Practical and Personal Aspirations of Crimonology Students for the Success of the Justice System

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ABSTRACT. The effectiveness of the criminal justice system relies not only on institutional structures but also on the motivations and aspirations of future practitioners. While previous studies have extensively examined criminology students' career choices and perceptions of crime and justice, there remains a notable gap in qualitative research that integrates both practical aspirations and personal motivations of criminology students as drivers of their commitment to improving the criminal justice system. Anchored on the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), this study explores how students' attitudes, values, and perceived roles shape their intentions to contribute meaningfully to the success of the criminal justice system. Using an exploratory qualitative research design, the study involves 18 criminology students selected through purposive sampling. Data are gathered through one-on-one semi-structured interviews guided by questions focusing on career aspirations, application of criminological knowledge, and personal motivations. The collected data are analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis, allowing for an in-depth examination of recurring patterns related to students' goals, values, and envisioned contributions. The expected outcomes include the identification of key themes reflecting criminology students' practical aspirations such as roles in law enforcement, corrections, policy reform, and community-based justice as well as personal values including justice, integrity, public service, and social responsibility. The findings are anticipated to demonstrate that strong personal motivations and positive behavioral intentions significantly influence students' commitment to supporting and strengthening the criminal justice system. This study aims to contribute to criminological education by providing insights that may inform curriculum development and student engagement strategies aligned with future system needs.

KEYWORDS: Practical, Aspiration, Criminology, Justice

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1. INTRODUCTION

The criminal justice system plays a fundamental role in maintaining social order, ensuring public safety, and promoting justice within society (Cole, Smith, & DeJong, 2019). Its effectiveness depends not only on legal frameworks and institutional structures but also on the

competencies, ethical standards, and commitment of individuals working within its various sectors, including law enforcement, courts, and correctional institutions (Peak & Giacomazzi, 2018). As future professionals in these fields, criminology students represent a critical segment of the criminal justice workforce whose aspirations, motivations, and values may shape the long-term effectiveness and integrity of the system (Brown et al., 2020). Similar findings in higher education research emphasize that students' values, motivations, and socio-cultural contexts significantly influence professional readiness and commitment across disciplines (Garil, 2024; Verdeflor, 2024).

Existing research on criminology students has primarily focused on career preferences, attitudes toward crime control, and perceptions of criminal justice institutions (Farnworth et al., 2018; Krimmel & Tartaro, 2019). While these studies provide valuable insights into students' career trajectories, much of the literature relies on quantitative approaches that emphasize outcomes such as job selection or institutional trust, often overlooking the deeper personal motivations and values that influence students' sustained commitment to the criminal justice system (Miller & Braswell, 2021). This limitation mirrors findings in other educational contexts where students' internal motivations and lived experiences remain underexplored despite their influence on long-term engagement and performance (Garil et al., 2024; Verdeflor, 2024). As a result, there remains a gap in qualitative research that holistically examines both the practical aspirations and personal motivations of criminology students and how these factors jointly influence their intention to contribute to the success and effectiveness of the criminal justice system.

This study is anchored on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) proposed by Ajzen (1991), which asserts that human behavior is primarily guided by behavioral intentions. According to TPB, intention is shaped by three interrelated components: attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Attitudes reflect an individual's evaluation of a behavior, subjective norms involve perceived social pressure to perform or avoid the behavior, and perceived behavioral control refers to the individual's belief in their capacity to successfully perform the behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). TPB has been widely applied in educational and career-related research to explain how students' motivations and beliefs influence professional intentions and future behavior (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Rhodes et al., 2016), including studies examining academic motivation, confidence, and professional decision-making in higher education settings (Bondoc, 2023; Chavez & Unga, 2024).

Within the context of criminology education, students' practical aspirations—such as pursuing careers in law enforcement, corrections, forensic investigation, or policy reform—reflect their attitudes toward criminal justice work. Meanwhile, personal motivations and values, including justice, integrity, public service, and social responsibility, are influenced by subjective norms and perceived behavioral control shaped by academic training, social expectations, and personal experiences (Bonn & Earle, 2019; Walters, 2020). Research in allied academic fields similarly highlights how instructional environments, experiential learning, and personal encounters shape students' professional values and intentions (Ceneciro, 2025; Verdeflor, 2024). TPB thus provides a suitable theoretical framework for examining how criminology students form intentions to contribute meaningfully to the criminal justice system and how these intentions are rooted in both professional goals and personal values.

