



Journal of Business and Social Science Review
Issue: Vol. 4; No.9; October 2023 (pp.14-28)
ISSN 2690-0866(Print) 2690-0874 (Online)
Website: www.jbssrnet.com
E-mail: editor@jbssrnet.com
Doi:10.48150/jbssr.v4no9.2023.a2

Fear of Crime among University Students in Bangladesh: Exploring the Roles of Sex, Victimization, And Media Influence

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Statement and Declaration

The study presented in this paper was undertaken only for academic purposes. The authors also declare that their study hasn't appeared in any other scholarly publication and isn't being considered for publication anywhere else. The integrity and validity of the study's results and conclusions have been maintained by researchers' strict adherence to ethical principles and standards across the research procedure. Additionally, the authors confirm that no external money or financial help was obtained to support the compilation of this research and that all relevant external contributions have been appropriately cited.

Abstract

Studies in different regions have identified that personal, socio-demographics, environmental, spatial, and incivility factors are all key factors in predicting levels of concern about crime. The present study examines the prevalence of fear of crime among university students, focusing on four autonomous public university campuses in Bangladesh. Three crucial factors—sex, victimization experience, and consumption of news media—have been examined to measure the correlation between these factors and concern about safety among undergraduates in a fast-growing country such as Bangladesh. Employing a quantitative research approach, student data from a wide range of backgrounds were collected through a questionnaire survey. This study highlights the importance of taking into account sex-specific perceptions of safety by revealing that the dread of crime is significantly higher among female students compared to male students. Individuals who have previously been victims of offenses also express experiencing increased degrees of dread. Surprisingly, media consumption was not determined to be a significant determinant of crime-related fear, challenging conventional wisdom. This study contributes valuable insights into the complex framework of factors that contribute to the concern about safety among the undergraduates in Bangladesh. The study contributes to an ever-increasing amount of knowledge, demonstrating the necessity of focused interventions and policies that address these specific elements to make universities safer and more secure. Moreover, it provides valuable insights into the causes affecting dread of crime, highlighting the significance of understanding these issues for campus authorities, policymakers, and students' mental health, offering a foundation for future research and interventions.

Keywords: Fear of Crime; University Students; Bangladesh; Victimization; Media Influence.

Introduction

Fear of crime has been a prominent issue since the 1960s and 1970s (McConnell, 1997). Scholars have attempted to understand this phenomenon using various theoretical frameworks and perspectives. While there are minor variations, most concepts emphasize the same topic. Concern about criminal activity has been a focus of research and policymaking since the 1960s (Tandoan&Topçu, 2018). Students are worried about becoming victims of crime on campus due to high-profile incidents that have raised concerns about safety (Smith, 1989). The constant dread of violence can adversely affect individuals' daily activities and career prospects, leading to stress, anxiety, and even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), making it difficult to focus on academics. Anxiety affects more than just the minds of students; it also changes the campus climate and the general public's view of campus security. Different manifestations of dread of crime exist depending on the individual and the specifics of the criminal event. To lessen their chances of becoming a victim, some persons may decide to modify their usual routines and habits (McCreedy& Dennis, 1996). Fear of becoming a target on educational institutions is a global problem. Individuals in the West of the United States, like individuals in other regions of the world, have a lot of trouble sleeping at night due to their dread of crime (Cohen &Felson, 2010).

There are more than 50,000 incidents of violence and property destruction on college campuses each year, as reported by the United States Department of Education (Braungart et al., 1980). Thousands of crimes, such as murder, assault, rape, and robbery, are committed every day on college campuses, according to the FBI. Tens of thousands of violent crimes, including numerous cases of serious assault, were reported on college campuses between 2001 and 2009 (Zaman&Neluferyesmen, 2017).

The most severe forms of campus crime in Bangladesh's universities include killing, assault, and extortion. Students' lives have been threatened on campus by acts of terrorism, rape, kidnapping, forced marriages, harassment, assault, and abduction. Since 1974, there have been 128 deaths and 4,290 injuries on campus. According to a study by Zaman and Neluferyesmen in 2017, Dhaka University has the highest number of homicides among universities in Bangladesh, followed by University of Rajshahi, Chittagong, and Islami University.

This study is intended to improve the amount of literature on fear of criminality by focusing on university students in Bangladesh. Four key facets have been identified for exploration: the general level of fear, sex variations in the perception of dread, the impact of past victimization, and the role of media consumption. These facets were chosen as they offer a comprehensive perspective on the multi-layered and diverse character of the dread of crime, aligning with Garofalo's (1981) and Lane and Meeker's (2003) work on the holistic understanding of fear of crime. Existing studies have delved into how various factors such as an individual's sex, age, and economic status affect the dread of crime. (Gibson et al., 2002; LaGrange et al., 1992; Hale, 1996).

