

Sociological study of the reasons for the youth tendency towards crime in cyberspace

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted for sociological examination of the reasons for the tendencies towards crime in cyberspace in youth and adolescents of Zahedan in 2015-2016. The present study was descriptive-survey in which a questionnaire was used to collect the opinions. The population of the youths and adolescents of Zahedan, who were using the Internet, was over 100,000, of whom 484 people were randomly selected using Morgan table. A researcher-developed questionnaire - whose validity was confirmed by the professors and authorities and reliability was obtained as 0.736 using Cronbach's alpha - was used for data collection. The study used descriptive and inferential statistics (T and Friedman tests) for data analysis. The results indicated that the characteristics of the cyberspace, individual characteristics and socio-cultural factors play a significant role in incidence of crime in a cyberspace. Among the factors examined in each hypothesis, the attractiveness of the virtual environment, computer knowledge, economic status, and unemployment, respectively, have significant roles in creating in cybercrime.

Keywords: Crime, sociological study, cyberspace

Introduction

Crime was the first phenomenon to emerge with the gathering of people and formation of society. Every crime has a cause affecting the individual and taking him to an incompatibility and abnormality. Delinquency usually burgeons from a set of crimes happening at a given time and place, so when they are investigated, all the economic, cultural, health, political, religious, and familial phenomena of a society are deeply studied.

Like the real space, cyberspace is subject to various elements of crime, and the components of criminal acts are very similar in these two spaces. The cyberspace is not a physical and tangible environment. This feature makes the cyberspace more

dangerous than the real environment. This is because, first, the protecting agent such as police does not exist with a tangible presence in this environment to have a deterrent effect, so the perpetrator feels free and committing the crime is facilitated in his mind ^[1]. Second, cybercrime victims do not face the criminals of hacking and cracking and there is no adjacency between the two ^[2]. Among the other features of cyberspace is the easy and fast access to this space i.e. the people can easily use the facilities of this space without restriction just through their PCs or internet cafes ^[3].

Cybercrime occurs in the cyberspace consisting of network of hosts. However, computer crimes occur in a wider space including instances outside networks, especially the Internet ^[4]. Thus, there is an absolute general and private relation between the two, so the scope of victims of computer crimes is wider than the scope of victims of cybercrimes ^[5].

Many reasons and factors are involved in the formation of cybercrime, including economic, cultural, political, psychological, and psychological problems such as depression, anger, jealousy, revenge, hatred, fun and hobbies, inferiority-complex, competition, and so on ^[6].

The features and characteristics of cyberspace are effective in the tendency of individuals towards committing cybercrime.

Access this article online

Website: www.japer.in

E-ISSN: 2249-3379

How to cite this article: Saeed Mohammadi Sadegh. Sociological study of the reasons for the youth tendency towards crime in cyberspace. *J Adv Pharm Edu Res* 2018;8(S2):166-170.

Source of Support: Nil, Conflict of Interest: None declared.

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Features such as the ease of access to the latest information, global scope, having a cyberspace, low risk of arrest, the different nature of cybercrime¹, the attractiveness of the Internet space and the freedom of information and communication and the specificity of the victims of cybercrimes, lack of need for close and physical contact with the victim, the dispersion of cyber victims, and the lack of detection of many crimes against individuals in the real world all can lead individuals to commit offensive deeds^[7].

As recognition of the factors affecting cyber victims plays an important role in preventing it, the paper examines the factors effective in youth and adolescents' being victims of cyberspace according to the ideas in the theory of routine lifestyle, which deals with the most important causes of cyber victimization.

Literature review

Presenting a precise and comprehensive definition of cybercrime seems problematic. Thus, different definitions have been provided in this regard, but despite all these differences, three main features of cybercrime should always be considered in definitions provided. These features include first, the complexity of technology (the inability to recognize the complex technical aspects of cybercrime due to the complexity of cyberspace), second the diversity of cybercrime (due to the development of cyberspace) and third the ability to make cybercrime mysterious.

