

Examining the Relationship between Media Portrayals of Crime Scenes and the Fear of Engaging in Criminal Behavior: A Correlational Study

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ABSTRACT

The correlation between media portrayals of crime scenes and the resulting fear of engaging in criminal behavior, providing insights into how media influences perceptions and actions related to crime. The study explored the correlation between media portrayals of crime scenes and the fear of engaging in criminal behavior in one of the private institution within Misamis Occidental. This study utilized descriptive research design. The respondents consist of criminology students from 1st year to 4th year level. An adapted survey questionnaire was the primary instrument utilized in gathering data for the study. The study's findings reveal a gender-diverse sample of criminology students, who perceive media portrayals of crime scenes as highly impactful in leading to significant apprehension about committing crimes, but without a statistically significant relationship between media portrayals and their level of fear. Based on the findings the research draw its conclusion which tells the importance of considering gender and academic year differences in understanding criminology students' perceptions of media portrayals of crime. It is recommended that institutions enhance their criminology curriculum by integrating media literacy and fear management strategies, with a focus on the influence of gender on media perceptions and tailoring these programs to different academic levels, to foster a critical understanding of crime portrayals, reduce unnecessary fears, and cultivate balanced and informed perspectives among students for their future roles in the criminal justice system. Keywords: *criminal behavior, crime scene, criminology students, influence, fear, and media portrayal*

INTRODUCTION

The media portrayal of the crime is frequently shaped the public's perception of crime risk and fear of crime (Prieto et al., 2020). Sensationalized stories and violent imagery can intensify anxiety and exaggerate the actual threat, influencing people's sense of safety in their communities (Silcox, 2022; Murray, 2020). Crime is frequently sensationalized and dramatized in the media, which leads to alter the public's view of criminal behavior and the encouragement of stereotypes and fear (Wong & Harraway, 2020; White, 2020). These presumptions can have an important effect on how society views crime and people accused of it (Chancellor, 2019; Stoykova, 2021). Furthermore, gender and socioeconomic prejudices frequently infiltrate media narratives, with males being presented as criminals and women as victims, ignoring the entire range of gender dynamics in crime (Clevenger et al., 2023; Fabiansson, 2023).

The media can contribute to distorted expectations and limited awareness of the intricacies of criminal conduct and judicial systems by exaggerating criminal motivations and exaggerating the heroism of law enforcement (Jones, 2021; Loja, 2022). Promoting an informed and balanced viewpoint on crime and its effects requires an understanding of these forces (Hunter et al., 2019; Gueta, 2020). Fear-mongering in the media, which exaggerates acts of violence and particular demographics, is a common problem that increases people's feelings of fear and insecurity (Hossain, 2023; Lakha, 2020; Langdon & Tismaneanu, 2019). This may further divide society by reinforcing stereotypes and prejudices (Hwang, 2021; Ragnedda, 2020). A loop of frightening stories may lead to harsher criminal justice customs, desensitization, decreased empathy, and community division. In addition, a vital aspect of societal awareness is the way public views crime (Nugmanovna, 2022; Rucker, & Richeson, 2021).

Despite a growing body of literature examining the impact of crime depictions in the media on public perceptions and attitudes, there is an important gap in our understanding of how specific elements within these depictions, such as the depiction of crime scenes, may shape individuals' fear of engaging in criminal behavior. (Marsh & Melville 2019; McCombs & Valenzuela 2020). While previous study has investigated the impact of media on crime anxiety, it frequently focuses on generic crime content and overlooks the possible specific impacts that portrayals of crime scenes may have. (Miethe, et al., 2019; Borecky, 2019). To fill this gap, more research is needed to understand the complex connection between media depictions of crime scenes and the fear of engaging in criminal behavior, with a focus on the processes by which these depictions may alter individuals' perceptions. (Liao, et al., 2020; Madriz, 2023). Such research is essential to inform media literacy programs, crime prevention strategies, and policy development aimed at reducing crime-related fears and potentially mitigating the risk of criminal behavior. (Harkness, 2020; Reynald, 2019).

The significance of this study arises from its potential for discovering a previously unexplored aspect of media effects on behavior—namely, the deterrent effect of media portrayals of crime scenes on individuals' propensity of engaging in criminal behaviors. This study, which investigates the relationship between media exposure to crime scenes and fear of engaging in criminal action, can provide useful insights into how media consumption influences not only general views of safety but also personal conduct. Understanding these interactions is critical for creating more effective crime prevention tactics and shaping media regulating legislation. Furthermore, this study can help to develop theoretical knowledge in media studies and psychology by revealing the psychological mechanisms by which media influences behavior.

