

# An Analysis of Criminology as a Profession in the Republic of South Africa

Mandlenkosi Richard Mphatheni<sup>1,\*</sup>, Sphamandla Lindani Nkosi<sup>1</sup>, Owethu Johnson Tutu<sup>2</sup> and Nirmala Gopal<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Criminology & Forensic Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa*

<sup>2</sup>*International and Public Affairs, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa*

**Abstract:** The professionalisation of criminology has not been a smooth process in South Africa. The literature reveals that it has been a slow process burdened with numerous challenges. The slow process of professionalising criminology has caused uncertainty about criminology as a profession. Although, South African universities have taken the significant steps towards recognising criminology as an academic discipline. This systematic review studied various sources to justify the inability of relevant structures to professionalise criminology. Moreover, it endeavoured to understand the extent to which criminology has been professionalised in South Africa. This critical analysis confirms that the process of professionalising criminology has been prolonged and that it has been fraught with challenges. Results of this study are relevant for any idea to restructure the criminology, and it is envisaged that appropriate structures may find results useful in altering the vision of the profession. This paper recommends that an independent professional board be established to assist and guide criminologists. Such a board could, for instance, suggest a constructive structure and broadly define the role and functions of criminologists within the South African context.

**Keywords:** Criminology, Crime, and Professionalisation.

## INTRODUCTION

Like any other term used in the academic sphere, criminology does not have a single universal definition. Various scholars within the field tend to apportion different meanings to the term. For progression, this article borrows an explanation from the work of Carrabine, Cox, South, Lee, Turton, and Plummer (2009) who define criminology as the scientific branch that deals with crime occurrence and criminals, and it focuses on criminal justice. The above-given definition is not the only definition of this concept that exists.

Like various professions in South Africa that provide services to the society, criminology has a considerable part to play; predominantly, in the criminal justice sector. However, criminology has remained a discipline that has no council, which does not qualify it to function as a complete profession. Although few studies reveal notable attempts to professionalise criminology in South Africa, the progress appears to be trickling and directionless (Beukman, 2008; Singh and Gopal, 2010).

According to this study, it remains utterly significant that the progress of professionalising criminology is speeded up to help counter the fast-growing crime in South Africa. The discourse in this study endeavours to explore the implications and characteristics of criminology as a profession with the context of South

Africa, and highlights aspects of professionalism that academics and experts find wanting in criminology.

It is envisaged that structures such as Criminological and Victimological Society of Southern Africa (CRIMSA), criminal justice and the academic sector will benefit from enormously from the conclusion made in this study. Notably, in terms of establishing new ideas concerning professionalising criminology, pertinent structures would find the deliberation made in this study very useful.

## The Genealogy of Criminology

The roots of criminology as the field of study are said to originate from Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Human (2018), Cesare Beccaria and Jeremy Bentham are regarded as the forefathers of the discipline of criminology. It was conceived in their minds that crime should be a punishable offence, and those who commit it should be severely punished. Moreover, in its initial stages, it had to evolve to include studies that sought to understand some of the factors that are regarded as the causation of crime. This discipline evolved and expanded over time as it was widely adopted as the field of study in various parts of the world. Be that as it may, criminology has always been seen as one of the heavily hybridised fields of study as it encompasses elements from different fields of speciality like psychology and sociology.

Moreover, criminology as a module, not a qualification was also offered in South African

\*Address correspondence to this author at the Department of Criminology & Forensic Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa; E-mail: doc.mandlenkosi@gmail.com

universities. Nevertheless, the origin of criminology as a discipline in South Africa cannot be accurately traced (Human, 2018). He further argues that “the origins of criminology remain unclear and contested in South Africa” (2018:49). However, the beginnings of formal teaching of criminology in South Africa can be traced back to 1949 at the University of Pretoria (UP) and the University of South Africa (UNISA) in 1958 (Beukman 2008). Moreover, seven other universities followed this in South Africa.

Currently, criminology is recognised as a field of study at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), the Walter Sisulu University (WSU), the University of Cape Town (UCT), the University of Fort Hare (UFH), the University of the Free State (UFS), the University of Johannesburg (UJ), and the University of Limpopo (UL). The growth in terms of the universities that offer this discipline indicates that South African institutions of Higher Education have made great strides towards recognising criminology as an independent academic discipline.

