

## Prevalence of mental health problems among youth involved in street crimes

Aman Ullah, Niaz Muhammad

Department of Sociology, University of Peshawar, Pakistan

**Objective:** To measure the demographic characteristics and association between street crimes and its impact on the psychological health of youth in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

**Methodology:** This cross sectional survey included 300 youth offenders in age brackets of 15 to 29 years placed in seven jails of the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS 25. Uni-Variate analysis was conducted to measures the frequency and percentage distribution of the respondent's responses.

**Results:** A highly significant association was found between participation in street crimes and offender stress as the value of Chi-square shows 36.279

highly significant at a 1% level of significance. Similarly, engagement in street crimes significantly determined aggressive behavior among offenders as the value of Chi-square revealed 34.688 highly significant at a 1% level of significance. Involvement in street crimes significantly contributed to prevalence of depression among offenders as the Chi-square value shows 14.118 significantly at a 5% level of significance.

**Conclusion:** Street crimes is associated with a consequent increase of stress, depression, and aggression among youth offenders. (Rawal Med J 202;45:938-942).

**Keywords:** Street crimes, offences, mental health.

### INTRODUCTION

Street crimes are a ubiquitous phenomenon across the world. Street crime can be described as "the offences of robbery, attempted robbery, snatching, and theft from the person irrespective of location. 'Snatch thefts' refer to those incidents where an offender snatches property away from the victim, the force being applied to the property as opposed to the person, and the victim being immediately aware of what has happened".<sup>1</sup> The prevalence of street criminality among youth in Pakistan, has been triggered by a paralyzed economic institution, family management, and attachment with the delinquent peer. Moreover, anti-social activities severely affect economic growth.

Meanwhile, criminals also suffer numerous mental health consequences of their delinquent lifestyle. Many studies across the globe have identified poor psychological health among young offenders.<sup>2,3,4</sup> Criminals have a higher frequency of psychiatric problems compared to the general population,<sup>5</sup> and emotional distress could be the outcome of criminal behavior and subsequent participation in delinquent behavior.<sup>6</sup> Besides, some prior studies on youth criminal behavior and mental health

problems have concluded that the prevalence of psychological problems and drug addictions in criminals could be the result of an association with criminal behavior.<sup>7,8</sup>

Likewise, the empirical findings of Dembo and Schmeidler have also suggested that majority of the offenders have "attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)" and psychotic problems as compared to normal people.<sup>9</sup> A study reported that among criminals 10% had major depression, 4% had psychotic illnesses and approximately 65% had a personality disorder.<sup>10</sup> A more recent study pinpointed that nearly 90% of the inmates had suffered at least one of the following mental health problems: derangement, depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and excessive use of alcohol or drug.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, youth participation in antisocial activities leads to severe depression and anxiety.<sup>4,12</sup> However, the pervasiveness of conducted disorder, depression, and substance use significantly triggered suicidal behavior among young offenders.<sup>13,14</sup> There is a dearth of studies reflecting the impact of street crimes on the mental health of young offenders. The purpose of this study was to assess the demographic characteristics and

association between street crimes and its impact on the psychological health of youth in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

## METHODOLOGY

This cross-sectional survey included 300 youth offenders having the age brackets of 15 to 29 years, as defined by the UN.<sup>15</sup> The sampled youth were approached were placed in seven jails of the province. The sample was selected from the total population of 1200 as per the criteria formulated by Yamane.<sup>16</sup> A prior permission of the Prison Department of province of KP was sought and an informed consent was obtained from all subjects for the interview with them. During this, no unethical questions were raised and no unnecessary matter was discussed with them. The proportional sample allocation method was used to determine the sample size for each selected jail. The formula for this application is mentioned below:

$n_i = \frac{n}{N} * N_i$  Where,

$n$  = Required sample size of street criminals,

$N$  = Total Population of street criminals in selected jails,

$N_i$  = Number of street criminals in  $I^{th}$  stratum,

$n_i$  = Sample Size of street criminals to be selected from  $I^{th}$  stratum

**Statistical Analysis:** Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS version 25. Uni-Variate analysis was conducted to measures the frequency and percentage distribution of the respondent's responses. Correlation analysis and Chi-square tests were used to predict the association between independent variable i.e. Street crimes, and dependent variable e.g. psychological impact.