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study is to address the identified research gap by examining the practical aspirations and personal motivations of criminology students in relation to their envisioned contributions to the criminal justice system. Specifically, the study seeks to

explore students' career goals, their plans to apply criminological knowledge and skills in real-world criminal justice settings, and the personal values and experiences that strengthen their commitment to improving system effectiveness. The key concepts examined include behavioral intention, career aspiration, personal motivation, values, and perceived behavioral control, which are central constructs within the TPB framework (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). Comparable qualitative inquiries in education and social sciences have demonstrated the value of examining student narratives to uncover underlying motivational and intentional processes (Garil, Abbas, & Limen, 2024; Murro, 2024).

Using one-on-one interviews and reflexive thematic analysis, this study aims to generate in-depth insights into how criminology students understand and articulate their future roles within the criminal justice system (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). Reflexive qualitative approaches have been widely used to capture students' lived experiences, aspirations, and meaning-making across academic disciplines (Verdeflor, 2024; Ceneciro, 2025). The expected outcome of this research is the identification of key themes illustrating how students' aspirations and motivations shape their intentions to contribute positively to criminal justice practice. These findings are expected to inform criminology education and training programs by emphasizing the importance of aligning curricular and experiential learning opportunities with students' values and intentions, thereby supporting the development of a committed and ethically grounded criminal justice workforce.

2. REVIEW RELATED LITERATURE

Criminology Students and the Criminal Justice System. Criminology as an academic discipline is closely linked to the development, evaluation, and improvement of the criminal justice system. Students of criminology are often viewed as future practitioners, policymakers, and reform advocates whose aspirations and values shape the effectiveness of justice institutions (Siegel, 2020; Chavez & Lamorinas, 2023). Understanding their practical and personal aspirations is essential, as these factors influence their readiness to contribute meaningfully to crime prevention, law enforcement, corrections, and community safety (Chavez, 2020).

Previous studies suggest that students' educational experiences in criminology programs significantly influence their career goals and perceptions of the criminal justice system (Tontodonato & Savolainen, 2019). Exposure to criminological theories, ethical standards, and real-world criminal justice issues helps students develop professional identities aligned with system improvement and reform, particularly in relation to integrity, ethics, and institutional accountability (Chavez, 2023; Dagoy et al., 2024).

Practical Aspirations of Criminology Students. Practical aspirations refer to students' career goals, professional plans, and intended contributions to the criminal justice system. Research indicates that criminology students commonly aspire to careers in law enforcement, corrections, forensic investigation, legal services, and policy development (Clear et al., 2018). These aspirations are often shaped by academic training, internship experiences, and interactions with criminal justice professionals, which influence their understanding of public service and leadership roles (Chavez et al., 2024).

Studies have shown that criminology education emphasizes applied skills such as critical thinking, research analysis, ethical decision-making, and problem-solving, which students intend to apply in real-world settings (Siegel & Welsh, 2021). Through these competencies, students aim to contribute to crime reduction, offender rehabilitation, and the promotion of justice and public

safety, aligning with broader expectations of professional accountability and ethical practice (Chavez, Cuilan, Mannan, et al., 2024).

Furthermore, some students express aspirations beyond traditional roles, including involvement in criminal justice reform, advocacy for marginalized populations, and the development of evidence-based policies (Cullen et al., 2019). These practical ambitions highlight a growing recognition among criminology students of the need for systemic improvement and innovation within the criminal justice system, particularly in advancing inclusive and socially responsive institutions (Leon et al., 2024).

Application of Criminological Knowledge and Skills. The application of theoretical knowledge to practical settings is a central goal of criminology education. According to Akers and Sellers (2016), criminological theories provide students with frameworks for understanding criminal behavior, victimization, and systemic responses to crime. Students who effectively integrate theory and practice are better equipped to assess existing policies and propose informed solutions that promote fairness and justice (Chavez, Gregorio, et al., 2024).

Research also emphasizes the importance of experiential learning, such as fieldwork and internships, in shaping students' confidence and competence in criminal justice roles (Fitzgerald et al., 2020). These experiences allow students to translate classroom learning into practical actions that support institutional effectiveness and ethical practice, reinforcing their sense of responsibility as future public servants (Chavez, Garil, Padirque, et al., 2024).

