



Original Research

Effect of Covid-19 Pandemic on Specific Crime in Dhaka, Bangladesh

Shah Md Mahmudul Hassan^a Sharif Ahmed Sazzad^{b*}, Shahriar Kabir Selim^b Abdullah Al Mozahid^c

^a Department of Criminology, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

^b Pathfinder Research & Consultancy Center, LLC, Delaware, USA

^c Department of Anthropology, University of Chittagong, Bangladesh

Corresponding author: sazzad139@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected every industry worldwide. The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly affected Bangladesh and several other nations. On March 8, 2020, we confirmed the first COVID-19 case in Bangladesh, marking it as the 108th country afflicted worldwide. The declaration of a national holiday on March 26, 2020, resulted in the enforcement of a strict lockdown throughout Bangladesh. The enforcement of the stay-at-home directive during the lockdown has profoundly negatively impacted several economic sectors in Bangladesh. A multitude of people, particularly within the private sector, encountered unemployment. The lockdown inhibited young, educated job seekers from submitting applications and confined students to their residences. Both small and large business enterprises suspended operations owing to the lockout. The lockdown led to unemployment. During the pandemic, there was a rise in several specific crimes. This research seeks to elucidate the crimes that escalated during that time. This study identified the primary factors contributing to the increase in criminal behaviour.

1. Introduction

According to the initial detection of COVID-19 on December 31, 2019, in Wuhan, China, the disease rapidly spread globally, resulting in a worldwide disaster (Akter and Ashadujjaman, 2022; Gungor, 2021; Gautam et al., 2022). On October 14, 2020, the World Health Organization's (WHO) COVID-19 dashboard indicated 38,002,699 confirmed cases and 1,083,234 deaths (WHO 2020; Chakma et al., 2022). In response to the virus, authorities enacted a worldwide lockdown, limiting travel and enforcing stay-at-home orders, which led to the rise of the work-from-home trend. The primary aim of the lockdown was to mitigate the epidemic; nonetheless, it may considerably impact other socio-economic elements, which, along with stagnant economic growth, have resulted in an increase in criminal activity (Ashakin et al., 2024). A change in the opportunity structure is the most plausible explanation for the alteration in criminal behavior (Arora and Majumder, 2021; Bari et al., 2023). We expect a decline in crimes such as burglary owing to the lockdown order, which restricts persons' activities and keeps them to their homes. The shift from

labor and education to online platforms has engendered novel types of criminal conduct, such as cybercrime. Restrictions on movement may increase the prevalence of violent crimes (e.g., domestic violence, intimate partner violence), whereas robberies, thefts, and aggravated assaults may decrease. Bangladesh instituted a thorough lockdown on March 26, 2020, in accordance with WHO recommendations, after the confirmation of its initial case on March 8, 2020. Following nearly two months of restrictions due to COVID-19, the Bangladeshi government announced the revocation of the official stay-at-home mandate on May 31, 2020. Government of Bangladesh, 2020 (Chowdhury et al., 2017, Alam et al., 2023a). A COVID-19 reaction task group, consisting of several social and law enforcement agencies, functioned during the 65-day nationwide lockdown to monitor and manage the situation. After the termination of lockdowns, the nation returned to a condition of normalcy, with varying degrees of social separation and health protocols enforced (Kuddus et al., 2022; Hennink and Kaiser, 2022; Ifty et al., 2023a).