## RESULTS

Table 1 shows jails surveyed. We found that 26.7% inmates were literate and 20.3% had a matric level of qualification. Most (82%) inmates were unmarried and 53.0% reported their family monthly income below 20,000. Majority (81.7%) of the inmates were arrested for the 1st time and mobile, wallet, and gold snatched was the most common offense (61.6%), followed by vehicle-related theft (23%) (Table 2).

**Table 1. Street criminals taken from each jail.**

Name of division	Name of Jail	Total street criminals (N <sub>i</sub> )	Sample Size (n <sub>i</sub> )
Peshawar	Peshawar	260	65
Mardan	Mardan	208	52
Dera Ismail Khan	D.I. Khan	80	20
Bannu	Bannu	290	73
Kohat	Karak	130	32
Hazara	Mansehra	120	30
Malakand	Malakand	112	28
	Total	1200	300

**Table 2. Demographic profile of street criminal.**

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Age (Years)		
15-18	77	25.7
19-22	145	48.3
23-26	52	17.3
27-29	26	8.7
Education Level		
Illiterate	80	26.7
Primary	48	16.0
Middle	57	19.0
Matric	61	20.3
Intermediate	44	14.7
Graduation	10	3.3
Marital status		
Unmarried	246	82.0
Married	43	14.3
Separate	10	3.3
Divorced	1	.3
Family Monthly income in PKR		
Below 20,000	159	53.0
20,001-40,000	59	19.7
40,001-60,000	48	16.0
Above 60,000	34	11.3
Frequency Of being arrested		
1st Time	245	81.7
Two time	55	18.3
Nature of Street crimes		
Mobile/Good/Wallet snatching	185	61.6
Vehicle related crime	65	21.7
Sealing Drugs	47	15.7
Physical assault	3	1.0
Total	300	100.0

**Table 3. Psychological problems of criminal.**

S.no	Psychological Problems	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Total
<b>Stress</b>					
1	You often stressed out on others	231(77%)	53(17.7%)	16(5.3%)	300(100%)
2	You often feel afraid if something awful to you.	223(74.3%)	45(15%)	32(10.7%)	300(100%)
3	You Always doubt others.	200(66.7%)	82(27.3%)	18(6%)	300(100%)
<b>Depression</b>					
1	You often get depressed.	223(74.3%)	40(13.3%)	37(12.3%)	300(100%)
2	Sometimes you feel like smashing things can reduce your stress and depression.	221(73.3%)	47(15.7%)	32(10.7%)	300(100%)
3	Do you have any problems in appetite	139(46.3%)	101(33.7%)	60(20%)	300(100%)
4	You often thought to commit suicide.	166(55.3%)	107(35.7%)	27(9%)	300(100%)
5	You are facing difficulty in sleeping	210(70%)	73(24.3%)	17(5.7%)	300(100%)
<b>Aggression</b>					
1	You quickly lose your temper	206(68.7%)	68(22.7%)	26(8.7%)	300(100%)
2	You are easily becoming annoyed.	226(75.3%)	53(17.7%)	21(7%)	300(100%)
3	When you get angry you start saying nasty things	199(66.3%)	69(23%)	32(10.7%)	300(100%)