However, some institutions are still grappling with the hybridisation of criminology as it involves many categories of the human and social sciences, such as sociology, psychology, and criminal law (Zedner 2007). In tertiary institutions such as the UKZN, Criminology is offered as a three-year Bachelor of Arts qualification. Criminology is also classified by the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) in the National Standard Body (NSB) as level 08. Some institutions in South Africa offer criminology as a module or a subject and while others offer it as an academic discipline up to level 10 (doctorate) of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). However, De Vries and Steyn (2011) argue that, despite the precise framing of criminology by academic institutions, criminology as a profession has not yet accorded the professional status it deserves in South Africa.

Regardless of adequate evidence from the literature that narrates the history and the origin of criminology as an academic discipline, there is still insufficient knowledge regarding the professionalisation of criminology as an independent field of practice. De Vries and Steyn (2011) raise the argument that the non-professionalisation of criminology as a field of practice is problematic. They added that students who are studying towards a qualification in this field are likely to flood the ever-increasing pool of South African unemployed graduates and the saturated South African job market (2009).

It is against this background that this article explores various aspects of the professionalisation of criminology. Further attempts to understand the significance of criminology as a profession in South Africa, and investigate the challenges faced in the professionalisation of criminology. It is envisioned that the article may contribute to the expansion of knowledge regarding the professionalisation of criminology as an independent branch of the social sciences. Under the South African quest to understand the significance of criminology as a profession, essential questions need to be answered. The following questions are significant to understand criminology as a profession. Firstly, what does criminology as a profession entail? Secondly, what is a criminologist? Lastly, what contribution is criminology likely to make as an independent profession?

### **The Conceptualization of Criminology**

Defining concepts that are used within the academic sphere is always marked with difficulties as no individual can easily claim to have proffered a single or universal definition of any academic term. It is on that basis that this study cannot offer an adequate definition(s) of the term criminology; however, it can only provide a working definition(s) that have been adopted by various scholars within the fields of criminology. The introduction of this article has somewhat advanced the definition of the concept of criminology as the field of study. However, at this juncture, this article adopts the definition advanced by Norty (1983) where he characterised criminology as a phenomenon that expresses scientific division that is interdisciplinary and also incorporates the cause and explanations of particular crimes, victims, and criminals as well as adjudication and prevention of crime.

It is the above-given definition that suggests that criminology as the body of knowledge that encompasses the crime phenomenon is concerned mainly with data that is scientifically collected, the law, morality and public administration. Hence, criminology cannot be dealt with independent of the law construction process and breaking of the law (Wolfgang 1963). It is therefore on that ground that criminology should be recognised as the designated area of study that critically deals with scientific knowledge about crime.

The position advanced by Human (2018) heavily buttresses the claim that criminology critically deals with scientific knowledge that is related to various

criminal activities. He further postulated that it was during the 1940s and 1950s when criminologists named Sheldon and Eleanor Gluck from Harvard Law School conducted several studies on antisocial and criminal behaviour. The interests of Sheldon and Gluck's studies were to uncover crime causations, and that was accomplished through the examination of the integrated sociological, psychological and biological characteristics, which inter alia, family, schoolwork performance, work experience and economic elements. It is the examination of the elements mentioned above that are deemed to be at the centre of crime causation in society.

### **The Professionalisation of Criminology in South Africa**

The growing interest in the criminology discipline could be attributed to the theoretical development of criminology over the years and the practical contributions made by South African criminologists to theory and practice (Human 2018). As is the case in other professional disciplines such as Social Work and Psychology, South African criminologists may specialise in different areas of crime and criminal behaviour analysis. Others attribute the growing interest in criminology to "the advancement of practical criminology in South Africa as a pragmatic boom" (Hesselink 2013:142). This ballooning interests in criminology should always be placed within the South Africa context, and it cannot be avoided that South Africa, like any other society, is plagued with the crime pandemic. Hence, there is a growing need for people who have specialised in the field of criminology.