The study explores into how Misamis University criminology students assess the impact of media portrayals of crime scenes and their fear of committing a crime. The research is guided by specific objectives, one of which is to profile the participants according to their age, gender, course, and year. The study also attempts to evaluate how much criminology students believe the media's depictions of crime scenes have an influence. In addition, the study attempts to determine the respondents' level of fear in relation to committing a crime. The main objective is to determine if the respondents' level of fear of committing a crime and how crime scenes are portrayed in the media are significantly correlated. This study has the opportunity to provide insightful information about the relationship between media representations and criminological viewpoints, providing a sophisticated grasp of how media portrayals may affect criminology students' views and anxieties regarding criminal activity.

This research endeavor embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the intricate relationship between media portrayals of crime scene and the resulting public fear of crime (Cullen, 2022; Disu, 2023). As media channels continue to evolve and diversify, and as the dynamics of crime in society undergo complex transformations, understanding this connection becomes increasingly vital (Koo, 2022; Sun & Zhao, 2022). We seek to unravel the multifaceted ways in which media representation of crime intersects with public perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral responses (Chen et al., 2022; Ceja Cardenas, 2023). Moreover, the importance of studying the relationship between public fear of crime and how crime is portrayed in the media is essential in many ways (Prieto Curiel et al., 2020; Harris, & Gruenewald, 2020).

It gives policymakers understanding into how media affects public opinion, assisting them in deliberations about media control and crime prevention (Lewandowsky et al., 2020; Monsees, 2020). Emphasizes the obligation of media outlets to report truthfully and responsibly, which might result in less biased coverage. It also clarifies the psychological impacts of sensationalized content and suggests ways to lessen them. (Rubin, 2022; Bello, & Igbashangev, 2023; Ross et al., 2020). Additionally, by focusing on media literacy and community involvement, this research can support efforts to decrease crime. Yue et al., 2019; Howell, & Brossard, 2021). In the end, comprehending this connection is essential for building more secure, knowledgeable, and resilient societies while also expanding the body of knowledge in criminology and media studies. (Barth, 2020; Martin, 2022; Eriksson, 2023).

METHODS

The quantitative approach is employed in this study. Specifically, the description research design was followed in achieving its objectives. Descriptive research involves collection of data to either test a hypothesis or

describe the variables mentioned in the data. (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). The design was utilized in this study to determine the perceived effects of media portrayals of crime scenes and the fear of committing a crime among the criminology students of Misamis University. (Urban, Jennings, & Cipher, 2022). An adapted survey questionnaire was the primary instrument utilized in gathering data for the study. It is used as a tool in this quantitative research since it acts as an organized tool for collecting data and measuring numerous variables within a study. This study was conducted at Misamis University. MU is open to students from pre-school to college, and is located at H.T. Feliciano St, Ozamiz City, Misamis Occidental of Northern Mindanao (Region X). Before the conduct of the survey, the researcher sought permission from the Dean of the College of the Criminology through a formal letter. Furthermore, the researcher carefully devised a comprehensive data collection plan to ensure the acquisition of high-quality and relevant information. The respondents were guided to understand the nature of their participation by reading and explaining to them the term and condition specified in the informed consent. The respondents are purposively chosen by the researcher's through the following inclusion of criteria: (1) a criminology student in Misamis University (2) willing to participate in the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Profile of the Respondents

The profile of the respondents in the study reveals a gender distribution and year level breakdown that provides insight into the composition of the sample. The respondents consist of 63 males, representing 42.00% of the total sample, and 87 females, accounting for 58.00%. This indicates a higher participation rate among female respondents compared to males. In terms of academic year level, the distribution shows a varied representation: 57 respondents are in their first year (38.00%), 27 are in their second year (18.00%), 38 are in their third year (25.33%), and 28 are in their fourth year (18.67%). This breakdown illustrates a balanced representation across different stages of the academic journey, with a slightly higher number of first-year students. The diverse mix of genders and year levels suggests that the study's findings will reflect a broad range of perspectives and experiences, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the respondent population.

The demographic profile of the respondents, with a higher representation of females and a balanced distribution across different academic year levels, has significant implications for the study. The predominance of female participants may influence the findings, especially in areas where gender perspectives are crucial. Additionally, the varied year-level distribution ensures that the study captures a wide range of experiences and insights from students at different stages of their education. This diversity can enhance the generalizability and relevance of the study's conclusions, providing a more holistic view of the issues being investigated. It also suggests that any interventions or recommendations derived from the study will need to be sensitive to both gender and academic year differences, ensuring they are effectively tailored to meet the needs of all respondent groups.