**Table 4. Association between street crimes and psychological impact.**

Street crimes	Psychological problems			Total	Statistics
	Stress				
	Agree	Disagree	Neutral		
Good Snatching	101(50.2%)	64(82.1%)	20(95.2%)	185(61.7%)	$x^2 = 36.279$ $p = 0.000$
Vehicle theft	59(29.4%)	6(7.7%)	0(0%)	65(21.7%)	
Drugs	38(18.9%)	8(10.3%)	1(4.8%)	47(15.7%)	
Sexual assault	3(1.5%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	3(1%)	
<b>Total</b>	201(100%)	78(100%)	21(100%)	300(100%)	
Street Crimes	Aggression				$x^2 = 34.688$ $p = 0.000$
	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Total	
Good Snatching	96(49.5%)	70(84.3%)	19(82.6%)	185(61.7%)	
Vehicle theft	56(28.9%)	9(10.8%)	0(0%)	65(21.7%)	
Drugs	39(20.1%)	4(4.8%)	4(17.4%)	47(15.7%)	
Sexual assault	3(1.5%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	3(1%)	
<b>Total</b>	194(100%)	83(100%)	23(100%)	300(100%)	
Street Crimes	Depression				
	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Total	
Good Snatching	119(55.6%)	37(71.2%)	29(85.3%)	185(61.7%)	
Vehicle theft	54(25.2%)	9(17.3%)	2(5.9%)	65(21.7%)	
Drugs	38(17.8%)	6(11.5%)	3(8.8%)	47(15.7%)	
Sexual assault	3(1.4%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	3(1%)	
<b>Total</b>	214(100%)	52(100%)	34(100%)	300(100%)	
Independent Variable		Dependent Variable( Psychological impact)			Correlation
Street crimes		Stress			-.283**
		Depression			-.187**
		Aggression			-.263**

A highly significant association was found between participation in street crimes and offender stress as the value of Chi-square shows 36.279 highly significant at a 1% level of significance. Similarly, engagement in street crimes significantly determined aggressive behavior among offenders as the value of Chi-square revealed 34.688 highly significant at a 1 % level of significance. Pearson's correlation analysis was used to confirm the relationship of predictor variables. Street crimes were significantly correlating with the offender's mental health problems (stress, depression & aggression) at a 0.01 level of significance (Table 3). Same results were also found at the bivariate level. Association between street crimes and psychological impact is shown in Table 4.

## DISCUSSION

This study contributes to the existing literature gap, where minimal empirical studies have been done on the psychological impact of offending behavior in youth. Farrington's study found that delinquent behavior tends to upsurge at a young age and decline gradually thereafter.<sup>19</sup> Other research findings in Pakistan also show that there is an invariable link between low education, low income, and street crimes.<sup>20</sup>

This study further explored that goods/mobile snatching was the most common offense (61.6%), followed by vehicle-related theft (23%) among the respondents. Our results pertaining to psychological problems and amplify prior research demonstrating that youth in imprisonment are severely exposed to poor mental health.<sup>21,22,23</sup>

A recent study in Pakistan reconfirmed that youth in jails severely faced psychological problems i.e. depression, anxiety, stress etc.<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, the findings as a whole recommend that participation in street crimes contributes to stress, depression, and aggression as major health problems in youth involved in delinquent behavior.

## CONCLUSION

Participation in street crimes is associated with a consequent increase of stress, depression, and aggression among youth offenders.

### Author Contributions:

Conception and Design: Aman Ullah

Collection and Assembly of data: Aman Ullah

Analysis and interpretation of data: Aman Ullah

Drafting of the article: Aman Ullah

Critical revision of the article for important intellectual content: Niaz Muhammad

