

A STUDY ON THE PERCEPTION OF LAW STUDENTS ABOUT THE SEVERITY OF CRIMES IN SAUDI ARABIA

Awad Ali Alwitheri, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University

ABSTRACT

This study empirically examines the perception of students who majored in Law in College of Business Administration at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University towards the seriousness of 26 crimes for the academic year 2020-2021. This study's results reveal that the students' view in the seriousness of the 26 listed crimes was identical in 19 cases, and it was significantly different in seven cases between males and females. Additionally, the results depict that the respondents believe that 20 crimes of the listed ones were high in the degree of their seriousness, and the rest six crimes were moderate in level of their seriousness. The most severe ranked crime was murder, and the least serious ranked crime was begging. In general, females are more opposed to crimes than males in which they believe that the listed crimes were considered more severe. This study has several implications for legal policy and regulations making in the country as it provides a deeper understanding of the perceptions of crimes by female and male students who, after graduation, would work in fields related to the judiciary and the courts.

Keywords: Crimes, Law Students, Saudi Arabia.

JEL Classifications: K1, K2, K3, K4.

INTRODUCTION

The legal definition of crime is that a crime or offence (or criminal offence) is an act harmful not only to some individual but also to a community, society, or the state ("*a public wrong*"). (Oxford Dictionary of Law). One proposed definition is that the crime is defined as every perverted and illicit human behavior either positive (act) or negative (refrain or avoid), intentional or unintentional, that is punishable as a criminal offence (Al-Saifi, 1994). Crime is studied to prevent it. The most recent World Crime Index report in 2021 rates Saudi Arabia 118th out of 135 countries (World Population Review, 2021). This indicates that Saudi Arabia's crime rate is low compared to the global crime rate. It is rated as 0.8 per 100,000, compared to the global rate of 7.6 per 100,000 (Okaz, 2019). The nature of Saudi law is that of integration of Islamic principles and contemporary civil law. The State has obliged a unique legal system that relies on modern civil law. In parallel, courts apply Islamic principles in the absence of legislative text that is enacted by legislatures. Therefore, the Sharia applies the main source to fill the legislative gaps and interpretation of the law (Alanzi, 2020).

According to the recent comprehensive study about the examination of university student's perspectives and views towards seventy-five crimes in Mexico, that was conducted by Petrified and McGee (2020), showed results based on the gender inequalities and differences regarding the opinions of the students as since in most cases crimes are rated on a scale of 1 to 100. There was no significant difference between the mean scores of males and females in the 46 out of 75 cases. Women were rated with more severe and particular crimes than men in the other 29 cases. Besides, the examination and study of the US citizen's perceptions regarding the relativity and seriousness of tax evasions to other violations and crimes were conducted by Burton et al. (2005). According to the results, tax evasion was ranked 11th out of the 21 crimes surveyed during the study. This shows that the average person considers tax evasion as only somewhat more serious. Violation of child labor laws, accounting fraud, and trading as an insider these collar crimes are usually ranked higher compared to tax evasion. It is also equivalent to the crime of welfare fraud and much higher than violation of laws protecting minimum wage. Further, an investigation concerning Yemen's citizen's perceptions of the severity and relativity of tax evasion to other violations and crimes was conducted by Abdul Manaf, Karlinsky, and Aljaaidi (2011). The results obtained from the comparative and mean analysis using the personnel structured interview and data from self-administration surveys showed that tax evasion is ranked among the three list serious crimes among the thirty crimes listed. Moreover, evasion of tax was categorized as the least serious sector out of 6 categories.

