

Impact of Personal and Family Income on unlawful homicides: A Comparison between Murderers and Non-criminals

Dr. Ranjay Kumar¹

Available online at: www.xournals.com

Received 20th September 2024 | Revised 26th September 2024 | Accepted 1st October 2024

Abstract:

Income is a prominent social determinant that influences human thoughts, behaviours, and actions, shaping the quality of personal and social life. Income ensures access to resources critical for maintaining well-being and contributes to the social and economic empowerment of an individual. The impact of income on violent crimes is a critical area of study in forensic psychology and criminology. This study explores the role of personal and family income in unlawful homicides. The research compares the personal and family income of 100 male subjects, 50 convicted murderers from Central Jail, Beur, Patna, Bihar and 50 non-criminals from various districts in Bihar. Participants, aged 20–60 years, were Hindu males with at least primary-level education, selected through purposive sampling. Data collection involved a self-prepared Personal Data Schedule (PDS), with analysis conducted using the t-test and Chi-square test. The results revealed significant differences in both personal and family income between the two groups. Convicted murderers and their family predominantly belonged to the lowest income category, potentially exacerbating stress, frustration, and poor decision-making linked to homicidal offenses. In contrast, non-criminals and their family were more likely to have higher income levels, which fostered better daily life management, stronger coping mechanisms, and reduced criminal tendencies. The findings underscore the interplay between personal and family income and violent crimes, emphasizing the need for holistic interventions to address income disparities, improve public health, and reduce crime.

Keywords: Income, Unlawful Homicides, Murderers, Non-Criminals

Authors:

1. Consultant Psychologist and Post Doctoral Researcher.

Introduction

Income is a fundamental factor that shapes the quality of life, influencing individuals' thoughts, behaviours, and actions. It serves as a cornerstone for accessing resources vital to physical and mental well-being and plays a pivotal role in enabling socio-economic empowerment. According to Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2021), income is the total earnings or financial resources available to an individual or household from employment, business, or other sources. Income inequalities, however, often lead to stress, frustration, and a lack of opportunities, which may influence individuals' involvement in criminal activities, particularly violent crimes like unlawful homicides (Agnew, 1992). Forensic psychology and criminology have long sought to understand the complex interplay between income levels and criminal behaviour, offering critical insights into preventive and corrective measures (Merton, 1938).

Personal and Family Income

Personal income, defined as an individual's total earnings from wages, investments, and other sources, serves as a vital indicator of well-being and access to resources. According to OECD (2021), personal income refers to the financial resources generated by an individual through employment or self-employment, whereas family income accounts for the combined financial resources of all members of a household. In other words, family income refers to the total monetary earnings and financial resources generated by all members of a household over a specified period. It includes income from various sources such as wages, salaries, business profits, rental income, investments, pensions, and government benefits. These financial variables often determine individuals' access to education, healthcare, and social mobility. Low-income levels have been associated with heightened stress and reduced decision-making capacity, potentially leading to criminal behaviours such as violent crimes (Sampson & Wilson, 1995).

Unlawful Homicides:

Unlawful homicide, commonly referred to as murder, is a heinous act influenced by various psychosocial and economic factors. According to (Blackstone 1765/1979), an unlawful homicide is the act of intentionally causing the death of another person without lawful justification, such as self-defence.

Murderers and non-criminals:

Murderers: According to (Blackstone 1765 & 2009), murderers are individuals legally convicted of unlawful homicide, which is defined as an intentional act that causes the death of another person without lawful justification. The act of murder is characterized by the intention to kill or cause grievous harm and the act of killing.

Non-Criminals: Non-criminals are individuals who comply with the law and have no history of participation in criminal activities. This category encompasses law-abiding citizens who have not been accused, arrested, or convicted of any crimes, thus maintaining a clean legal record (Sutherland, et al. 1978).

Literature Review

Economic theories, such as those proposed by Becker (1968), emphasize that the decision to commit a crime is rational, akin to any economic choice. According to Becker, individuals weigh the expected costs and benefits of legal versus illegal activities before deciding to engage in crime. The probability of conviction, severity of punishment, and other socio-economic variables are key determinants in this decision-making process. Individuals facing financial strain may experience frustration, alienation, and helplessness, leading to impulsive or aggressive actions.

Research has consistently shown that socioeconomic disparities significantly influence criminal behaviour. Agnew's General Strain Theory posits that economic strain leads to negative emotions like frustration and anger, which, when unaddressed, may manifest in criminal acts (Agnew, 1992). Similarly, Merton's Strain Theory highlights how limited access to socially accepted means of achieving success can drive individuals toward deviant behaviours (Merton, 1938). Low-income levels often correlate with reduced access to education and employment, key protective factors against criminal tendencies (Siegel, 2020).

