

Economics of Criminal Behaviour: An overview of Convicted Property Offenders in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract— Effective response towards crime is one of the essential priorities for all society. In order to provide an effective response, it is significant to understand the relationship between crime and various factors. Economics has always been a social science which focuses on resource availability as its demand. The imbalance created has paved way for economic distortions and impact on well-being of mankind. In the pursuit to improve financial well-being, criminals have always been guided by economic factors and thereby providing a wide scope to analyze inter-dependence between economics and crime. Therefore, an attempt has been made to find out the socio-economic status and various factors for committing property crime among 654 convicted property crime offenders housed in the eleven prisons of the state of Tamil Nadu. Findings reveal that almost all of the respondents are belong to poor socio economic status and they have cited various factors such as personal factors, situational factors resulted in committing property crime. The derived finding will be more useful in preventing individuals from committing property crime by understanding and rectifying the causative factors.

Keywords— Economics of Crime; Property Offenders; Economic Factors.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Endow an effective response towards crime ample of research studies have been conducted century before in different field to establish the relationship between crime and various factors lead to commit crime. However, in the field of economics the relationship between crime and economics were studied only about three decades before. The work of Gary Becker (1968) on “Crime and punishment: An economic approach” was the first ignite made the scholars of economics to concentrate more researches on relationship between economics and crime. With regard to Indian context there is growing concern about the researches on relationship between economy and crime. But still, there is a huge need for more focus and in-depth research.

The concept of economics of criminal behaviour was begun from the ideas of Beccaria and Bentham. They have

stated that ‘the profit of the crime is the force which urges man to delinquency: the pain created by the penal action is the driven force engaged to control him from committing crime. The crime will be committed only if the first of these forces be the greater and crime will not be committed if the second forces be the greater’ (Bentham, 1789).

Later, the main idea of Bentham was maximized and modernized by Becker (1968) through his breaking article on Crime and Punishment. According to his theory he stated that some individuals become criminals because of the gain they generated from the crime is more when it was compared to the earnings from legitimate work amidst of the probability of apprehension and conviction, and the severity of penal order. Becker also argues that mental illness or immoral attitudes are not the deciding factor for criminal activity, however it is prepared on the basis of a maximization problem in which individuals compare the expenditure and the profit of legal and illegal activities, concurrently taking into account the likelihood of being arrested & punished and the expected returns from crime (Buonanno & Montolio, 2008).

The concepts of social philosophers of eighteenth century Cesare Beccaria and Jeremy Bentham who form the basis of the recent empirical modelling of crime based upon deterrence theory (Sampson & Wooldredge, 1987; Cohen & Felson, 1979; Levitt, 2004). According to deterrence theory the probability of being caught, the severity of the punishment and the time interval between the two are the elements for an offender takes into forward to commit crime. With this basic model of deterrence theory, Becker (1968) developed it by using economic analysis and suggested that an offender makes a rational choice to commit a crime.

The core of rational choice theory is based on economic choice between legitimate and illegitimate employment, switching between the two based on expected effort and reward, measured by expected financial return (Becker, 1968). This method of rational thinking becomes alternative to many of the more traditional crime theories, which have fortified our knowledge of the causation of crime. As a sub-field of the rational choice theory proposed by Becker, Cohen and Felson (1979) proposed the Routine Activities Theory (RAT). RAT develops the deterrence theory and looks at the criminal act itself, what is needed for it to occur and is very much based upon a rational choice model. This theory emphasize that for a crime to be

committed there must be a convergence in space and time of three minimal elements, namely: a motivated offender, suitable target and lack of capable guardian. These convergences are affected by the routine activities of targets and offenders. It is evident through various empirical researches (Tseloni & Pease, 2010; Wiles and Costello, 2000) that routine activity theory is more consistent in explaining levels of property crime than other crime categories such as violent crime. Consequently routine activity theory has had a number of links to intervention programmes, which are designed around the three key components of the theory mentioned above.

Economics has always been a social science which focuses on resource availability as its demand. The imbalance created has paved way for economic distortions and impact on well-being of mankind. In the pursuit to improve financial well-being, criminals have always been guided by economic factors and thereby providing a wide scope to analyze inter-dependence between economics and crime.