Personal Motivations and Values of Criminology Students. Personal motivations and values play a crucial role in students' commitment to the criminal justice system. Many criminology students are motivated by values such as justice, fairness, public service, and respect for human rights (Banks, 2017). These values often stem from personal experiences, community exposure, or awareness of social inequalities, which shape their perspectives on ethics and social responsibility (Chavez & Ceneciro, 2024).

Studies suggest that students who hold strong ethical values are more likely to advocate for humane treatment of offenders, victim support, and restorative justice approaches (Zehr, 2015). Such motivations influence not only career choices but also how students engage with their studies and envision their future roles within the system, particularly in maintaining integrity and ethical conduct in professional practice (Chavez, 2023).

Experiences Shaping Commitment to Criminal Justice. Personal experiences, including exposure to crime, victimization, or community injustice, have been identified as significant factors shaping students' commitment to criminology (Brown et al., 2020). These experiences often reinforce students' desire to contribute positively to the criminal justice system and address its shortcomings, especially in promoting equity and inclusion (Leon et al., 2024).

Research indicates that reflective learning and personal narratives strengthen students' sense of purpose and professional responsibility (Meadows, 2018). As a result, criminology students often develop a long-term commitment to improving justice outcomes and fostering trust between the criminal justice system and the communities it serves, reflecting broader ideals of ethical leadership and public accountability (Chavez et al., 2024).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative exploratory research design to examine the practical and personal aspirations of criminology students in contributing to the success and effectiveness of the criminal justice system. An exploratory design is appropriate when a phenomenon is not yet extensively studied and when the goal is to gain in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives, motivations, and lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The qualitative approach allowed for rich, detailed accounts of students' aspirations and values, which are best captured through open-ended inquiry rather than quantitative measurement.

3.2. Population and Sampling

The population of the study consisted of criminology students enrolled in a higher education institution offering a criminology program. A total of 18 criminology students (n = 18) participated in the study. Purposive sampling was utilized to select participants who could provide relevant and meaningful insights regarding their aspirations and motivations related to the criminal justice system. Participants were selected based on the following criteria: (a) current enrollment in a criminology program, (b) willingness to participate in an in-depth interview, and (c) ability to articulate their academic and career aspirations related to the criminal justice field. The sample size was deemed sufficient for qualitative inquiry, as it allowed for data saturation while ensuring depth of analysis (Guest et al., 2012).

3.3. Instrument

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide developed by the researchers based on the study objectives. The interview guide consisted of two main sections: (1) questions exploring the practical aspirations of criminology students in contributing to the effectiveness and success of the criminal justice system, and (2) questions examining their personal motivations and values that influence their commitment to supporting and improving the system. The semi-structured format allowed flexibility for probing and follow-up questions, enabling participants to elaborate on their responses and share personal experiences relevant to the study. The interview questions were reviewed for clarity and alignment with the research objectives prior to data collection. Table 1 presents the list of guide questions used by this research study.

Table 1. Interview guide questions.

Objectives	Interview question
1. To explore the practical aspirations of criminology students in contributing to the effectiveness and success of the criminal justice system.	1. What specific goals or career aspirations do you have that you believe will contribute to the success of the criminal justice system? 2. How do you plan to apply your knowledge and skills from your criminology studies in real-world criminal justice settings? 3. Can you share an example of an initiative or project you hope to pursue to improve the effectiveness of the criminal justice system?

2. To examine the personal motivations and values of criminology students that influence their commitment to supporting and improving the criminal justice system.

1. What personal values or beliefs inspire your interest in criminology and supporting the criminal justice system?
2. How do your motivations influence the way you approach your studies or future work in the criminal justice field?
3. Can you describe a situation or experience that strengthened your commitment to contributing positively to the criminal justice system?

3.4. Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, ethical considerations were observed. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. One-on-one interviews were conducted at a time and setting convenient for the participants. Depending on accessibility and preference, interviews were conducted either face-to-face or through an online platform. Each interview followed the prepared interview guide and lasted approximately 30–60 minutes. With participants' permission, interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate data capture. Field notes were also taken to document non-verbal cues and contextual observations.

3.5. Data analysis

The collected data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis, following the procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method was selected because it allows for the identification, analysis, and interpretation of patterns of meaning within qualitative data while acknowledging the researcher's active role in knowledge construction. The analysis involved six phases: familiarization with the data through repeated reading of interview transcripts, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the analysis process to ensure transparency and rigor, with the researchers continuously reflecting on their assumptions and interpretations.

