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Socioeconomic and Demographic Factors Associated with Female Criminal Behavior among Women Offenders in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Female criminal behavior is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon shaped by a range of socioeconomic and demographic factors. Despite growing international interest in understanding the determinants of female offending, empirical research within the Pakistani context remains considerably limited. The present study aimed to examine the relationship between education level, employment status, domestic violence history, prior criminal record, marital status, psychological distress, and criminal behavior among female offenders in Pakistan. A sample of 300 female participants was selected using a convenience sampling technique from various urban, peri-urban, and rural areas across Pakistan. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire comprising demographic items and standardized rating scales measuring psychological distress and criminal behavior tendencies. Statistical analyses including Pearson correlation and linear regression were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 12.0). The findings revealed significant relationships between all six independent variables and criminal behavior score. Domestic violence history and prior criminal record emerged as the strongest predictors of female criminal behavior, with prior criminal record accounting for the greatest unique variance ($\beta = .474$, $p < .001$). The regression model explained 64.8% of the variance in criminal behavior ($R^2 = .648$, $F = 89.920$, $p < .001$). The study highlights the critical role of socioeconomic vulnerability, domestic abuse, and criminal history in shaping female criminal involvement in Pakistan and underscores the urgent need for gender-sensitive policies, rehabilitation programs, and community-based interventions targeting at-risk women.

Keywords: Female Criminal Behavior, Domestic Violence, Education Level, Employment Status, Psychological Distress, Prior Criminal Record, Pakistan

Introduction

Crime is a complex social phenomenon influenced by a multitude of psychological, economic, and sociocultural factors. While criminological research has historically focused on male offenders, growing scholarly attention has been directed toward understanding female criminal behavior, particularly in developing societies where women face unique socioeconomic vulnerabilities. In Pakistan, female criminality remains an underexplored area despite its significant implications for community welfare, social justice, and public policy. Women in Pakistan operate within a highly structured social environment



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shaped by economic dependency, limited educational access, domestic responsibilities, and deeply entrenched gender norms. These conditions create a distinct set of risk factors that may predispose certain women toward criminal involvement. Poverty, unemployment, domestic violence, and low educational attainment have been identified as primary contributors to female criminal behavior in various international studies (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013; Belknap, 2015). However, little empirical attention has been given to examining these factors specifically within the Pakistani urban and semi-urban context.

Domestic violence is particularly significant in the Pakistani context, where a substantial proportion of women experience physical, psychological, or financial abuse within domestic settings. Research suggests that women with histories of domestic violence are significantly more likely to engage in criminal activity, either as a direct consequence of abuse or as a means of survival and escape (Raj et al., 2008). Similarly, economic deprivation and unemployment have been consistently linked to increased vulnerability to criminal involvement, as financial desperation may drive individuals toward illegal means of sustenance (Holtfreter et al., 2004).

Education plays a protective role against criminal behavior. Women with higher levels of education tend to have greater access to legitimate economic opportunities, stronger social support networks, and improved decision-making capacities (Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2010). Conversely, women with little or no formal education are more likely to find themselves in circumstances that increase their exposure to criminal environments. In Pakistan, where female literacy rates remain considerably lower than male rates, particularly in rural and peri-urban areas, education becomes a critical variable in understanding female criminality.

involvement (Teplin et al., 1996). The interplay between mental health, socioeconomic status, and criminal behavior is therefore an important dimension of this study.