However, these studies predominantly emanate from Western contexts. There is a paucity of research that takes into account the unique sociocultural aspects of non-Western societies like Bangladesh. The current study attempts to address this vacuum by looking into how these sociocultural variables interact with demographic factors to influence dread of crime among undergraduates in Bangladesh. Additionally, while the effect of media on dread of crime has been a subject of numerous studies (Chiricos et al., 2000; Lowry et al., 2003; O'Keefe and Reid-Nash, 1987), the relationship is far from linear. Conflicting findings from these studies present a nuanced picture that requires further exploration.

In this study, it is intended to probe the intricacies of this relationship in the specific context of Bangladesh. Through this focused inquiry, the study aims to provide actionable insights that can inform future research, educational policies, and interventions determined to alleviate the fear of crime and its adverse impacts on university campuses in Bangladesh and potentially in similar sociocultural settings.

Theory of Fear of Crime

The concept of social disorganization advanced by Shaw and McKay in 1942 proposes that the structural features of a community and the levels of social disorganization therein affect the prevalence of criminal activity and the dread of criminal activity. According to this school of thought, Individuals' feelings of security and vulnerability to criminal activity are heavily influenced by their immediate surroundings and the relationships they maintain within their community (Kubrin et al., 2009).

The current research will employ social disorganization theory to analyze what causes students at Bangladesh's four public, autonomous universities to feel unsafe. Students' levels of crime fear will be examined in relation to their gender, their exposure to crime depictions in the media, and their history of victimization. The ultimate goal of this endeavor is to initiate social disorganization theory to the problem of crime fear on college campuses and to draw conclusions about how those findings might inform efforts to reduce that fear (Bursik, 1988; Ferraro, 1995; Rosenbaum, 1988; Kubrin et al., 2009).

According to environmental design theorists (Jeffery, 1971; Newman, 1973), how a neighborhood looks can influence how individuals perceive the safety issues (and vice versa). The idea highlights the significance of architectural and environmental variables in influencing community crime and its associated fear. According to this theory, properly designed and maintained environments with natural monitoring can reduce people's idea of safety and their anxiety about criminal activities (Jeffery, 1971). Because environmental elements such as lighting, visibility, accessibility, and spatial layout can affect individuals' perceptions of security and anxiety (Cozens et al., 2002), this theory is applicable to this research because it sheds light on why students in Bangladesh's independent public institutions are so afraid of crime. Additionally, the constructed environment might interact with gender-specific worries and victimization experiences in ways that influence fear responses differentially among male and female pupils (Ferraro, 1996; Hale, 1996). Exposure to crime-related media might increase a person's fear of crime by giving them an inflated view of actual crime rates (Surette, 1992). The study's overarching goal is to inform measures to make university campuses safer by adding to our comprehension of the complex elements that have an impact on how students feel about the safety on campus.

Imagined victimization is the cognitive process in which individuals envision themselves as potential victims of crime, even if they have not experienced victimization directly. Individual characteristics, social interactions, and exposure to media portrayals of crime are just a few psychosocial factors that have an impact on this phenomenon (Ferraro, 1995; Mark, 1984; Jackson, 2009). The term "psychological risk" describes the psychological and emotional toll that fearing about one will become a target of assault, for example, can take on a person. Feelings of hopelessness, worry, and dread in the face of what seems like an imminent threat from criminal activity are all components of this state. There is evidence that seeing violent crime and victims portrayed in the media might increase one's sense of danger and trigger an amplification of an individual's nervous reactions (Hale, 1996; Jackson, 2011; Surette, 1992).

The intricate character of the dread of crime is exemplified by the interplay between imagined victimization and psychological danger. According to social cognitive theory, the connection between external stimuli (media depictions, victimization experiences) and fear reactions is mediated by cognitive processes such as perceived vulnerability and expected emotions (Bandura et al., 1999). According to the theory, viewers' emotional responses and sense of susceptibility to crime are influenced by what they see in the media (Gerbner et al., 1980). Fear of crime among students in Bangladesh's publicly funded, autonomous universities might be better understood by examining the relationship between social disorganization, environmental design, and imagined victimization. This knowledge may be used to influence data-driven initiatives to increase campus security and lessen students' anxiety. Addressing these theoretical perspectives will provide a comprehensive framework for enhancing campus security and creating a safer environment for students.