Six ethical issues were examined by Ross, Kilicasian, McGee, and Benk (2009), who cooperated in the World Values Surveys at German University, comprised of two hundred and fifty-two students. Determination of the justifiability of the six ethical concerns was supposed to be performed by the respondents. Some forms of tax evasion were considered more justifiable than others since they were somewhat more justified for some acts than others. Furthermore, examining the perception of taxpayers of the US about the relativity and severity of the tax evasion to other crimes in general and white-collar offenses, in particular, was conducted by Karlinsky et al. (2005). A comparison between the tax evasion perceptions and the other twenty offences, violations, and other violent crimes such as murder, rape, and relatively minor crimes tax evasions conducted by McGee et al., (2009). These issues comprise governmental benefit claims to which people are not entitled, avoidance of public transport fares, fraud and cheats about taxes in case of opportunities, acceptance of bribes in the course of their duties, and bribing to avoid services. They discovered that there was a difference between the issue and the extent of agreement. The significant opposition came from the females than males in three out of six ethical difference regarding examining the differences in women and men's opinions about six behaviors was conducted by Eicher et al. (2002). Overstated deductions in tax were discovered as the second the least severe crimes for both genders, 36 % and 44% of females and males. They felt that the behavior was somehow or very acceptable. Over speeding was discovered to be the least serious offense since males were more likely to view that act as acceptable (least severe) compared to ladies. A study regarding the seriousness of thirteen specific behaviors of offenses was conducted by the Australian Institute of Criminology in 1986. It has been illustrated that any person who cheats taxes of A\$ 5000 was rated or ranked ninth and considered closer to six times more severe crime followed by smuggling of heroin and the minor shoplifting commodities and goods worth AU & 5. Murder was considered more twenty-seven

times more stringent than shoplifting of goods and bicycle theft. Shoplifting of goods was regarded as almost similar to the crime of bicycle theft (Walker et al., 1986).

A study conducted by Petrides and McGee (2020) showed that attitudes towards different and various acts vary widely with time and geographical area. Specific use of particular drugs, for instance, can cause long-term imprisonment or even deaths in some countries such as the Philippines and Iran. A similar narcotic can be considered a misdemeanor or cannot be a crime in other jurisdictions such as Colorado and California. Nevertheless, they also reported that it's impossible to definitively state how or the crime is with any form of mathematical precision in single research because of various factors and aspects that must be accounted for and considered. However, some new studies have attempted to shed some light and clarity about the relativity and seriousness of various offenses and crimes. Further, the most available literature is carried out in different developed and developing countries other than Saudi Arabia. Therefore, this study intends to measure the severity of several crimes and violations among law students.

This study contributes to the knowledge by better understanding the views towards crimes among KSA students in a governmental university, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University. Moreover, the results of this study will be of interest to researchers and the academic community due to a lack of a formal research body addressing the issues of crimes in KSA universities. Therefore, this study will provide them with substantial information about issues in the KSA context and premise data in the future. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, a study measuring the perception toward certain crimes in the context of Saudi Arabia does not exist. Besides, this study contributes practically in a manner that policymakers at the Ministry of Education and judicial bodies, College of Businesses at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, faculty members, and students would benefit from the results of this study in terms of increasing the awareness of severe crimes among law students who are expected to work in courts.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 discusses the research methodology, section 4 highlights the results and discussions, and the final section illustrates the conclusions and implications.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire Design

As a quantitative method, the collection of the data using the questionnaire survey is an appropriate data collection instrument to answer the identified research questions: "What is the degree of seriousness of crimes?" and "To what extent does the seriousness of crimes differ between male and female students?" The model of this study is adopted and adapted from McGee and Petrides (2020). The questionnaire was voluntary and anonymous, and it was distributed out in the Arabic language to the sample of the study after translating from English. The questionnaire is divided into two sections. Section A is designed to obtain demographic information of the respondents. Questions were asked in this part relate to gender and age. In section B, the seriousness of 26 crimes was provided. More details are provided in the following sections.

Instrument of Measurement

Demographic information: Section A in the questionnaire includes demographic information of the respondents. The demographic variables included gender and age.

The Seriousness of Crimes

Section B of the questionnaire places a value on the seriousness of 26 crimes by using a five-point Likert scale, where:

- 1 = Not serious
- 2 = Somewhat serious
- 3 = Serious
- 4 = very serious
- 5 = Extremely serious

The value “1” indicates the lowest degree of view towards the seriousness of crimes, and “5” indicates the highest degree of view towards the seriousness of crimes.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics such as mean, maximum, minimum, standard deviation, frequency, percentage, and Chi-square were used to report the demographic information, the degree of crimes’ seriousness, and the significance of differences in mean score between males and females. If a significant level of the given offenses is at 0.05 or low, it is considered a significant difference in the perception.