The professionalisation of criminology is met with urgency in societies like South Africa, which are faced with such a high crime rate. Therefore, that process of professionalisation of criminology has to encompass all the necessary aspects that any profession requires. Moreover, it is imperative to adjust those aspects with the perennial changing needs and challenges of societies depending on the context. Hence, Singh and Gopal (2010) advanced the position that criminology should adapt to meet the challenges and changes in society. Therefore, any profession that fails to meet the needs of society at any given time cannot be characterised as the needed vehicle through which societal needs are met, and challenges are resolved. As the resolution of the societal challenges should be a vital part of any existing profession.

Therefore, the process of professionalising criminology at its core should feature certain aspects,

namely, the certification requisites, formation of the professional body and well-established code of conduct. However, vital aspects of professionalising criminology are not only limited to the above-mentioned aspects. But for the purpose of this paper, the focus will be on the three mentioned aspects. Firstly, the establishment of the certification requisites for the admission to practice as a criminologist. This will help to set standards and goals for all those who desire to venture into the field of criminology. These certification requisites should be meant for those who have just graduated with their degrees in criminology. Moreover, examination to acquire that professional certificate should be administered at the national level.

The second aspect would be to establish the body which will oversee the admission process and also be responsible for the issuing of the certification. In addition, this body should be entrusted with the duty of performing an oversight over the profession of criminology. Lastly, it remains a necessity to establish a code of conduct as the means through which will determine how professionals within criminology should conduct themselves. It is always imperative to have the guiding framework, which serves as an instrument that protects the decorum of the profession itself. As the submission by Underwood and Edmunds (2003) points out that characteristics of a profession include establishing the code of conducts, development of a professional association and creation of the support law. Therefore, the establishment of the afore-discussed aspects would mean a giant leap towards the professionalisation of criminology.

### **Criminologists as Professionals**

Professional performance tends to embody four prominent characteristics that are regarded as essential. Firstly, the knowledge and skills base of professional practice. This characteristic emphasises that any professional within the field that is regarded as a profession must be able to demonstrate that s/he is equipped with the relevant knowledge and skills that make their profession relevant to society as such knowledge will better the place of the profession itself to respond sufficiently to societal needs—further entrenching the profession's necessity within society. Secondly, the mastery of theoretical knowledge that means that theorising that which is destined to help catalyse the development of any society is not only necessary. But also helps in terms of illustrating that those who practice a particular profession have understood how their society operates and what it

needs. In addition, theorising places them in a position of demand within society.

Thirdly, the capacity to solve problems... like in any other existing profession, the chief objective is to resolve societal issues, and the criminology profession is not an exception as it seeks to respond to crime-related issues that plagued the society today. Lastly, it is also crucial for those who are members of a professional body to always engage in the process of self-enhancement. This develops not only the individuals within the field but also the profession itself and further encourage those who still want to enroll in the field of criminology to do that with enthusiasm.

The literature suggests that enhancing these four characteristics should form a significant part of qualifications in Criminology (Norrey 1983; Karmen 2004; Beukman 2008; De Vries and Steyn 2011). In the field of education, professional disciplines have in common the goal of preparing graduates who will be competent and will successfully transit into the workplace (Williams 2001). However, continued professional accountability is required by society; thus, competent graduates must demonstrate knowledge and technological inclinations (Williams 2001). Moreover, professionals must maintain the ability to perform and improve, and they should avoid undesirable conduct (Kuo, 1997). Therefore, a professional body has to ensure that it is organised and that its members enhance their practice, performance, and standards; safeguard quality; and address any problems encountered in the profession (Houle 1980).

A professional internalises an idea or uses a practice habitually through the mode of performance so that it becomes a fundamental part of how [he/she] thinks about and undertakes his or her work (Houle 1980). Beukman (2008) concurs that the professionalisation of discipline depends on the establishment of collective identity and argues that it occurs through structures and systems that foster and maintain conceptual and competency characteristics. Further argues that it is crucial to explain and sustain role relationships among allied occupations – for Criminology, these maybe social work and psychology (Beukman 2008). However, complicated relationships may develop among criminologists and other occupational groups that tend to be more professionalised. Thus, professionalism is regarded as a practice that does not occur in isolation (Beukman 2008).

## METHODOLOGY

This study is a desk-based research; it only employed secondary data, which obviated fieldwork. This study utilised published reports as well as all sources of information that did not require any surveys or field research, which inter alia, articles published in accredited journal, books and government gazettes.