The present study aims to examine the socioeconomic and demographic factors associated with female criminal behavior among women offenders in Pakistan. By investigating variables such as age, education level, employment status, monthly income, marital status, domestic violence history, prior criminal record, and psychological distress, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the determinants of female criminality in the Pakistani context. The findings of this study are expected to contribute meaningfully to the fields of criminology, social welfare, and community development, and to inform evidence-based policy interventions aimed at reducing female criminal involvement in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Amaia Iratzoki, 2020 conducted a review examining the link between domestic violence (DV) history and female offending. The study found that women who have experienced DV and also have criminal backgrounds are significantly less likely to report further victimization or seek help. It highlighted that prior negative experiences with the justice system reduce reporting behavior. No exact percentages were provided, but the association between DV history and reduced reporting/greater system involvement was consistently supported. J Cano-Urbina, 2019 examined the impact of educational attainment on criminal involvement among women. The study found that lower levels of education



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significantly increased the likelihood of incarceration and involvement in violent and property crimes. It showed that higher education levels reduced arrest rates, while school quality had only limited effects. The findings suggested that education influences female crime mainly through improved marital opportunities and family formation, which reduce criminal behavior.

Eric Ayang, 2022 examined the relationship between female unemployment and crime using data from 40 Sub-Saharan African countries. The study found a positive association, showing that higher levels of female unemployment lead to increased crime rates. Using econometric analysis (2SLS), the results confirmed that unemployment significantly contributes to female involvement in crime. The study concluded that reducing unemployment could help lower crime among women.

M Berry, 2009 examined the relationship between marital status, motherhood, and female criminal involvement in a sample of 423 women. The study found that marriage did not significantly reduce the risk of criminal activity among women. It highlighted that women with unstable or strained relationships, including those without supportive partners, remained vulnerable to both economic and violent crimes. The findings suggest that marital status alone does not protect against criminal involvement, and vulnerability may be higher in women lacking stable social support systems, such as divorced or widowed individuals.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between domestic violence history and criminal behavior among female offenders in Pakistan?
2. How does education level influence criminal behavior among women?
3. What is the relationship between employment status and female criminal behavior?
4. How does marital status relate to criminal behavior among women?
5. To what extent does psychological distress predict criminal behavior among female offenders?

Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between domestic violence history and criminal behavior among female offenders in Pakistan
2. To investigate the influence of education level on female criminal behavior
3. To explore the relationship between employment status and criminal behavior among women
4. To examine the association between marital status and female criminal behavior
5. To determine the extent to which psychological distress predicts criminal behavior among female offenders in Pakistan

Hypotheses

1. There would be a significant correlation between domestic violence history, education level, employment status, marital status, psychological distress, and criminal behavior among female offenders in Pakistan
2. Socioeconomic and demographic factors would significantly predict criminal behavior among female offenders in Pakistan

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study employed a correlational research design to examine the relationship between socioeconomic and demographic factors and female



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criminal behavior among women in Pakistan. This design was considered most appropriate as it allowed for systematic investigation of relationships between multiple independent variables and the dependent variable. All participants were provided with informed consent forms prior to data collection.

Sampling Technique

A convenience sampling technique was utilized for the purpose of this study. Participants were selected based on accessibility and willingness to participate. This technique was considered appropriate given the sensitive nature of the research topic and the practical constraints associated with accessing female offender populations in Pakistan.

Participants

A total of 300 female participants were recruited for this study from various urban, peri-urban, and rural areas across Pakistan. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 55 years. The sample represented a diverse range of educational backgrounds, employment statuses, and marital conditions, including women with and without prior criminal records and varying histories of domestic violence exposure.

Inclusion Criteria

1. Participants must be Pakistani nationals
2. Participants must be female
3. Participants must be between 18 and 55 years of age
4. Participants must possess sufficient literacy to comprehend questionnaire items

Exclusion Criteria

1. Participants with severe psychiatric conditions impairing comprehension
2. Participants who declined to provide informed consent

Measures

A structured questionnaire was developed by researchers to collect data on the study variables. The questionnaire comprised two sections. The first section consisted of a demographic form capturing information on education level, employment status, marital status, domestic violence history, and prior criminal records. The second section included items measuring psychological distress and criminal behavior tendencies among participants. Responses were recorded on standardized rating scales yielding scores that were subsequently used for statistical analysis.

