

## The Effect of Poverty on Crime: A Case Study of Marvdasht City, Iran

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**Abstract:** The relationship between poverty and crime has been a controversial subject over the years. History has proven that there is in fact a direct link between poverty and crime. Hence, the objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between poverty and crime in urban areas of Marvdasht city, Iran. Pearson correlation used to identify this relationship. The findings through survey questionnaire indicated that there are positive relations between poverty and crime rate in the urban areas. It is expected that the findings of this study could be utilized by the government and NGOs for their future follow-up on programs for poverty reduction towards crime reduction.

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### 1. Introduction

The relationship between poverty and crime has been a controversial subject over the years. Many scholars argue that poverty does not have a causal relationship to crime because there are countries in which poverty is very high but the crime rate is relatively low (Studymode 2013). Sociologist and criminal justice scholars have found a direct correlation between poverty and crime. One economic theory of crime assumes that people weigh the consequences of committing crime. They resort to crime only if the cost or consequences are outweighed by the potential benefits to be gained. The logical conclusion to this theory is that people living in poverty are far more likely to commit property crimes such as burglary, larceny, or theft (Williams 2009).

A study by the U.S. Government Accountability Office released in 2007 showed that those who are in areas where poverty is abundant had fewer options in life. People who were in poverty-stricken areas were more likely to have adverse health issues due to unaffordable healthcare, risky behavior and the lack of proper education. Those who experience poverty are more likely to suffer from health conditions due to being closer to freeways and industrial buildings that are not usually welcome in higher-income areas (Logan 2009).

Crime is a major economic and social problem in most developing countries. There has long been the belief that, within developing countries, poverty favors crime. Raphael and Winter-Ebmer (2001) use U.S. data to examine the effects of unemployment on crime. Their results suggest that decreases in property crime rates can be explained, in part, to decreases in unemployment rates. In a study using data from U.S. urban counties, Kelly (2000) finds that inequality has

no effect on property crime but a strong influence on violent crime (Anderson 2009). More evidence of the effect of poverty on crime is becoming available in developing countries. Acharya & Codina (2012) and Fajnzylber et al. (2000) show that differences in crime rates are related to growth and poverty and partly driven by demographic factors (Fafchamps & Minten 2006).

In contrast, evidence concerning the poverty and crime connection and related relationships in developing countries, while growing, is still relatively sparse. This is due largely to the lack of available crime data. Existing studies include Fajnzylber et al (2000) and Dreze and Reetika (2000) illustrate that differences in crime rates can be linked to growth and poverty. In India, Dreze and Reetika (2000) find that murder rates are unrelated with poverty.

In general, evidence concerning the effects of poverty on crime is looked upon with skepticism. Several important issues arise when trying to determine if a relationship exists. First, reverse causation could lead to the incorrect conclusion that a positive correlation between poverty and crime is verification that poverty levels determine criminal activity. In truth, it may be that causality runs in the other direction. That is, increasing rates of criminal activity within a community may lead to increases in poverty (Anderson 2009). With considering these data, this study also an attempt is to investigate the relationship between poverty and crime in urban areas of Marvdasht, Iran. However, up to now there is a little literature on the effects of poverty on crime rate in Iran.

## 2. Literature Review

Poverty discourse and definitions are multifarious and highly extensive. However, poverty is pronounced when the basic necessities of life (which include adequate income, education, good health, security, self-confidence and certain freedoms) are absent (Emmanuel 2012).

Poverty is an exceptionally complicated social phenomenon, and trying to discover its causes is equally complicated. The 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen defines poverty as follows: "Poverty has various manifestations, including lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihoods; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increased morbidity and mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments; and social discrimination and exclusion. It is also characterized by lack of participation in decision-making and in civil, social and cultural life ..." (United Nations 1995, Heintz & Jardine 1998).

Some theorists have accused the poor of having little concern for the future and preferring to "live for the moment"; others have accused them of engaging in self-defeating behavior. Still other theorists have characterized the poor as fatalists, resigning themselves to a culture of poverty in which nothing can be done to change their economic outcomes. In this culture of poverty-which passes from generation to generation- the poor feel negative, inferior, passive, hopeless, and powerless (Cessna 2011).

More recently, sociologists have focused on other theories of poverty. One theory of poverty has to do with the flight of the middle class, including employers, from the cities and into the suburbs. This has limited the opportunities for the inner-city poor to find adequate jobs. According to another theory, the poor would rather receive welfare payments than work in demeaning positions as maids or in fast-food restaurants. As a result of this view, the welfare system has come under increasing attack in recent years (CliffsNotes.com 2013).

