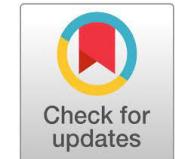


Economic Determinants of Crime and Their Psychological Impacts on Offender Personality: New Evidence Sheds Light on an Old Debate



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: May 19, 2024

Revised: June 18, 2024

Accepted: June 20, 2024

Published: June 30, 2024

Keywords:

Criminality
 Economic determinants
 Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
 Offender personality
 Psychological impacts

ABSTRACT

The issue of crime is universal and found across the country. The prevalence of criminality among people in rural-urban areas of Pakistan has been triggered by the paralyzed and dysfunctional economic system. This empirical ascertains the association between economic factors and participation in crimes. The present study also explored psychological issues such as depression, stress, and aggression experienced by people involved in unlawful activity. Data were gathered through structured interviews with 200 criminals housed in the sampled prisons of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa-Pakistan. Furthermore, to investigate the level of significance and association between an independent and dependent variable Bivariate analysis was carried out through a contingency table as well as Chi-Square statistics. Likewise, the association between multiple variables was examined through Multivariate analysis. It has been observed that on Bi and Multivariate level involvement in crimes was found significant with economic factors (≤ 0.000). A strong significant relationship was also found between involvement in criminal activities and an upsurge in mental health issues such as stress, depression, and aggression among inmates. Existing findings were also in line with previous studies dealing with criminality and economic factors. Certainly, the results of the present study have substantial additions to the existing literature on crimes in Pakistan, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Government and non-government organizations who are looking to develop effective strategies to reduce crime rates can benefit from this study.

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of delinquent activity is common in nature and present in every society. The prevalence of criminality among youth in rural-urban areas of Pakistan has been triggered by the paralyzed and dysfunctional economic system. For instance, the work of Edmark (2005) disclosed that unemployment serves as a driving force in the

occurrence of various crimes including burglary, theft of a bicycle, and cars. Besides, empirical works revealed around the crime-economy association resulted in the shape of huge empirical evidence covering a range of academic disciplines and put forward a variety of theories, most of which are associated with strain, motivational, opportunity, conflict, or rational choice perspectives" (Cantor & Land, 1985; Cook & Watson, 2014).

Prior theoretical literature, indicated a positive relationship between unemployment and crime: an upsurge in unemployment enhances the rate of crime (Cantor & Land, 1985; Jawadi, Mallick, Cheffou, & Augustine, 2019; Ullah, Shakir, Ahmad, & Shakir, 2021) Notwithstanding, joblessness represents the country's economic condition (Cantor & Land, 1985). Likewise, Becker (1968) measures the association of expected benefits and the cost of crime by a delinquent. He further added that people involved in

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How to Cite:

Shah, S. N., Aziz, S. Z., Dildar, A., Ubaid, F., & Khan, O. Z. (2024). Economic Determinants of Crime and Their Psychological Impacts on Offender Personality: New Evidence Sheds Light on an Old Debate. *CARC Research in Social Sciences*, 3(2), 264–268.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58329/criss.v3i2.141>

various crimes were triggered by several factors that might influence the expected net benefits of committing a crime, including worse economic conditions and a lack of job opportunities in the labor market. Contemporary research studies of Sachsida, de Mendonça, Loureiro, and Gutierrez (2010) also yield that the occurrence of crimes positively co-existed with income disparity and unemployment (dos Santos & Kassouf, 2013).

Tang (2010) and Hamzah and Lau (2013) also pinpoint that the root causes of violent crimes are unemployment and poverty. In addition, joblessness, living costs, and nonfulfillment of material wishes are some of the main causes of criminal behavior. Precisely, economic hardship may lead people to participate in drug dealing markets or various street crimes in order to fulfill their basic needs (Rosenfeld & Fornango, 2007). In the meanwhile, the delinquent lifestyle of offenders has several negative effects on their psychological health. Despite the fact that previous research has shown a variety of mental health issues triggered by criminal activity, several international studies have found that offenders have poor psychological health as was explored and reconfirmed by one of the empirical studies that youth involved in criminal acts have a higher probability of psychiatric problems compared to the normal population. Likewise, emotional distress was significantly increased in youth involved in antisocial behavior.

