-15 years
- b. 16-30 years
- c. 31-50 years
- d. Above 50 years

Results:

The majority of the people selected option (b) with 87%. The second most selected option was (c) with 10.2%, third was option (a) with 1.9% and the option (d) with 0.9%.

Interpretation:

People in the age group of 16-30 years can commit a crime due to impulsiveness, peer pressure, social and economic marginalization and lack of opportunities. People in this age group is generally tend to act rashly towards situations and hence, leading to their doubtfulness in the society.

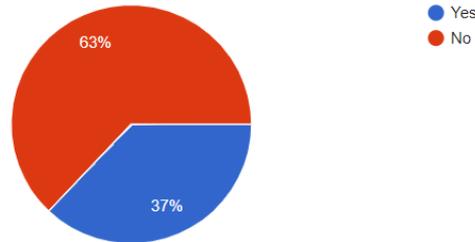
Children in the age group of 5-15 years lack the mental and physical capacity to seriously harm an person or property. People above the age of 50 years are old and wise hence, do not try to cause harm to other’s unnecessarily. People in the age group of 31-50 years are well settled and try to live a productive life and therefore, are less keen on disrupting theirs’ as well as others lives.

7. Ways to punish a Criminal

Do you think a prison or death sentence is the only way to punish a criminal



108 responses



The questions was ‘Do you think a prison or death sentence is the only way to punish a criminal’.
The options which were given were: -

- a. Yes
- b. No

Results:

63% of the respondents selected option (b) while 37% of the respondents selected option (a).

Interpretation:

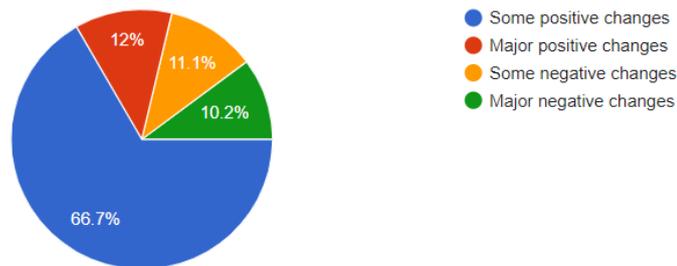
Most of the people feel that a prison or death sentence is not enough to punish a criminal. A prison sentence can sometime, lead to repeat offenders while a death sentence will end the life of the offender but not end the suffering caused by the offender. People who feel prison or death are enough to punish a criminal for his/her offence generally have a high level of believe in the authority that governs them.

8. Changes shown by someone who has served a sentence

Do you think someone who has served a prison sentence shows some or major change in behaviour or attitude



108 responses



The questions was ‘Do you think someone who has served a prison sentence shows some or major change in behavior or attitude’.

The options which were given were: -

- a. Some positive changes
- b. Major positive changes
- c. Some negative changes
- d. Major negative changes

Results:

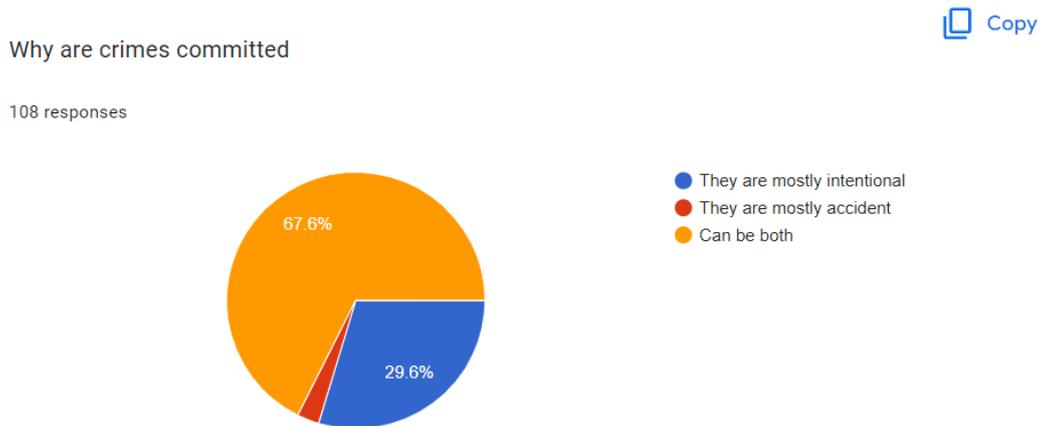
66.7% of the respondents selected option (a), 12% selected option (b), 11.1% selected option (c) while the 10.2% selected option (d).

Interpretation:

Majority of the people think that a prison serves an institute where people have a tendency to change their behavior or attitude due the hash life they have to endure in there. People who believe that that prison serves as an institute where major positive changes take place may believe it due to the rash life, fear of being an outcast in society, discrimination, resentment etc.

People who think prison leads to negative changes in behavior or attitude may be due bad company, fear of discrimination in future etc. people who think prison leads to major negative change may believe it due to negative image of prison, presence of more notorious criminals, adapting to prison life etc.

9. Reason for crime to be committed



The questions was ‘Why are crimes committed’.

The options which were given were: -

- a. They are mostly intentional
- b. They are mostly accident
- c. Can be both

Results:

The majority of the people selected option (c) with 67.6%. The second most selected option was (a) with 29.6%, third was option (b) with 2.8%.