Table 1. Profile of the Respondents

Profile	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	63	42.00
Female	87	58.00
<i>Year Level</i>		
First Year	57	38.00
Second Year	27	18.00
Third Year	38	25.33
Fourth Year	28	18.67

Level of effects of media portrayals of crime scene as perceived by the criminology students in Misamis University

The data in Table 2 indicates that criminology students perceive the effects of media portrayals of crime scenes as significantly impactful, with a mean (M) score of 3.81 and a standard deviation (SD) of 0.53. This mean score falls within the "High" category on the provided scale, which ranges from 3.40 to 4.19. This high level of perceived impact suggests that media portrayals of crime scenes substantially influence the students' understanding and perceptions. The relatively low standard deviation indicates that the students' responses were consistent, showing general agreement about the strong effects of media portrayals. These findings underscore the importance of critically examining media content in criminology education, as it appears to play a significant role in shaping students' views and possibly their future professional attitudes and approaches.

Media portrayals of crime scenes have long been a subject of interest in criminology and media studies, as they play a significant role in shaping public perceptions and attitudes toward crime and the criminal justice system (Hatter, 2020; Muzzatti, et. al., 2023; Abbas, et. al., 2021). These portrayals often emphasize sensational and violent aspects of crime, which can lead to a distorted understanding of the frequency and nature of criminal activities. (Marceaux, et. al., 2023; dos Santos, F. 2024). For criminology students, who are in the process of forming their professional identities and frameworks, the impact of these portrayals can be profound. The frequent depiction of dramatic and high-stakes crime scenarios may influence students' expectations and attitudes, potentially skewing their perceptions of what their future careers will entail. This can also affect their understanding of criminal behavior, victimization, and the effectiveness of various law enforcement strategies (Aleem, et. al., 2021; Choi, et. al., 2020).

Furthermore, the media's portrayal of crime often neglects the complexity and nuances of criminal justice processes, focusing instead on immediate and visually striking elements (Greer, C.2019; Silva, J. 2019). This can lead to an oversimplified view of crime and justice, where the procedural aspects and the broader social context are overlooked. For criminology students, such portrayals might reinforce stereotypes and biases, both about criminals and about the criminal justice system itself (Marsh, I., & Melville, G. 2019; Aleem, et. al., 2021; Hatter, S. C. 2020). This can hinder their ability to develop a well-rounded and critical perspective necessary for effective practice in the field (Training, B. 2020; Srisaracam, S. 2019). Additionally, the emotional impact of consuming such media content can affect students' mental health, potentially leading to increased anxiety or desensitization to violence. The way media portrays crime scenes is not just a matter of entertainment but has significant implications for the education and professional development of future criminologists (Shaktawat, 2021; Tahir, et. al., 2022).

The implications of criminology students perceiving media portrayals of crime scenes as highly impactful are multifaceted. Firstly, it underscores the need for educators to critically engage with media content in their curriculum, ensuring students develop a nuanced understanding of crime beyond sensationalized depictions. By addressing these portrayals, educators can help students navigate potential biases and stereotypes that may arise from media consumption, fostering a more balanced and critical approach to their future professional roles. Moreover, recognizing the emotional and cognitive impacts of media portrayals can guide efforts to support students' mental health and resilience in the face of potentially distressing content, thus promoting a healthier learning environment and professional practice in criminology (Abi-Jaoude, et. al., 2020; Rogers, A., & Pilgrim, D. 2021).

Table 2. Level of Effects of Media Portrayals of Crime Scene as Perceived by the Criminology Students

Constructs	M	SD	Remarks
Effects of Media Portrayals of Crime Scene	3.81	.53	High

Scale: ;4.20-5.0 (Very Highly); 3.40-4.19 (High); 2.60-3.39 (Moderately High) 1.80-2.59 (Low) ;1.0-1.79 (Very Low)

Level of Fear in Committing a Crime

The criminology students of Misamis University perceive a high level of fear in committing a crime, as indicated by a mean score of 3.72 with a standard deviation of 0.33. This places their perception within the "High" category on the provided scale, suggesting a significant level of apprehension among the students. Such high levels of fear could influence their attitudes and behaviors towards criminal activities and the criminal justice system. This finding may reflect a heightened awareness of the consequences of criminal behavior, potentially shaping the students' future professional attitudes and approaches in criminology. (Thurgood, M. 2020; Parrotta, et. al., 2021). Understanding these perceptions is crucial for educators and policymakers in tailoring effective strategies to address students' concerns and support their development in the field of criminology.