Income and Violent Crime

Studies specifically examining the relationship between income and violent crimes highlight the direct and indirect impacts of poverty. A meta-analysis by Pratt and Cullen (2005) found that poverty and income inequality are among the strongest predictors of violent crime, including murder. Furthermore, Wolfgang's seminal work on homicide emphasized

that economic deprivation contributes to the development of violent tendencies (Wolfgang, 1958).

Personal Income and Criminal Behaviour

Personal income provides financial autonomy and the ability to meet basic needs, which reduces stress and frustration. According to a study by Sampson and Wilson (1995), individuals in low-income brackets often experience social isolation and reduced access to resources, which can escalate into aggressive behaviours. Conversely, higher personal income has been linked to better coping mechanisms, reduced stress, and a lower likelihood of engaging in criminal acts (Loeber & Farrington, 2000).

Family Income as a Protective Factor

Family income plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's opportunities and resilience. Families with stable financial conditions can provide better education, healthcare, and emotional support, reducing the risk of criminal behaviour. A longitudinal study by Fergusson et al. (2004) found that children from low-income families were more likely to exhibit delinquent behaviours and engage in violent crimes as adults. On the contrary, higher family income fosters a nurturing environment, enabling individuals to develop positive psychosocial skills and reducing their propensity for violence (Glueck & Glueck, 1950).

Comparative Studies: Murderers vs. Non-Criminals

Few studies have directly compared the income profiles of murderers and non-criminals. A study by Rogers and Pridemore (2013) found that convicted murderers were predominantly from low-income backgrounds, while non-criminals often belonged to middle or higher-income categories. This disparity highlights the role of economic stressors in exacerbating frustration and impaired decision-making, which are critical risk factors for violent crimes. Income disparities also influence mental health, which in turn affects criminal behaviour. Poor financial conditions often lead to chronic stress and mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, which are associated with impulsive and aggressive behaviours (Stevens et al., 2005). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) underscores that improving income equality can significantly enhance mental health outcomes and reduce crime rates.

Conceptual Frame Work

Research has consistently highlighted a connection between low income and crime; however, there is limited focus on how this relationship specifically impacts unlawful homicides. This study explores the influence of personal and family income on such crimes by comparing the income profiles of murderers and non-criminals. By examining how income disparities contribute to violent behaviour, the study addresses a critical gap, aiming to inform strategies for crime prevention and public health improvement.

Relevance of the Study

Understanding the role of income in unlawful homicides is essential for developing effective policies to reduce violent crimes. This research could guide initiatives aimed at addressing income inequality through quality education, skill development, and employment opportunities for disadvantaged populations, thereby contributing to public safety and social equity.

Statement of the Problem

Aim: To assess the impact of personal and family income on unlawful homicides, comparing murderers to non-criminals.

Objectives

1. To examine and compare the personal income of murderers and non-criminals.
2. To examine and compare the family income of murderers and non-criminals.

Methodology

Study Design: The study adopts a comparative research design, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse the relationship between age, personal and family income and unlawful homicides.

Study Sample and Location: A total of 100 male subjects, aged between 20 and 60 years, were selected for the study. The subjects were divided into two groups: 50 murderers from Central Jail, Beur, Patna, Bihar, and 50 non-criminals from various districts of Bihar. Both groups were matched in terms of age, religion, education, physical & mental health, and cooperativeness.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria: Selection of subjects in experimental and control group was based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. Subjects who fulfilled the following criteria were selected for study:

- **Experimental Group (Murderers):** Sanatan (Hindu), male, aged 20-60 years, convicted for murder (U/s 302 IPC), with at least primary-level education, in good physical health, and cooperative.
- **Control Group (Non-Criminals):** Sanatan (Hindu), healthy males, aged 20-60 years, with no history of criminal activity, mental illness, substance abuse and cooperative.

Research Tool: Data were collected using a semi-structured Personal Data Schedule (PDS), which recorded socio-demographic details including age and the personal and family income.

Procedure: The written approval obtained from the Inspector General of Police (Prison) of Bihar state to conduct the study on the murderers' population imprisoned in central jails of Bihar, India. Prior written consent was obtained from all participants. Relevant data were obtained from murderers and non-criminals using the Personal Data Schedule (PDS) and were modified into numeric scores for statistical analysis to examine the differences between the murderer and non-criminal groups. **Statistical Analysis:** The collected data from sample subjects were statistically analyse using the t-test for comparing means and Chi-square tests for categorical variables.

Results and Discussions

Age: Age provides an understanding about personal and social contexts. It brings maturity, which influences a person's psychological and physical thoughts and behaviours. To examine the impact of personal and family income, this study included only participants aged between 20 and 60 years. This age range represents a critical period during which individuals play a significant role in societal survival and expansion. However, it is also a period during which individuals may pose a threat to society and commit unlawful homicides and called a murderer.

