University Student Attitudes Towards Crime

**Introduction**

Throughout human history, violence has been considered as one of the most serious problems. According to World Health Organization (WHO), violence is defined as “the intentional use of power and physical force against oneself, against a community or group or another person, that either results in deprivation, maldevelopment, death, injury and psychological harm” (Krug et al., 2002). In recent years, increased interest is seen in research related to violence. One of the reasons can be due to the effect of violence on society. An attitude can be defined as a personal tendency to take a negative or positive stand on any phenomenon and matter. At a large population-level study, attitudes are usually described as opinion surveys in which participants usually state their opinions regarding any matter (Resnick et al., 2004).

Attitudes toward crime and justice have been of great concern to policymakers, criminal justice practitioners and researchers. Cultural-based learning, which is also known as diversity or multi-cultural service-learning, is a pedagogical approach which integrates learning with community service. Students must have an understanding of diversity, social injustices, crime and justice system (Anderson et al., 2006). In this modern era, one of the important functions of education is to develop an enlightened and informed citizen. Almost all people in their life can have contact with the police in a different number of ways, such as interaction on the street to report to jury duty. The crime and justice system is also heavily reported in the media but despite this, most of the people especially students are not aware of the justice system (Brockenbrough et al., 2002, Anderson et al., 2006).

**Research Problem**

Over the last few years, youth violence has rapidly been increasing and it is an alarming condition that effects both individuals and communities. Youth violence can be between groups, peers and dating partners. In the US, violence between groups and the peer is considered to be a second leading cause of death. Youth violence has significant emotional, personal and financial costs. The crime statistics from the UK and the USA showed that almost 20 % of all the recorded crime that is committed by young people is due to their violent nature (Morgan, 2015, Sickmund and Puzzanchera, 2014). Given the scale and scope of this issue, it is necessary to determine the attitude e of young people towards violence as it is very important in preventing violence. The research on student opinion about the crime and justice system has been neglected and major focus in the past study was on the attitude of public towards the crime and justice. Therefore, this study will determine the attitude of students towards crime and justice.

The main objective of this study is

* To determine the student's attitude towards violence
* To determine the level of fear among students
* To asses student attitude towards the justice system
* To determine the association between gender and level of fear
* To determine the association between gender and violence
* To determine the association between level of education, age, time spent on social media and violence.

**Methodology**

**Participants**

This study is conducted among the university students who were studying psychology, criminology, legal dispute and criminal justice. A total of 220 students who have completed the questionnaire were included in this study.

**Informed Consent**

Ethical approval was taken from the university to carry out the survey. Before starting the survey, a written informed consent was taken from each participant in which they were told about the objective of the study. All the participants in this study were assured the confidentiality and privacy of their information.

**Questionnaire**

A questionnaire was formulated that comprised of 7 sections. Demographic information was included in the first section and the other section included questions regarding the opinion of participants towards crime and justice. The ATV, 5-point Likert scale questions were developed to measure the attitude of students towards violence and criminal justice. This scale is used in this study because it has been validated by different researchers (Funk et al., 2003).

**Data Collection**

Different students who were studying psychology, criminology, legal dispute and criminal justice were approached through facebook, twitter and email. Data was collected by using an online survey and students were allowed to fill the questionnaire in 15 minutes.

**Data Analysis**

Data was collected and then entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) after coding. The data was double-checked for any errors. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were calculated. Chi square test was used to find the assocoiatin between different variables.The P-value of 0.05 was considered as significant.

**Results**

**Demographic Information of Respondents**

In this study, data is collected from 220 respondents. Among respondents, 42 (19%) were male and 176 (79.6%) were female. Regarding the level of education; 101 (45.7%) were undergraduate and 101 (45.7%) were postgraduate. Majority of the respondents i.e. 138 (64.4%) were between 18-25 years of age (table1).