Data Collection

A survey instrument was designed and distributed using Google Forms to access a large number of respondents that, in turn, increase the respondents’ rate. The simple random sampling technique was used to select the sample subjects of this study. The survey link was given to the faculty members in the Department of Law in College of Business Administration at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University to distribute it to their students during class time. The students were also asked to share the link voluntarily and anonymously with their classmates. The process of distributing and retaining back the surveys by students has been taken about two weeks. The usable and valid analysis surveys returned were 118 surveys consisting of 84 (%71.2) males and 34 (%28.8) females.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Profile of the Respondents

A total of 118 questionnaires were collected from college students who majored in Law. As shown in Table 1, most of the respondents (71.2%) were male, and (28.8%) were female. The majority of the students (72.9%) were aged 19-21, (20.3%) 22-24, (5.9%) ≤ 18 , and (0.8%) ≥ 25 .

Demographic information	Frequency (n = 118)	Percent %
Gender		
Male	84	71.2
Female	34	28.8
Age		
≤ 18	7	5.9
19-21	86	72.9
22-24	24	20.3
≥ 25	1	0.8

Seriousness of Crimes' Rankings

The descriptive statistics of the seriousness of crimes are illustrated in Table 2. The overall mean scores show that the least serious crime was begging (3.2034) and the most serious crime was murder (4.8983).

No.	Crime	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Bribery	2.00	5.00	4.3305	0.89686
2	Rape	2.00	5.00	4.8898	0.44881
3	Drug abuse	2.00	5.00	4.6186	0.78359
4	Theft	2.00	5.00	3.9576	0.99909
5	Tax evasion	1.00	5.00	3.3814	1.03709
6	Embezzlement	1.00	5.00	3.8644	1.10875
7	Sexual harassment	2.00	5.00	4.5254	0.84441
8	Murder	2.00	5.00	4.8983	0.49596
9	Bribing a public official	1.00	5.00	4.1949	0.99793
10	Trafficking in persons	1.00	5.00	4.5424	0.92120
11	Tax fraud	1.00	5.00	3.6525	1.07319
12	Gambling	1.00	5.00	4.0678	1.09176
13	Terrorism	1.00	5.00	4.8559	0.57402
14	Alcohol consumption	1.00	5.00	3.9915	1.11321
15	Adultery	2.00	5.00	4.6017	0.75266

No.	Crime	Mean	SD	Min	Max
16	Homosexuality	2.00	5.00	4.7797	0.62887
17	Contempt of religion	2.00	5.00	4.6441	0.73410
18	Forgery of official documents	1.00	5.00	4.2458	1.02061
19	Begging	1.00	5.00	3.2034	1.20227
20	Counterfeiting of currency	1.00	5.00	4.2203	1.09494
21	Armed robbery	2.00	5.00	4.5339	0.76997
22	Forgery of official seals	2.00	5.00	4.3390	0.96273
23	Unarmed robbery	1.00	5.00	3.2881	1.02199
24	Damaging of buildings and property	1.00	5.00	3.5593	1.13636
25	Polluting the environment	1.00	5.00	3.5169	1.31222
26	Kidnapping	2.00	5.00	4.5339	0.78099

Table 3 depicts the rankings of the crimes seriousness from rank “1” as the most serious crime to the rank “26” indicating to the least serious crime. This rank is based on the overall mean scores of the crimes. The results showed that murder was ranked as the most serious crime and begging was ranked as the least serious crime. Further, the range of the possible mean scores for the seriousness of crimes was between 5 and 1, with 5 indicating a high serious crime and 1 indicating the lowest serious crime. These scores were divided into three levels: (1) the lower scores ranged between 1 and 2.33, the moderate scores ranged between 2.34 and 3.66, and the highest scores are between 3.67 and 5.