4. RESULTS

Research Objectives 1. To explore the practical aspirations of criminology students in contributing to the effectiveness and success of the criminal justice system.

Question No. 1. What specific goals or career aspirations do you have that you believe will contribute to the success of the criminal justice system?

1.1 *Building community trust*

Eight (8) respondents expressed that they want to become a police officer who helps build community trust through consistent, fair, and professional conduct in everyday interactions. They

understand that trust is developed over time, especially through how officers handle routine patrols, complaints, and conflict situations. Additionally, they mentioned that by following proper procedures, respecting human rights, and communicating clearly with civilians even in difficult encounters they aim to reduce tension and misunderstandings. They also believe that being accountable for their actions and treating people with dignity can encourage cooperation, improve information sharing, and make law enforcement more effective in maintaining public safety.

> *"I want to become a police officer who helps build community trust through consistent, fair, and professional conduct in everyday interactions."*
>
> *" By following proper procedures, respecting human rights, and communicating clearly with civilians even in difficult encounters I aim to reduce tension and misunderstandings."*

1.2 *Effective crime prevention*

Five (5) respondents shared that they want to work in crime prevention and community education by being directly involved in grassroots programs that address youth behavior at the community level. This includes participating in school-based awareness sessions and youth outreach activities that focus on practical issues such as peer pressure, substance use and conflict resolution. By working closely with teachers, parents, and local officials, they aim to help identify at-risk youth early and connect them to mentoring, skills training or recreational programs. Additionally, they mentioned that instead of emphasizing punishment, they believe in providing clear, realistic explanations of the legal and social consequences of crime, along with guidance on making better choices. Through consistent presence and cooperation with the community, these efforts can help reduce juvenile delinquency and promote responsible, law-abiding citizenship.

> *"I want to work in crime prevention and community education by being directly involved in grassroots programs that address youth behavior at the community level."*
>
> *"Instead of emphasizing punishment, I believe in providing clear, realistic explanations of the legal and social consequences of crime, along with guidance on making better choices."*

1.3 Balancing law enforcement with empathy

Five (5) respondents expressed that they want to serve in the criminal justice system not only to enforce laws, but to ensure that justice is carried out fairly and responsibly in the daily realities of law enforcement, corrections, or legal work. This involves treating everyone from victims, suspects, and community members with respect and dignity, carefully following established procedures, and making decisions based on evidence and context rather than assumptions or biases. Additionally, they shared that by combining professionalism with empathy, they hope to contribute to a system that protects public safety while minimizing unnecessary harm, ensuring that people feel heard, respected and treated fairly. These consistent and grounded

practices can help foster public trust, improve cooperation and strengthen the credibility and effectiveness of the criminal justice system as a whole.

> *"I want to serve in the criminal justice system not only to enforce laws, but to ensure that justice is carried out fairly and responsibly in the daily realities of law enforcement, corrections, or legal work."*
>
> *"By combining professionalism with empathy, I hope to contribute to a system that protects public safety while minimizing unnecessary harm, ensuring that people feel heard, respected, and treated fairly."*

Question No. 2. How do you plan to apply your knowledge and skills from your criminology studies in real-world criminal justice settings?

2.1 *Work with organizations supporting crime victims*

Five (5) respondents expressed that they hope to work with organizations that support victims of crime, such as NGOs, social service agencies or government victim assistance programs. Their criminology studies have given them insights into how crime impacts individuals psychologically, emotionally and socially ranging from trauma and anxiety to disrupted family and community relationships. With this understanding, they can now provide more empathetic support, help victims navigate legal processes and connect them to counseling or rehabilitation services. Additionally, they mentioned that they want to contribute to prevention strategies by identifying risk factors in communities and educating people on safety measures, early intervention and resources available to reduce vulnerability. They aim to combine direct assistance with proactive initiatives so that victims feel heard, supported and empowered while communities become more resilient against crime.