Table 1

Demographic information of respondents.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Variables** | **Categories** | **Response**  **n (%)** |
| Gender | Male | 42 (19) |
| Female | 176 (79.6) |
| Level of education | Undergraduate | 101 (45.7) |
| Postgraduate | 117 (52.9) |
| Age | 18-25 | 138 (62.4) |
| 26-33 | 50 (22) |
| 34-41 | 19 (9.8) |
| 42-49 | 10 (4.8) |

**Fear of Crime**

Fear of crime among students was measured by 17 item questions. Respondents were asked about how fearful they are towards being murdered, of being attacked by someone with a knife, being harassed or threatened by someone, being sexually assaulted and rape etc. Among respondents, 81 (36.8%) stated that they are not at all fearful of being cheated and conned, whereas, only 13 (9%) stated that they are extremely fearful of being cheated or conned. 89 (40.5%) of the respondents were not at all fearful of being harassed or threatened by some stranger whereas, 63 (28.6%), 34 (15.5%) and 17 (7.7%) were somewhat fearful, fearful and extremely fearful to being harassed and threatened respectively. Most of the respondents 97 (44.1%) and 77 (35%) were not at all afraid of being murdered or attacked by someone with a weapon, respectively. Among respondents, 12 (12.3%) were strongly disagreed that they have any fear regarding the stealing of credit card or other banking information, through hacking or malicious software. Majority of the respondents 122(55.5%) disagreed that they have fear being harassed, stalked or threatened by their current or former intimate partner.

Table 2

Respondents’ attitude towards fear

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Not at all fearful | Somewhat fearful | Fearful | Very fearful | Extremely fearful |
| Fear being cheated, conned or swindled out of your money by someone online | 81 (36.8) | 89 (40.5) | 28 (12.7) | 9 (4.1) | 13 (5.9) |
| Fear Being harassed, stalked or threatened by strangers online, such as via social media, dating apps or web forums | 89 (40.5) | 63 (28.6) | 34 (15.5) | 17 (7.7) | 17 (7.7) |
| Fear having someone break into your home while you are there | 55 (25) | 84 (38.2) | 39 (17.7) | 27 (12.3) | 15 (6.8) |
| Fear being raped or sexually assaulted | 44 (20) | 63 (28.6) | 31 (14.1) | 34 (15.5) | 48 (21.8) |
| Fear Being murdered | 97 (44.1) | 49 (22.3) | 24 (10.9) | 15 (6.8) | 35 (15.9) |
| Fear being physically assaulted by a current or former intimate partner | 125 (56.8) | 29 (13.2) | 25 (11.4) | 15 (6.8) | 26 (11.8) |
| Fear being attacked by someone with a weapon | 77 (35) | 72 (32.7) | 30 (13.6) | 14 (6.4) | 27 (12.3) |
| Fear having your car stolen | 87 (39.5) | 71 (32.3) | 32 (14.5) | 16 (7.3) | 14 (6.4) |
| Fear being robbed or mugged on the street | 61 (27.7) | 89 (40.5) | 37 (16.8) | 12 (5.5) | 21 (9.5) |
| Fear being sexually harassed by strangers in the street, such as from unwanted whistles, comments, and/or looks | 51 (23.2) | 58 (26.4) | 35 (15.9) | 38 (17.3) | 38 (17.3) |
| |  | | --- | | Fear being kidnapped | | 116 (52.7) | 45 (20.5) | 16 (7.3) | 11 (5) | 32 (14.5) |
| Fear having someone send your nude/sexual photos or videos to others or post them online | 115 (52.3) | 35 (15.9) | 28 (12.7) | 14 (6.4) | 28 (12.7) |
| Fear being harassed, stalked or threatened by a current or former intimate partner | 122 (55.5) | 42 (19.1) | 19 (8.6) | 14 (6.4) | 23 (10.5) |
| Fear having someone access your private online accounts, such as your email, social media, or mobile applications, without your permission | 55 (25) | 81 (36.8) | 40 (18.2) | 25 (11.4) | 19 (8.6) |
| Fear having your credit card or other banking information is stolen online, such as through hacking and/or malicious software | 27 (12.3) | 83 (37.7) | 44 (20) | 32 (14.5) | 34 (15.5) |

**The Overall Score of Fear.**

The overall score of fear was calculated. A score of 1was given to those who were not all fear, score of 2 was given to those who were somewhat fearful, score of 3 was given to those who were fear, score of 4 was given to those who were very fearful and score of 5 was given to those who were extremely fearful. The overall fear score of each respondent was calculated and based on that, average fear score was calculated for all respondents. Among respondents, 109 (49.5%) were not at all fearful, 65 (29.5%) were somewhat fearful, 26 (11.8%) were fearful, 13 (5.9%) were very fearful, and only 6 (2.7%) were extremely fearful.