This study aims to elucidate criminal behavior in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, during and after the official lockdown. Developed countries perform most research on the relationship between epidemics and crime, with diverse outcomes. Few studies have investigated the pandemic's impact on overall crime trends, especially in impoverished countries, with the majority relying on various print media sources (Ahmed et al. 2020; Bhuiyan et al. 2020; Alam et al., 2023b; Ifty et al., 2023b). A plausible rationale for the lack of empirical study is that impoverished nations consistently have difficulties in acquiring reliable and up-to-date crime data sources (UNODC 2019). As a result, there is an inherent lack of knowledge about the impact of the COVID-19 shut down on crime patterns in a developing country (Ashakin et al., 2024; Ifty et al., 2024). This study aims to bridge the knowledge gap by examining crime rates in Dhaka, Bangladesh, during and after the official COVID-19 lockdown. The total number of arrests indicates an increase in a select few specific offenses, according to police data. The subsequent offenses have escalated during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) requires police to oversee daily criminal activities, including crime categories, comprehensive descriptions of offenses (e.g., types and quantities of firearms and ammunition confiscated), the total number of suspects, and the overall count of arrests executed (Dhaka Metropolitan Police, 2018). DMP crime analysts provide monthly crime data on their website at the conclusion of each month. Endnote 2 The DMP documents acts such as dacoity, burglary, homicide, firearms and ammunition violations, drug-related crimes, violence against women and children, kidnappings, thefts, and various other criminal activities (Islam et al., 2023; Moniruzzaman et al., 2023). This article largely addresses occurrences including illegal arms trafficking, automotive theft, illicit drug trafficking, cybercrime, and domestic abuse. Dhaka functions as the capital of Bangladesh. According to "Dhaka Population 2022 (Demographic Maps, Graphs)," the current population of the city is 22,478,116, compared to 21,741,090 in 2021 (Bangladesh Police, 2019). It is among the most densely populated cities globally. The Dhaka Metropolitan Police comprises a total of 50 police stations. This DMP is protecting the city. DMP publishes a publicly available monthly extract of incident-level police records across many crime categories. The government's yearly crime

statistics bulletins and those from independent entities would otherwise conceal emerging crime trends; nevertheless, this open-access data source enables their monitoring.

The DMP preserves an exhaustive account of daily criminal activities, with the complete count of arrests, suspects, confiscated guns, and other implements. They upload all their archived data onto the website. They provide all the classifications of offenses they oversee. Their research on the COVID-19 era facilitates discourse on a number of specific incidents. The following are supplied below (Rashid, 2021; Salam et al., 2024). Bangladesh implements the Gun Control Act of 1878, which forbids gun possession without a license. Vehicle theft is a widespread offense in the nation, with criminal organizations appropriating automobiles for resale. The Bangladeshi Penal Code of 1860 delineates legal protocols for the theft of vehicles. The Department of Narcotics Control is responsible for enforcing strict anti-drug regulations that prohibit the manufacturing, processing, importation, exportation, purchase, sale, or use of any narcotic. The Drug Control Act of 1990 prohibits the production of medications containing alcohol unless both the manufacturer and the consumer possess a drug policy license. Cybercrime, a manifestation of criminal activity stemming from technical progress, is on the rise in Bangladesh owing to the digital revolution. Cybercrimes encompass phishing, harassment, prostitution, child pornography, TikTok-related activities, account hacking, and drug trafficking. The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified domestic violence, particularly intimate partner abuse, resulting in the marriage of several jobless and underprivileged high school girls (Spencer, 2007; Seidoglu et al., 2024).

This study explores the evolving characteristics of criminal behaviour in Bangladesh under the Covid-19 pandemic, seeking to ascertain if the virus has instigated a global epidemic. The study seeks to ascertain the causes and consequences of crime, determine variables that have led to a reduction in offenses, and provide law enforcement with insights into crimes perpetrated during the epidemic.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Research Locale

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted public safety and crime patterns globally. The Dhaka metropolitan area in Bangladesh has recorded variations in crime rates since the onset of the epidemic, highlighting this phenomenon. The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) indicates that curfew disruptions, economic strains, and altered daily routines have affected crime activities in the city. This research primarily investigates the metropolitan area of Dhaka to assess the effects of COVID-19 on several kinds of crime. The research area includes vital metropolitan locations where social, economic, and environmental elements intersect, providing a comprehensive analysis of crime trends in connection to the pandemic.