The perception of fear in committing a crime among criminology students is a significant area of study within the field, reflecting broader societal attitudes towards criminal behavior and its consequences (Chadee, et. al., 2019; Daigle, 2022). Research has consistently shown that fear of crime can have profound effects on individuals' behaviors and perceptions of safety, influencing their interactions within their communities and their support for crime prevention strategies (Valente, R., & Vacchiano, M. 2021; Allen, T. T., & Whitt, A. 2020). For criminology students, this fear may serve as a motivating factor in their pursuit of understanding criminal behavior and the criminal justice system. It can also shape their professional identities, influencing their attitudes towards crime prevention and law enforcement practices. Educators and policymakers should consider these findings when developing educational programs and policies that aim to support students in their studies and future careers in criminology.

Moreover, the study of fear in committing a crime is crucial for understanding the broader implications of criminal justice policies and societal attitudes towards crime. High levels of fear can influence public support for punitive measures and affect perceptions of justice and safety (Pickett, J. T. 2019; Bolger, M. A., & Bolger, P. C. 2019). This fear may also contribute to social inequalities, as individuals and communities with higher levels of fear may experience greater social and economic impacts. By addressing these perceptions through research and policy, stakeholders can work towards promoting more equitable and effective approaches to crime prevention and criminal justice reform. (Beaunoyer, et. al., 2020; Madriz, E. 2023).

The high level of fear in committing a crime perceived by criminology students at Misamis University highlights several implications for both education and policy. Firstly, it underscores the importance of integrating fear management strategies into criminology curricula to help students develop a balanced understanding of crime and its implications. Addressing these perceptions can also aid in preparing future professionals to navigate their roles effectively within the criminal justice system, promoting evidence-based policies and interventions that consider public perceptions of safety and justice. Additionally, policymakers should consider these findings when designing crime prevention initiatives, aiming to alleviate community fears while enhancing public trust in the justice system, ultimately fostering safer and more cohesive communities (Lockey, et. al., 2019; Sayles, A. 2023; Kangaria, S. 2019).

Table 3. Level of Fear in Committing a Crime as perceived by the Criminology Students of Misamis University

Constructs	M	SD	Remarks
Fear in Committing a Crime	3.72	.33	High

Scale: ;4.20-5.0 (Very Highly); 3.40-4.19 (High); 2.60-3.39 (Moderately High) 1.80-2.59 (Low) ;1.0-1.79 (Very Low)

Significant Relationship between the level of media portrayals of crime scene and the level of fear in committing a crime among the Criminology Students

The analysis reveals that there is no statistically significant relationship between the level of media portrayals

of crime scenes and the level of fear on committing a crime among criminology students at Misamis University. The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.207$) indicates a weak positive relationship, and the calculated p -value ($p = 0.567$) exceeds the conventional threshold of significance ($p < 0.05$), confirming the finding of not significance. This suggests that while students perceive both media portrayals and fear at relatively high levels, these variables do not strongly influence each other in a predictable manner based on this data set. Understanding this lack of relationship is important for educators and policymakers when addressing the impact of media on students' perceptions and attitudes in criminology education, highlighting the need for further research to explore other potential influences on fear of crime among students.

The lack of a significant relationship between the level of media portrayals of crime scenes and the level of fear on committing a crime among criminology students, as indicated by the analysis, aligns with previous findings in the literature. Research has shown that the relationship between media exposure to crime and fear of crime can be complex and influenced by various factors such as personal experiences, social contexts, and individual differences in cognitive processing (Lytle, et. al., 2022; De Silva, 2023). While media portrayals often emphasize dramatic and sensationalized crime scenarios, which could theoretically heighten fear among viewers, individual responses to these portrayals can vary widely. This variability can be influenced by factors such as media consumption habits, perceived susceptibility to crime, and levels of social support and community engagement (Elliott, 2021; Koppelman, 2024).

Moreover, the nonsignificant findings underscore the importance of considering nuanced approaches when studying the impact of media on fear of crime. It suggests that while media portrayals may play a role in shaping perceptions, their direct influence on fear levels among criminology students may not be as pronounced as previously assumed (Kim, D. 2023; Foster, M. 2019). Future research should explore additional variables that may moderate or mediate this relationship, such as media literacy, personal resilience, and exposure to real-life crime experiences. Understanding these factors can help educators and policymakers develop more targeted strategies to mitigate any potentially negative effects of media exposure and promote a balanced understanding of crime and safety among future criminologists (Hobbs, R. 2021; Motley, et. al., 2020).