Sadeghifar (2010) conducted a study entitled "Social factors affecting youth and adolescent boys' tendency towards delinquency and prevention strategies."^[8] The results showed a direct relationship between the degree of family problems and the tendency of adolescents and young people towards delinquency. Moreover, it was concluded that as youth, adolescents have more mismatch friends, and associate with them, they become more inclined towards delinquency. Aalizadeh (2007) explored the role of family and media in juvenile delinquency in a study entitled "Examining the factors affecting juvenile delinquency" and stated that three factors affect juvenile delinquency: family, school and society^[9]. In a study entitled "A glance at the delinquency of youth and adolescents," Karimian (2009) concluded that the emergence of delinquency among today's adolescents and youth is the family in the first place^[10]. In a study entitled "An analysis of the conditions of the natural and social environment of Kurdistan regarding delinquency," Saleh Validi (2006) stated that the study of crime has been inadequate regardless of the effect of natural and geographical factors. Moreover, in terms of the

effect of natural environment and geography on crime, the effect of climate is more prominent than other aspects.

In studying Chicago's crime-prone areas, Shaw saw that the correlation between the juvenile delinquents and the poor financial status of the family was 74%. The research revealed a close relationship between crime and economic conditions. After the statistical study of ten European countries, Hoir, a contemporary psychologist and psychiatric practitioner, claimed that 88% of the children committing crimes are from disrupted families. With his study, this scientist showed that 80% to 90% of deviant or offender children are from the families in a state of turmoil and disorganized.

Research questions

- 1) What are the social and sociological causes of youth crime in cyberspace? How much do the characteristics of cyberspace contribute to crime in the cyberspace? How much do individual characteristics contribute to crime in the cyberspace? How much do socio-cultural factors contribute to the tendency towards crime in the cyberspace?
- 2) What features of the cyberspace play a role in creating cybercrimes? Which feature of individual characteristics plays a more significant role in cybercrime? Which one of the socio-cultural factors plays a more significant role in cybercrime?

Methodology

The present study was descriptive-survey. In descriptive method, the purpose objective, real, and regular description of the characteristics of a situation or subject, and the researcher reports what happens with no interference or mental inference and gets objective results from the situation. Survey study is a kind of social research that although uses a questionnaire, other techniques such as structured interviews and content analysis is used as well. The population of the study was youth and adolescents of Zahedan who use the Internet that is over 100,000 people. Krejci and Morgan (1976) sampling method was used for determining the sample size. According to the population size (100,000 people), the sample size (according to the Morgan table) was 484 people, but simple random sampling method was used in this study.

The data collection tool was a researcher-made questionnaire. As there were no standard questionnaires in this regard, while studying related papers and research, the researcher developed a questionnaire, which was used after the corrections, evaluation and approval of the supervisor. The questionnaire was a 5-option Likert scale with "very high, high, average, low and very low" options. The questionnaire has three variables: 1) Features of the cyberspace: Items 1 to 5, 2) Individual characteristics: items 5-13, and 3) Socio-cultural causes: items 13-19.

As the questionnaire used was researcher-developed, 19 questions were approved after determining the validity of the questionnaire based on the experiences of the relevant authorities and with the help of the supervisor in terms of face

¹ Some crimes are specific to cyberspace; for example, the virus attacks (love bug virus) appeared in Hong Kong in 2000 and spread through the Internet to the entire world. The virus destroyed files and stole passwords. Following that, the German newspaper *Abendblatt* stated that approximately 2000 digital images in the newspaper's archive have been destroyed due to the virus attack. In Belgium, ATMs broke down and did not give customers money. In France, e-mail services were disrupted, leading to the closure of business activities across Europe, and more than 70% of the efficiency of the computer systems operating in Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden declined significantly. The virus is estimated to affect more than 45 million computer users in 20 countries with about \$ 2 billion to \$ 10 billion damage (Goodman & Brenner Ibid p)

and content validity. For calculating the validity of the questionnaire, 30 questionnaires were distributed among the sample and after statistical software analysis, Cronbach's alpha was 0.736. As the alpha obtained is suitable with a significant value, the questionnaire was implementable and reliable. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analysis. In descriptive statistics, frequency tables, percentages, graphs, mean, mode and median, as well as dispersion indexes such as standard deviation, variance, and so on were used. In inferential tests, the test compatible with the data such as Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used.

Results

Table 1 shows the general information of the statistical indices of the variables of the study, including central tendency, dispersion and tendency indices.