> *" I hope to work with organizations that support victims of crime, such as NGOs, social service agencies, or government victim assistance programs. "*
>
> *"I want to contribute to prevention strategies by identifying risk factors in communities and educating people on safety measures, early intervention, and resources available to reduce vulnerability."*

2.2 *Apply knowledge to support law enforcement*

Five (5) respondents expressed that they aim to apply their knowledge of criminal behavior and investigative techniques to support law enforcement in solving cases efficiently and ethically. Their criminology studies have equipped them with an understanding of offender profiling, crime scene analysis, evidence collection and forensic procedures, which they can use to ensure investigations are thorough and accurate. Additionally, they mentioned that they also want to contribute by analyzing patterns in criminal activity to help prevent future crimes, assist in risk assessments, and provide actionable insights for policing strategies. Beyond technical skills, they aim to maintain ethical standards, by ensuring that justice is served while protecting the rights of both victims and suspects.

> *"I aim to apply my knowledge of criminal behavior and investigative techniques to support law enforcement in solving cases efficiently and ethically."*
>
> *"I also want to contribute by analyzing patterns in criminal activity to help prevent future crimes, assist in risk assessments, and provide actionable insights for policing strategies.*"

2.3 Work in community-based programs to educate youth

Eight (8) respondents mentioned that they want to work in community-based programs that educate youth about the consequences of crime and encourage responsible citizenship. Their criminology background allows them to understand the social, psychological and environmental risk factors that increase the likelihood of juvenile offending. With this knowledge, they can help design and implement interventions that are evidence-based, culturally sensitive and age-appropriate, such as mentorship programs, life-skills workshops or community awareness campaigns. Additionally, they mentioned that they aim to collaborate closely with schools, local organizations, law enforcement, and families to create a support network that reinforces these lessons and provides real-world guidance. Part of their approach would also involve monitoring and evaluating program effectiveness like adjusting strategies based on feedback and ensuring interventions are culturally relevant and sensitive to the unique needs of each community.

> *"I want to work in community-based programs that educate youth about the consequences of crime and encourage responsible citizenship."*
>
> *"I aim to collaborate closely with schools, local organizations, law enforcement, and families to create a support network that reinforces these lessons and provides real-world guidance."*

Question No. 3. Can you share an example of an initiative or project you hope to pursue to improve the effectiveness of the criminal justice system?

3.1 *Develop a data analytics project to predict crime hotspots*

Eight (8) respondents expressed that they hope to develop a data analytics project that helps law enforcement predict crime hotspots more accurately. This project would combine historical crime data, demographic information, socioeconomic indicators and environmental factors to identify areas at higher risk of criminal activity. By applying predictive modeling and machine learning, law enforcement could proactively allocate resources, plan patrols and implement targeted prevention programs rather than reacting after crimes occur. Additionally, they mentioned that the project could include a public-facing dashboard for community stakeholders to increase awareness of local safety trends, and encourage collaboration between residents and authorities. Ethical considerations would be central in ensuring that data use avoids racial or socioeconomic profiling, respects individual privacy and incorporates transparency measures so the community understands how predictions are made. The goal is not just to predict crime, but to prevent it responsibly.

> *"I hope to develop a data analytics project that helps law enforcement predict crime hotspots more accurately. "*
>
> *"The project could include a public-facing dashboard for community stakeholders to increase awareness of local safety trends, encouraging collaboration between residents and authorities."*

3.2 *Create a community-based program for first-time offenders*

Five (5) respondents expressed that they want to create a community-based rehabilitation program for first-time offenders that focuses on counseling, skill-building and mentorship. The program would provide individualized support, including psychological counseling to address behavioral triggers, vocational or educational training to enhance employability and mentorship from community leaders or trained volunteers to guide reintegration into society. Additionally, they mentioned that continuous monitoring and feedback would ensure that interventions are effective and adaptable to each participant's needs. By collaborating with local organizations, schools and businesses, the program could create pathways for employment, further education or volunteer work reducing the likelihood of going back to a previous behavior, especially criminal behavior. The goal is to transform first-time offenders into responsible and contributing members of society.

> *"I want to create a community-based rehabilitation program for first-time offenders that focuses on counseling, skill-building, and mentorship."*
>
> *"Continuous monitoring and feedback would ensure that interventions are effective and adaptable to each participant's needs."*

3.3 Develop a support network for victims of crime

Five (5) respondents expressed that they want to develop a comprehensive support network for victims of crime that offers counseling, legal guidance and advocacy services. The program would provide immediate emotional support through trauma-informed counseling, helping victims process their experiences and regain a sense of safety. Legal guidance would assist them in understanding their rights, navigating court procedures and accessing protective measures when necessary. Additionally, they mentioned that the project could also incorporate community education campaigns to raise awareness about victims' rights and reduce social stigma associated with reporting crimes. By addressing both emotional and practical needs, this initiative would make the criminal justice system more compassionate, accessible and effective in promoting justice.