**The overall score of attitude to violence**

Overall score of attitude towards violence was determined. A score of 1 was given to those who strongly disagreed, score of 2 for those who somewhat disagreed, score of 3 to those who neither agreed nor disagreed, score of 4 to those who somewhat agreed and a score of 5 to those who strongly agreed. The overall attitude of violence scale for each participant was calculated and the average score for all respondents was determined. Results showed that almost all the respondents 198 (89.6%) have a negative attitude towards violence.

**The Attitude of Respondents towards Violence**

As shown in Table 2, majority of the respondents 195 (88% ) strongly disagreed that they see them as committing crime in next 5 years, 208 (94.1%) and 200 (90.5% ) strongly disagreed that they could see themselves in joining a gang and its okay to use any kind of violence to get what they want respectively. Only 1 (5%) of the respondents were of the point of view that those who use violence get respect. Majority of the respondents i.e. 158 (71.5%) in this study strongly disagreed with carrying a knife while only 10 (4.5%) somewhat agreed with keeping a knife. Most of the respondents 79 (35.7%) strongly agreed that they try to stay away from places where violence is likely to occur. Among the respondents, 71 (32.1%) agreed that they are afraid to get hurt by violence.

Table 3

Attitude of respondents towards violence.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Strongly Disagree | Somewhat disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree |
| I could see myself committing a violent crime in 5 years | 195(88) | 13(5.9) | 8(3.6) | 2(0.9) | 2(0.9) |
| I could see myself joining a gang | 208(94.1) | 8(3.6) | 2(0.9) | 2(0.9) | 1(0.5) |
| It’s okay to use violence to get what you want | 200(90.5) | 13(5.9) | 3(1.4) | 3(1.4) | 01(0.5) |
| I try to stay away from places where violence is likely | 16(7.2) | 23(10.4) | 20(9.0) | 82(37.1) | 79(35.7) |
| People who use violence get respect (a) | 148(67) | 34(15.4) | 26(11.8) | 10(4.5) | 2(0.9) |
| Lots of people are out to get you (a) | 146(66.1) | 36(16.3) | 29(13.1) | 1(0.5) | 1(0.5) |
| Carrying a knife would help me feel safer | 154(69.7) | 30(13.6) | 12(5.4) | 17(7.7) | 7(3.2) |
| If a person hits you, you should hit them back (b) | 91(41.2) | 57(25.8) | 40(18.1) | 24(10.9) | 8(3.6) |
| It’s okay to beat up a person for badmouthing me or my family (b) | 169(76.5) | 35(15.8) | 8(3.6) | 5(2.3) | 3(1.4) |
| It’s okay to carry a knife if you live in a rough neighbourhood (b) | 130(58.8) | 35(15.8) | 32(14.5) | 18(8.1) | 5(2.3) |
| It’s okay to do whatever it takes to protect myself (b) | 48(21.7) | 46(20.8) | 38(17.2) | 61(27.6) | 27(12.2) |
| It’s good to have a knife (b) | 158(71.5) | 26(11.8) | 24(10.9) | 10(4.5) | 2(0.9) |
| Parent’s should tell their children to use violence if necessary (b) | 1691(72.9) | 24(10.9) | 24(10.9) | 7(3.2) | 4(1.8) |
| If someone tries to start a fight with you, you should walk away | 6(2.7) | 10(4.5) | 18(8.1) | 79(35.7) | 107(48.4) |
| I’m afraid of getting hurt by violence | 26(11.8) | 28(12.7) | 51(23.1) | 71(32.1) | 44(19.9) |

**The Attitude of the Respondents towards the Criminal Justice System**

As shown in table 4, only 7 (3.2%) believed that the criminal justice system gives victims the support they need. Among respondents, 105 (47.5%) stated that the criminal justice system takes into account the circumstances which surround the crime. Majority of the respondents, about 158(71.5%) strongly agreed that the criminal justice system discriminates against particular groups and individual. Among respondents, 52 (23.5%) stated that the criminal justice system is too soft for those who are accused of committing a crime.

