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Gender and factors associated for crime among prison inmates at a central jail in north India

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ABSTRACT

Background and Aims

There is an increase in number of prison population over past few years. The nature of crime relates to social and economic conditions of society. To study socio-demographic factors associated with crime of prison inmates at a Central Jail in north India according to gender.

Methods and Results

The cross-sectional point prevalence study was conducted at Central Jail, Patiala, Punjab (India) from August 2007 to July 2008. Two hundred male inmates from different categories of crime after stratification and all sixty-five female inmates were included. The inmates were interviewed by using a pre-designed pre-tested questionnaire regarding factors associated with crime. Descriptive analysis was done, and Chi-square test was used as test of significance. There was significant difference found between educational status ($p=0.00$), occupational status ($p=0.00$), marital status ($p=0.00$), history of any untoward happening during childhood ($p=0.00$), history of conflict between family members ($p=0.02$) and history of alcohol/substance intake ($p=0.00$) of female inmates vis-à-vis male inmates. Rest of the factors were not found to be significantly different among female and male inmates. **Conclusion:** Factors for crime among female inmates were not much different from male inmates except for their level of education, level of occupation, marital status and family-related factors which makes female more vulnerable towards crime.

Keywords: Crime, Gender, India, Prison.

INTRODUCTION

The number of prisoners is more than 10 million globally, mostly in USA, China and Russia. (1) The prison population has risen by more than 1 million in more than two-thirds of countries worldwide in the past decade. (2) India has also witnessed an increase in number of prisoners. Over a decade (2005-2015), the prison population has rose from 358 368 (including 3.9% women) to 419 623 (including 4.3% women) in India. (3, 4) There are various social and economic factors related to crime. Dubey and Aggarwal state that political, economic and socio-cultural factors play a vital role in crime and crime control practices in India. Social changes tend to produce social pathologies, including crime. In India, the rapid growth in the urban population; the increase in the stress and strains of urban life; the higher standard of living; and, the changes in the existing value systems and political system, were some of the factors contributing to the increase in the crime rate. (5) Impoverished living conditions are risk factor for crimes. (6) On the other hand, the improvement in lifestyle pattern due to enhancement of economic and living standards in rural areas has important implications in emergence of crimes related to caste. (7)

There are drastic changes going on in Indian society due to industrialization, westernization and urbanization. These changes have positive as well as negative impacts. Women are becoming prone to crime due to various factors e.g. family disorganization, marital discord, high aspiration level and stress due to non-fulfillment of aspirations. (8)

A meta-analysis on childhood predictors of adulthood criminality found number of childhood and adolescent factors linked with criminal behaviors during adulthood. (9) These were aggression, anxiety, attentional problems, restlessness, social alienation. The factors contributed to deviant and antisocial behavior among youths include peer influence, impulsivity and school misconduct. In addition, family-related factors suspected of leading people to commit crime were negative parenting strategies such as authoritarian behaviors, child abuse, lack of child supervision, domestic violence or interparental conflict, and poor communication; large family size and low parental education. (9-12) The family and peer group have large impact on moral value system. These start right from childhood and during

adolescents e.g. childhood and adolescent trauma, poor and unstable parenting, and peer pressure are associated with commitment of crimes. (13-15)

The plentiful literature is available on factors responsible for crime which mainly include antisocial personality, mental health, and psychopathy. (16-18) However, there is limited literature available on socio-demographic factors related to crime among prisoners in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) including India. Against this background, the present study was conducted with an objective to study socio-demographic factors associated with crime of prison inmates at a Central Jail in Patiala, Punjab (India) according to gender.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study area, study design & study period

The study was done at the prison 'Central Jail' in Patiala, state of Punjab, India. It is among one of the nine central jails in Punjab. (4) It had a capacity to keep 1500 inmates (1470 male and 30 female inmates), but 1555 inmates (1490 males and 65 females) were present at time of study having an occupancy rate of 103.7%. The cross-sectional point prevalence study was conducted from August 2007 to July 2008.

