**Introduction**

During the last three decades, crime has become a new field for investigation. This is because, over the same period, there has been an outstanding increase in criminal activities, as confirmed by several empirical studies (Buonanno, 2003). Crime is a violation of the law that threatens the well-being of individuals, families, and communities (Coyle & Fair, 2018)Crime is a universal issue that afflicts all societies to varying degrees (Kizilgol & Selim, 2017). It degrades the quality of life, limiting movement and access to employment and educational opportunities. Furthermore, it discourages asset accumulation and creates a risk-averse environment that inhibits entrepreneurial and economic activity (Dutta & Zakir, 2009). An increased crime rate makes a community economically less productive and physiologically insecure (Taylor, 1995).

Globally, no region is barren of crime and the fear it generates. The issue has become particularly critical in developing countries (Nabeela et al., 2015). Recent trends indicate that crime patterns are changing, offenders are becoming younger, and incidents of violent crime are increasing (Ainsworth & Peter, 2000). Additionally, societal perceptions of crime and its reporting have shifted significantly in response to the changing crime patterns in recent years.

The roots of violence and crime are complex and multifaceted. Declining income, limited job opportunities, and the resulting frustration among youth are significant contributing factors. for youth are important factors (Ainsworth and Peter, 2000). Notably, there is no single cause of crime: it results from multiple social, economic, cultural, and familial conditions (Ainsworth & Peter, 2000; Anwar, Arshed, & Anwar, 2017). Moreover, crime has a relationship with factors such as poverty, social exclusion, income inequality, inflation, migration, cultural characteristics, demographic factors, the level of urbanization, and other economic problems (Hamzah and Lau, 2013, & Chang and Wu, 2012).

While crime rates are rising globally, many serious crimes are more manifested in developing nations. These developing countries frequently face ordinary volume crimes alongside culturally sanctioned violence and crime such as domestic violence, sex trafficking and drug trafficking, and theft of natural resources including valuable minerals, endangered animals, fish stocks, and timber (Natarajan, 2016).

While crime manifests in various ways globally, its impact is particularly pronounced in developing nations like Ethiopia. Ethiopia is currently wrestling with several social, cultural, administrative, and economic challenges that contribute to rising crime rates. This country suffers from a lack of necessities such as food, health care, housing, and education (Andargachew, 2004; cited in Omod Opodhi Akway, 2019). This issue is especially exhibited in urban areas, where rapid migration from rural areas is in search of employment and better opportunity. The consequences of this urbanization include increased homelessness and crime in cities like Debre Tabor. Ethiopia has faced significant challenges in maintaining peace and security in recent years, exacerbated by political and socio-economic instability. This context has led to an alarming increase in crime rates, particularly in urban areas and districts.

Despite the seriousness of the crime in Ethiopia, it has received only scant attention from stakeholders, including government bodies, civil society, religious leaders, and academic researchers. In existing literature, few studies were conducted on crime, criminality, criminalization, and the cause of crime in the Ethiopian context (Nega and Berhanu, 2015). For instance, Nega & Berhanu Nigussie (2011) analyzed police data to assess criminality and victimization in the Oromia region. Still, comprehensive research on the causes and impacts of crime in Ethiopia remains scarce. Especially in Debre Tabor town, one of the south Gondar zone administrations, crime, and criminal activities are repeatedly reported compared to the other districts in the zone. Moreover, the zone administration seeks a compressive study of the cause for successful intervention (South Gondar Zone Security Office, 2023). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the major factors contributing to the increased crime rate and criminality in Debre Tabor, one of the south Gondar zone administrations, where crime and criminal activities are recurrently reported as compared to other districts in the zone.

Objective

To investigate the driving factors for increased crime rates in selected districts.

**Methods and design**

This study utilized an explanatory and descriptive cross-sectional design, allowing for the construction of ideas based on the participants' experiences and points of view (Bob Mathews & Ross, 2010). This approach facilitates the collection of data across multiple cases at a single point in time and uses various data collection methods, such as statistical records, in-depth surveys, and comparisons of different variables instantaneously (Nyman, 2004; Walliman, 2006; Mathews & Ross, 2010).

A concurrent mixed-methods approach was implemented, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis and collect data within a time (Creswell & Clark, 2007). The mixed-methods approach increases the reliability and validity of the collected data (Creswell, 2008). Quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire administered to respondents, including police officers, community members, and local militia members. In addition, qualitative methods were employed through interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) to seize participants’ emic perspectives. Twelve participants were involved in the key informant and in-depth interviews: three peace and security officers, three local militia members ("Minisha"), three kebele chairpersons, and three local community members. Data collection continued until saturation was reached.