Table 4

Respondents’ attitude towards the criminal justice system

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Strongly Disagree | Somewhat disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree |
| The Criminal Justice System gives victims and witnesses the support they need | 21(9.5) | 69(31.2) | 52(23.5) | 71(32.1) | 7(3.2) |
| The Criminal Justice System treats those who have been accused of a crime as ‘innocent until proven guilty’ | 22(10) | 71(32.1) | 32(14.5) | 71(32.1) | 24(10.9) |
| The Criminal Justice System takes into account the views of victims and witnesses | 10(4.5) | 33(14.9) | 50(22.6) | 105(47.5) | 22(10) |
| When handing out sentences the Criminal Justice System takes into account the circumstances surrounding the crime | 11(5) | 42(19) | 37(16.7) | 102(46.2) | 28(12.7) |
| The Criminal Justice System is too soft on those accused of committing a crime | 30(13.6) | 66(29.9) | 55(24.9) | 52(23.5) | 17(7.7) |
| The Criminal Justice System achieves the correct balance between the rights of the offender and the rights of the victim | 22(10) | 79(35.7) | 67(30.3) | 46(20.8) | 6(2.7) |
| The Criminal Justice System discriminates against particular groups or individuals | 16(7.2) | 17(7.7) | 29(13.1) | 82(37.1) | 76(34.4) |

**Fear of Crime among Respondents in Relation to Gender**

A significant difference was seen in the attitudes of male and female towards fear. Among female respondents, 80 (45.5%) did not have any fear at all, whereas, 28 (66.7%) of the male respondents didn’t have any fear (p=0.000). No significant difference was seen in the level of education and fear (p= 0.159). No significant difference was seen between the age of respondents and fear (p=0.435). In this study, no significant difference was seen in gender and violence (p= 0.15).

**Total crime in the last two years**

As shown in figure 1, majority of the respondents, about 171 (77.4%) stated that crime rate increased in the last 2 years whereas only 7 (3.2%) were of opinion that crime rate decreased in last 2 years.



**Figure 1:** Crime rate in the last 2 years

**Total Time Spent on the Social and Association with Violence**

As shown in figure 2, among all the respondents, 171 (77.4%) spend less than 6 hours on social media and 49 (22.3%) spend more than 6 hours on social media. A significant association was seen between violence and the level of use of social media. Among respondents who spend less than 6 hours on social media, 91.2% have a positive attitude towards violence whereas among respondents who spend more than 6 hours on social media 85.7% have a positive attitude towards violence (p=0.000).



**Figure 2:** Total time respondents spend on social media

**Discussion**

The primary purpose of this study was to determine the attitude of students towards violence and criminal justice. Additionally, this study also aimed to determine the association of violence and level of fear with gender, age and level of education. This study is conducted to determine the attitude of students towards violence which is a very important predictor of violence. Other studies also confirm that determination of attitude toward violence is an important factor in the prevention of violence (Davidson and Canivez, 2012, Anderson and Carnagey, 2009). Gellman and Delucia-Waack in their study also stated that attitude towards violence is a good predictor for the use of violence(Gellman and Delucia‐Waack, 2006).

