

### Why MKULTRA is Relevant to Criminology

**Definition of MKULTRA:** CIA mind control and behavioural modification program (1953–1973), involving covert experiments on unwitting human subjects.

**Criminology relevance:** Example of state crime and crimes of the powerful.

Illustrates systematic violation of domestic and international law.

Demonstrates how scientific expertise can be weaponised by state agencies.

**Key research lens:** State secrecy → prevents detection, obstructs accountability.

Intersection of law, ethics, and power.

### Criminological Frameworks Applicable to MKULTRA

#### State Crime

**Definition:** Illegal or deviant acts committed by state agencies or officials in pursuit of their policies.

**MKULTRA as state crime:** Violated the Nuremberg Code (informed consent, avoidance of harm).

Covert dosing of civilians → assault, poisoning, battery.

### Criminological Frameworks Applicable to MKULTRA (cont)

Experiments overseas violated host country sovereignty.

#### Crimes of the Powerful

**Edwin Sutherland's white-collar crime theory:** Crimes committed by persons of respectability and high social status.

**MKULTRA fit:** Perpetrators were senior scientists, psychiatrists, government officials.

Shielded by professional authority and classified security clearance.

#### Neutralisation Theory (Sykes & Matza, 1957)

**Techniques of neutralisation used by MKULTRA personnel:** Denial of injury: Framing experiments as harmless or necessary for national security.

Appeal to higher loyalties: Claiming Cold War threats justified the actions.

Denial of victim: Viewing subjects (prisoners, psychiatric patients) as expendable or unworthy.

#### Strain Theory

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### Criminological Frameworks Applicable to MKULTRA (cont)

**Merton:** Crime arises when legitimate means to achieve goals are blocked.

**MKULTRA angle:** The CIA sought control over human behaviour — an “innovation” where they abandoned lawful means and pursued illegal experimentation to achieve strategic dominance.

#### State-Corporate Crime

Partnership between government and private actors to commit harm.

**MKULTRA used:** University researchers (e.g., Harvard, McGill).

Pharmaceutical companies supplying drugs.

Front organisations to hide CIA involvement.

### Criminal Acts and Legal Violations

#### Domestic US Law

**Assault and battery:** Covert drugging without consent.

**Homicide:** Deaths of subjects (e.g., Frank Olson).

**Kidnapping/unlawful detention:** Some subjects held in isolation.



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### Criminal Acts and Legal Violations (cont)

Fraud: Misuse of federal funds under false pretences.

#### International Law

Nuremberg Code breaches: Experiments without voluntary consent.

Geneva Conventions: Prohibition on inhumane treatment of civilians and POWs.

Sovereignty violations: Experiments conducted in Canada, Germany, Japan.

#### Civil Liability

Tort law violations: Negligence, intentional infliction of emotional distress.

Barriers to litigation: State secrets doctrine, statute of limitations.

### Victims and Vulnerable Populations

Prisoners: Viewed as expendable; less public oversight.

Psychiatric patients: Already institutionalised and discredited.

Minorities and the poor: Disproportionately targeted.

Military personnel: Sometimes used without full disclosure.

Criminology note: Victimology shows a pattern where those with least social power are most vulnerable to state abuse.

### Investigations and Exposure

#### Church Committee (1975–1976)

US Senate investigation into intelligence abuses.

Revealed MKULTRA and related programs.

Found systematic destruction of evidence (Sidney Gottlieb ordered MKULTRA files burned in 1973).

#### Legal Cases

Frank Olson family lawsuit (1970s–1990s).

Canadian survivors of Ewen Cameron's "Montreal Experiments" sued the CIA and Canadian government.

#### Barriers to Justice

State secrecy doctrine: Courts defer to executive branch claims of national security.

Evidence destruction: Limits prosecution.

Statute of limitations: Many claims time-barred before program exposure.

### Theoretical Insights from MKULTRA in Criminology

State immunity enables large-scale harm without accountability.

Elite deviance can operate under the guise of legitimate authority.

Crimes of obedience (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989): Individuals commit acts they know are wrong when ordered by superiors.

Moral disengagement (Bandura): Rationalising harm by reframing it as necessary or justified.

### Legacy and Policy Reforms

Post-M-KULTRA reforms: Stronger human subject research protections (Belmont Report, IRBs).

Increased congressional oversight of intelligence agencies.

Continuing concerns: "Black sites" and covert experiments post-9/11 raise parallels.

Surveillance and behavioural data collection as modern equivalents of control research.



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