Literature Review

Fear of Crime

Scientific investigation of fear of criminal activities in scholarly literature has emerged within the last fifty years, representing a relatively contemporary field of research (Ferraro, 1995; Fox et al., 2009; Schafer et al., 2006). The exploration of fear of crime among students within educational institutions has recently gained prominence in the realms of criminology and sociology. Scholars have studied fear of crime from different perspectives since the 1960s and 1970s, with various conceptualizations that share a common focus but have slight differences (McConnell, 1997; Tandoğan&Topçu, 2018). More than 20 years ago, Bennett and Flavin (1994) noted that the relevant theories intended to illustrate the dread of criminal activities primarily concentrated on examining this phenomenon within the particular context of the United States. Studies carried out by academics within the America dominate the works on fear of crime.

Nevertheless, despite decades of study, very few works on the topic have been conducted in nations outside the United States. This lack of international research limits our understanding of crime-related phenomena across different contexts (Bennett & Flavin, 1994). Comparative research on dread of crime among undergraduates is an important topic that has primarily been focused on the United States (Day, 1994; Fisher & May, 2009; Fisher & Sloan, 2003; Hilinski, 2009; Lee & Hilinski-Rosick, 2012). However, there is a lack of exploration regarding the applicability of the same conceptual models in contexts other than the United States. This study fills a significant research gap by being the first to look into pupils' perceptions of crime on four public university campuses in Bangladesh, a nation in South Asia.

Anxiety of crime is a psychological reaction that combines feelings of stress, anxiety, and concern due to criminal activities in one's surroundings, encompassing both a sense of safety and vulnerability (Ferraro, 1995; Ward et al., 1986). Researchers have studied fear from various perspectives, examining its physiological aspects and differentiating it from the emotional perception of perceived risk (Chockalingam & Srinivasan, 2009; Warr, 2000). In contrast to the emotional assessment of potential victimization commonly observed in studies, the underlying essence of fear of crime predominantly rests on physiological responses (Warr, 2000). The fear of crime is often viewed as the physiological reaction of individuals to criminal circumstances or the dissemination of information related to criminal activities (Ferraro & LaGrange, 2017).

Literature on fear of crime has consistently addressed some common underlying factors, including socio-demographic characteristics, neighborhood characteristics, spatial elements, situational crime prevention features, contextual variables, and previous victimization experiences that may contribute to fear of criminal victimization in an individual's perception (Bedenbaugh, 2003; Chockalingam & Srinivasan, 2009; Liska et al., 1982). This present study examines the impact of sex, victimization experience, and frequency of news media consumption as independent variables on dread of criminal activities.

Sex and Fear of Crime

Individuals' dread of criminal activities may be predicted, at least in part, by their sex (Baumer, 1978; Clemente & Kleiman, 1977; Kennedy & Silverman, 1985; Miethe & Lee, 1984), coupled with their age, ethnic background, socioeconomic status, and dwelling. The present study considered sex as an independent variable to assess the correlation between sex and dread of offenses among university students on campus. In order to achieve the study's goals, it is crucial to carefully examine and synthesize the current research on crime fear. Researchers have found that female and the aged are highly inclined to feel dreadful, notwithstanding the matter that they are more unlikely to end up targets of crime compared to males and youths (Fisher et al., 1998; McConnell, 1997; Bedenbaugh, 2003; Hindelang et al., 1978).

Similar research indicated that women are more prone to feel greater levels of dread, along with the poor, the uneducated, and the urban-dwelling (Chockalingam & Srinivasan, 2009). Even when controlling for other factors, the scientists found that sex was the most reliable determinant of dread of criminal behavior. While a majority of studies have presented consistent findings concerning the association of sex with the level of fear, variations have also been noticed in different aspects and dimensions. Considering that both personal and demographic factors, including gender, place of residence, race, age, and socioeconomic position, have been linked to degrees of reported fear of crime, individuals' responses to a survey designed to assess their level of safety anxiety in various settings were analyzed (Steinmetz & Austin, 2014). Findings on demographic factors were inconsistent. According to the survey findings, it was observed that male full-time students residing on campus exhibited a lower propensity for dread of victimization than the male residing off campus.

Victimization and Fear of Crime

The criminological research neighborhood is focusing on the effects of students' concern about crime on their well-being and the campus community, with victimization experiences significantly influencing their perceptions of safety. According to Steinmetz and Austin (2014), quite a few variables come into play that may contribute to individuals' concerns about safety on campus. These include demographics, past victimization experiences, and the site's physical characteristics. Some studies have shown evidence that supports the crucial connections between the victimization experience and fear of crime, while others have found that these two variables have no significant relation (Hale, 1996).

The victims of crimes such as burglaries and assaults sometimes feel unsafe and threatened when they return to places where they experienced such offenses (Skogan and Maxfield, 1981).