In a macro-economic perspective, factors such as poverty, unemployment, lack of opportunities, lack of facilities/infrastructures, wages and income inequalities are the predominant causes for crime in general and property crime in particular, the various research results across the world were also stands as an evident for this. Nevertheless, the micro-economic factors for crime particularly to the property crime such as need/gain for money, modern life style enjoyment, substance abuse, easiest way of earning, revenge, thrill / pleasure seeking and so on are also had a significant role and it could not be denied. Increase in the level of economic growth of a country is the ultimate remedy to reduce the crime, but still the crimes can be prevented and reduced by stringent enactment of laws and if the preventive measures adopted based on the above mentioned micro-economic factors.

Witte and Witt (2000) strengthened the above mentioned concepts and concluded that the influence of an individual's decision to engage in criminal activities are (i) the amount of gain earned from successful property crime (ii) the probability of being apprehended (iii) extent of punishment and (iv) the opportunities in illegal activities, the inadequacy of criminal justice system.

As stated elsewhere, economic factors remains key factor when compared to socio-psychological and demographic factor. In economic factor poverty, unemployment, lack of labour market opportunities, lack of facilities/infrastructure, wage and income inequality and so on are the predominant features for property crime. It is evident from the study conducted by Hipp (2011) "Spreading the wealth: the effect of the distribution of income and race/ethnicity across households and neighborhoods on city trajectories" revealed that high levels of inequality and more economic segregation had much higher levels of property crime. Another study conducted by Hashimoto (1987) found that wage and income inequality reflects in increased property

crimes but not with violent crimes. The existing literatures clearly revealed that the decrease in above mentioned features leads to crime drop and if increases, apparently it leads to increase in crime.

There are several categories of crime such as Crimes against property, Crimes against body, Crimes against public order, Economic crimes, Crimes against women, Crimes against children and so on. However, the present research only focused on property crime classified based on State Crime Record Bureau, Tamil Nadu such as Murder for gain, Dacoity, Robbery, Burglary and Theft. The present research was confined to studying pattern and trend of property crime in Tamil Nadu since 2003 to 2014, socio economic and demographic profile, the reasons and target choice of property crime offender. Though the negative perceptions of property crime offenders towards victim in investigation & prosecution process, fear of offenders and so on advantages the offenders favorably to commit and repeat property crimes. Therefore, the present research also focuses on to understand the perception of offender towards victim of property crime and correctional measures.

Against this background, the present study was conducted among the convicted inmates of the property crime who are undergoing sentencing inside the central prisons of Tamil Nadu. Objectives of the present study is as follows,

- To understand the socio-economic and demographic profile of the property crime offender
- To elucidate the factors for committing property crime

2. Method

2.1 Variables Investigated

Socio-economic variables: Socio-economic variables includes their current age, gender, religion, community, education status, marital status, type of family, previous occupation and monthly earnings, and locality.

Reasons for committing property crime: Reasons for committing property crime was measured using two factors namely, personal factors and situational factors. The first one consist of five items such as, need/gain for money, modern life style, substance abuse, easiest way of earning, revenge, and thrill/pleasure seeking the later consists of four items includes easy accessibility, victim vulnerability, lack of surveillance, and labelling. Respondents were asked to respond on a five point scale ranging from very strongly agree to strongly disagree (Cronbach's alpha $\alpha=0.71$).

2.2 Source of Data

The information related to the number of convicted prisoners imprisoned in various part of the country was obtained from the report being published every year as 'Prison Statistics India' by the National Crime Records

Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs. The researcher done an extensive field work in Prisons and found through the admission books of central prison that in the year 2016 there are 654 convicted property offenders resides in various prisons across Tamil Nadu. The researcher has done an extensive survey by including all those convicted property offenders imprisoned.

2.3 Tool for Data Collection

For the purpose of elucidate, the results related to the objectives of the present research the researcher used a structured interview schedule. A structured interview schedule was constructed to elucidate data for the variables relating to property crime offenders. Initially, pilot study was conducted and preliminary analysis was made. The researcher also discussed with the eminent scholars who are working in the related field, experts, and practitioners. After obtained input from the experts and the results of the pilot study interview schedule was modified. Addition and deletion of certain items were made. Further reliability test was also applied to find out the reliability of the tool. Reliability value for each variable was briefly explained in the variables investigated section.

