

1.13: Different Types of Crimes and Offenses

Once an act gets identified as a crime, the law then attempts to define crime in a way that can distinguish the harm done and the severity of the crime. There are different types of crime and two different types of offenses that will get discussed. In the previous section, street crime, corporate crime, and white-collar crime get discussed. However, more broadly, there are crimes against the person, crimes against property, crimes against public order, and drug crime that typically get counted and fall under street crime.

Crimes Against the Person

Crimes against the person are often considered the most serious and may include homicide, rape, assault, kidnapping, and intimate partner violence. Each of these crimes can carry a different penalty based upon the seriousness of the crime. For example, because Ted Bundy murdered women, rather than ‘just’ assaulted, Ted was eligible for capital punishment in the U.S. The state defines the crime and the punishment.

Crimes Against Property

Property crimes are widespread and seen as less severe than crimes against the person. Property crimes may include larceny, burglary, arson, and trespassing. There are varying degrees of liability depending on the circumstances of the case.

Crimes Against Public Order

Public order crimes may not harm other people or property but impact social order. Think back to the example of feeding homeless in community’s where that is illegal. Other typical examples would be disorderly conduct, loitering, and driving under the influence. The victim is society, and the goal is to maintain social order. Many debates whether certain crimes against public order are more or less severe, but get inappropriately punished. For example, driving while intoxicated can take lives and may be more severe. However, the law will charge for vehicular manslaughter or murder if life gets taken because someone drove drunk.

Drug Offenses

Most often drug offenses can be seen as a crime against public order, but the United States reaction to illegal drug use has altered the resources of the CJ system because of the “war on drugs.” Some examples of drug offenses can be possession of illegal drugs, being high, and selling. Punishment will vary based on the drug, how much of the drug is in possession or sold, and where it gets sold.

Misdemeanor

A misdemeanor is considered a minor criminal offense that is punishable by a fine and jail time for up to one year.

Felony

A felony is an offense that is punishable by a sentence of more than one year in state or federal prison and sometimes by death.

Many different types of crimes and punishments can be handed out by the criminal justice system. Each state determines what and how this will operate if discussing state-level crime. Other crimes are defined in federal statutes and can get punished at the federal level such as treason. Some crimes are seen as more severe, especially if they are violent in nature or harm people. Others may get seen as a ‘victimless’ or behavior that gets seen as consensual, yet undesirable to those making the laws. This general overview demonstrates the complexity of defining crime and understanding the role society has in shaping these perceptions.

This page titled [1.13: Different Types of Crimes and Offenses](#) is shared under a [CC BY-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Alison S. Burke, David Carter, Brian Fedorek, Tiffany Morey, Lore Rutz-Burri, & Shanell Sanchez \(OpenOregon\)](#) .

- [1.13: Different Types of Crimes and Offenses](#) by Alison S. Burke, David Carter, Brian Fedorek, Tiffany Morey, Lore Rutz-Burri, & Shanell Sanchez is licensed [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).