Sample size & sampling technique

A multi-stage random sampling technique was adopted. In first stage, prison inmates were stratified into male and female, based upon gender. In second stage, the male prison inmates were stratified based upon categories of crime having more than 50 'sentenced' male inmates. These categories included drug-related offences (under Narcotic Drug & Psychotropic Substances act), murder (Sec 302 Indian Penal Code), fraud (Sec 420 Indian Penal Code) and theft (Sec 411 Indian Penal Code). In third stage, 50 male prison inmates were randomly selected from each selected category, making total 200 male sentenced inmates. All sixty-five female prison inmates, both 'sentenced' and 'under-trials' were included due to being less in number. Forty-two female inmates were undergoing trial at time of study and 23 were convicted for various crimes viz. charges for murder (20), dowry (19), drug-related (08), theft (08), fraud (01) and other crimes (09). Thus, total

265 prison inmates were included in the study. Inmates who did not give their consent, male under-trial inmates and who were in maximum security cell were excluded.

Data collection

The data was collected on a pre-designed pre-tested questionnaire using interview technique by first author. The visits were made to a prison at regular intervals. The questionnaire includes information on socio-demographic variable, family-related variables, and imprisonment.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Data was entered into Microsoft Office Excel 2007 and analyzed with SPSS version 16. Discrete data was represented by number, percentages, mean and standard deviation. Chi-square test and t-test were used as test of significance, taking the level of significance as <0.05.

Ethical considerations

The approval for the study was taken from the Faculty Medical Sciences, Baba Farid University of Health Sciences, Faridkot (Punjab, India). The permission to visit the prison and conduct the study was obtained from the Punjab Prisons Headquarter, Chandigarh. Informed consent was taken from all participants after establishing rapport. They were informed that information disclosed during the interview would remain confidential and they were assured of anonymity. It was also explained that they would not be victimized should they chose not to participate or withdraw themselves from the

study at any point in time. The inmates were also informed that the interview in no way assist them with their legal proceedings.

RESULTS

The present study was done among 265 prison inmates (200 male and 65 female) at prison in Patiala. Socio-demographic profile of inmates is shown in Table 1. Majority of the inmates (52.4%) belonged to Sikh religion followed by Hindus (42.3%). Nearly one-third of them were illiterate while 22.6% of inmates were educated up to primary level. Only 11.3% of inmates were unemployed. Among employed, majority (30.9%) were skilled workers. Above half of the inmates (53.2%) belonged to lower class followed by middle class (45.2%). Majority of the inmates were living in joint families (47.9%) followed by nuclear (32.1%) and broken (20.0%) families. More than half (56.6%) of the inmates were married followed by unmarried (26.0%) and divorce/widow(er) (17.4%). The overcrowding was present in house of 57.7% of the inmates. Nearly one-fifth (21.1%) inmates had history of untoward happening during childhood. There was history of alcohol/substance intake in family and friends of 37.4% and 30.9% of inmates, respectively. History of alcohol/substance intake before imprisonment was present among 38.9% of inmates while 11.5% had taken alcohol/substance at the time of crime. Only 13 inmates (04.9%) had history of previous imprisonment.

Table 1: Socio demographic profile of participants

Variables	N=265	Percentage
Age group		
18 - 30 years	66	24.9
30 - 50 years	131	49.4
50 years & above	68	25.7
Gender		
Male	200	75.5
Female	65	24.5
Place of residence		
Rural	198	74.7
Urban	67	25.3
Education		
Illiterate	97	36.6
Literate	168	63.4
Occupation		

Unemployed	30	11.3
Unskilled/ Semi-skilled/ Skilled worker	166	62.6
Clerical/shop/farm/ Semi-professional/ Professional	69	26.1
Socioeconomic Status		
Lower class	141	53.2
Middle/ Upper class	124	46.8

The average duration since imprisonment was found to be 3.4 years. Seventy-seven percent of inmates reported contact with their family members or friends through prison visits. Majority of the inmates were of opinion that their family members and society would accept them after release from prison (92.4% and 65.0%, respectively).

Table 2 shows the association between gender of inmates and socio-demographic variables. The mean age of female inmates was higher than male inmates (42.7 years vs. 39.4 years, respectively).

The proportion of illiterate female inmates was significantly higher than male inmates (p=0.00). Among literate inmates, school drop-out was found among 67.8% female (19/28) and 56.4% male (79/140) (p=0.26). The proportion of unemployed female inmates was significantly higher than male inmates (p=0.00). Majority of female inmates belong to lower socioeconomic class whereas male inmates were almost equally belonging to lower and middle/upper class.