The data collected is reliable and valid as it is obtained from credible sources that had also attempted to provide clarification on the challenges of criminology as a profession. The reliability of the data is further substantiated by the fact that the sources of information, particularly the journals, had been peer-reviewed and were deemed suitable for publication in reputable journals.

The authors have espoused analytical research philosophy as the research methodology. The approach is a cautiously examination and analysis of already existing data (Ali and Razi 2020). This study further discussed and analysed relevant articles on the formation of criminology and steps required for criminology discipline to be recognised as a professional body in South Africa. For the credibility of research, the research method must be precise, as explained by Ndaguba and Hanyane (2019), if research methodology is questionable, the study findings will be debatable. Thus, this study used critical discourse and thematic content analysis approaches to examine criminology discipline in SA.

It was pivotal for this study to be conducted in order to understand the delays in achieving the goal of establishing an independent body, where all criminology graduates can account on such a body. The establishment of an independent body for people who have studied criminology would go a long way to protect the interest of students who studies criminology. The body could also regulate and protect those who have studied criminology as well as those who are in their respective occupations perform duties that require studying criminology or criminology discipline expertise.

The doctrine of analytical research is theoretical; thus, vast data required for the research are found in the libraries and other databases. The crucial objective of the systematic review doctrine of this study is to analyse, explain, and examination of criminology discipline. The article examined the steps and process required for a discipline for it to be recognised as a

profession. Furthermore, the authors examined the delays in acknowledging criminology discipline as a profession in SA.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The debate on the professionalisation of criminology was introduced by providing some background to the professionalisation initiative of Criminological Society of Africa (CRIMSA). By outlining some of the delays that had been experienced, clarity was provided on the implications of a register and professional board for the discipline. While allied to this, the envisaged four-year professional degree was mentioned. In essence, the paper proposes that criminology as an academic or tertiary discipline complies with requirements for it to be considered a profession.

Requirements for a discipline to be considered a profession includes; offering a four-year program and registration to a professional board. However, Human (2018) alludes that without a statutory regulatory body, criminology may not be regarded as a profession. Therefore, the absence of a regulating body that protects those who use the services of criminologists and those who apply criminology expertise in their field of work is an obstacle in affording the criminology discipline the status of a profession. Unfortunately, till now attempts to establish professional board for criminologist in SA has not received success.

Although CRIMSA is working towards the professionalisation of criminology, this movement has been slow, considering the fact that CRIMSA was inaugurated in 1986. It is now 36 years after CRIMSA was founded, yet there is still no regulating body for those who studied criminology and apply criminology expertise in their occupation. Also, the attempt to establish a professional body for criminology has met challenges.

This article found that CRIMSA initiated the process to establish a professional body for the criminology discipline since 1995. The process kick-started with a survey conducted in 1995 by the executive of CRIMSA. Criminologist (final year and post-graduates' students) surveyed to determine the need for a criminology body, of the 269 respondents 91.8% supported the establishment of the board (Naude 2010). An opportunity for criminology to acquire the status of a professional emerged, "when Social Work Amendment Act 102 of 1998 made provision for the establishment of a regulatory board for other related professions" (Human 2018:54).

Plentiful negotiations between CRIMSA and the SACSSP took place in the quest to establish the professionalised criminology. Just like other occupations and professions under the guidance of SACSSP criminology too was expected to follow the same standards. As stated by Naude (2010) these standards were;

- Standards for education, training and development
- Standards for professional conduct
- Registration requirements

Unfortunately, numerous factors amongst; "uninformed perceptions and opinions, academic exclusivity, the standing of CRIMSA, and waning CRIMSA membership, hampered the process" (Human 2018:54) of criminology to be registered as the profession. A representative from different University during CRIMSA conference raised a concern of losing government funding if criminology was to be offered as a four-year degree-professional (Bezuidenhout and Minnar, 2010) as it is required for a professional degree. These universities were reluctant to align their curriculum to accommodate a four-year degree.

The article found that a four-year degree would be beneficial as it would increase the demand to study criminology since criminology graduates would be able to register with a professional board and also enjoy tittle of being regarded as the professional criminologist. Human (2018) reported that the proposal of offering criminology as a four-year degree did not receive endorsement by all institutions; hence, till now, criminology is offered as a three-year degree.