Victimization and fear are associated in a way that makes sense according to the routine activities hypothesis, which argues that individual behaviors and perspectives transform as a result of their life circumstances (Cohen & Felson, 2010). In their study, Pryce et al. (2018) found that female students, older students, and anxiety about school and community violence in Sub-Saharan Africa is more common among individuals who have been crime victims. Similarly, Chockalingam and Srinivasan (2009) studied the effect of prior victimization on present-day crime anxiety; results showed that having been a victim of crime in the past does not increase individual's concerns about becoming a future victim. Individuals who had been victimized before were more likely to express dread about being victimized again, according to their survey of college students. Equally convincing is the research by Lee and Farrall (2008), which found that victims of crime reported greater degrees of fear compared to those who had not been victimized.

Conversely, Miethe and Lee (1984) identified that prior victimization memory is more significant for dread of violent offense than property-related offense. Although there appears to be a strong correlation between having been victimized of crime and being afraid of crime, it is interesting to take into account the contribution that other factors offer in shaping this correlation. In their study, Hale et al. (1994) looked at how different forms of victimization affected people's anxiety and found that burglary victims have a higher propensity towards anxiety of becoming victims again, but victims of other crimes did not show the same trend. This study suggests that victimization experiences may have different impacts on varying degrees of dread in accordance with the specifics of the case.

Variations in the victimization-fear association among the sexes have also been studied. Balkin (1979) and Skogan (1986) are only two of the researchers who have found evidence that this correlation may be less or nonexistent for some subsets of women and men. These studies demonstrate how men and women respond to victimization differently, which should be considered in studies on fear of crime. The study of the correlation between past victimization and fear is crucial in Bangladesh, as there is a fewworks on students'dread of crime, and understanding how these experiences influence safety perceptions is vital for universities.

Media Influence and fear of crime

Feelings of vulnerability and loneliness can increase worry about becoming a target of crimes, and more study is required for complete comprehension of the causes of this fear, with media coverage identified as a potential factor influencing this fear and highlighting the importance of studying the media's impact on fear (Braungart et al., 1980). Individuals' perceptions of danger are nuanced and wide-ranging, and they can be ignited by learning others' accounts of catastrophic incidents (Jackson, 2006). Farrall et al. (2007) found that people worry about being victims when they can imagine themselves in that role. Hale and Taylor (1986) refer to this as a "crime multiplier," where knowledge of others being victimized increases the perception of danger. Skogan (1986) describes this as the first-hand and second-hand information about crime rates in the area. Third-party exposure to crime may have a higher influence on fear of victimization than first-hand reports, and hearing about the victimization of relatives or neighbors might elevate fear of crime (Hale, 1996).

There is growing concern that how the media portrays violence and criminal activity in today's connected society may affect people's perceptions of security and fear. Prioritizing dramatic crime stories, especially those with violence and high drama, might mislead viewers into thinking that crime is more widespread and serious than it actually is (Smith, 2015; Dowler, 2003; Surette, 1992). Consequently, individuals may mistakenly feel that they have a higher chance of being victims since the media tends to highlight only certain sorts of crimes, geographic areas, and demographic groups (Chiricos et al., 1997; Gerbner, 1980).

Media consumption is correlated with fear of criminal activity, with some studies showing a coherent link between frequent media consumption and greater concern about crime (Hale, 1996; Rountree & Land, 1996), while other studies have found different results, indicating a conditional association (Skogan & Maxfield, 1981; Warr, 2000). Studies underline that individual differences and contextual variables moderate the correlation of Consumption of daily news in the media with being afraid of criminality.

Individuals' perception of criminality and victimization is heavily influenced by the media with conflicting viewpoints on whether it increases anxiety or makes victimization more likely, as studies have shown that hearing about crime through the media has a greater impact on perceived societal and personal threats than hearing about it from family and friends (Hale, 1996; Tyler & Cook, 1984).

Sociologist Virginia Warr first described this phenomena, which she called "vicarious victimization," in the year 2000. It describes how victims are more likely to develop a fear response after seeing news coverage of other victims. People's apprehension of criminal activity is affected by more than simply what they see in the news, as discovered by Skogan and Maxfield (1981) and Mark (1984). This review delineate that exposure to crime reports in the media can make people feel less safe; however, factors such as demographics, culture, and media literacy play a role in molding these beliefs. By examining the connection between students' media consumption and their concerns about crime in Bangladesh, this study underlines the significance of taking all of these factors into account.

Methods

Study Context

Univesity of Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, and Jahangirnagar were the four campuses used for the research. These schools were chosen as representations for the entire Bangladeshi higher education system, so that we may have a good idea of the potential cultural and geographical variances in how students feel about their own security on campus.

Research Design

The dread of crime among Bangladeshi university students is investigated in this cross-sectional study using descriptive and inferential statistical approaches. The study set out to examine sex, victimization, and media consumption to answer four research questions.