Kebeles were classified into strata based on previous crime rate reports: high, medium, and low. Systematic random sampling was used to identify participants within these strata. Additionally, purposive sampling techniques were employed to select participants for interviews and FGDs.

Using a standard deviation of 0.5, a total of 396 participants were selected from the entire strata, calculated using the formula: n=N1+N(e2) n = \frac(Baban) {1 + N(e^2)} n=1+N(e2) N

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Semi-structured interviews and the FGD guide, alongside a standardized questionnaire, were exploited to collect qualitative and quantitative data, respectively. For quantitative data analysis, descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to describe and present the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics and to infer causal relationships between dependent and independent variables. Multiple regression techniques were used to examine the relationships between variables and to identify frequently reported crimes, using crime as the dependent variable and socio-demographic factors as independent variables.

**Ethical Considerations**

To get participants informed consent to take part in the study and that consent is freely volunteered the participants will get full information about the research objective. In addition, the participant will also know that he/she can withdraw at any time. Information presented to respondents will be explained; what will happen; what is being asked; that the respondents can agree or disagree to take part; and will be given in clear language at a level that the respondents can understand, and when it will be necessary visual aid will be used. Issues related to confidentiality and privacy will also be communicated. Furthermore, the researchers will not show any fashion, style, or other unnecessary things and act in front of the respondents rather the researchers will try to cover all the refreshment costs.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation**

**Demographic Analysis**

***Table 1***

Although more than half (56%) of the respondents were male, with women making up the remaining 44%, it is fair to say that the sample was inclusive enough to balance the gender formation of the respondents. Additionally, all of the respondents were 18 years old and above. The researchers also considered religious affiliation as another demographic variable. Of 396 respondents, 99% and 1% are Orthodox Christians and Muslims respectively. The other demographic variable the researcher looked into was the number of years the respondents had lived in the study area, which may affect whether they know the real situation about crime and its antecedent variables. Out of the 396 respondents, 74 (19%) had lived in the area for a year or less. The remaining 322 (81%) have lived in the area for at least a year.

**Validity and Reliability Test**

To check the face and content validity, items taken from previous empirical studies were validated (Chen, 2014), and questionnaires were submitted to researchers to evaluate them. Therefore, the researcher found that reliability was achieved since Cronbach’s alpha values ranged between 0.731 and 0.879.

***Table 2***

The researcher also tested the validation of the multiple regression model assumptions to investigate the effect of economic, administrative, sociocultural, and demographic factors, and family influence on crime rate:

Normality Test

Skewness and Kurtosis values give information about the distribution of scores for each variable. These statistics are displayed with their standard errors. *(n = 396)*

***Table 3***

Therefore, as shown above, the distribution of the data is normal. The coefficient of skewness data value is between—0.5 and 0.5, and the kurtosis value is not far from zero. The other way of testing is a graphical plot of the histogram. The frequency distribution in which the observed values are plotted against their frequency states a visual estimation of whether the distribution is bell-shaped. At the same time, it indicates the insight gap in the data and outliers (Das & Imon, 2016). The normal distribution curve on the histogram is normal.

***Graph 1***

**Linearity test**

One of the assumptions of the Ordinary List Square (OLS) estimation of multiple regression is that the dependent variable is a linear function of the independent variables (Niermann, 2007). As Figure shows, the relationship of independent variables with the dependent variable is linear.

***Graph 2***

Multicollinearity test

Multicollinearity is a high degree of correlation among several independent variables. The tolerance value for each independent value should be between 0 and 1, whereas the variance inflation factors (VIF) between the predictors should not be greater than 10 (Hair et al., 2015). (n = 376)

***Table 4***

As shown in the Table, all the variables have a tolerance value greater than 0.1 but less than 1, and the VIF is less than two. So, there is no problem of multicollinearity between independent variables.

**Fitness of the general model**

As revealed, R = 0.639 means an overall strong and positive relationship between the variables examined. The R-square was found to be 0.408 indicating that the independent variables (economic, administrative, socio-cultural, demographic factors, and family influence) explain 41% of the variation in the dependent variable, i.e., the crime rate in the zone.

***Table 5***

**Dependent Variable: MCRR**

The most important part of the model is the ANOVA, also known as the global F-test. Because R2 is not a test of statistical significance (it only measures explained variation in Y from the predictor X), it does not have a threshold. The global F-test, on the other hand, is a test statistic with an F–ratio after an F–distribution and a probability of significance. The F-ratio found in the ANOVA table measures the probability of a chance departure from a straight line. In the study, since the F = 9.397 with p-value = 0.000, reject the null hypothesis that all the coefficients are zero, i.e., accept that at least one of the coefficients is different from zero.