The effects of poverty are serious. Poverty has been shown to negatively influence child health and development along a number of dimensions (Aber Bennett Conley & Li 1997). Children who grow up in poverty suffer more persistent, frequent, and severe health problems than do children who grow up under better financial circumstances. Poverty and child labor also are inexorably linked; however, poverty can exist even when child labour does not. Ben-Chendo et al. 2012).

Levels of stress in the family have also been shown to correlate with economic circumstances. Studies during economic recessions indicate that job loss and subsequent poverty are associated with violence in families, including child and elder abuse. Poor families experience much more stress than middle-class families (CliffsNotes.com 2013).

Poverty's effects on crime can be explained through a variety of reasons. "There is a higher rate of mental illness in the poor than in the rich" (Brill 1993). Poverty can lead to high levels of stress that in turn may lead individuals to commit theft, robbery, or other violent acts. Moreover, poverty may lead to an actual or perceived inferior education, which would cause youth to count on less access to quality schools, jobs, and role models, decreasing the opportunity costs of crime and increasing the probability of youth spending time on the street associating with gangs, etc (Ludwig 2001).

## 3. Methodology

This study was carried out in Marvdasht city, during the period November and December 2012. This study is based on qualitative methodology to investigate the relationship between poverty and crime. Crime, as defined in this paper, includes assault, robbery, rape, murder and abduction.

The data were collected through a survey questionnaire. Pre-testing of the research instrument was carried out to examine the appropriateness and reliability of the instrument (Ismael & Ibrahim 2012). The results were sufficiently comprehensive and verified the value of the instrument. Pearson correlation was used to interpret the data in this study. It uses questionnaire survey to examine the effect of poverty on crime through 185 residents in the local communities of Marvdasht.

The questionnaire was structured around a Likert scale. Each statement was situated on a five scales with 1 representing a response of "strongly disagree" and 5 representing "strongly agree". A face to face onsite self-administered survey was conducted using the convenience sampling method. Convenience sampling methods has been widely used by almost all the major public opinion polling groups, political groups and market research organization (Aref 2011, 2010; Deng et al., 2010).

## 4. Results and Discussion

The questionnaire was used to obtain the primary data through a survey of 185 community residents of Marvdasht city, Iran. All the respondents provided completed answers to every question. Out of the 185 leaders, 39.14% were females and 60.86% were males, with an average age of 42 years. The

youngest participant was 18 years and the eldest one was 67 years of age. Pearson correlation used to identify this relationship. Correlation statistic is a statistical technique to measure the strength of the association that exists between two quantitative variables (Ary, Jacobs, & Rezavieh, 1996). The Pearson correlation coefficient,  $r$ , was used to measure the degree of linear relationship. The value of  $r$  is always between +1 and -1. A Pearson

correlation addressed the relationship between level of poverty ( $M= 59.74$ ,  $SD= 3.683$ ), with the level of crime ( $M=48.95$ ,  $SD= 4.184$ ).

For an alpha level of .05, the correlation between poverty and level of crime was found to be significant, ( $r = .000$ ,  $N = 185$ ,  $p = .796$ , two-tailed). The table 1 indicates that level of poverty and crime rate are significant ( $r = .000$ ,  $N = 185$ ,  $p = .796$ , two-tailed).

Table 1. Pearson correlation between poverty and crime.

Variables		Poverty	Crime
Poverty	Pearson Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.796(**)
	N	1	.000
Crime	Pearson Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.796(**)	1
	N	.000	185

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Findings through Pearson Correlation showed there is positive significant relationship between level of poverty and crime rate. Poverty is the main factor which can effect on level of crime and violence between poor people in poor areas. In support with this finding Ludwig, Duncan, and Hirschfield (2001) find evidence that suggests that giving families the opportunity to move to neighborhoods with lower levels of poverty reduces criminal behavior by teenagers. These findings also consist with the findings of Fajnzylber et al (2000). According to their findings, differences in crime rates can be linked to growth and poverty (Fajnzylber et al 2000).

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has identified the relationship between poverty and crime rate in the urban areas of Marvdasht City, Iran. In this paper I use data from a survey to investigate the relationship between crime rate and poverty. Evidence greatly suggests that increases in poverty lead to increased violent crime. This paper is one of very few efforts to understand criminal activity in urban areas of Iran.

Overall, the findings indicated that the residents have positive attitude towards contribution of poverty on crime rate. The findings from this study are valuable for establishing some conceptual and empirical baselines for subsequent studies of crime reduction in Iran. It is expected that the findings of this study could be utilized by the government and NGOs and Non-Profit Organizations (Murdie & Kakietek 2012; Zaidi & Gul 2012) for their future

follow-up on programs for poverty reduction towards crime reduction.

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