Population and Sample

There were an estimated 77,452 students throughout the four universities who participated in the survey. To ensure a representative cross-section of respondents, a total of 560 were included in the analysis. A total of 140 students from each school were included in the sample, giving each institution a fair chance to participate in the results.

Data Collection

Face-to-face interviews with a structured questionnaire consisting of closed-ended questions were initiated to compile the data. To ensure the reliability of the collected data, these interviews were carried out only by qualified researchers. Before conducting any interviews, it has been ensured that all participants fully understand the nature of the study and give their consent.

Variables

There were three independent variables analyzed. The initial variable is the respondent's sex, which can be divided into two categories: male and female. The second is whether or not the person has ever been a victim, which is a yes/no categorical variable. The third variable is the media consumption habits of the respondents, coded on an ordinal scale as 0 for 'rarely,' 1 for 'occasionally,' 2 for 'often,' and 3 for 'always.' The dependent variable in this study is the level of fear of crime, measured on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 reflects the minimum fear and 5 indicates the maximum fear.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study intended to answer four research questions. These are:

RQ1: *What is the general level of fear of crime among university students in Bangladesh?*

RQ2: *Is there a significant difference in the level of fear of crime between male and female university students?*

RQ3: *How do victimization experiences affect the level of fear of crime among university students?*

RQ4: *Is there a correlation between media consumption and the level of fear of crime among university students?*

In accordance with these research questions, the study posits three hypotheses:

H1: *The level of fear of being a victim of crime is significantly higher among female students than male students.*

H2: *Students who have encountered victimization experiences exhibit higher levels of fear of crime compared to those without such experiences.*

H3: *Habitual consumption of media content is significantly associated with higher levels of fear concerning criminal activities.*

Data Analysis

The collected data has been analyzed using SPSS software, employing both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics offers an initial insight into the general trends and patterns within the data. For inferential statistics, the Mann-Whitney U Test will be used to compare the fear levels between different groups (male and female, victimized and non-victimized), and Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation has been employed to explore the correlation of media consumption habits with the level of fear.

Findings

RQ1: What is the general level of fear of crime among university students in Bangladesh?

To solve the first research question, "What is the general level of fear of crime among university students in Bangladesh?" descriptive statistics were computed for the level of fear, as measured on a 5-point Likert scale (see Table 1). The mean score for fear of crime was $M=3.43, SD=1.13$, indicating a moderate to high level of fear among the students. The data exhibited a range of 4 points, with most students reporting fear levels of 4 ("Agree") on the Likert scale. This was further supported by the mode ($Mo=4.0$) and the median ($Mdn=4.0$), both of which also indicated that most students agreed they were fearful of crime.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Frequency Distribution of Fear of Crime among University Students in Bangladesh (N=560)

| Measure | Value | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------|-------|-----------|------------|
| Descriptive Statistics | | | |
| Mean | 3.43 | - | - |
| Median | 4.0 | - | - |
| Mode | 4.0 | - | - |
| Standard Deviation | 1.128 | - | - |
| Range | 4.0 | - | - |
| Frequency Distribution | | | |
| Level 1 (Strongly Disagree) | | 33 | 5.9% |
| Level 2 (Disagree) | | 113 | 20.2% |
| Level 3 (Neutral) | | 71 | 12.7% |
| Level 4 (Agree) | | 268 | 47.9% |
| Level 5 (Strongly Agree) | | 75 | 13.4% |

Note: Rounding causes some percentages to not add up to 100 percent.

In terms of frequency distribution, a large proportion of the sample, $n=268,47.8$, reported agreeing that they were fearful of crime, followed by 20.2% ($n=113$) who disagreed, 13.4% ($n=75$) who strongly agreed, 12.7% ($n=71$) who were neutral, and 5.9% ($n=33$) who strongly disagreed. This distribution further corroborates the central tendency measures, highlighting that most students are in agreement about their fear of crime on campus. The data highlights a pressing concern: nearly half of the student population agrees with feeling a heightened level of fear regarding crime, while only about one-fifth disagree with this sentiment. This disproportionality underscores the need for immediate attention from campus authorities and policymakers to address the factors contributing to this widespread fear.

RQ2: Is there a significant difference in the level of fear of crime between male and female university students?

H1: The level of fear of being a victim of crime is significantly higher among female students than male students.

To investigate the hypothesis that female students experience a heightened degree of dread of being victims of crime than the male students, a Mann-Whitney U Test was applied. This non-parametric test is appropriate for comparing ordinal variables between two independent groups.