Table 1: Statistical indicators related to the study of variables

Variables	Central tendency indices			Dispersion indices		
	Mode	Median	Mean	Change range	Variance	SD
The characteristics of the cyberspace	3	3.2	3.24	4	0.54	0.73
Personal characteristics	3	3	2.95	3.5	0.41	0.63
Socio-cultural causes	4	3.5	3.49	4	0.49	0.7

Table 2 shows the distribution of frequency of gender, education, age, and crime history.

Table 2: Frequency of distribution and percentage of statistical sample concerning gender, educational level, age, and crime history

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	221
	Male	229
Education	Diploma and sub-diploma	180
	Associate Degree	112
	Bachelor	135
	Master's degree and higher	23
Age	Less than 25 years old	247
	25-30	128
	30-35	47
	Older than 35	28
Crime history	Yes	135
	No	315

Using the univariate student t-test, a comparison was made between the mean of the characteristics of the cyberspace, individual characteristics and socio-cultural factors, and their average value that is 3. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of the characteristics of the cyberspace, individual characteristics and socio-cultural factors

	Frequency	Mean	SD	Mean standard error
The characteristics of the cyberspace	450	3.24	0.73	0.034
Personal characteristics	450	2.95	0.63	0.03

Socio-cultural causes	450	3.45	0.7	0.033
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As shown in Table 4, the two-sided significance value is zero. As testing hypothesis is related to the features of the cyberspace and socio-cultural factors playing a significant role in creating a crime in a cyberspace, one-sided examination should be conducted. This means that as the mean difference (0.24) and (0.49) are positive, we divide zero into a two-dimensional meaningful value, which is equal to zero. This value is less than 0.05, so one can state that the characteristics of the cyberspace and the socio-cultural factors play a significant role in creating crime in the cyberspace. This means the characteristics of the cyberspace lead to cybercrime.

Considering individual characteristics, two-sided significance value is 0.152. As testing the hypothesis concerns that individual characteristics play a significant role in the occurrence of cybercrime, one-sided examination should be conducted. As the mean difference value (-0.04) is negative, to obtain the one-sided significance value, we divide 0.152 into two and deduce it from one that equals 0.924. This value is greater than 0.05. Thus, one can claim that individual characteristics do not play a significant role in cybercrime. This means that individual characteristics insignificantly lead to cybercrime.

Table 4: Univariate t-test results

	T statistic	Degree of freedom	Two-sided significance value	Mean difference	95% confidence interval	
					Low bound	High bound
The characteristics of the cyberspace	7.17	449	0.00	0.24	0.18	0.31
Personal characteristics	-1.43	449	0.152	-0.04	-0.1	0.01
Socio-cultural factors	14.87	449	0.00	0.49	0.42	0.55

Using Friedman test and ranking between questions of the above variables, the results of Table 5 were obtained to answer the question of "which features - cyberspace, individual characteristics and socio-cultural factors - play a more significant role in creating cybercrime?"

Table 5: The results of ranking the cyberspace characteristics using Friedman test

	Mean of ranks	
Cyberspace	3.22	How much does the attractiveness of cyberspace cause crime motivation?
	3.10	How much does the ease of access to cyberspace cause crime motivation?
	2.74	How much does the intangibility of cyberspace cause crime motivation?
	2.96	How much does the infinity of cyberspace cause crime-motivation?
	2.99	How much does the sense of security in cyberspace cause crime-motivation?
Personal characteristics	4.57	How much does your curiosity contribute to your crime in the Internet and cyberspace?
	3.92	How much does your hatred feeling annoyed cause you to bother the person in the cyberspace?

	3.85	How much does your anger and violence make you commit cybercrime?
	3.86	How much do your beliefs and religion (insulting other's sanctities) make you commit cybercrime?
	5.08	How much is education effective in committing crime through cyberspace?
	5.35	How much does your computer information make you commit crime in cyberspace?
	4.92	How much is a person's age effective in committing crime in cyberspace?
	4.45	How much is a person's gender effective in committing cybercrime?
		How much does the cultural status of the community contribute to motivation of crime in cyberspace?
	3.22	
		How much does the cultural status of the family contribute to motivation of crime in cyberspace?
	3.47	
		How much do the friends and classmates contribute to your motivation of cybercrime
Socio-cultural factors	3.36	How much does the lack of laws contribute to motivation of crime in cyberspace?
	3.19	How much does unfamiliarity with crimes and their punishment contribute to motivation of crime in cyberspace?
	3.56	
	4.2	How much does the economic status and unemployment contribute to motivation of crime (robbery and fraud) in cyberspace?