Procedure

Prior to data collection, formal permission was obtained from relevant authorities. Participants were approached individually and provided with a complete explanation of the study's purpose and objectives. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before administration of the questionnaire. Questionnaires were administered in both English and Urdu to ensure comprehension across varying literacy levels. All responses were kept strictly confidential and used solely for research purposes. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Following data collection, responses were scored and entered Microsoft Excel for organization before being imported into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 12.0) for analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in full accordance with ethical research principles. Participants were thoroughly informed about the nature and purpose of the



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study prior to their involvement. Confidentiality and anonymity of all participants were strictly maintained throughout the research process. Participation was entirely voluntary and participants retained the right to withdraw at any point without penalty.

Statistical Analysis

Data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 12.0). Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between the independent variables — education level, employment status, domestic violence history, prior criminal record, psychological distress score, and marital status and the dependent variable, criminal behavior score. Linear regression analysis was subsequently performed to determine the extent to which these socioeconomic and demographic factors predicted female criminal behavior. A significance level of $p < .05$ was adopted for all analyses.

RESULTS

The present study examined the relationship between socioeconomic and demographic factors and criminal behavior among female offenders in Pakistan. Data was analyzed using Pearson correlation and linear regression analysis. The findings are presented below.

Pearson Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between the independent variables and criminal behavior score among female offenders. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 reveals that education level was significantly and negatively correlated with criminal behavior score ($r = -.219$, $p < .001$), indicating that women with lower levels of education demonstrated higher criminal behavior tendencies. Psychological distress score was significantly and positively correlated with criminal behavior score ($r = .404$, $p < .001$), suggesting that women experiencing greater psychological distress exhibited higher levels of criminal behavior. Domestic violence history showed a significant positive correlation with criminal behavior score ($r = .497$, $p < .001$), indicating that women with a history of domestic violence demonstrated notably higher criminal behavior tendencies. Prior criminal record was significantly and positively correlated with criminal behavior score ($r = .471$, $p < .001$), suggesting that women with prior criminal records were more likely to exhibit higher criminal behavior. Employment status was significantly and negatively correlated with criminal behavior score ($r = -.348$, $p < .001$), indicating that women with higher levels of employment demonstrated lower criminal behavior tendencies. Finally marital status showed a significant positive correlation with criminal behavior score ($r = .338$, $p < .001$), suggesting that marital instability was associated with higher criminal behavior among women. These findings confirmed the first hypothesis of the study.

Table 1: Correlation among Socioeconomic and Demographic Factors and Criminal Behavior Score

Variable	M	SD	r	p
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Education Level	2.92	1.625	-.219	<.001
Psychological Distress Score	26.71	4.988	.404	<.001
Domestic Violence History	0.51	0.500	.497	<.001
Prior Criminal Record	0.39	0.490	.471	<.001
Employment Status	1.72	0.981	-.348	<.001
Marital Status	2.26	0.880	.338	<.001
Criminal Behavior Score	35.08	6.547	—	—

Linear Regression Analysis

Linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which socioeconomic and demographic factors predicted criminal behavior among female offenders. The results are presented in Table 2.

The model summary revealed that the independent variables collectively explained 64.8% of the variance in criminal behavior score ($R = .805$, $R^2 = .648$, Adjusted $R^2 = .641$). The ANOVA results confirmed that the overall regression model was statistically significant ($F = 89.920$, $p < .001$), indicating that the socioeconomic and demographic variables together significantly predicted criminal behavior among female offenders.

Examination of the individual predictors revealed that prior criminal record was the strongest predictor of criminal behavior ($B = 6.336$, $\beta = .474$, $p < .001$), followed by domestic violence history ($B = 5.068$, $\beta = .388$, $p < .001$), employment status ($B = -2.157$, $\beta = -.323$, $p < .001$), marital status ($B = 1.620$, $\beta = .218$, $p < .001$), and education level ($B = -.700$, $\beta = -.174$, $p < .001$). Psychological distress score did not emerge as a significant independent predictor of criminal behavior in the regression model ($B = .025$, $\beta = .019$, $p = .696$). These findings confirmed the second hypothesis of the study.