Table 2: Mann-Whitney U Test and Rank Summaries for Fear Levels by Sex

| Measures | Value | Male | Female |
|------------------------|---------|----------|----------|
| Rank Summaries | | | |
| Number of Respondents | - | 280 | 280 |
| Mean Rank | - | 210.66 | 350.34 |
| Sum of Ranks | - | 58984.00 | 98096.00 |
| Test Statistics | | | |
| Mann-Whitney U | 19644.0 | - | - |
| Wilcoxon W | 58984.0 | - | - |
| Z | -10.904 | - | - |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.00 | - | - |

Note: Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) is the p-value, indicating statistical significance at $\alpha = 0.05$.

The Mann-Whitney U test yielded a U-value of 19644.000 and a Z-score of -10.904, with an asymptotic significance level (two-tailed) of 0.000. Given the p-value is less than the predetermined significance level of $\alpha=0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected. Furthermore, the mean rank for female respondents was substantially higher ($M=350.34$) than that of their male counterparts ($M=210.66$). This disparity was also mirrored in the sum of ranks, with females scoring $\Sigma R=98096.00$ as opposed to males' $\Sigma R=58984.00$.

The data strongly corroborate the initial hypothesis, affirming that female students experience a significantly heightened fear of crime relative to their male peers. This stark differential in perception raises a pressing call to action for both academic institutions and policymakers to delve deeper into the underlying causative factors and to strategize effective interventions accordingly.

RQ3: How do victimization experiences affect the level of fear of crime among university students?

H1: Students who have encountered victimization experiences exhibit higher levels of fear of crime compared to those without such experiences.

The third research question (RQ3) and its associated hypothesis (H1) investigated the correlation between victimization experiences and fear levels concerning criminal activities among university students. In line with the hypothesis, according to the Mann-Whitney U Test, there is a statistically significant variation in individuals' feelings of fear between individuals who have and have not experienced victimization.

Table 3: Mann-Whitney U Test and Rank Summaries for Fear Levels by Victimization Experience

| Measures | Value | Yes | No |
|------------------------|---------|----------|----------|
| Rank Summaries | | | |
| Number of Respondents | - | 341 | 219 |
| Mean Rank | - | 267.72 | 300.41 |
| Sum of Ranks | - | 91291.00 | 65789.00 |
| Test Statistics | | | |
| Mann-Whitney U | 32980.0 | - | - |
| Wilcoxon W | 91291.0 | - | - |
| Z | -2.491 | - | - |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.013 | - | - |

Note: Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) is the p-value, indicating statistical significance at $\alpha = 0.05$.

The Mann-Whitney U Test yielded a U-value of 32980.0, with a Z-score of -2.491 and an asymptotic significance (two-tailed) of 0.013. Given that the p-value is less than the standard significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, the null hypothesis is hereby refused. Intriguingly, the mean rank for students without victimization experiences was slightly higher ($M = 300.41$) compared to those with such experiences ($M = 267.72$). Contrary to expectations, these findings indicate that students without victimization experiences reported a statistically significantly higher level of fear compared to those with victimization experiences. This counterintuitive result necessitates a deeper exploration into the psychosocial factors that could be influencing these perceptions of fear among students.

RQ4: Is there a correlation between media consumption and the level of fear of crime among university students?

H3: Habitual consumption of media content is significantly associated with higher levels of fear concerning criminal activities.

In an effort to unravel the complicated connection between media consumption habits and fear levels pertaining to criminal activities, a Spearman's rank-order correlation was initiated. This non-parametric statistical test was deemed appropriate given the ordinal nature of both the dependent and independent variables.

Table 4: Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation for Media Consumption and Fear of Crime

| Measures and Statistics | Value |
|--|-------|
| Correlation Coefficient (Spearman's ρ) | 0.029 |
| Significance (2-tailed) | 0.499 |
| Sample Size (N) | 560 |

Note: The alpha level for significance is set at $\alpha=0.05$.

The Spearman's rho correlation coefficient between media consumption habits and fear of crime was $\rho(558)=0.029$ with a two-tailed significance level of $p=0.499$. Contrary to the research hypothesis, the analysis revealed negative association that is so slight as to be meaningless between the frequency of media consumption and levels of fear concerning criminal activities. Given the high p-value ($p=0.499$), which exceeds the commonly accepted alpha level of $\alpha=0.05$, the correlation is statistically insignificant. Therefore, the data do not corroborate the hypothesis that habitual consumption of media is directly interlinked with elevated levels of fear concerning criminal activities.

This non-significant outcome prompts several considerations. First, it raises questions about the directness and simplicity of the assumed association between media influence and the level of fear. It is possible that the relationship is more nuanced and could be mediated or moderated by other variables, such as personal experience with crime, social support, or psychological resilience. Second, the very weak correlation suggests that media consumption habits alone may not be a substantial predictor of fear levels concerning criminal activities. Other societal or individual factors might play a more dominant role in shaping these perceptions. Third, given that the sample size was substantial ($N=560$), the lack of statistical significance is unlikely to be a result of insufficient statistical power. This lends weight to the interpretation that media consumption may not be a key driver of dread of being victim of offense among students in this context.