Table 1: Comparison of Age between Non-Criminals and Murderers

Variable	Non-Criminals Group (N=50)	Murders Group (N=50)	t - Value	df	p
Age (Mean ± SD)	31.56 ± 6.65	37.60 ± 8.09	4.07 *	98	0.00

*(p<0.01)

NS=non-significant

Table 1 shows a statistically significant difference in the age variable between non-criminals and murderers. The mean age of non-criminals was 31.56 ± 6.65 , whereas the mean age of murderers was 37.60 ± 8.09 ($t = 4.07$, $p < 0.01$). The difference between the two mean age scores was 6.04 years. These results suggest that the murderer group is significantly older than the non-criminal group, indicating that age may play a role in the commission of serious offenses such as unlawful homicides.

Moreover, during case investigations, court trials, and periods of life imprisonment, murderers tend to exhibit greater age-related maturity compared to non-criminals. This finding aligns with previous research, which suggests that violent crimes are often committed by individuals in adulthood (Sampson & Laub, 2005). The higher age of murderers may reflect the maturity of offenders at the time of their crimes.

Personal Income and Unlawful Homicides

Personal income refers to the monthly earnings of an individual. To explore the association between income levels and unlawful homicides, participants were grouped into four income categories: incomeless, earning up to ₹5,000, earning ₹5,000–₹10,000, and earning above ₹10,000 per month.

Table 2: Comparison of Personal Income between Non-criminals and Murderers

Personal Income (monthly)	Non-Criminals Group (N=50)	Murderers Group (N=50)	χ^2 / t	df	p
Incomeless	-	9 (18%)	53.30*	3	0.00
Up to ₹5,000	5 (10%)	37 (74%)			
₹5,000–₹10,000	36 (72%)	3 (6%)			
Above ₹10,000	9 (18%)	1 (2%)			

Table 2 shows a statistically significant difference between non-criminals and murderers on the personal income variable (chi-square value: 53.30).

The results reveal stark differences between the two groups. Among murderers, 74% earned below ₹5,000 per month, compared to only 10% of non-criminals in this category. Additionally, 18% of murderers were completely incomeless before committing murder, whereas no non-criminals fell into this category. Conversely, 72% of non-criminals earned between ₹5,000 and ₹10,000, compared to just 6% of murderers. Furthermore, 18% of non-criminals earned above ₹10,000 per month, while only 2% of murderers belonged to this income bracket.

The chi-square value of 53.30 highlights a statistically significant difference between the income levels of the two groups. This suggests that financial insecurity and poverty are significant risk factors associated with violent crimes such as unlawful homicides. Social epidemiology studies, such as those by Bosworth (2018), indicate that low socio-economic status, including limited education and income, is associated with poor health outcomes, higher illness risks, and increased mortality. Low income is directly linked to a heightened sense of disenfranchisement and desperation, increasing the likelihood of resorting to violent crimes such as murder. Fleisher (1966) found that delinquency correlates positively with low income, as financial struggles raise the relative cost of engaging in legal activities while reducing the opportunity cost of incarceration. Moreover, poverty

is associated with poor mental health outcomes, which further contribute to criminal tendencies.

Family Income and Unlawful Homicides

Family income refers to the monthly earnings of all individuals in a family. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), Family income is defined as "the combined gross income of all members of a family living in the same household, inclusive of wages, investments, and other sources of earnings." To explore the association between family income levels and unlawful homicides, participants were grouped into three income categories: earning up to ₹5,000, earning ₹5,000–₹15,000, and earning above ₹15,000 per month.

Table 3: Comparison of Family Income between Non-criminals and Murderers

Family Income (monthly)	Non-Criminals Group (N=50)	Murderers Group (N=50)	χ^2 / t	df	p
Up to ₹5,000	-	25 (50%)	33.35*	2	0.00
₹5,000–₹15,000	33 (66%)	16 (32%)			
Above ₹15,000	17 (34%)	09 (18%)			

*p < 0.01

NS=non-significant

Table 3 shows a statistically significant difference between non-criminals and murderers regarding the family income variable (chi-square value: 33.35). The results reveal stark differences between the two groups. Among the families of murderers, 50% earned below ₹5,000 per month, whereas none of the families of non-criminals fell into this category. Conversely, 66% of non-criminals' families earned between ₹5,000 and ₹15,000, compared to just 32% of murderers' families. Furthermore, 34% of non-criminals' families earned above ₹15,000 per month, whereas only 18% of murderers' families were in this income bracket.

The chi-square value of 33.35 demonstrates a statistically significant difference between the family

income levels of the two groups. This suggests that financial insecurity and poverty are significant risk factors associated with violent crimes such as unlawful homicides.