2.4 Method of Data Collection

To collect the data for the present research the researcher done a survey among all the convicted inmates of property crime. The researcher visited all the eight central prisons and three special prisons for women across Tamil Nadu. To interview the respondents the researcher got assistance from the post graduate students of Department of Criminology, University of Madras. Before the researcher commenced the interview, the participants were briefed about the objectives and purpose of the study. Participants were given assurance that the information collected from them will be confidential and will be used only for research purpose. Participants were also given option to stop the interview at any time if they wish to leave. Women students were assisted to collect date from the convicted women prisoners. All participants were given the names and affiliation of the researcher and individually they could contact if they had any concerns or questions about the research. A total of 654 respondents were approached of which all the respondents were given consent to take part in the study.

2.5 Analysis of Data

By using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20.1 the collected data were processed. Response for the five point scales were converted into scores ranging from 5 to 1. Descriptive statistics such as frequency table and cross table was used.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Socio – economic Status of the Respondents

Table 3: Socio-demographic profile of the respondents

	Response	Frequency	Percentage
(N = 654)			
Age	21 – 24 yrs	22	3.4
	25 – 44 yrs	424	64.8
	45 – 64 yrs	191	29.2
	Above 65 yrs	17	2.6
Gender	Male	629	96.2
	Female	24	3.7
	Transgender	01	0.2
Religion	Hindu	547	83.6
	Christian	59	9.0
	Muslim	48	7.3
Community	Forward Class	17	2.6
	Backward Class	247	37.8
	Most Backward Class	226	34.6
	Scheduled Caste	140	21.4
	Scheduled Tribe	24	3.7
Educational Status	Illiterate	108	16.5
	Primary School	138	21.1
	Middle School	162	24.8
	Secondary	100	15.3
	Higher Secondary	37	5.7
	Diploma	37	5.7
	UG Degree	50	7.6
	PG Degree	20	3.1
Others	02	0.3	
Marital Status	Single	193	29.5
	Married	439	67.1
	Divorced	09	1.4
	Widower	04	0.6
	Live-in-together	09	1.4
Family Type	Nuclear Family	394	60.2
	Joint Family	260	39.8
Locality	Urban	167	25.5
	Sub-Urban	333	50.9
	Rural	154	23.5
Occupation (before conviction)	Agriculture	78	11.9
	Unorganized Worker	276	42.2
	Self-Employed/Business	138	21.1
	Daily Wage	154	23.5
	Others	08	1.2
Monthly Income (before conviction)	Below 5000	245	37.5
	5001 - 15000	329	50.3
	15001 - 25000	43	6.6
	Above 25000	37	5.7

Socio-economic status was measured using variables such as their current age, gender, religion, community, education status, marital status, type of family, previous occupation and monthly earnings, and locality. Finding of the Socio-demographic profile of the respondents are briefly discussed below.

Table 3 represents the socio-demographic profile of the convicted property offenders who were chosen as respondents for the present study. Of the total respondents 64.8 per cent of them were belong to the age group of 25–44 years, a significant per cent of the respondents were belong to the age group of 44–64 years and the mean age of the respondents is 40 years. With regard to the gender of the respondents it was observed from the above table that a vast majority of the respondents (96.2%) are males and 3.7 per cent of them are females and only one respondent constitute transgender. In connection with the religion status of the respondents, majority of the respondent were belong to Hindu (83.6%) and Christians constitutes 9 per cent and Muslim constitutes 7.3 per cent. As far as the respondents community status is concerned, majority of are belong backward class (37.8%) and most backward class (34.6%) respectively, around one third of the respondents are belong to the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe. It was found from the table that around 17 per cent of the respondents were illiterates; around 45 per cent of them have completed their primary and middle school education; around 13 per cent of the respondents have reported that they have completed diploma and under graduate. It was seen from the above table that around 30 per cent of the respondents were married and 67.1 per cent of them were unmarried. With relate to the locality of the respondents it was found that almost two third of the respondents were belong to urban and sub-urban area. Almost three fifth of the respondents were reported that they were engaged in unorganized sector employment and daily wages before they came into the prison. Of those whom were working before they came in to prison, findings show that almost half of the respondents were earning Rs. 5000-15000 every month and 37.5 per cent of them were earning Rs. 5000 and below every month (see Table 1).