Professionalisation of criminology issue was raised again in the second of August 2017 during CRIMSA Annual General Meeting (Human 2018). At this Annual General Meeting CRIMSA celebrated 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2018, yet they have not achieved the objective of establishing a professional board for criminology that they had during the inception of CRIMSA 30 years ago.

Establishment of a professional board for criminology would create the prospect for criminology to be acknowledged as an applied profession. Furthermore, the article found that the establishment of a regulating body for criminology would be advantageous as South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) suggest that professional board promote

reliability and trust in a profession that is regulated by a recognised professional body (SAQA 2016).

The professional body is essential as it safeguards public interest regarding the services offered by its members. Also, a professional body is expected to publish a code of conduct, monitor, and investigate members who may have contravened the code of conduct (Human 2018). Naude (2010) further mentioned some advantages of a statutory regulatory board for criminology. She mentioned that; it would improve the employment status of a criminologist and protect against unscrupulous criminologists. Thus, improving the work ethics of a criminologist.

It is essential for CRIMSA as a responsible organisation for the establishment of criminology board to address the issues raised by Bezuidenhout and Minnaar (2010). These issues amongst include;

*“The small pool of ‘professional’ working criminologists other than academics; exclusivity of the criteria for registering on the proposed professional board; the need to train future criminologists to be able to apply criminological and allied skills in the workplace; the lack of job opportunities; for criminology to be more inclusive and look at sub-disciplines and allied vocational skills qualifications; the costs of running a Criminology Professional Board outside of CRIMSA; the problem of sanctions to be applied to transgressions by any registered criminology professional; and the allied problem of nonregistered transgressors; finally what benefits/value would a SACSSP register/professional board bring to CRIMSA”* (Bezuidenhout and Minnaar, 2010:4).

Unarguably, criminology cannot be accorded professional status because various aspects that impact this process have not yet been addressed. For instance, Singh and Gopal (2010) suggested that re-registration of a 4-year degree must be negotiated with SAQA to ensure the introduction of an acceptable formal qualification of a national standard. Also, a code of conduct should be developed along with guidelines to ensure the application of disciplinary measures for unethical behaviour.

Notwithstanding the indispensable contributions of criminology in South Africa, it remains an immutable

fact that the applicability of criminology is still in its infancy (Herbig and Hesselink-Louw 2009; Hesselink 2014; Human 2018). Commenting on the challenges experienced by practising criminologists in South Africa, Herbig and Hesselink-Louw (2009:445) state the following:

*“Practicing criminologists still resort under the category of ‘scarce skills/professions’ considering the nonexistence of professional recognition. Notably, it is still incumbent upon criminologists to promote their facilities considering the lack or absence of a professional regulating body.”*

Criminologists in South Africa do not have even a vague body that governs or regulates their profession; however, progress towards professionalisation, although slow, is evident.

Interestingly, CRIMSA has, since its birth in 1986, made it one of its objectives to develop a regulating board for criminology (Bezuidenhout & Minnaar, 2010; Naude, 2010). Naude (2010) reiterates that the objectives of CRIMSA are to galvanise the identity of the discipline, protect it against exploitation by other disciplines, and preclude the wrongful usability of the title. Two years ago, Barkhuizen (2018) was hopeful that the establishment of a regulating board for criminologists was still in progress.

The significance of criminology as a profession lies in the fact that it could be the only science body that focuses on the crime phenomenon (De Vries & Steyn, 2011). This can give it credibility and stature as an independent social science branch. However, as the professionalisation of criminology is a continuing process that has not yet been concluded, the broad field of criminology still needs to register with the Professional Certification Board (PCB). This will help create a criminology register and cultivate a code of conduct that will lead to the successful launch of the PCB with the South African Council for Social Services Professions (SACSSP). Furthermore, a high membership rate will ensure that annual fees are affordable, and this will sustain and stabilise the PCB.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Crime is a major problem in South Africa, should the official recognition of criminology as a profession be achieved, this will enable criminologists to contribute to

crime prevention and support victims of crime. A professional board could assist and guide criminologists by recommending a constructive structure and precisely define the role and functions of criminologists in South Africa.

This article recommends that the process of professionalising criminology be hastened. Professionalising criminology will create more job opportunities for students who majored in criminology. Also, the professionalization of criminology will protect the integrity of the discipline and those who apply criminology expertise in their occupations.

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