These findings align with theories suggesting that economic hardship impairs mental health and social functioning, potentially contributing to violent tendencies. Grogger (1998) highlighted those low wages among young people in the 1970s and 1980s corresponded with increased crime rates. He noted that African Americans, who had lower wages on average than white individuals, exhibited higher crime rates. Additionally, crime rates were found to rise during youth and decline in adulthood, corresponding to wage patterns across age groups. Grogger's analysis of property crime concluded that wages substantially influence criminal tendencies.

Conclusion

The findings of the study indicate that murderers had a poorer background in terms of the personal and family income compared to non-criminal, which may contribute to their criminal behaviours. In conclusion, lower-level personal and family income is associated with a higher likelihood of engaging in unlawful homicides.

Suggestions and Recommendation

The study highlights the link between income and crime, emphasizing the need for interventions like poverty alleviation, education access, and employment opportunities to reduce economic strain and prevent criminal tendencies. Targeted mental health support for low-income populations can address psychosocial stressors contributing to violent crimes (Lindsey et al., 2009). Social support and economic empowerment initiatives are vital for reducing crime and promoting stability. Future research should include diverse samples, incorporating females and individuals from various regions, and employ longitudinal studies to examine the long-term impact of income on crime, providing deeper insights into effective preventive strategies.



References:

Agnew, R. (1992). Foundation for a general strain theory of crime and delinquency. *Criminology*, 30(1), 47-87.

Becker, Gary S. "Crime and Punishment: An Economic Approach." *Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 76, no. 2, Mar. 1968, pp. 169–217. <https://doi.org/10.1086/259394>.

Blackstone, W. (1765/1979). *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (with Modern Notes by Thomas M. Cooley). Chicago: Callaghan & Company.

Blackstone, William. *Commentaries on the Laws of England, Volume 1: A Facsimile of the First Edition of 1765-1769*. 1966. ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA58950676.

Bosworth, B. (2018). Increasing disparities in mortality by socioeconomic status. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 39, 237–251.

Fergusson, David M., et al. "Show Me the Child at Seven: The Consequences of Conduct Problems in Childhood for Psychosocial Functioning in Adulthood." *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, vol. 46, no. 8, Mar. 2005, pp. 837–49. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.2004.00387.x>.

Fleisher, B. M. (1966). The effect of income on delinquency. *The American Economic Review*, 56(1/2), 118–137.



References:

Glueck, Sheldon, and Eleanor T. Glueck. "Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency." *Journal of Education*, vol. 133, no. 9, Dec. 1950, pp. 252–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002205745013300903>.

Grogger, J. (1998). Market wages and youth crime. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 16(4), 756–791.

Lindsey, M., Korr, W., Broitman, M., Bone, L., Green, A., & Leaf, P. (2009). Helping disconnected youth by addressing the conditions that lead to mental health and psychosocial problems. *American Journal of Public Health*, 99(1), 1-7.

Loeber, Rolf, et al. "Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders: Risk Factors and Successful Interventions." *Behavioral Disorders*, vol. 25, no. 4, Aug. 2000, pp. 374–75. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019874290002500406>.

Merton, R. K. (1938). Social structure and anomie. *American Sociological Review*, 3(5), 672-682.

OECD. (2021). Income and poverty: Definition and data. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Pratt, Travis C., and Francis T. Cullen. "Assessing Macro-Level Predictors and Theories of Crime: A Meta-Analysis." *Crime and Justice*, vol. 32, Jan. 2005, pp. 373–450. <https://doi.org/10.1086/655357>.

Rogers, M. L., & Pridemore, W. A. (2013). Poverty, crime, and homicide rates: A cross-national test of competing hypotheses. *Criminology*, 51(2), 267-298.

Sampson, R. J., & Laub, J. H. (2005). A life-course view of the development of crime. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 602(1), 12–45.

Sampson, Robert J., and William Julius Wilson. "2. Toward A Theory of Race, Crime, and Urban Inequality." *Stanford University Press eBooks*, 1995, pp. 37–54. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503615557-004>.

Siegel, L. J. (2020). *Criminology: Theories, patterns, and typologies*. Cengage Learning.

Stevens, G., Mascarenhas, M., Mathers, C., & WHO. (2005). Global health risks: Mortality and burden of disease attributable to selected major risks. World Health Organization.

Sutherland, E. H., & Cressey, D. R. (1978). *Criminology* (10th ed.). New York: Lippincott.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *Income and Poverty in the United States: 2020*. Washington, D.C.

Wolfgang, Marvin E. "Patterns in Criminal Homicide." *University of Pennsylvania Press eBooks*, 1958, <https://doi.org/10.9783/9781512808728>.

World Health Organization (WHO). (2021). Reducing income disparities for improved public health.