Table 2: Gender of inmates and socio-demographic variables

Variables	Female N = 65	Male N=200	P
Age (in Years)			
Mean (S.D.)	42.7 (16.3)	39.4 (13.3)	0.10
Place of residence			
Rural	45 (69.2)	153 (76.5)	0.27
Urban	20 (30.8)	47 (23.5)	
Education			
Illiterate	37 (56.9)	60 (30.0)	0.00*
Literate	28 (43.1)	140 (70.0)	
Occupation			
Unemployed	24 (36.9)	06 (03.0)	0.00*
Unskilled/ Semi-skilled/ Skilled worker	36 (55.4)	130 (65.0)	
Clerical/shop/farm/ Semi-professional/ Professional	05 (07.7)	64 (32.0)	
Socioeconomic Status of Family			
Lower class	40 (61.5)	101 (50.5)	0.12
Middle/ Upper class	25 (38.5)	99 (49.5)	

Values are in mean ± SD and frequency (percentages) where appropriate.

*Significant. Comparison was done using Chi-square tests for categorical variables and t-tests for continuous variables.

Table 3 shows the association between gender of inmates and family-related variables. Among unmarried inmates, majority were male (31.0% vs. 10.8% female) whereas among divorced/widow(er), majority were female (38.5% vs. 10.5% male). The difference between gender according to marital

status was found to be statistically significant (p=0.00). Females inmates had experienced significantly higher traumatic event due to untoward happening during childhood (35.4% vs. 16.5% male, p=0.00). History of conflict between family members was found to be significantly higher among female (27.7%) than male (15.0%) inmates (p=0.02). History of alcohol/substance use in friends and in inmates themselves was found to be significantly higher for male inmates (p=0.00 and p=0.00, respectively).

Table 3: Gender of inmates and family related variables

Variables	Female N = 65 (%)	Male N=200 (%)	p
Marital Status			
Unmarried	07 (10.8)	62 (31.0)	0.00*
Married	33 (50.7)	117 (58.5)	
Divorced/ Widow/Widower	25 (38.5)	21 (10.5)	
Overcrowding in house			
Yes	35 (53.8)	118 (59.0)	0.48
No	30 (46.2)	82 (41.0)	
Untoward happening during childhood			
Yes	23 (35.4)	33 (16.5)	0.00*
No	42 (64.6)	167 (83.5)	
History of conflict between family members			
Yes	18 (27.7)	30 (15.0)	0.02*
No	47 (72.3)	170 (85.0)	
History of alcohol/substance intake in family			
Yes	23 (35.4)	76 (38.0)	0.70
No	42 (64.6)	124 (62.0)	
History of alcohol/substance intake in friends			
Yes	01 (01.5)	81 (40.5)	0.00*
No	64 (99.5)	119 (59.5)	
History of alcohol/substance intake before imprisonment			
Yes	01 (01.5)	102 (51.0)	0.00*
No	64 (99.5)	98 (49.0)	

*Significant.

Regarding imprisonment related variables, only 03 female (04.6%) and 10 male (05.0%) inmates had past history of imprisonment. Majority of inmates (69.2% female and 79.5% male) received visitors, either family members or friends. Almost all inmates (90.8% female and 93.0% male) felt that family members would accept them after release from prison. The proportion of male inmates who felt that society would accept them after release from prison was higher than female inmates (67.0% vs. 58.5%). The gender of inmates did not show statistical significance with any of the imprisonment related variables.

DISCUSSION

The cross-sectional study was done among 265 prison inmates including 200 male inmates and 65 female inmates. Male sentenced inmates were imprisoned under charges for drug-related offences (50), murder (50), fraud (50) and theft (50). Female prison inmates, both 'sentenced' and 'under-trials' were facing charges for murder (20), dowry (19),

drug-related offences (08), theft (08), fraud (01) and other crimes (09). The inmates were mostly in age-group 30-50 years and belonged to rural area. Nearly one-third of them were illiterate. Only one in ten inmates were unemployed before imprisonment. More than half of the inmates belonged to lower socioeconomic class.

The prison had a capacity to keep 1500 inmates, but 1555 inmates were present at time of study with occupancy rate of 103.7%. The occupancy rate of prisons in Punjab and India were 130.2% and 145.4%, respectively in 2005. (3) This indicates overcrowding was present in prisons (occupancy rate >100). However, during the past decade, an improvement in occupancy rate has occurred as occupancy rates of prisons in Punjab and India has declined to 117.8% and 114.4%, respectively in 2015. (4)