Discussion and Conclusion

Understanding fear of crime among university students involves examining a multitude of complex factors, including individual experiences and sociocultural influences. Previous studies have indicated rising concerns about safety and security on campuses, a concern that is especially relevant in Bangladesh due to unique challenges in law enforcement. The purpose of this research is to expand upon already established understanding on the subject of crime fear by examining four central aspects of the landscape: the prevalence of fear, variations between sexes in fear perception, the impact of prior victimization, and the function of media consumption. These elements were chosen because they provide a complete picture of how students internalize their fear of crime (Garofalo, 1981; Lane & Meeker, 2003). To inform future research and policy interventions, the discussion will attempt to make sense of these findings in the context of previously conducted studies.

Based on a 5-point Likert scale, university students in Bangladesh scored an average of $M=3.43$ ($SD=1.13$), indicating a moderately high level of fear. Most students reported a fear level of 4 ("Agree"), indicating a great deal of anxiety about safety on campus. This lends credence to Hale's (1996) argument that widespread anxiety about crime has the potential to create a "fearful society," which has serious consequences for social harmony and group well-being. Nearly half of the students (48%) expressed concern about being a crime victim. When compared to research conducted in other fields, this is an unexpected finding.

For example, one survey of college students in the United States found that 30 percent were worried about being a victim of crime while attending school (Fisher & Nasar, 1992). Differentiating sociocultural and economic factors in the Bangladeshi context may account for the relatively a greater degree of anxiety observed in this study. Hossain and Mohammad (2018), for instance, pointed out that ineffective law enforcement, public corruption, and restricted opportunities for justice all contribute to a climate of fear in Bangladesh, which may explain why so many students in this study reported feeling unsafe.

In addition, these findings are consistent with the theory of mean world syndrome,' originally suggested by Gerbner et al. (1980), which posits that prolonged encounters with aggressive or dangerous situations, whether through the media or direct experience, can significantly contribute to an amplified perception of risk and insecurity. The high levels of fear reported suggest that other factors, perhaps sociocultural or institutional, maybe at serve (Chadee&Ditton, 2003), but an in-depth examination of the individual's feelings that might lead to this increased fear was not part of this study.

According to Lorenc et al. (2013), the substantial degree of fear among students is not just an academic concern, but it can have real-world implications on mental health and overall quality of life. This is supported by the finding that nearly half of the student population in a study agreed with feeling a heightened level of fear regarding crime. Therefore, there is an urgent need for intervention from campus authorities and policymakers. Farrall et al. (2007) also emphasized the importance of addressing fear among students, as prolonged fear can lead to community fragmentation and hinder academic and social experiences. The high level of fear among university students in Bangladesh may indicate broader social, cultural, and institutional issues that require comprehensive exploration and intervention.

The study's initial hypothesis posited that female students would report higher dread of crime on university campuses in comparison to male students. This hypothesis has been substantiated by the study's findings, corroborating a wealth of existing academic literature (Fisher et al., 1998; McConnell, 1997; Bedenbaugh, 2003). Aligned with previous evidences by Gibson et al. (2002) and LaGrange et al. (1992), this study identified a statistically significant connection between sex and the anxiety about campus safety. These researchers have added to the growing literature that explains how men and women view their own risk and vulnerability differently. Hale (1996) further underscores this, highlighting gender as one of the most potent determinants of fear of crime, even when accounting for other demographic variables like age, socioeconomic status, and geographical location.

Intriguingly, while female students express higher levels of fear, multiple studies have shown that they have a lower chance of being the target of crime than the general population on campus (Junger, 1987; Fisher et al., 1998; McConnell, 1997). This paradox is not limited to one geographical context; a UK-based study explored that female exhibited heightened degrees of dread across most categories of crime, with the exception of burglary, vehicle theft, and thefts from vehicles (Barberet et al., 2004). Several theories have been posited to explain this phenomenon. One commonly cited explanation focuses on women's perceived physical and social vulnerability (Chockalingam& Srinivasan, 2009). This vulnerability is often attributed to gender socialization, where women are conditioned to adopt less active roles, often predicated on submissiveness or passivity, thereby perpetuating patriarchal norms (Chockalingam& Srinivasan, 2009).

Another layer of complexity is added by Skogan and Maxfield (1981), who suggest that lifestyle differences between males and females also contribute to this disparity in fear levels. Contrary to these perspectives, Baumer (1985) contends that gender does not inherently influence fear levels in different neighborhood settings, indicating that it may be specific to the circumstance of how women and men react to crime fears.