***Table 6***

***Table 7***

**Crime and Criminal type**

During focus group discussions and interviews, prevalent types of crime were identified. Violent crimes, such as homicide, are a significant concern in the area, often involving firearms or sharp objects. Both simple and heavy assaults are commonly reported, and the rape of women and girls represents a critical issue affecting the community (FGDs). Property crimes are also widespread, including the theft of livestock such as cows, oxen, goats, and sheep, as well as gun theft and kidnappings, which contribute to overall insecurity within the zone. Damage to vehicles on the road is also frequently noted as well.

**Causes of Crime and Criminal Behaviour**

The FGD and interviews revealed key motivations for the crimes committed. Excessive drinking is often linked to incidents of violence, while personal revenge drives many violent acts. Conflicts over arable and grazing land frequently lead to violent confrontations, and economic hardship and lack of education compel individuals to theft and kidnap. Additionally, cultural practices, such as gun-holding every time, and celebratory gunfire during events such as funeral and wedding ceremonies (mostly in rural areas) contribute to a culture of violence. These explained the complex interplay of cultural, social, political, and economic factors that drive criminal behavior.

**Socio-cultural factors**

Social and cultural variables shape its inclusive identity, influencing various characteristics, including crime rates. The researcher anticipated that socio-cultural factors would have a significant positive impact on criminal activities. Therefore, the quantitative analysis revealed that these factors are important determinants of the crime rate in the area, with a coefficient of 0.141 and a p-value of 0.017. Aligns with theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence from previous studies (e.g., Olson & DeSouza, 2017; Osayi, 2015).

In the qualitative study, one of the factors for the increments in crime is excessive drinking, expressly severe crimes committed drinking while armed, as one participant (a 55-year-old) noted,

*"Drinking while holding a gun is just as dangerous as drinking and driving,"* highlighting the risks of combining alcohol and firearms *(Interview 3).* The other 28-year-old participant explained that

*"Drinking often leads to group fights, sexuality crime, and theft" (Interview 8).*

In the FGDs, participants stated that

*‘’The culture of gun-holding aggravates criminal behavior, especially when individuals are drunk, have previously encountered someone they argued with, or are emotionally unwise. The other cultural grievance for crime and criminal behavior is blood revenge. This culture of revenge leads to violence*” (FGDs).

The reason identified for gun-holding culture is the perception of safety. Gun owners expressed a reluctant dependence on firearms for protection, fearing theft if left unattended at homes. They remarked,

*"People do not want to carry guns, but they have no choice; because they believe, it is their only guarantee protecting from unexpected attacks, avenge, and theft" (FGDs & Interviews).*

**Economic Factors**

The other determinate factor is economic issues. Economic factors were found to be insignificant determinants of the crime rate. Resource curse theory states that, when a certain area is endowed with an abundance of a given resource and coupled with mismanagement and maladministration, people from that area abuse the gift and misuse the resource. This leads to increased criminal activity in the area. This was illustrated in Fogera and the fertile part of Libo Kemkem districts. The direction of this hypothesis was supported (with a beta coefficient of -0.023), and at 5% with a p-value of 0.4845. The finding is consistent with prior studies (e.g., Widyastaman and Hartono, 2021).

During the qualitative investigations, participants revealed that challenges such as inflation and unemployment (aggravated by the current conflict in the Amhara region) contributed hugely to crime, particularly among youth. For instance, a lack of electricity has increased idleness (out of work) and, consequently, higher crime rates in areas like Menguzer kebele in Fogera district. Barbers and other services have been shut down because of a lack of electricity facilities. Youths are now setting up without jobs, which has increased the rate of crime in the kebele. Many youths feel hopeless due to unemployment, leading them to crime(FGDs).

**Administrative and political factors**

The researchers hypothesize that administrative factors have a significant positive impact on crime. In line with this, the quantitative analysis revealed that administrative factors significantly determine crime in the area, with a coefficient of 0.103 and a p-value of 0.0449, consistent with previous research findings. This means that, with a unit change in the administrative factors, the crime rate changes by 0.159.

On the other hand, in the qualitative study, participants stated that administrative factors such as corruption, infrastructural facility challenges, and legal issues highly determine the crime rate and criminal behavior.

One of the participants in the interview explained underreport crime:

*"We do not report crimes because we think the police would not help us and arrive timely. In addition, if the criminal is caught and found guilty; we frustrate the revenge after the criminal is released from imprisonment " (interview 11).*

During the interviews and FGD, participants revealed that infrastructure issues such as lack of streetlights, and poor urban planning contribute to crime. A 36-year-old woman states:

*"Dark streets make it easy for criminals to operate" (Interview 9).*

**Determinants of Crime**

To test the hypotheses developed, we ran a multiple regression analysis. Administrative factors, socio-cultural factors, and demographic factors have a positive significant effect on the crime rate in the South Gondar Zone at a 5% significance level.