> *"I want to develop a comprehensive support network for victims of crime that offers counseling, legal guidance, and advocacy services. "*

> *"The project could also incorporate community education campaigns to raise awareness about victims' rights and reduce social stigma associated with reporting crimes."*

Research Objectives 2. To examine the personal motivations and values of criminology students that influence their commitment to supporting and improving the criminal justice system.

Question No. 1. What personal values or beliefs inspire your interest in criminology and supporting the criminal justice system?

1.1 Empathy and Compassion

Eight (8) respondents expressed that they value supporting victims and helping them regain a sense of safety because they've seen how crime can deeply shake a person's life whether emotionally, psychologically and even socially. Empathy drives them to listen to their stories, validate their experiences and advocate for their needs within a system that can sometimes feel impersonal or intimidating. This belief motivates them to contribute to a criminal justice system that is compassionate, accessible and responsive to the real human impact of crime. Additionally, they mentioned that they believe that justice isn't only about punishing offenders, it's also about restoring the well-being and dignity of those harmed. By providing victims with counseling, guidance and practical support, they hope to help them reclaim control over their lives, feel heard and rebuild trust in society.

> *"I value supporting victims and helping them regain a sense of safety because I've seen how crime can deeply shake a person's life whether emotionally, psychologically and even socially."*

> *"I believe that justice isn't only about punishing offenders; it's also about restoring the well-being and dignity of those harmed."*

1.2 *Public Safety and Community Service*

Five (5) respondents expressed that they are motivated by the belief that everyone deserves to feel safe in their community because safety is the foundation of trust, well-being and opportunity. They know that crime doesn't just affect individuals, it can also fracture neighborhoods, create fear and limit people's ability to live fully. They want to contribute to creating environments where people can go about their daily lives without fear. Additionally, they mentioned that they want to help build bridges between law enforcement, local organizations and residents so that safety is a shared effort and every community member feels valued and protected. This motivation comes from a sense of social responsibility and the belief that the criminal justice system should not only respond to crime but also actively foster safer and more resilient communities.

> *" I'm motivated by the belief that everyone deserves to feel safe in their community because safety is the foundation of trust, well-being, and opportunity."*
>
> *" I want to help build bridges between law enforcement, local organizations, and residents so that safety is a shared effort and every community member feels valued and protected."*

1.3 *Justice and Fairness*

Five (5) respondents expressed that they believe everyone deserves a fair chance because justice should be about more than punishment, it should be about understanding, accountability and the possibility of positive change. They want to be part of a system that ensures fairness by advocating for due process, supporting rehabilitation programs and making sure that decisions are based on evidence rather than bias or assumption. For them, justice is about balancing the needs of victims, communities and offenders, recognizing that each case has its unique circumstances. Additionally, they mentioned that they also hope to help prevent miscarriages of justice, reduce recidivism and support individuals in making meaningful changes in their lives. This belief drives their interest in criminology because it combines their commitment to ethical practice with a desire to create a system that protects society while treating people with dignity.

> *"I believe everyone deserves a fair chance because justice should be about more than punishment, it should be about understanding, accountability and the possibility of positive change."*
>
> *"I also hope to help prevent miscarriages of justice, reduce recidivism, and support individuals in making meaningful changes in their lives."*

Question No. 2. How do your motivations influence the way you approach your studies or future work in the criminal justice field?

2.1 Motivated by supporting victims and ensuring they feel heard and protected

Five (5) respondents expressed that they are motivated by a desire to support victims and help them feel heard and protected. Because of this, they focus on learning about restorative justice and victim support services, so that in the future they can contribute to a system that doesn't just punish offenders but also heals communities. This motivation also pushes them to engage with case studies, volunteer programs and community outreach initiatives, so that they can see firsthand how support systems work in practice. Additionally, they mentioned that they actively seek knowledge about trauma-informed approaches, counseling techniques and legal advocacy to better understand the needs of victims at every stage of the justice process. They believe that by combining academic learning with real-world exposure, they can help design interventions that empower victims and ensure that justice is comprehensive. Their goal is to create a more compassionate and responsive criminal justice system where victims feel validated, supported and protected.