In societies with deeply rooted patriarchal norms, such as Bangladesh, women are often perceived as particularly vulnerable, thus exacerbating their fear of becoming victims of crime. Besides gender, a number of other causes, including the effectiveness of law enforcement, the design of the physical environment, judicial processes, and the rule of law, can also significantly influence women's fear levels (Skogan&Maxfield, 1981).

The study's next hypothesis—which the literature partially supports—is that prior victimization of crime increases students' dread of crime on university campuses. The findings represent that students with prior victimization experience are more inclined to remain anxious of crime on university campuses than those without any victimization experience. These findings agree with those of other research, which highlight the significant impact of personal victimization occurrences on fear perceptions (Skogan&Maxfield, 1981; Lee &Farrall, 2008). Another study corroborating the findings of the present research delineated that victims had "stronger emotions of uneasiness" than non-victims and that victims in Australia and most other locations tested were more likely to avoid specific regions after evening (Kury& Ferdinand, 1998).

Although numerous studies have supported the victimization-fear association, some authors (Balkin, 1979; Liska et al., 1982; Skogan, 1986; Yin, 1985) have deemed the correlation to be weak or nonexistent. The fear of criminal activity that is violent was shown to be strongly connected with victimization, whereas the fear of property crime was not (Miethe & Lee 1984). Importantly, whether or not a student has been a target of crime, their dread of crime can still influence their perspective (D. Woolnough, 2009). Numerous factors, including one's own experience as a victim, affect an individual's fear of crime. These moderating factors have a dampening effect on the correlation between victimization and fear of crime because they influence both victims and non-victims. Victimization should therefore have an impact on fear in addition to these factors (Agnew, 1985). Data collected in 1984 show that victims of muggings and assaults do not develop a greater aversion to becoming victims again. However, in comparison to people who did not become a victim of a burglary, those who experienced are more prone to worry that they will be targeted again (Box et al., 1988; Hale et al., 1994). After a significant change in the percentage of burglary incidents in Bangladesh and the representation of burglary incidents as a symbol of the prevalence of property-related crime, the aftermath of burglaries and other similar types of criminal activities, such as theft and robbery is an important area to investigate further.

The fourth research question (RQ4) and its corresponding hypothesis (H3) sought to look into the association between media consumption habits and levels of fear concerning criminal activities among university students. Contrary to expectations, the analysis yielded a very weak, statistically non-significant correlation between the two variables, as evidenced by a Spearman's rho correlation coefficient of $\rho(558)=0.029$ and a high p-value of 0.499. These findings cast doubt on the direct and uncomplicated linkage assumed between media influence and fear of crime, thereby complicating the discourse that often centers on the media's contribution in heightening dread of crime (Chiricos, Padgett, & Gertz, 2000).

The inconclusive nature of these findings is particularly interesting in light of conflicting empirical studies in the broader literature. Lowry et al., (2003), for instance, found that residents in areas where local newspapers devoted more space to crime reports exhibited higher levels of fear. Likewise, O'Keefe and Reid-Nash (1987) identified a correlation between increased anxiety and crime coverage on television but found no such relationship in print media. This complex mosaic of research outcomes adds nuance to our understanding of how media might affect fear of crime, suggesting that the medium itself, as well as the nature and extent of coverage, could play crucial roles.

Hale (1996) provides a perspective that contradicts with the findings of the current study, suggesting that hearing about local crimes, especially unusual or violent ones, heightens anxiety levels. Moreover, Tyler and Cook (1984) put forth that media coverage influences public perceptions of crime prevalence but not individual risk perceptions. Diverse studies (Heath & Petraitis, 2017; Doob & Macdonald, 2017) have indicated that watching TV increases anxiety about crime in abstract metropolitan settings but not in immediate neighborhoods, and only in high-crime areas. This array of results hints at the intricacies and conditional nature of media's influence, which can vary with respect to the type of media, locality, and specific types of crime.

It is conceivable that factors like personal experience with crime, social networks, or psychological resilience mediate the dominance of media on the levels of dread of crime (Heath & Gilbert, 1996). This resonates with the current study's findings and further emphasizes the complex interplay of various issues that influence individuals' dread of crime. The weakness of the correlation also challenges the notion that media consumption is a primary predictor of fear levels concerning criminal activities. Instead, it suggests that other variables, possibly at both societal and individual levels, might exert a more significant influence (Farrall et al., 2009). Given that the sample size was substantial ($N=560$), the absence of statistical significance is unlikely to be a result of insufficient power, fortifying the argument that media consumption might not be a primary driver of dread of crime in this particular demographic.

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