**Family Factors**

Family norms play an important role in influencing the behavior of their members. Initially, we hypothesized that family members have a positive and significant effect on the criminal activities (including criminal intent) of their peers. However, family influence was found to be an insignificant determinant of crime in the South Gondar Zone. Although this finding is inconsistent with prior studies (Stults & Hasbrouck, 2015), it may be that factors such as gun culture, heroism, and other related variables are more strongly influenced by social and cultural factors than by family affairs. Therefore, unlike cultural influences, the family exerts little control over these factors. However, during the interview and FGD explained that family institution has a big role in the existence of harmony, integration, and peaceful coexistence. According to Talcott Parson's "system theory," a family is a social system in which members are interrelated and interdependent on one another. Socializing norms, values, and morals is one of the most important issues for families. Some of the roles of the family mentioned in the FGD to minimize crime and criminal activities in their districts include strengthening social bonds, advising adolescents to abstain from criminal activities, and controlling the destructive behaviors of their children.

*"We are managing our children's behavior through advice and stress.*

*Do not bring the conflict into the family "said an FGD participant.*

*We want a pilgrim church that is free of frustration. We do not need any bloodshed. Those who ignore their family's guidance commit crimes." (FGD 1-5).*

**Influence of Demographic Variables on Crime**

Demographic factors such as sex, age, and education level significantly influence an individual’s likelihood of engagement in criminal activity. Our hypothesis postulated that these variables would positively and significantly affect crime rates in the South Gondar Zone, supported by the findings (coefficient = 0.164, p = 0.0007). This aligns with Engelen et al.'s (2016) and Khan et al. (2015) research, further validating the importance of demographic influences on crime. Based on the regression analysis, three of the five hypotheses developed from prior literature, i.e., H2, H3, and H5, were supported at a 5% significant level, whereas H1 and H4 were not supported at even a 10% level of significance. A Social control theory, proposed by Easterlin (1978) and Greenberg (1985), explains the changing crime rates by age. According to Sampson and Laub (1995), the impact of both formal and informal social controls varies with age. This hypothesis posits that adolescent social bonds are weakened, allowing an individual to break societal standards. When social bonds are weakened due to weak integration into social control agencies such as schools, families, and workplaces communication gaps, and criminal and deviant behavior emerge. Furthermore, peer groups encourage them to engage in deviant behavior that they would not have done if they were alone.

***Table 8***

**Discussion**

According to the findings of the study, the common types of crime in the study area arehomicide, simple and heavy assault, robbery, animal theft (cows, oxen, goats, sheep), kidnapping, gun theft, illegal gun smuggling, property damage (cars on the road), and gender-based violence (such as rape, abduct, and early marriage on women and girls). In committing these crimes, criminals mostly used common weapons like gunfire, knives, sticks, and other sharp materials. These criminal activities are mostly committed at night time as a group. Excessive use of alcohol (traditional distilled and beer), revenge for disputes over arable and grazing land, economic and administrative problems such as corruption and limited infrastructural facilities, and cultural practices involving gunfire during rituals are the most determinantal factors for crime and criminal behavior. The study found that criminal behavior is influenced by various socioeconomic and cultural aspects as well as family dynamics. This argument is supported by Anwar, Arshed, and Anwar (2017), that crime is the result of an interplay between sociocultural, economic, administrative, and demographic factors, as well as interactions with the environment and social groups. Socioeconomic status appears to be a critical determinant of criminal behavior. Fleisher (1963) treated crime from an economic perspective, such as inflation, unemployment, and poverty proposing that individuals may choose crime due to the perceived economic benefits. On the other hand, the study analysis as individuals age increases the likelihood of involvement in violent crime appears to decrease, supporting Kratcoski, (2017) argument that the proportion of violent crimes declines with age.

Furthermore, family pressures coupled with cultural orientation, such blood revenge, may also drive mostly male family members (or sometimes women) to seek retribution for the death of a relative, further influencing criminal behavior. The findings also highlight the role of peer pressure, particularly among youth, who often look up to their friends and view their actions as acceptable, especially when influenced by substance abuse such as alcohol. From a theoretical perspective, the findings strengthen the idea that crime cannot be understood from a single viewpoint. Instead, it must be examined from broader economic, environmental, social, and cultural perspectives. These findings suggest that addressing socio-economic factors, demographic influences, and situational factors such as improving infrastructure and regulating alcohol consumption in a multifaceted approach could be vital in mitigating crime rates in the South Gondar Zone.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research emphasizes the importance of considering socio-economic factors when examining criminal behavior. While there is no single root cause of crime, the findings suggest that socioeconomic conditions, family influence, administrative issues, and the age of offenders all play significant roles. Addressing these factors through comprehensive policies and interventions is crucial for reducing crime and promoting long-term social stability.

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