No.	Crime	Overall rating	Rank	Seriousness
8	Murder	4.8983	1	High
2	Rape	4.8898	2	High
13	Terrorism	4.8559	3	High
16	Homosexuality	4.7797	4	High
17	Contempt of religion	4.6441	5	High
3	Drug abuse	4.6186	6	High
15	Adultery	4.6017	7	High
10	Trafficking in persons	4.5424	8	High
21	Armed robbery	4.5339	9	High
26	Kidnapping	4.5339	10	High
7	Sexual harassment	4.5254	11	High
22	Forgery of official seals	4.3390	12	High
1	Bribery	4.3305	13	High
18	Forgery of official documents	4.2458	14	High
20	Counterfeiting of currency	4.2203	15	High
9	Bribing a public official	4.1949	16	High
12	Gambling	4.0678	17	High
14	Alcohol consumption	3.9915	18	High
4	Theft	3.9576	19	High
6	Embezzlement	3.8644	20	High

Rank	Crime	Mean	Count	Severity
11	Tax fraud	3.6525	21	Moderate
24	Damaging of buildings and property	3.5593	22	Moderate
25	Polluting the environment	3.5169	23	Moderate
5	Tax evasion	3.3814	24	Moderate
23	Unarmed robbery	3.2881	25	Moderate
19	Begging	3.2034	26	Moderate

Table 3 illustrates that 20 crimes out of the 26 included in the survey were ranked as serious crimes, and the rest 6 crimes were ranked as moderate crimes in their seriousness.

Gender Differences in the Severity of Crimes' Degrees

Table 4 presents the difference in perception of the severity of crimes based on gender.

Crimes	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value
Bribery	Male	84	4.35	0.885	0.279
	Female	34	4.29	0.938	
Rape	Male	84	4.87	0.510	0.789*
	Female	34	4.94	0.239	
Drug abuse	Male	84	4.63	0.818	0.267
	Female	34	4.59	0.701	
Theft	Male	84	3.94	0.949	0.292
	Female	34	4.00	1.128	
Tax evasion	Male	84	3.26	1.031	1.991*
	Female	34	3.68	1.007	
Embezzlement	Male	84	3.86	1.066	0.111
	Female	34	3.88	1.225	
Sexual harassment	Male	84	4.37	0.941	3.292**
	Female	34	4.91	0.288	
Murder	Male	84	4.88	0.568	0.596
	Female	34	4.94	0.239	
Bribing a public official	Male	84	4.18	0.959	0.279
	Female	34	4.24	1.103	
Trafficking in persons	Male	84	4.49	1.000	1.006*
	Female	34	4.68	0.684	
Tax fraud	Male	84	3.50	1.092	2.480**
	Female	34	4.03	0.937	
Gambling	Male	84	4.10	1.048	0.428
	Female	34	4.00	1.206	
Terrorism	Male	84	4.88	0.568	0.743*
	Female	34	4.79	0.592	

Alcohol consumption	Male	84	3.93	1.138	0.965*
	Female	34	4.15	1.048	
Adultery	Male	84	4.58	0.764	0.415
	Female	34	4.65	0.734	
Homosexuality	Male	84	4.79	0.678	0.164
	Female	34	4.76	0.496	
Contempt of religion	Male	84	4.57	0.811	1.703*
	Female	34	4.82	0.459	
Forgery of official documents	Male	84	4.24	1.025	0.128
	Female	34	4.26	1.024	
Begging	Male	84	3.18	1.163	0.351
	Female	34	3.26	1.310	
Counterfeiting of currency	Male	84	4.30	1.015	1.207*
	Female	34	4.03	1.267	
Armed robbery	Male	84	4.50	0.768	0.750
	Female	34	4.62	0.779	
Forgery of official seals	Male	84	4.25	0.980	1.588*
	Female	34	4.56	0.894	
Unarmed robbery	Male	84	3.15	0.988	2.267*
	Female	34	3.62	1.045	
Damaging of buildings and property	Male	84	3.36	1.137	3.152**
	Female	34	4.06	0.983	
Polluting the environment	Male	84	3.38	1.316	1.786*
	Female	34	3.85	1.258	
Kidnapping	Male	84	4.48	0.768	1.265*
	Female	34	4.68	0.806	
Overall	Male	84	108.000	13.6408	1.511*
	Female	34	112.294	14.8049	