Table 2: Relationship between personal and situational factors of the property offenders

	N	r	Sig
Personal Factor	654	.535	.01*
Situational Factor			

* 5% level of significance

From the above table (Table 2) results of the correlation analysis conducted to find out the relationship between the personal factor and the situational factor is presented. It can be inferred from the above table that there is a positive correlation ($r=0.535$) between personal factor and the situational factor.

Table 3: Gender vs. personal and situational factors of the property crime offenders

Factors	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Personal	Male	629	21.88	4.65	2.62	.01
	Female	24	23.46	2.80		
Situational	Male	629	14.47	4.09	1.29	.20
	Female	24	13.38	3.45		

Table 3 clearly depicts the difference between the gender of the respondents and two factors namely personal and situational. When compare the mean score for the personal factor, it can be inferred from the result that female respondents has more personal factor ($M=23.46$) to commit property involved crime than male respondents ($M=21.88$), this result may be due to less number of female respondents by increasing the female sample size the results will be different. It was found from the above table that statistically there is a significant difference between gender and personal factor ($t=2.62$, $p=0.01$) whereas, statistically there is no difference between gender and the situational factor ($t=1.29$, $p=0.20$) (see Table 3).

Table 4: Monthly income vs. personal factors of the property crime offenders

Factor	Monthly Income	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Personal	Below 5000	245	22.53	4.14	2.07*	.04
	5001 - 15000	329	21.76	4.67		
	Below 5000	245	22.53	4.14	2.37*	.02
	15001 - 25000	43	20.86	4.97		
	Below 5000	245	22.53	4.14	1.49	.14
	Above 25000	37	21.03	5.94		
	5001 - 15000	329	21.76	4.67	1.18	.24
	15001 - 25000	43	20.86	4.97		
	5001 - 15000	329	21.76	4.67	0.72	.47
	Above 25000	37	21.03	5.94		
	15001 - 25000	43	20.86	4.97	0.14	.89
	Above 25000	37	21.03	5.94		

Table 4 indicates whether there is a difference between the monthly income respondents warned before came into prison and the personal factors contributed to commit property involved crime. T-test was applied to find out the difference and it was found that respondents who were earning Rs. 5000 and below and Rs. 5001-15000 has high personal factor to committee property involved offense than those who were earning more than that. It can be argued from the results that statistically there is a significant difference between the respondent's income and personal factor ($t=2.07$, 2.37 , 5 % level of significance).

Table 5: Monthly income vs. situational factors of the property crime offenders

Factor	Monthly Income	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Situational	Below 5000	245	14.34	3.84	0.57	.57
	5001 - 15000	329	14.53	4.11		
	Below 5000	245	14.34	3.84	0.58	.56
	15001 - 25000	43	14.77	4.57		
	Below 5000	245	14.34	3.84	0.80	.43
	Above 25000	37	13.78	4.62		
	5001 - 15000	329	14.53	4.11	0.35	.73
	15001 - 25000	43	14.77	4.57		
	5001 - 15000	329	14.53	4.11	1.04	.30
	Above 25000	37	13.78	4.62		
	15001 - 25000	43	14.77	4.57	0.96	.34
	Above 25000	37	13.78	4.62		

It can be inferred from the above table that an attempt was made to find out the difference between monthly income of the respondents and the situational factors influence them to commit property involved offence. Result of the T-test was clearly shows that there is no statistically significant difference exist between the monthly income of the respondents and the situational factors influence them to commit property involved offence, since p value is greater than 0.05 for all groups (see Table 5).

Table 6: Increasing of economic status of the respondents due to committing of property involved crime (N=101) and its nature

		Money	Jewels	Land	Building	Motor Vehicle	Business	Others
Do you think that the Property Crime(s) that you have involved has increased your economic status	Yes (N=101)	91 (90.09)	63 (62.38)	12 (11.88)	05 (4.95)	16 (15.84)	03 (2.97)	24 (23.76)

Multiple responses were obtained from the respondents Respondents were asked whether the property involved crime/s which they have committed has increased their economic status, if so then in what way it increased. The results have showed that of the total respondents' only around 15 per cent of the respondents have revealed that committed of property involved has increased their economic status. Of which, 90 per cent of them stated that

they have got more money, 62.4 per cent of them reported jewels and around 16 per cent of them reported motor vehicle (see Table 6).