According to gender, there were 65 female inmates (4.2%) and 1490 male inmates (95.8%) present in prison, indicating preponderance of male inmates. It has been seen that majority of the crimes are committed by males as reflected by

proportion of prison inmates according to gender. It could be because more aggressive nature of male and their dominance in Indian society. It has also found that part of the gender gap in delinquency is due to the greater exposure of girls than boys both to direct and indirect parental controls. (19-21) As per Prison Statistics India, proportion of female prisoners was only 05.3% and 03.9% in Punjab and India, respectively in 2005. (3) After a decade, the proportion of female prisoners has declined in Punjab (from 05.3% to 04.8%) while it has increased in India (from 03.9% to 04.3%). (4)

In present study, the mean age of inmates was 41.2 years with female inmates slightly older than male inmates. Goyal *et al* and Gupta *et al* in their study at prisons in Amritsar (Punjab) and Kota (Rajasthan) found that mean age of inmates were 36.4 years and 34.1 years, respectively. (22, 23) Maximum inmates, both male and female, were in age group 30-50 years. The greater mobility and less restraints in this age-group among males and young females remain confine to home due to family control could be the reason. In case of females, young and unmarried females are also protected by their family to avoid consequences of imprisonment.

Earlier research has shown that absenteeism from school and drop out was higher among offenders. (24, 25) In present study, nearly one-third of prison inmates were illiterate, and school drop-out was reported by 58.3% of them. The proportion of illiterate female inmates was significantly higher than male inmates. Among literate inmates, school drop-out was found more among female than male. However, female prisoners were less likely reported ever been suspended, excluded or expelled from school than men in the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of prisoners in England and Wales. (26)

In present study, unemployed female inmates were significantly higher than male inmates. It could be due to fact that majority of women were illiterate and homemakers who look after daily household chores. Majority of inmates in present study were from lower and middle socioeconomic class as also found by other authors. (22, 27) Majority of female inmates belong to lower socioeconomic class whereas male inmates were almost equally belonging to lower and middle/upper class. The illiteracy and school drop-

out, unemployment, low socioeconomic status acts as stimulants to crime, so as to full-fill the daily needs of family as majority of the prison inmates belonged to joint family.

Majority of inmates (56.60%) were married as also found in other studies. (22, 27) Among unmarried inmates, majority were male whereas among divorced/widow(er), majority were female. Majority of unmarried (18/62) and divorced/widower (10/21) male inmates were imprisoned for murder. Most of female inmates were charged for murder of family members including their husbands, followed by inmates who were charged for dowry. The adjustment in a family and intra-familial relation depend upon its size and composition. In India, especially in rural area and in case of daughters, most of the marriages were arranged by the parents without discussing with children. Many times, these female offenders had to deal not only with an unsympathetic husband, but also with nagging and possessive in-laws leading to an unhappy married life. Saxena found that most of female offenders were poorly adjusted to the family settings. (28)

It has been seen that adverse childhood experiences can have an impact on future criminality. (29, 30) In present study, female inmates had experienced significantly higher traumatic event during childhood. History of conflict between family members, either related to ownership of agricultural land, ancestral house, marital discord, children etc. was found to be significantly higher among female inmates. In a SPCR study, women (53%) were more likely to report having experienced some sort of abuse than men (27%). Four in ten of prisoners had observed violence at home as a child, and female were more likely to report having observed violence at home. (26)

In present study, history of alcohol/substance use in friends and in inmates themselves was found to be significantly higher for male inmates whereas alcohol/substance use in family was almost similar among male and female inmates. Among male inmates, history of alcohol/substance use in friends and in inmates themselves was mostly found among those who imprisoned for drug related offences. The use of alcohol/substance in family and in peers influences one's behaviour towards these things. Malhotra *et al* (2007) found that peer groups played a major role in initiation of drug use. (13) SPCR

study found that female inmates were more likely to report having a family member with a current alcohol problem as well as drug problem than men. (26)

The contact of inmates during imprisonment with their families is important in facilitating their transitions back into society when they are released from prison. (31, 32) In present study, almost all inmates felt that family members would accept them after release from prison whereas in case of acceptance by society, the proportion of male inmates was higher than female inmates. In SPCR study, female inmates were more likely than men to say that getting support from their family would help them stop reoffending. (26) However, Kumari found that female prisoners perceived that they would face problems in life even after release because of their imprisonment. (33)

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CONCLUSION

The factors for crime among female inmates were not much different from male inmates except for their educational status, occupational status, family-related factors i.e. marital status and history of untoward happening during childhood which makes female more vulnerable towards crime. It is possible that interventions to reduce school drop-outs, better intra-familial relationships and safe affectionate home environment for children and adolescents could have a positive effect on reducing likelihood of their future offending.

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