Statistical Expertise: Niaz Muhammad

Final approval and guarantor of the article: Aman Ullah

**Corresponding author email:** Aman Ullah:

Aman@uoswabi.edu.pk

**Conflict of Interest:** None declared

Rec. Date: May 29, 2020 Revision Rec. Date: Oct 23, 2020 Accept

Date: Nov 01, 2020

## REFERENCES

1. Smith J. Home Office Research Study 254: The nature of personal robbery. Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate. 2003.
2. Chitsabesan P, Kroll L, Bailey S, Kenning C, Sneider S, MacDonald W, et al. Mental health needs of young offenders in custody and in the community. *Br J Psychiatry* 2006;188:534-40.
3. Kroll L, Rothwell J, Bradley D, Shah P, Bailey S, Harrington R. Mental health needs of boys in secure care for serious or persistent offending: a prospective, longitudinal study. *The Lancet* 2002;359:1975-9.
4. Teplin LA, Abram KM, McClelland GM, Dulcan MK, Mericle AA. Psychiatric disorders in youth in juvenile detention. *Arch Gen Psychiatry* 2002;59:1133-43.
5. Muller AE. A systematic review of quality of life assessments of offenders. *Int J Offender Ther Comp Criminol* 2020. doi.org/10.1177/0306624X19881929.
6. Huesmann LR, Dubow EF, Boxer P, Landau SF, Gvirsman SD, Shikaki K. Children's exposure to violent political conflict stimulates aggression at peers by increasing emotional distress, aggressive script rehearsal, and normative beliefs favoring aggression. *Dev Psychopathol* 2017;29:39-50.
7. Wallace C, Mullen PE, Burgess P, Palmer S, Ruschena D, Browne C. Serious criminal offending and mental disorder: Case linkage study. *Br J Psychiatry* 1998;172:477-84.
8. Fazel S, Gulati G, Linsell L, Geddes JR, Grann M. Schizophrenia and Violence: Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *PLOS Med* 2009;6:15.
9. Dembo R, Schmeidler J. A classification of high-risk youths. *J Res Crime Delinq* 2003;49:201-30.
10. Fazel S, Danesh J. Serious mental disorder in 23 000 prisoners: a systematic review of 62 surveys. *The Lancet* 2002;359:545-50.
11. National GAU. Mental health of adults in contact with the criminal justice system: Identification and management of mental health problems and integration of care for adults in contact with the criminal justice system. 2017.
12. Huesmann LR, Boxer P, Dubow EF, Smith C. Anxiety, depression, and offending in the Columbia County longitudinal study: A prospective analysis from late

- adolescence to middle adulthood. *J Crim Justice* 2019;62:35-41.
13. Putnins AL. Correlates and predictors of self-reported suicide attempts among incarcerated youths. *Int J Offender Ther Comparative Criminol* 2005;49:143-57.
14. Gould MS, Greenberg TED, Velting DM, Shaffer D. Youth Suicide Risk and Preventive Interventions: A Review of the Past 10 Years. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry* 2003;42:386-405.
15. Najam A, Bari F. Pakistan National Human Development Report. Unleashing the Potential of a Young Pakistan. Islamabad: UNDP. 2017.
16. Yamane T. Problems to accompany" Statistics, an introductory analysis": Harper & Row; 1967.
17. Lovibond PF, Lovibond SH. The structure of negative emotional states: Comparison of the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS) with the Beck Depression and Anxiety Inventories. *Behav Res Ther* 1995;33:335-43.
18. Orpinas P, Frankowski R. The Aggression Scale:: A Self-Report Measure of Aggressive Behavior for Young Adolescents. *J Early Adolesc* 2001;21:50-67.
19. Farrington DP. Age and crime. *J Crime Justice* 1986;7:189-250.
20. Khan N, Ahmed J, Nawaz M, Zaman K. The Socio-Economic Determinants of Crime in Pakistan: New Evidence on an Old Debate. *Arab Economic Business* 2015;10:73-81.
21. Cocozza JJ, Skowrya KR. Youth with mental health disorders: Issues and emerging responses. *Juv Just* 2000;7:3.
22. Robertson AA, Dill PL, Husain J, Undesser C. Prevalence of mental illness and substance abuse disorders among incarcerated juvenile offenders in Mississippi. *Child Psychiatry Hum Dev* 2004;35:55-74.
23. Maniadaki K, Kakouros E. Social and mental health profiles of young male offenders in detention in Greece. *Crim Behav Ment Health* 2008;18:207-15.
24. Dawood S, Khan AQ, Rashid A. Psychological disorders among prisoners in Pakistan. *J Pak Psychiatr Soc* 2017;1:14.