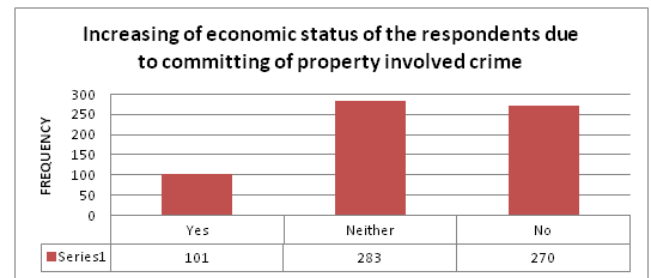


Fig.1: Increasing of economic status of the respondents due to committing of property involved crime

Table 7: Reasons for non-increasing of economic status of the respondents

	Frequency (n=270)	Percent
Stolen property was recovered by police	236	87.4
Cheated by team/group members	40	14.8
Stolen property was shared by many	06	2.2
Money was spent for conducting judicial trial	15	5.5
Spent most money on drugs/alcohol	32	11.9
Spent most money on gambling and other illegal means	12	4.4
Spent most money on sexual activities	05	1.9

Multiple response question- Respondents those who have expressed that committing of property involved crime has not increased their economic status, were asked to reveal the reasons for the same. Findings from the survey clearly show that a significant per cent (87.4) of the respondents reported that most of the time the stole property are being recovered by the police and a sizable per cent (14.8) of them reported that they have been cheated by their own group members and around 20 per cent of them stated that they used to spent most of the money/property on consuming drugs/alcohol, gambling and sexual activities (see Table 7)

4. Conclusions and recommendations

To conclude, it is to state from the findings that almost full of the respondents are belong to poor socio-economic status. Of the total respondents 64.8 per cent of them were belong to the age group of 25– 44 years, a significant per cent of the respondents were belong to the age group of 44–64 years and the mean age of the respondents is 40 years. With regard to the gender of the respondents it was observed from the above table that a vast majority of the

respondents (96.2%) are males and 3.7 per cent of them are females and only one respondent constitute transgender. With relate to the locality of the respondents it was found that almost two third of the respondents were belong to urban and sub-urban area. Almost three fifth of the respondents were reported that they were engaged in unorganized sector employment and daily wages before they came into the prison. Of those whom were working before they came in to prison, findings show that almost half of the respondents were earning Rs. 5000-15000 every month and 37.5 per cent of them were earning Rs. 5000 and below every month. With respect to the various factors contributing towards committing of property crime it was found from the finding that, two factors was found to be a major micro-economic factors namely, personal factors and situational factors. The first one consist of five items such as, need/gain for money, modern life style, substance abuse, easiest way of earning, revenge, and thrill/pleasure seeking the later consists of four items includes easy accessibility, victim vulnerability, lack of surveillance, and labelling. The findings show that there is a positive correlation ($r=0.535$) between personal factor and the situational factor. It was also found that there is a significant difference between gender and personal factor ($t=2.62$, $p=0.01$) whereas, statistically there is no difference between gender and the situational factor. Further, the respondents who were earning Rs. 5000 and below and Rs. 5001-15000 has high personal factor to committee property involved offense than those who were earning more than that. It can be argued from the results that statistically there is a significant difference between the respondent's income and personal factor whereas with respect to the situational factor there is no statistical difference. Around 15 per cent of the respondents have revealed that committed of property involved has increased their economic status this finding is in line with the finding of Witte and Witt (2000). Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a relationship between the socio-economic status and various factors contributing towards committing of property crime. It is proposed that various micro economic inclusive program may be implemented to curb the negative personal and

situational factors, as found by the study that respondents those who had high income status had less personal and situational factors towards committing property offence. Intervention programs may be conducted among the convicted property offenders to bring stability in their personal and economic factors to prevent them be become habitual offenders. Further, it's also recommended that in depth studies may be conducted to understand the other macro-economic factors contributing towards committing of property offence.

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