As is seen, concerning the cyberspace, the average score of the first question (attractiveness of cyberspace) is higher than the other factors, and the average rank of the third question (the intangibility of the cyberspace) is lower than the other factors. Thus, the attractiveness of this environment has a greater role in creating crime in cyberspace. Additionally, concerning the personal characteristics, the average rank of the sixth question (computer information) is higher than the other factors, and the average score of the third question (anger and violence) is less than the others are. Thus, computer information plays a more significant role in creating cybercrime. Finally, concerning socio-cultural factors, the average of the rank of the sixth question (economic status and unemployment) is higher than the other factors, and the average rank of the fourth question (lack of laws) is less than the other factors. Hence, the economic status and unemployment play a greater role in creating crime in a cyberspace.

Conclusion

As an amazing phenomenon that within a short time of its emergence has created a revolution in human life, despite all the potentialities and complexities it has, like all other human achievements, cyberspace have had negative effects and consequences. Thus, the mentioned technology has provided the context for committing new crimes and many advances that were unprecedented, and now it is available to the perpetrators of crime, considering it as an opportunity to commit a criminal offense. The most preliminary action is to identify the causes of cybercrime to block the cybercrime trafficking routes by examining the mechanisms governing this space. Regarding this, special attention is paid to preventive non-punitive measures and the development of restorative justice instead of criminal justice and useless punishment.

Concerning the research sub-question, "Which features of the cyberspace have a more significant role in creation of cybercrime?" the results show that the characteristics of the cyberspace play a significant role in cybercrime. This means that the characteristics of cyberspace greatly contribute to cybercrime. Additionally, the average rank of the first question (attractiveness of the cyberspace) was higher than the others were, and the average rank of the third question (the intangibility of the cyberspace) was lower than the rest. Thus, the attractiveness of this environment has a greater role in creating cybercrime. The results of this question are in line with the result of the study by Karimian (2009) entitled "A glance at the delinquency of youth and adolescents," where he concluded that the emergence of delinquency among today's adolescents and youth is the family in the first place. Regarding this, he believes that by raising the public culture of the community, the necessary information in the formation and continuation of the family based on affection should be provided to the new generations. The study introduces the lack of proper education - which is the duty of educators to educate the society to provide adequate knowledge of the acceptance and acquisition of social norms - as another cause of crime. The government can play a critical role in all areas, such as economic independence of individuals and job creation, which is an important factor in crime prevention. Moreover, religious scholars play a significant role in strengthening the faith, enlightenment and cultivation of the soul, as a very important mental and psychological factor in the crime prevention.

Concerning the second sub-question of the study - "Which one of individual characteristics has a more significant role in cybercrime?" - the results showed that individual characteristics do not play a significant role in creating cybercrime i.e. individual characteristics insignificantly lead to cybercrime. Moreover, the average rank of the sixth question (computer information) is higher than the other factors, and the average score of the third question (anger and violence) is less than others. Thus, computer information plays a more significant role in creating cybercrime. The results of this question are consistent with the results of Sadeghfard (2010) entitled "Social factors affecting youth and adolescent boys' tendency towards delinquency and prevention strategies." The results showed a direct relationship between the degree of familial problems and the tendency of adolescents and young people towards delinquency. Moreover, it was concluded that as youth, adolescents have more mismatch friends, and associate with them, they become more inclined towards delinquency. In other words, with increase in religious adherence of the family, delinquency of individuals reduces.

Concerning the third sub-question - "Which one of the socio-cultural factors plays a more significant role in creating cybercrime" - the results showed that social and cultural factors play a significant role in creating cybercrime. This means that the socio-cultural factors significantly increase the crime rate in the cyberspace. Additionally, the average of the rank of the sixth question (economic status and unemployment) is higher

than the other factors, and the average rank of the fourth question (lack of laws) is less than the other factors. Hence, the economic status and unemployment play a greater role in creating crime in a cyberspace. The result of this question was consistent with the results of Aalizadeh (2007) entitled "Examining the factors affecting juvenile delinquency." The study stated that three factors affect juvenile delinquency: family, school and society.

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