Religiosity and Crime:

A Cross-Sectional Study on *Tangail* Jail, Bangladesh

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Abstract

The main intent of the study is to explain the nature of relationship between an individual religiosity and criminality. As, an issue of an inquiry 'crime and religion' are widely prevailed in criminological literature, the researchers tried to make a causal relationship between religiosity and crime in their context. Survey method was used to collect data from the prisoners of Tangail Jail, Bangladesh by using simple random sampling. The research finding shows that most of the prison inmates were the first offender and they belong to a specific religious group from their childhood. The results perfectly indicate that there is no relationship between religiosity and crime. Most of the offenders have committed crime not by the influence of their religious beliefs but by the other factors such as age, gender, poverty and education.

Key words: *Religion; Crime; Religiosity; Recidivist.*

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the study is to examine the relationship between religiosity and crime. Religion is, in a general definition, a set of values. These values influenced individuals to behave in accordance with those religious rules. There are important correspondences between these religious rules and other social and legal rules. On the other hand, crime is a kind of social deviance or a variation from a social norm, which is proscribed by criminal law (Gunes, 2003:01). First of all, the complex, vague and qualitative nature of the concepts 'religiosity' demands a clear definition. Roof (1979) defines religiosity as "an individual's beliefs and behavior in relation to the super- natural and/or high-intensity values" (Roof, 1979: 18). Moreover, Lenski (1961) have identified different dimensions or ways of being religious. According to Roof, dimensions of religiosity vary from 1 to 13, depending on the research problem. In recent work on the family, two major dimensions, private and public, were studied (Cornwall, 1988). Private religiosity refers to individual practices that are not seen by others, such as personal prayer, scripture study, attempts to live by religious principles, and personal commitment to religious ideals. Public religiosity includes attending church, praying in public and participating in other group activities and rituals.

The relation between religiosity and criminality in social research is well and long established tradition (Baier & Wright, 2001).

Arguably, the most infamous case of the study of religiosity and crime is that of Hirschi and Stark (1969). In their landmark study, Hirschi and Stark (1969) found a negligible effect of religiosity (measured through church attendance) on delinquency. The results of the quest proved to widen the debate as to whether a relationship between religiosity and criminality existed, and furthermore what are the nature of such a relationship was (Baier and Wright, 2001). Similar findings were provided by Chitwood, Weiss, and Leukefeld (2008) in their study on religiosity and drug/alcohol use and abuse. They found that, religiosity was negatively correlated with drug/alcohol use and abuse. Johnson, et.al (2001) sought to examine the importance of religiosity in reducing and protecting a youth from delinquency and to further add to the theoretical debate on the religiosity/crime relationship by incorporating social bonding and social learning variables. The authors found that religiosity had a significant, direct, and consistent dampening effect on delinquency. Johnson and Morris (2008) utilized the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) to explain whether a juvenile's religiosity mediated increased levels of strain

(as measured by exposure to violence and school troubles) and reduced violent and property criminality.

In the context of Bangladesh, though several literatures are available about religiosity but there is no academic study on religiosity and crime. Eminent professor O'Connell (2011) studied about the historical development of religious study in South Asia. Besides, Saaduddin (2011) studied about sociological approaches to religion from Bangladesh perspectives. He mainly emphasized on the bewildering variety of religious beliefs in Bangladesh. He cited that, there is no relation between crime and religious practice. Moreover,

Islam (2011) studied on historical overview of religious pluralism in Bangladesh. There were no attempts to study crime and criminal behavior by making a causal relationship with religion and or religiosity. Now a days, religious fundamentalism has been studied as a reason of criminal activities or terrorism in Bangladesh. But in this research paper the authors focused on the ordinary criminals and their religious belief. Fundamentalists or terrorists are not main focus of the research. Even though there is increasing agreement that religion is an inhibitor of criminality rather than a contributor, the nature of a relationship between religiosity and criminality/crime is still controversial and unclear.