Interpretation:

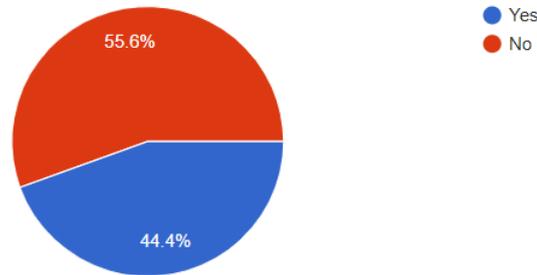
Majority of the people think that crimes can be committed either intentionally or accidentally. It involves that people commit crimes with the knowledge to harm another person as well as without such knowledge. However, accidental crimes are rare and few while, intentional crimes involve a conscious decision to engage in behavior that is prohibited by law or to cause harm to another person or property. Intentional crimes are generally considered more severe than accidental crimes, and the punishments for intentional crimes can be much more severe. The degree of punishment often depends on the specific crime committed, as well as factors such as the offender’s prior criminal record and the harm caused to the victim.

10. Do people have a mental image of an criminal

Imagine a criminal, did you imagine a particular face or body features



108 responses



The questions was ‘Imagine a criminal, did you imagine a particular face or body features’.

The options which were given were: -

- a. Yes
- b. No

Results:

55.6% of the respondents selected option (b) while 44.4% of the respondents selected option (a).

Interpretation:

Criminals tend to vary in height, body structure, sex, appearance etc. therefore, it is difficult to imagine a specific individual for a person. Also, the influx of television shows and movies, books, mass media etc. describing the wide range of different people who commit a crime varies. Hence, they believe that regardless of appearance anyone can commit a crime.

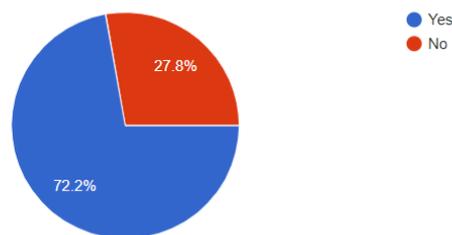
People that have specific image a criminal in their minds may have had an prior experience or mental image defining how a criminal should look like. It can due to prejudice, misconceptions, media influence, Stereotyping etc.

11. Likelihood a person to receive help after becoming a criminal

Do you think society would help a person who has served a prison sentence in emergences like an accident



108 responses



The questions was ‘Do you think society would help a person who has served a prison sentence in emergences like an accident’.

The options which were given were: -

- a. Yes
- b. No

Results:

72.2% of the respondents selected option (a) while 27.8% of the respondents selected option (b).

Interpretation:

Majority of people believe that an individual will be likely receive help from society in an unfortunate event. In many interviews people responded that they would be more willing to help if they know about the crime they committed, the circumstances that lead to it, severity of the crime etc.

People who believe that an individual would not be likely to receive help for the society would act coldly towards them. The society would judge them based upon their past acts without considering the changes or reflections they have made upon looking back on their acts.

IV. Findings

1. People have a very vague idea or understanding of what crime and criminal mean. They therefore, tend to rely on law or other constructs to define something they themselves are not sure about.
2. People tend to believe that lack of empathy or sympathy towards others is a major characteristic of a criminal, while his/her being impulsive is also common.
3. People believe that revenge or personal satisfaction drives that majority of crimes, while need or want of money is the second major reason followed by poor upbringing by parents, use of drugs or alcohol etc.
4. People believe that sexual harassment is the most common type of crime to be committed. Robbery follows since, crimes related to stealing have become widespread, followed by others like murder, violence etc.
5. Majority of the people believe that anyone is capable of committing a crime under the right circumstances. Some people think that they cannot be sure about who is able to do so.
6. Majority of the people believe that people of the age group 16-30 are most likely to commit a crime because they can be rash, impulsive and influenced. However, as people get older they are less likely to commit a crime since they better understand the consequences.
7. People believe that a prison or death sentence is not enough to punish a criminal and desire a more severe or satisfying way to punish them. People who agree that prison or death sentence are enough often do not want to think about different ways to punish them.
8. Most of the people believe that a prison sentence serves as positive reinforcement for someone who has served such sentence. It might be due to long prison hours, harsh physical labor etc. People also believe that prison sentence can serve as a negative environment since, an individual has a chance to be with more criminals.
9. Most of the people believe that crimes are committed deliberately and the person has at least some level of awareness about the actions undertaken. While only a few people believe that crimes are accidental.
10. Many people do not have a mental image about a person whom they can associate with as a criminal, it can be due to the awareness that crime can be committed by anyone with or without certain characteristics.
11. Majority of the people believe that a person with a criminal record is likely to receive help if needed in an emergency. However, respondents said that they are more willing to help if they knew about the person, the reason to commit the crime, what type of crime was committed etc.

V. Conclusion

The perception of society towards criminals is a complex and multifaceted issue that has been the subject of extensive research and debate. Social psychologists and criminologists have studied the ways in which people understand, make judgments about, and respond to crime and criminals, and how these perceptions are influenced by a range of individual, situational, and cultural factors.

One of the key findings from this research is that people's perceptions of criminals are often shaped by stereotypes and biases, which can result in a skewed and unjust view of criminal behavior and those who engage in it.

Another important factor that affects the perception of criminals is the media, which has been shown to play a significant role in shaping public attitudes and beliefs about crime and punishment. The media often focuses on high-profile, sensational cases, and this coverage can contribute to an exaggerated view of the prevalence and nature of crime, as well as reinforce stereotypes about offenders and their motivations.

Additionally, research has shown that the public's perception of crime and punishment is influenced by their personal experiences and the social and cultural context in which they live. People who live in high-crime areas, for example, may have a more negative view of offenders and the criminal justice system than those who live in low-crime areas.

In conclusion, the perception of criminals by society is a complex issue that is influenced by a range of individual, situational, and cultural factors. By recognizing and addressing these influences, it may be possible to create a more just and equitable society in which people's perceptions of crime and criminals are based on accurate and fair assessments of reality.

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