2.2 Method of Data Collection

This study used a mixed-methods approach, including qualitative and quantitative data gathering approaches, to thoroughly examine the pandemic's impact on crime rates in Dhaka. By merging

these techniques, the study may clarify both statistical patterns and deep insights into the factors influencing crime in the Dhaka region during the pandemic.

2.2.1 Survey Instruments

The fundamental aspect of this study is the collection of quantitative data using standardized survey questions administered to the residents of Dhaka. We conduct the polls online to ensure accessibility and safety throughout COVID-19. The survey design includes closed-ended and rating scale questions aimed at evaluating individuals' perceptions of crime, personal experiences, and observations during the epidemic. Targeted checklists allow respondents to verify habits and attitudes, thereby facilitating reliable analysis. This systematic method enables statistical analysis, thereby streamlining the assessment of perceived alterations in crime types and rates from the public's perspective.

2.2.2 Sampling Method

The surveys seek to include a diverse cross-section of the Dhaka population, ensuring representation across several demographics, such as age, gender, employment, and residential location within the city. This technique offers a comprehensive insight into crime experiences across various socioeconomic categories.

2.2.3 Design of the Questionnaire

The queries aim to evaluate participants' awareness of criminal incidents, personal experiences with crime, and the effectiveness of law enforcement during the epidemic. We utilize a Likert scale to assess participants' views on the incidence and categories of crime most affected by the epidemic.

2.2.4 Document Examination

Historical crime data is crucial for examining crime trends prior to and throughout the epidemic. This study uses document analysis as a cost-effective and reliable method for gathering historical records. Data sources include crime statistics from the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) and articles from reputable news media, offering insights into crime rates, classifications, and temporal patterns. Document analysis enables the collection of verified data for longitudinal comparisons, providing a factual basis for evaluating the impact of COVID-19 on crime. The essential materials analysed are DMP's monthly crime reports, official publications, and data from credible online news sources, which improve understanding of the city's criminal picture.

2.2.5 Systematic Interviews

The research integrates survey data and structured interviews with key informants, such as law enforcement officers, community leaders, and individuals, to evaluate the pandemic's effect on crime dynamics. Structured interviews utilize a predetermined set of questions, ensuring consistency across the interviews. Two types of interviews are employed.

2.2.6 Remote (telephonic/video) Interviews

Most interviews take place remotely via internet-based platforms like Skype to enhance convenience and security. This strategy enables access to a broader range of participants, including interviews with those who may be unable to meet in person. Inquiries seek to get information on crime rates, emerging criminal categories, and law enforcement challenges related to the epidemic.

2.2.7 Face-to-Face Interviews

We conduct in-person interviews in secure settings whenever possible. This method allows for more comprehensive inquiries, facilitating probing and clarifying replies to obtain more complex information. In-person interviews enable the observation of body language and non-verbal cues, hence enhancing the quality of information gathered. We record and transcribe each interview to ensure accuracy and to facilitate further qualitative analysis. The research aims to identify patterns, behaviours, and attitudes related to crime during the COVID-19 epidemic by rigorous analysis of responses.

This study method provides a systematic and comprehensive methodology for examining the impact of COVID-19 on crime in Dhaka, combining quantitative crime data analysis with qualitative insights from public perception and expert opinions. We intentionally select each data collection method to yield extensive and diverse insights, facilitating a full understanding of crime patterns influenced by the pandemic in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

3. Results

3.1 Crime and COVID-19

The commencement of the COVID-19 epidemic and ensuing lockdowns markedly altered crime trends in Dhaka, Bangladesh, as evidenced by data from Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) records and additional sources. The data indicate a contradiction in crime patterns, with certain crimes declining owing to restricted mobility and heightened law enforcement presence, while others escalated as individuals' lives grew more focused at home and online. This section examines the identified crime patterns and offers insight into the overarching socio-economic and psychological elements influencing these alterations.

