

Menstruation and Crime: Is There a Link?

The relationship between the different phases of the menstrual cycle and criminal behaviour has been the focus of interest for many researchers over the last century. Attempts have been made to determine whether scientific evidence supports the hypothesis that some women, during certain phases of their menstrual cycle, are more disposed to commit antisocial acts.

Numerous researchers have suggested that if criminal behaviour is associated with the hormonal changes of the female reproductive cycle, their findings could be admissible in criminal trials of female offenders. Some authors have debated whether the psychological symptoms associated with menstruation might form a plea of insanity for some female offenders.

Psychiatrists Drs. Bruce Harry and Charlotte M. Balcer of the University of Missouri-Columbia School of Medicine reviewed all existing studies that pertain to the relationship between the menstrual cycle and crime. Many studies claim to have found that some women are more likely to perpetrate violent crimes during the pre-menstrual week. For example, J. H. Morton and his associate researchers found that 62% of the women they interviewed reported that they were in their premenstrual week when they committed a violent offence. On the other hand, 17% reported that they committed a violent offence during their menstruation. The remainder of the women interviewed did not remember the date of their last menstruation in relation to the time of their index crimes, or reported having no menstruation.

Harry and Balcer concluded in their review that the present state of scientific knowledge is such that conclusions cannot be made concerning an association between any phases of the menstrual cycle and criminality. According to them, there is no evidence linking fluctuations in reproductive hormones with criminal behaviour. Therefore, the studies linking menstruation and crime should not be admissible in criminal trials.

The authors also found it problematic that none of the studies on menstruation and crime examined the many other attributes often associated with criminality, such as socio-demographic and socioeconomic variables, criminal, psychological and psychiatric histories, and family background factors. In order for the research to be useful, Harry and Balcer feel that researchers must learn to deal with the diverse properties of the menstrual cycle and better contend with issues such as stress as a confounding factor.

Harry, H., Balcer, C.M. (1987). Menstruation and Crime: A Critical Review of the Literature from the Clinical Criminology Perspective. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, vol.5, 307-321.