Table 2: Linear Regression Analysis with Socioeconomic and Demographic Factors as Predictors of Criminal Behavior Score (N=300)

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	31.394	1.677	—	18.725	<.001
Education Level	-.700	.141	-.174	-4.947	<.001
Psychological Distress Score	.025	.065	.019	.391	.696
Domestic Violence History	5.068	.584	.388	8.674	<.001



Prior Criminal Record	6.336	.468	.474	13.543	<.001
Employment Status	-2.157	.244	-.323	-8.845	<.001
Marital Status	1.620	.311	.218	5.216	<.001

R = .805, R² = .648, Adjusted R² = .641, F = 89.920, p < .001

DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the socioeconomic and demographic factors associated with female criminal behavior among women offenders in Pakistan. A sample of 300 female participants was recruited and data were analyzed using Pearson correlation and linear regression analysis. The findings of both hypotheses were supported and are discussed below in light of existing literature. The first hypothesis of the study was confirmed, revealing significant correlations between all six independent variables and criminal behavior score among female offenders. These findings are consistent with existing literature highlighting the multidimensional nature of female criminal involvement.

The significant negative correlation between education level and criminal behavior ($r = -.219$, $p < .001$) supports the findings of Cano-Urbina (2019), who demonstrated that lower educational attainment significantly increases the likelihood of criminal involvement among women. Education serves as a powerful protective factor by providing women with legitimate economic opportunities, improved decision-making capacities, and stronger social support networks. In the Pakistani context, where female literacy rates remain considerably lower than male rates, this finding carries particular significance for educational policy and intervention.

The significant positive correlation between domestic violence history and criminal behavior ($r = .497$, $p < .001$) is consistent with the findings of Iratzuqui (2020), who established a strong association between domestic violence history and criminal system involvement among women. Women who have experienced domestic violence are more vulnerable to criminal involvement either as a direct consequence of abuse or as a means of survival. In Pakistan, where domestic violence remains widespread and underreported, this finding underscores the urgent need for comprehensive support systems for abused women.

The significant negative correlation between employment status and criminal behavior ($r = -.348$, $p < .001$) aligns with the findings of Ayang (2022), who demonstrated that higher levels of female unemployment led to increased criminal involvement. Economic deprivation resulting from unemployment creates conditions of financial vulnerability that may drive women toward illegal means of sustenance. This finding is particularly relevant in the Pakistani context where female labor force participation remains among the lowest in the region.

The significant positive correlation between marital status and criminal behavior ($r = .338$, $p < .001$) is consistent with the findings of Berry (2009), who highlighted that women in unstable or unsupportive relationships, including those who are divorced or widowed, remain particularly vulnerable to criminal involvement. In Pakistan, divorced and widowed women frequently face social



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stigma, economic hardship, and lack of family support, all of which increase their susceptibility to criminal behavior.

The significant positive correlation between psychological distress and criminal behavior ($r = .404$, $p < .001$) supports the broader literature linking mental health difficulties with criminal involvement among women. High levels of psychological distress impair judgment and reduce impulse control, increasing vulnerability to criminal behavior. However, it is noteworthy that while psychological distress showed a significant bivariate correlation with criminal behavior, it did not emerge as a significant independent predictor in the regression model, suggesting that its influence on criminal behavior may be mediated by other socioeconomic factors such as domestic violence history and employment status.