3.2 Crime Trends

3.2.1 Arms and Ammunition

In 2018, there were 375 incidents of illegal arms, resulting in 577 arrests and the recovery of 3,152 guns. By 2020, the figures had decreased to 92 cases, 167 arrests, and 660 recovered firearms. The significant decrease in arms-related incidents was likely due to the lockdown's movement limitations, which hindered illegal arms trafficking networks. The increased frequency and visibility of police patrols significantly deterred the trafficking and exchange of illicit firearms.

The transition underscores how restricted access and heightened monitoring may curtail possibilities for certain crimes, illustrating the impact of environmental factors and law enforcement on crime prevention.

3.2.2 Vehicle Theft

In 2018, 328 vehicle theft cases were recorded, with 154 arrests and 381 recovered vehicles. In contrast, 2020 saw only 228 cases, 110 arrests, and 251 recovered vehicles. The decrease in vehicle theft is attributed to fewer vehicles on the streets during the lockdown, as most were parked in secured residential areas or garages. Reduced public activity and the resulting high visibility of police patrols discouraged potential offenders. This reduction reflects the situational crime prevention theory, which posits that limiting access to potential crime opportunities can result in fewer offenses.

3.2.3 Drug Trafficking

In 2018, there were approximately 11,329 incidents of drug trafficking, resulting in 19,419 arrests. In 2020, the figures declined to 8,900 cases and 9,120 arrests. Although drug trafficking saw a decrease, it did not diminish as significantly as other offenses, indicating the tenacity of narcotics networks even after lockdowns. Restricted transit alternatives and rigorous border regulations impeded trafficking pathways, partially contributing to the decline. Nevertheless, persistent demand suggests that although external regulations may restrict supply chains, societal actions are crucial to tackle fundamental demand issues.

3.2.4 Domestic Violence

Data from the BRAC Human Rights and Legal Services program revealed an almost 70% rise in domestic abuse cases in March and April 2020 relative to the corresponding time in the preceding year. Thousands of women and children reported instances of abuse during the lockdown, as confirmed by subsequent surveys, including one by the Manusher Jonno Foundation. The economic hardship, psychological stress, and enforced confinement resulting from the epidemic established a high-risk environment for domestic violence. Many individuals spent extended periods at home without the presence of traditional social support networks, which exacerbated the strain within their households. The lack of accessible support networks rendered several victims susceptible, exposing significant deficiencies in support systems during emergencies. This increase highlights the necessity for strong domestic violence reporting and response systems, especially during lockdowns.

3.2.5 Cybercrime

Cybercrime surged during the epidemic, with 33.6% of instances recorded from 2014 to 2020. Prevalent manifestations encompassed phishing schemes, cyberbullying, and deception. As physical mobility became constrained, online activities proliferated, increasing the chances for hackers. The transition to remote employment, online education, and digital transactions has

augmented individuals' digital footprint, hence heightening the danger of cyber exploitation. The proliferation of cybercrime underscores the necessity of strengthening cybersecurity protocols and informing the public about digital safety, particularly in an era where society is more dependent on digital platforms for daily functions.

4. Discussion

The findings indicate a complicated interplay of socio-economic determinants, psychological stresses, and crime patterns, providing a nuanced comprehension of how external events, such as a pandemic, affect criminal conduct. This discussion addresses the principal variables behind these changes and proposes implications for future crime prevention and response tactics. Effects of Mobility Constraints on Criminal Trends (Akel et al., 2022; Ahmed, 2022; Hoeboer et al., 2024).