The implication of finding no significant relationship between media portrayals of crime scenes and fear of committing a crime among criminology students suggests that educators and policymakers should adopt a more nuanced approach to media literacy and education. While media portrayals may not directly heighten fear levels among students, their influence on perceptions and attitudes toward crime remains significant. (Shah, et al., 2020; Choi, et al., 2020). It is crucial for educators to incorporate critical media analysis into criminology curricula, helping students develop the skills to discern between sensationalized portrayals and realistic crime scenarios (Osiecki, K. M., & Mejia, A. 2022; Cowling, S. 2021). Policymakers should also consider these findings when designing crime prevention strategies and media regulations, aiming to promote accurate representations of crime while minimizing any potential negative impacts on public perceptions and fear levels. This approach can contribute to a more informed and balanced understanding of crime among future criminologists and the broader public (Wood, et. al., 2022; Wong, J. S., & Harraway, V. 2020; Lee, et. al., 2020).

Table 4 Significant Relationship the level of media portrayals of crime scene and the level of fear in committing a crime among the Criminology Students

Variables	r value	p value	Decision
<i>Level of Media Portrayals of Crime Scene & Level of Fear in Committing a Crime</i>	0.207	.567	Not Significant

Ho: There is no relationship between media portrayals of crime scene and level of fear in committing a crime among the respondents.

Note: Probability Value Scale: ** $p < 0.01$ (Highly Significant); * $p < 0.05$ (Significant); $p > 0.05$ (Not significant)

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were crafted by the researchers: The demographic profile underscores the importance of considering gender and academic year differences in understanding perceptions of media portrayals of crime scenes and fear of committing crime among criminology students. The higher participation of females and the diverse academic year representation enhance the study's generalizability and relevance. Gender perspectives and the varying academic experiences should be taken into account when interpreting the study's findings. The study's findings highlight the significant role of media portrayals in shaping criminology students' perceptions of crime and justice. The high impact perceived by students underscores the importance of integrating critical media literacy into criminology education. Educators should help students develop a more nuanced and informed understanding of media representations to mitigate potential biases and stereotypes. This will enable students to approach their future careers with a more balanced perspective and critical thinking skills. Moreover, recognizing the emotional and cognitive impacts of media portrayals can guide efforts to support students' mental health and well-being. Fear of committing a crime is prevalent among criminology students, indicating a need for educators and policymakers to address these perceptions effectively. This fear could impact students' educational experiences and future careers in the criminal justice system, influencing their approaches to crime prevention and law enforcement. Understanding these perceptions is crucial for developing strategies that support students' educational development and prepare them to navigate the complexities of the criminal justice field. The study concludes that media portrayals of crime scenes do not significantly contribute to the fear of committing a crime among criminology students. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that the relationship between media exposure to crime and fear of crime is complex and influenced by various individual and contextual factors. Educators and policymakers should consider these nuances when designing educational programs and policies related to media literacy and crime prevention strategies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are crafted by the researchers: Based on the findings, it is recommended to further explore how gender influences perceptions of media portrayals and fear of crime. Additionally, interventions and educational programs should be tailored to address the needs of students at different academic levels, ensuring a more inclusive approach to criminology education. Policymakers and educators should also consider these demographic factors when designing curricula and media literacy programs to promote a balanced understanding of crime and safety among criminology students. It is recommended that Misamis University and similar institutions integrate media literacy modules into their criminology curriculum. These modules should focus on analyzing and critiquing media portrayals of crime scenes, helping students develop a more critical approach to understanding crime and justice. Additionally, educators should facilitate discussions on the ethical and social implications of media representations to foster a more responsible consumption of media among students. Furthermore, efforts should be made to support students' mental health and resilience by providing resources and support systems to help them cope with potentially distressing media content. By implementing these recommendations, Misamis University can better prepare criminology students for their future roles in the criminal justice system with a balanced and informed perspective. The Misamis University and similar institutions implement fear management strategies within their criminology curriculum. These strategies should focus on educating students about the realities of crime and justice, aiming to alleviate unnecessary fears while promoting a balanced understanding. Additionally, policymakers should consider these perceptions when designing crime prevention initiatives, ensuring they address public concerns while enhancing trust in the justice system. By addressing fear in committing a crime through education and policy, stakeholders can work towards promoting safer and more supportive communities, ultimately contributing to more effective crime prevention and criminal justice practices. It is recommended to continue integrating critical media analysis into criminology education to help students develop a nuanced understanding of media portrayals of crime scenes. Educators should focus on teaching students to distinguish between sensationalized and realistic crime scenarios. Additionally, further research is recommended to explore other potential influences on fear of crime among students, such as personal experiences, community engagement, and media consumption habits. Policymakers should also consider these findings when formulating media regulations and crime prevention strategies to

ensure they are evidence-based and effective in promoting accurate perceptions of crime and safety among the public and future criminologists.

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