> *"I'm motivated by a desire to support victims and help them feel heard and protected."*
>
> *" I actively seek knowledge about trauma-informed approaches, counseling techniques, and legal advocacy to better understand the needs of victims at every stage of the justice process."*

2.2 Motivation stems from personal experiences with crime in the community

Eight (8) respondents expressed that their motivation comes from personal experiences with crime in their community, which made them realize how deeply crime affects individuals and families. This drives them to focus on both the human and systemic sides of criminology, understanding not only criminal behavior and the legal framework but also the social, economic and psychological factors that contribute to crime. They aim to study investigative procedures, community programs and criminal justice policies in a way that balances efficiency with compassion. Additionally, they mentioned that they also prioritize developing skills in communication, mediation and trauma-informed approaches, so they can interact with victims, offenders and law enforcement professionals respectfully and empathetically. Their goal is to be a practitioner who creates real, positive change in the criminal justice system by helping communities feel safer, supporting victims and holding offenders accountable without losing sight of the dignity and humanity of everyone involved.

> *"My motivation comes from personal experiences with crime in my community, which made me realize how deeply crime affects individuals and families."*
>
> *"I also prioritize developing skills in communication, mediation, and trauma-informed approaches, so I can interact with victims, offenders, and law enforcement professionals respectfully and empathetically. "*

2.3 Preventing crime before it occurs

Five (5) respondents expressed that they want to prevent crime before it happens. This motivates them to understand criminal behavior, risk factors and community programs, so they can address the root causes of criminal activity rather than just its consequences. In their studies, they focus not only on criminological theories but also on evidence-based interventions, juvenile delinquency patterns, and social development programs. They are particularly interested in learning how to identify early warning signs and design community outreach initiatives that educate and provide resources for at-risk youth. Additionally, they mentioned that they also explore strategies for collaboration between schools, local organizations and law enforcement to create a holistic approach to crime prevention. By combining theoretical knowledge with practical program design, they aim to contribute to safer communities and offer young people constructive alternatives that reduce the likelihood of involvement in criminal activity.

> *"I want to prevent crime before it happens. This motivates me to understand criminal behavior, risk factors and community programs, so I can address the root causes of criminal activity rather than just its consequences."*

> *"I also explore strategies for collaboration between schools, local organizations and law enforcement to create a holistic approach to crime prevention."*

Question No. 3. Can you describe a situation or experience that strengthened your commitment to contributing positively to the criminal justice system?

3.1 Witnessed how young people turn to illegal activities due to lack of guidance

Eight (8) respondents expressed that growing up in a neighborhood where petty crimes were common, they saw firsthand how young people often turn to illegal activities out of necessity, peer pressure or lack of guidance. Many of these young people had potential but lacked access to supportive programs or positive role models. Volunteering in a local youth mentorship program gave them the chance to work directly with these individuals. Additionally, they mentioned that the experience in volunteering not only showed them the power of prevention but also highlighted the gaps in the system where resources and education are lacking. It strengthened their commitment to contributing to the criminal justice system in ways that go beyond enforcement by advocating for community-based programs and educational initiatives that address the root causes of crime and help young people develop pathways to success before they become involved in the justice system.

> *" Growing up in a neighborhood where petty crimes were common, I saw firsthand how young people often turn to illegal activities out of necessity, peer pressure, or lack of guidance."*

> *"The experience in volunteering not only showed me the power of prevention but also highlighted the gaps in the system where resources and education are lacking."*

3.2 Found that juvenile justice policies often disproportionately impact marginalized communities

Five (5) respondents shared that while researching juvenile justice policies, they discovered that certain laws and enforcement practices disproportionately affect marginalized communities, often criminalizing poverty, racial identity,or lack of access to education and support systems. They learned that systemic inequities can trap youth in cycles of incarceration rather than helping them rehabilitate or reintegrate into society. This realization strengthened their determination to pursue a career where they can influence policy reform so that justice becomes fair, equitable, and accessible to everyone. Additionally, they mentioned that they want to contribute to creating policies that focus on rehabilitation, prevention and support, rather than punishment alone. They also want to ensure that the criminal justice system protects all members of society, not just those with resources or influence.