The decrease in gun and car theft incidents suggests that the availability of potential targets and the level of mobility intrinsically influence criminal possibilities. The confinement changed normal patterns of gun trafficking and car theft, supporting the "routine activities theory" in criminology (Paramasivan et al., 2024; Sunny et al., 2021). This theory says that crime happens when a determined criminal meets a possible target without enough safety measures. The lockout effectively eliminated viable targets since cars were parked in secure areas and diminished pedestrian traffic curtailed illicit arms transactions. Isolation, financial pressure, and increased stress levels are responsible for the significant rise in marital violence (Hossian et al., 2021; Afrin and Zainuddin, 2021; Sunny et al., 2023). The loss of money and social isolation can foster a tumultuous atmosphere inside homes, exacerbating tensions and even resulting in violence (Bakhtiar, 2020; Sazzad et al., 2024a). This trend underscores the critical necessity for accessible social and mental health support networks during lockdowns, with more robust domestic violence regulations that tackle the distinct issues of imprisonment (Adeyoju, 2019; Sunny et al., 2021; Tufael et al., 2024).

However, the increase in cybercrime during the epidemic highlights the weaknesses in swift digitization. As individuals increasingly depend on digital platforms for employment, education, and social engagement, there is an urgent necessity to enhance cybersecurity protocols and promote awareness regarding online safety (Sazzad et al., 2023; Hossain, 2021). Law enforcement and cybersecurity organizations must allocate resources and develop measures to mitigate online fraud, phishing, and exploitation (Cuevas-Parra, 2021; Sazzad et al., 2024b). Moreover, digital literacy initiatives can provide individuals with the competencies to recognize and evade cyber risks, hence fostering safer online settings. The pandemic's impact on crime has highlighted the necessity for flexible and robust crime prevention tactics (Jordan and Mossman, 2018; Meyer et al., 2022; Molnar and Aebi, 2024)). Law enforcement authorities might leverage information obtained during the lockout to develop adaptable response plans for future emergencies. For

example, sustaining a prominent police presence and promoting safe car storage during emergencies might significantly deter specific criminal activities (Reid and Baglivio, 2022; Trajtenberg et al., 2024). Moreover, strengthening assistance for domestic abuse victims and improving cyber safeguards are essential for ensuring community safety. The findings from this study identify essential domains for more investigation, including: Economic distress is a major catalyst for certain categories of crime, including drug trafficking and domestic violence. Comprehending the impact of extended economic adversity on crime rates may guide social programs focused on economic assistance and support for at-risk communities (Newton, 2015; Dookeram et al., 2024).

The epidemic underscored the necessity for accessible domestic violence and mental health support networks, particularly in developing nations. Subsequent study might investigate the efficacy of remote counselling, emergency hotlines, and shelter services during emergencies. Given the proliferation of cybercrime, it is imperative to allocate resources towards cybersecurity infrastructure and public education. A future study may investigate optimal methods for implementing digital literacy programs and enhancing cybersecurity frameworks, particularly during times of heightened online activity.

5. Conclusion

The study indicates that the COVID-19 shut down substantially affected criminal behaviour in Dhaka. Gun trafficking and vehicle theft experienced reductions owing to limited mobility; however, domestic violence and cybercrime escalated. The surge in domestic abuse incidents underscores the necessity for accessible support systems during emergencies. The increase in cybercrime highlights the weaknesses associated with rapid digital adaptation, underscoring the necessity for strong cybersecurity protocols and public awareness about digital safety. The study emphasizes the necessity of adaptable crime prevention techniques and responsive support structures to address future calamities and pandemics. The study of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on certain crimes in Dhaka, Bangladesh, offers a comprehensive examination of how the pandemic's social and economic alterations affected crime patterns across many categories. It posits that adaptable crime prevention and responsive support networks are crucial for addressing crime during unforeseen social changes. By concentrating on these domains, law enforcement and community organizations can improve public safety and fortitude in forthcoming crises.

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Author Contribution

Each author took involved in the creation of the study design, data analysis, fieldwork, and execution stages. Every writer gave their consent after seeing the final work.

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A statement of conflicting interests

The authors declare that none of the work reported in this study could have been impacted by any known competing financial interests or personal relationships.

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