According to Dembo and his colleague's empirical studies, the majority of criminals have psychotic issues and "attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)" in comparison to normal persons. Likewise, a review of research on the prevalence of mental diseases in offenders found that 10% had serious depression, 4% had psychotic conditions, and 65% had a personality disorder (Chitsabesan et al., 2006; Dembo & Schmeidler, 2003; Huesmann, Boxer, Dubow, & Smith, 2019; Kroll et al., 2002; Muller, 2020; Smith, 2003; Teplin, Abram, McClelland, Dulcan, & Mericle, 2002; Ullah & Muhammad, 2020).

Rational of the Study

The occurrence of delinquent acts including theft, vehicle stealing, and other valuables snatching is surging day by day both in rural and urban areas of Pakistan. Several factors were responsible for youth involvement in adopting

offending behavior. However, the main theme of this article is restricted to the economic causes that are responsible for delinquent behavior among youth. The present study also explored psychological issues experienced by youth involved in unlawful activity. Besides, this study further ascertains the economic conditions of criminal acts among the youth. The sample respondents for this study were those young people convicted of crimes and being held in selected jails in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Objectives of the Study

- To find out the economic factors responsible for criminal behavior.
- To explore the Psychological Impacts of criminal behavior on offender Personality

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted under the umbrella of quantitative strategy and cross-sectional survey method. Furthermore, a sample size of 200 inmates involved in various criminal activities having the age fragments of "18 to 40 years", were selected from Mardan and Swabi prisons of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Moreover, the conceptual framework for the present study has covered economic disparity, youth involvement in crime, and psychological impacts of criminal behavior, along with one background variable (literacy status). Close-ended interviews were used to gather primary data, which was then subjected to univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analysis.

Economic Factors and Criminal Activity

The findings presented in Table 1 unveil the relationship between study variables. The economic factors were observed ($p=0.000$) strongly significantly associated with involvement in offending. These findings are closely in line with previous empirical work that correlated economic determinants as a major factor behind youth street criminal behavior. For instance, the results of Coomer (2003) work show that unemployment, price increases, and poverty are some of the major causes of crimes. Likewise, Khan, Ahmed, Nawaz, and Zaman (2015) stated the majority of the youth participated in offending behavior in order to fulfill their basic needs.

Table 1
Association between Economic Factors and Criminal Activity

Independent variables	Dependent variables	Statistics
Economic Factor	Criminal activity	$\chi^2=71.349$ $p=0.000$

Association between Economic Factors and Criminal Activity (Controlling Literacy as a Control Variable)

The relationship between economic factors and youth criminal behavior while using literacy as a control variable was carried out. Findings of the study show that the

economic factor was found highly significant ($p=0.000$) with offending behavior, for the literate. However, in the illiterate group, the relationship among the aforementioned variables was discovered only significant ($p=0.021$).

Table 2

Association between Economic Factors and Criminal activity (Controlling literacy as a control variable)

Literacy as Control Variable	Independent Variables	Dependent variables	Statistics
Illiterate	Economic Factor	Criminal activity	$\chi^2=49.684383$ $p=0.000$
Literate	Economic Factor	Criminal activity	$\chi^2=11.552584$ $p=0.021$

Criminal Activity and Prevalence of Depression

The findings presented in Table 3 show the relationship between study variables. Criminal activity was observed

($p=0.000$) significantly associated with the prevalence of Depression. These findings suggest that there is a meaningful association between these two variables that requires further empirical studies in the study area.

Table 3

Association between Criminal Activity and Prevalence of Depression

Independent variables	Dependent variables	Statistics
Criminal activity	Prevalence of Depression	$\chi^2=37.306$ $p=0.000$

Criminal Activity and Prevalence of Aggression

The findings presented in Table 4 indicate the association between study variables. The criminal activity

was observed ($p=0.000$) significantly associated with the aggression. These findings were also supported by previous studies.