> *"While researching juvenile justice policies, I discovered that certain laws and enforcement practices disproportionately affect marginalized communities, often criminalizing poverty, racial identity or lack of access to education and support systems."*

> *"I want to contribute to creating policies that focus on rehabilitation, prevention and support, rather than punishment alone."*

3.3 Assisted victims of domestic violence during internship

Five (5) respondents mentioned that during their internship, they had the opportunity to assist victims of domestic violence. Listening to their personal stories, they saw the emotional, psychological and practical challenges they faced not only from the crime itself but also from navigating a system that can sometimes be slow or intimidating. This experience affected them and made them realize that justice is more than enforcing laws, it's about ensuring victims feel supported, safe and empowered throughout the process. Additionally, they shared that some victims struggled to access protection orders, legal advice or emotional support, which left them feeling vulnerable and unheard. These situations strengthened their commitment to contributing to the criminal justice system in ways that prioritize victim advocacy, trauma-informed practices and accessible support services, so that the system protects and uplifts those who need it most.

> *"During my internship, I had the opportunity to assist victims of domestic violence. Listening to their personal stories, I saw the emotional, psychological and practical challenges they faced not only from the crime itself but also from navigating a system that can sometimes be slow or intimidating."*

> *"Some victims struggled to access protection orders, legal advice or emotional support, which left them feeling vulnerable and unheard."*

5.DISCUSSION

Guided by the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), this study highlights how criminology students' practical aspirations and personal motivations shape their intention to contribute to the success and effectiveness of the criminal justice system. According to Ajzen (1991), behavior is influenced by attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. These components provide a useful framework for understanding how students translate their values and goals into future professional intentions within the criminal justice field.

In relation to the first objective, the findings suggest that criminology students possess strong behavioral intentions grounded in positive attitudes toward contributing to the criminal justice system. Their aspirations such as pursuing careers in law enforcement, corrections, legal services, or policy reform reflect a belief that their roles can meaningfully enhance system effectiveness. Students' plans to apply academic knowledge through ethical practice, evidence-based approaches, and system improvements demonstrate a clear alignment between educational preparation and real-world application. These intentions are further strengthened by perceived behavioral control, as students express confidence in their skills, training, and capacity to enact change within institutional settings.

Addressing the second objective, personal motivations and values such as justice, fairness, public service, and accountability emerge as key drivers of students' commitment.

Within the TPB framework, these motivations shape favorable attitudes toward supporting the criminal justice system and reinforce sustained engagement in their studies. Additionally, experiences such as exposure to crime, community injustice, or inspirational role models contribute to subjective norms, reinforcing the belief that contributing to the system is both socially valued and morally significant. These internalized norms motivate students to align their future professional behavior with their personal values.

Overall, the discussion demonstrates that criminology students' intentions to support and improve the criminal justice system are not incidental but are systematically shaped by interconnected cognitive and motivational factors outlined in the Theory of Planned Behavior. By fostering positive attitudes, strengthening supportive norms, and enhancing students' sense of competence, criminology education plays a crucial role in preparing future professionals who are both practically equipped and personally committed to advancing the effectiveness and integrity of the criminal justice system.

6.CONCLUSION

This study reveals that criminology students possess strong practical aspirations and deeply rooted personal motivations that collectively shape their commitment to contributing to the effectiveness and success of the criminal justice system. In line with the first research objective, students expressed clear career goals focused on building community trust, preventing crime through education and early intervention, supporting victims, and balancing law enforcement with empathy and ethical practice. Their envisioned initiatives—such as data-driven crime prevention projects, community-based rehabilitation programs, and comprehensive victim support networks—demonstrate a proactive and preventive orientation toward justice rather than a purely punitive approach. Addressing the second research objective, the findings show that students' motivations are strongly influenced by values of empathy, fairness, public safety, and social responsibility. Personal experiences with crime, exposure to systemic inequalities, and direct engagement with victims and at-risk youth reinforced their desire to pursue trauma-informed, community-centered, and equitable justice practices. These values shape how students approach their studies by prioritizing evidence-based interventions, victim advocacy, ethical decision-making, and collaborative community work. Overall, the results suggest that criminology students are motivated not only by professional ambitions but also by a strong moral commitment to improving the criminal justice system. Their aspirations reflect a generation of future practitioners who aim to strengthen public trust, promote fairness, prevent crime at its roots, and ensure that justice is both effective and humane. This alignment of practical goals and personal values underscores the potential of criminology education to cultivate competent, ethical, and socially responsive contributors to the criminal justice system.

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