In the present study, to find out the relationship between religiosity and crime the researcher highlighted on the social control function of religion and its effects on crime. Although religion and religiosity and their relations with different subjects are considered by a lot of social scientists from different dimensions, there are very few scientific studies on the social control functions of religion. There are a lot of studies on the relationship between religiosity and crime in the Western World, especially in the United States and European countries (Ellis, 1985; 501) but in Bangladesh, there aren't any comprehensive sociological studies on this subject. The study will help to understand the effects of religiosity on criminal activities in Bangladesh.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Baier and Wright (2001) conducted a meta-analysis of 60 previous research studies examining religiosity and crime. The authors found that in general, religiosity has a significant, however modest,

inverse relationship with criminality over all studies, and that variance in this relationship between studies could partially be explained by four factors: sampling religious populations, violent versus non-violent crime as the dependent variable, sample size, and racial diversity of the

sample (Baier & Wright, 2001). Similar findings were provided by Chitwood, Weiss, and Leukefeld (2008) in their examination of religiosity and drug/alcohol use and abuse. In a meta-analysis of 105 studies examining relationships between alcohol/drug use and religiosity, Chitwood, et al. (2008) found that in the vast majority of studies, religiosity was negatively correlated with drug/alcohol use and abuse. The authors further assert that religiosity was found to be a protective factor against drug and alcohol abuse, regardless of how religiosity was measured in a given study.

Though both Chitwood et al. (2008) and Baier and Wright (2001) have provided informative meta-analyses suggesting an overall consensus among researchers about religiosity and crime relationship, but neither provide universal theoretical foundations for why the relationship exists and how the two (religiosity and criminality) interact.

In an attempt to examine the process in which an individuals religiosity reduces his/ her delinquency, Johnson et. al. (2001) incorporated variables from two theoretic explanations: social bonding (measured by beliefs) and social learning (measured by delinquent peer association). The authors found that individual string belief on religion negatively related to delinquent peer association and it reduced delinquency.

The relationship between religiosity and crime also has been scrutinized through the paradigm of general strain theory (GST). This theoretical explanation posits that an individual's religiosity can be relied upon to cope with various stressors and strain in one's life, and as such religiosity will serve as an inhibitor to criminal behaviors. Johnson and Morris (2008) found that, as expected, increased levels of strain were highly informative to increased levels of criminal behavior among the sample. However, the results of Johnson and Morris' (2008) research clearly show that religiosity was unable to reduce or eliminate criminal behavior in response to a juvenile's strain, leading the authors to question whether religiosity and other strain conditioning variables are at all informative to understanding strain coping strategies. Though Johnson and Morris (2008) were unable to find any direct dampening effect of religiosity on criminality, their findings are not universal.

From the data of National Survey of Black Americans, Jang and Johnson (2005) probed the relationships between gender, religiosity, strain, and criminality. The authors discovered that females were far more likely to be religious than men and that their religiosity was a vital tool in

their reactions to strain and reduced their likelihood of responding to strain in criminal ways. The authors explain that the increased level of religiosity found among females in the sample altered their strain response by increasing their exposure to other religious individuals, who were in turn able to assist them through their stressful times. Furthermore, the authors argue that being female and religiosity both increase the likelihood of internalizing strain and reducing the likelihood of responding to strain in aggressive/antisocial ways.

On the other hand, there is a growing body of evidence that religious activity and religiosity tend to decrease the likelihood of adolescent drug use (Bahr et. al, 1998). In a longitudinal study over a 3-year period, Jessor (1976) observed that nonusers had high religiosity and drug users tended to have low religiosity. Kendel (1980) observed that involvement in a religious organization had a negative association with alcohol and marijuana use. Burkett (1980) found that anti-drinking beliefs learned from religious groups tended to deter drinking among adolescents. A number of other researchers have reported an inverse relationship between religiosity and adolescent drug use (Bahr and Hawks, 1995).

The theoretical debate surrounding religiosity and criminality rages on. At this juncture in religiosity/criminality research, the only clear and universal agreement appears to be that no one theory has yet explained how an individual's religiosity interacts with criminality.

There are many empirical studies about the relationship between religiosity and crime. Lee Ellis examined the assertions about the relationship between religiosity and crime in the light of 56-research studies, paying special attention to how criminality and religiosity were operationalised in each study. These studies constitute three different groups. The first group of studies established the relationship between church attendance and crime rates. According to these studies, at least among church members frequent church attendees have lower crime rates than infrequent church attainders especially in victimless crimes. But these studies did not show a significant relationship between church attendance and criminality.