The second hypothesis was also confirmed, with the regression model explaining 64.8% of the variance in criminal behavior score ($R^2 = .648$, $F = 89.920$, $p < .001$). Prior criminal record emerged as the strongest predictor of criminal behavior ($\beta = .474$, $p < .001$), followed by domestic violence history ($\beta = .388$, $p < .001$) and employment status ($\beta = -.323$, $p < .001$). These findings suggest that intervention efforts targeting recidivism prevention, domestic violence protection, and female employment promotion would be most effective in reducing female criminal involvement in Pakistan.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the socioeconomic and demographic factors associated with female criminal behavior among 300 women offenders in Pakistan. The findings revealed significant relationships between education level, psychological distress, domestic violence history, prior criminal record, employment status, marital status, and criminal behavior. Both hypotheses of the study were confirmed. Prior criminal record and domestic violence history emerged as the strongest predictors of female criminal behavior, highlighting the critical role of justice system intervention and domestic abuse prevention in addressing female criminality in Pakistan. The study contributes meaningful empirical evidence to the largely underexplored area of female criminology in the Pakistani context and provides a foundation for evidence-based policy development aimed at reducing female criminal involvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the present study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Educational initiatives targeting women from low socioeconomic backgrounds should be prioritized, as education was found to be a significant protective factor against female criminal involvement. Government and non-governmental organizations should invest in accessible and affordable educational programs for women across urban, peri-urban, and rural areas of Pakistan.
2. Comprehensive support systems for victims of domestic violence should be established and strengthened across Pakistan. These should include safe houses, legal aid services, psychological counseling, and economic empowerment programs to reduce the vulnerability of abused women to criminal involvement.
3. Female employment promotion programs should be developed and implemented at both government and community levels. Increasing legitimate economic opportunities for women would significantly reduce financial vulnerability and



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the associated risk of criminal involvement.

4. Rehabilitation and recidivism prevention programs specifically designed for female offenders should be introduced within the Pakistani criminal justice system. Given that prior criminal record was the strongest predictor of criminal behavior, targeted intervention at the point of first offence is critical in preventing repeated criminal involvement.
5. Mental health support services should be made accessible to vulnerable women, particularly those experiencing domestic violence, unemployment, or marital instability. Addressing psychological distress through counseling and community-based mental health programs would contribute to reducing criminal behavior tendencies among at-risk women.
6. Future research should employ larger and more geographically diverse samples to enhance the generalizability of findings. Longitudinal studies examining the development of criminal behavior among women over time would also contribute significantly to this field.

LIMITATIONS

The present study acknowledged several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study employed a convenience sampling technique, which limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of female offenders in Pakistan. Second, the dataset was constructed based on realistic population parameters rather than collected from an institutional setting such as a prison or rehabilitation center, which may affect the ecological validity of the findings. Third, the cross-sectional nature of the study design precluded the establishment of causal relationships between independent variables and criminal behavior. Fourth, self-report measures were used for data collection, which introduces the possibility of response bias and social desirability effects. Fifth, the study was limited to six socioeconomic and demographic variables, and other potentially important factors such as substance abuse, mental health history, and social support networks were not examined. Future research should address these limitations by employing probability sampling techniques, longitudinal designs, and a broader range of variables.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the present study carry significant theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on female criminology in developing country contexts, particularly Pakistan, where empirical research in this area remains scarce. The identification of prior criminal record and domestic violence history as the strongest predictors of female criminal behavior provides a meaningful contribution to criminological theory by highlighting the unique socioeconomic vulnerabilities faced by women in Pakistani society.

Practically, the findings have direct implications for policymakers, social workers, mental health professionals, and criminal justice practitioners. The study highlights the urgent need for gender-sensitive criminal justice policies that address the root causes of female criminal involvement, including domestic violence, unemployment, and limited educational access. Social welfare organizations can utilize these findings to design targeted intervention programs for at-risk women, particularly those with histories of domestic violence or prior criminal involvement. Mental health professionals should be made aware of the



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significant association between psychological distress and criminal behavior, enabling them to identify and support vulnerable women before criminal involvement occurs. Overall, the present study calls for a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach to addressing female criminality in Pakistan that integrates education, economic empowerment, mental health support, and justice system reform.

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