One of the important findings of this study is that no significant association between gender and violence is seen. In contrast, studies have been conducted in the past where significant association is found between violence and gender. In a study conducted by Mervin and Ellis (2004), association between gender and violence is seen where men were found to have a more positive attitude towards violence(Anderson et al., 2006). In another study by Gellman and Delucia-Waack, positive relationship between violence and adolescent attitudes was seen. According to these studies men hold more favourable attitude towards violence as compared to the females (Gellman and Delucia‐Waack, 2006)

Another important finding of this study is that a significant association is seen between the use of social media and violence. This is consistent with other studies where social media is considered as a predictor for violence. This can be due to the reason that social media provides a platform to share hatred speech and broadcasting vision (Patton et al., 2013). In one study it is stated that due to the result of sharing some stuff on social media, many fights arise especially among the young generation. In other studies also, harmful effects of observing violence through different forms of social media is demonstrated (Anderson and Carnagey, 2009, Huesmann, 2007). In previous literature, it is determined that those students who have previously been exposed to violence tend to exercise any type of violence on others, but in this study, no such association have been found (Carnagey et al., 2007).

**Conclusion**

Based on this survey, it is concluded that most of the respondents were having a positive attitude towards violence. A significant association was seen between gender and level of fear. No significant association was seen between the age of the respondent and level of fear. There was also no significant difference between the level of education and fear.

**Recommendations**

In this study, association between violence and use of social media has been seen, therefore it is recommended that protective and preventive measures against the offensive content should be taken and awareness regarding proper and reasonable use of social media should be created among students. Further studies should be conducted on a large scale to determine the risk factors that are associated with violence among young people. Early intervention and prevention efforts regarding violence among youth should be highlighted and specifically targeted for students and youth.

**References**

Anderson, C. A., Benjamin JR, A. J., Wood, P. K. & Bonacci, A. M. 2006. Development and testing of the Velicer attitudes toward violence scale: Evidence for a four‐factor model. *Aggressive Behavior: Official Journal of the International Society for Research on Aggression,* 32**,** 122-136.

Anderson, C. A. & Carnagey, N. L. 2009. Causal effects of violent sports video games on aggression: Is it competitiveness or violent content? *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology,* 45**,** 731-739.

Brockenbrough, K. K., Cornell, D. G. & Loper, A. B. 2002. Aggressive attitudes among victims of violence at school. *Education & Treatment of Children,* 25**,** 273.

Carnagey, N. L., Anderson, C. A. & Bushman, B. J. 2007. The effect of video game violence on physiological desensitization to real-life violence. *Journal of experimental social psychology,* 43**,** 489-496.

Davidson, M. M. & CANIVEZ, G. L. 2012. Attitudes toward violence scale: Psychometric properties with a high school sample. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence,* 27**,** 3660-3682.

FUNK, J., ELLIOTT, R., BECHTOLDT, H., PASOLD, T. & TSAVOUSSIS, A. 2003. The attitudes toward violence scale: Child version. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence,* 18**,** 186-196.

GELLMAN, R. A. & DELUCIA‐WAACK, J. L. 2006. Predicting school violence: A comparison of violent and nonviolent male students on attitudes toward violence, exposure level to violence, and PTSD symptomatology. *Psychology in the Schools,* 43**,** 591-598.

HUESMANN, L. R. 2007. The impact of electronic media violence: Scientific theory and research. *Journal of Adolescent health,* 41**,** S6-S13.

KRUG, E. G., MERCY, J. A., DAHLBERG, L. L. & ZWI, A. B. 2002. The world report on violence and health. *The lancet,* 360**,** 1083-1088.

MERWIN, R. M. & ELLIS, J. B. 2004. Children's reasons for living, self-esteem, and violence. *Archives of suicide research,* 8**,** 251-261.

MORGAN, W. 2015. Violence among Young People: A Framework for Assessment and Intervention. *Young People in Forensic Mental Health Settings.* Springer.

PATTON, D. U., ESCHMANN, R. D. & BUTLER, D. A. 2013. Internet banging: New trends in social media, gang violence, masculinity and hip hop. *Computers in Human Behavior,* 29**,** A54-A59.

RESNICK, M. D., IRELAND, M. & BOROWSKY, I. 2004. Youth violence perpetration: what protects? What predicts? Findings from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. *Journal of adolescent health,* 35**,** 424. e1-424. e10.

SICKMUND, M. & PUZZANCHERA, C. 2014. Juvenile offenders and victims: 2014 national report.