Table 4

Association between Criminal Activity and Prevalence of Aggression

Independent variables	Dependent variables	Statistics
Criminal activity	Prevalence of Aggression	$\chi^2=28.111$ $p=0.000$

Criminal Activity and Prevalence of Stress

The findings disclosed in Table 5 indicate the association between study variables. The criminal activity

was observed ($p=0.000$) as significantly associated with stress. These findings were also supported by previous studies.

Table 5

Association between Criminal Activity and Prevalence of Stress

Independent variables	Dependent variables	Statistics
Criminal activity	Prevalence of Stress	$\chi^2=13.825$ $p=0.008$

Discussion

Empirical findings about economic factors and involvement in crime are multifaceted. Some study suggests that participation in crimes is triggered by the worst economic conditions. However, other findings unveil that crimes are a major cause of enjoyment for youth (Bennett & Brookman, 2008). Notwithstanding, Jacobs and Wright (1999) have linked street crimes with enhancing status among youth. This study tests whether an economic factor is a major cause of crime in the study area. At bi-variate and multivariate levels we used Chi-square statistics to explore the causal relation between the study variables. Findings of the inferential statistic at the bi-variate level show a significant association between economic factors and involvement in crimes. These findings could be attributed

to the fact that a large population, joblessness, and access to meaningful jobs push up youth participation in various street crimes. Notwithstanding, drastic changes in inflation in Pakistan, ineffective family planning, and the worst economic conditions vividly affected the youth's quality of life and triggered their tendency towards antisocial activities.

Moreover, at the Multivariate level, we used the literacy of the sample respondents as a control variable commonly used in chi-square statistics. Findings derived through said analysis show that economic disparity was found significant with criminal behavior, for the literate and illiterate group. Little access to jobs/ financial activity in study areas leads to financial issues that motivate educated youth to participate in anti-social activity. It is important to mention

that findings from the multi-variate level analysis clearly indicated that the normative behavior of the youth is not guaranteed by education alone or by eliminating external factors that enhance youth engagement in antisocial activity. As Grogger (1998) established a link between falling wages work as a driving force in rising youth involvement in crime. Likewise, Kelly (2000) has tried to link income inequality as a major determining factor of criminal activity.

Likewise, the above results also explored that a significant relationship exists between involvement in illicit activities and an upsurge in mental health issues such as stress, depression, and aggression among inmates. Moreover, these results also provide strong evidence that these psychological challenges are more commonly prevalent among those people involved in illegal activities. Smilier results were also explored by Putnins (2005) as he examines the associates and interpreters of suicidal behaviors among 900 young inmates in South Australian detention centers. His study rooted out that offenders are a high-risk population for suicide, with significant relation observed between suicidal behaviors and other factors such as drug use, sustained dysphoric mood, signs of ADHD, along with bad temper.

CONCLUSION

This empirical study intended to unveil the association between economic factors and involvement in crimes. Previous studies also explored that joblessness, poverty, and economic insecurity are some of the contributing factors to criminal behavior. It is evident from the findings of the study that economic hardship, undoubtedly, negatively affects young people in the study area. Majority of the young segment in this study is involved in crime in order to meet their economic needs. Prior empirical work was also found to align with the present findings. The study also investigated, the delinquent lifestyle of offenders has several negative effects on their psychological health. Involvement in criminal activity subsequently increases mental health issues such as depression, stress, and aggression. In light of the above findings this study recommends that job opportunities along with skill enhancement training should be the main priority of the government on the national level as well as on the provincial level and its implementation in true spirit to support youths who are belonging to families and are jobless. Moreover, imprisoned inmates have complex psychological needs, necessitating thorough assessments and treatment by trained psychologists and sociologists.

Conflict of Interests

The authors has declared that no competing interests exist.

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