Note: * significant at 0.05 level ** significant at 0.01 level

Table 4 shows that three variables (sexual harassment, tax, and damaging of property) show a significant difference based on gender at 0.01 level. For 11 variables, there was a significant difference at 0.05 level. No significant difference was found for 12 variables. The overall score also showed a significant difference at 0.05 level, based on gender. It needs to be noted that in the majority of the cases, females scored higher mean values, signifying that females expressed higher levels of concern in these crimes than males. The only difference to this pattern was observed in the variables terrorism, pollution, and counterfeiting. In these variables, males had higher mean values, signifying that they had higher concerns.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

This study aims at examining the perception of law students towards various crimes. The study was based on the data collected from 118 law students from Saudi Arabia. The gravity of crimes of 26 listed crimes was examined. The study results indicate that the most severe crime

perceived by the females and males was murder, and the least serious crime was begging. The results also indicate that respondents view 20 crimes as high serious crimes and 6 crimes as moderate serious crimes. In addition, the results show that in 2 of the 26 crimes included in the survey, male and female mean scores were different at 1 percent level, 3 crimes had a significant difference at 5 percent level, and 2 crimes had significant difference at 10 percent level. At the same time, the rest of the 19 of 26 crimes had insignificant difference mean scores between males and females. Moreover, in 19 cases, male and female mean scores were not significantly different. In 14 of the 19 cases, the female mean scores were higher than the males except for counterfeiting of currency, bribery, terrorism, drug abuse, and gambling. Although all these 19 crimes were viewed identically by females and males, females believed these crimes were more serious than males. Further, in 6 out of the 7 cases, females believe that these 6 cases are more serious crimes than males. These include sexual harassment, tax fraud, damaging of buildings and property, forgery of official seals, kidnapping, and tax evasion. On the other hand, homosexuality was viewed as a more serious crime by males than females.

However, the results of this study extend the previous studies in the crimes by adding new empirical evidence. This study is limited to several limitations. This study enlists 26 crimes examined among law-majored students. Future lines of research may replicate the same study in different colleges, universities and GCC countries and by adding more crimes with different categories. In addition, future studies may conduct comparative analysis in terms of specialization, age, college, university and country.

REFERENCES

- Alanzi, A.A. (2020). Development of the civil legal system in Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Legal, Ethical and Regulatory Issues*, 23(4), 1-7.
- Aljaaidi, K.S.Y., Manaf, N.A.A., & Karlinsky, S.S. (2011). Tax evasion as a crime: A survey of perception in Yemen. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 6(9), 190-201.
- Al-Saifi, A. (1994). *The general provisions of penal system*. King Saud University Printing Press.
- Benk, S., McGee, R. W., & Ross, A. (2009). An empirical study of ethical opinion in Turkey. *Journal of Accounting, Ethics and Public Policy*, 10(1), 83-94.
- Burton, H. A., Karlinsky, S. S., & Blanthorne, C. (2005). Perception of a white-collar crime: Tax evasion. *The ATA Journal of Legal Tax Research*, 3(1), 35-48.
- Eicher, J. D., Stuhldreher, T. J., & Stuhldreher, W. L. (2002). *Men, women, taxes, and ethics*.
- Karlinsky, S., Burton, H., & Blanthorne, C. (2004). Perception of tax evasion as a crime. *e Journal of Tax Research* 2(2), 226-240.
- McGee, R. W., & Petrides, Y. (2020). Gender views on 75 crimes: A survey of mexican opinion. *Journal of Accounting, Ethics & Public Policy*, 21(4), 563-595.
- McGee, R. W., Benk, S., Ross, A., & Kılıçaslan, H. (2009). An empirical study of ethical opinion in Germany. *Journal of Accounting, Ethics and Public Policy*, 10(2), 243.
- McGee, R. W., Petrides, Y., & Ross, A. M. (2012). How serious is tax evasion? A survey of Mexican opinion. In *The Ethics of Tax Evasion* (pp. 405-411). Springer, New York, NY.
- Okaz. (2019). *Three pillars leading Saudi Arabia to an economic, economic and investment renaissance*. Okaz. Originally dated February 13, 2019. It was released on February 12, 2019, Riyadh
- Walker, J., Wilson, P., & Mukherjee, S. (1986). How the public sees crime: An Australian survey. *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, 2(2), 1-4.
- World Population Review. (2021). *Crime rate by country 2021*. Retrieved from <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/crime-rate-by-country>