On the other hand, a group of studies about church membership indicate that it is positively related to criminality. There are eight relevant studies which shared a common methodology. They compared church membership for groups of prisoners with church membership of

populations from which the prisoners came. But this approach has been criticized and these studies are regarded as inconclusive because of their methodology (Ellis, 1985; 507).

The second group of studies examined the relationship between religiosity and crime on the basis of religious membership among the main western religions. Among the main western religions, membership in Judaism is associated with lower crime rates as compared to the Christian religious membership as a whole. Among Christians, Protestants have lower crime rates than Catholics. The explanations of these differences are mainly related with the factor that; some religions require a set of Orthodox beliefs from their members than other religions. To the degree that religion's group solidarity, belief in divine sanctions, obedience to authority help to prevent crime involvement, as a result, crime rates are lower among the more orthodox religions than among the members of more liberal religions. Rhodes and Reiss (1970) analyzed data separately by race and found that 'non-religious` whites had higher crime rates than any of the Judeo-Christian groups, and nonreligious black had next to the highest rates. Whites in other religions had the second highest crime rate, and blacks in other religions (probably mainly Moslems) had lowest crime rates (Ellis, 1985; 510)

The third groups of studies using 'belief in afterlife with divine punishment', at least among persons who consider themselves members of an organized religion were found to have lower crime rates. But using 'belief in a personal god' as a measure of religiosity has produced inconsistent results. Consistent results were found when the belief in an afterlife and divine sanctions are used as a measure of religiosity (Ellis, 1985; 508).

Stephen J. Bahr by using a national sample over 17.000 high school seniors, examined the effect of the education level of parents, the employment status of the mother, the number of parents in household, religiosity, religious affiliation, gender and race on alcohol and marijuana use. The results showed that neither parental education nor the employment status of mother was related to the use of alcohol or marijuana. Although the differences were small, adolescents who lived with both parents were less likely to use marijuana than adolescents who lived in single- parent homes. But the level of religiosity had a significant association with alcohol and marijuana use among all religious denominations. Religious denomination, gender, and race were also related to drug use. This study shows that religiosity is a very important variable on alcohol and marijuana use. So, adolescents who were active religiously tented to use less alcohol and marijuana than those adolescents not involved in religious activities (Bahr, 1986; 53, 71).

Blackwell and Grasmick examine the issue of public support for random drug testing by focusing on the role of religion, specifically religious affiliation in shaping public opinion as a social control mechanism. Evidences from the data shows that conservative Protestants,

compared to liberal moderate Protestants, Catholics and those with no affiliation, indicate higher levels of support for random drug testing. This study and other similar studies (Grasmick, Bursik and Blackwell; 1993, Grasmick Cochran, Bursik and Kimpel; 1993) suggest that there is a need for further research exploring the role of religion in the development of drug policies and social control policies in general. At the same time the role of religion in shaping public sentiment and policy concerning crime cannot be overlooked (Blackwell and Grasmick, 1997; 135-147).

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the paper was formulated based on the question that, "how an individual's level of religiosity is responsible for being a criminal in her/himself?" Basically, it is an explanatory research in nature. To investigate the impact of an individual's religiosity on crime, the present study was used cross-sectional survey research methods. Survey research encompasses a considerable methodological and substantive range, hence accounting for the broad appeal and wide use of survey research. Survey research has well defined advantages. Firstly, surveys can be used to investigate problems in realistic settings. Secondly, it is cost effective and thirdly a large amount of data can be collected with relative ease from a variety of people. Researchers have felt that survey research produces reliable and useful information.

The data which were used in the paper were collected by personal interview. Tangail Jail was selected as the study area. As it was emphasized on the study of religiosity of a prison inmate, so Tangail jail is convenience for data collection because of its location and heterogeneity of the samples. All the inmates of the Tangail Jail were selected as population of the study. All the convicted prisoners list of Tangail Jail is sampling frame. A pilot survey was conducted to know the number of prison inmates and to test the reliability of the questionnaire. Total number of population was 1058. The sample size is 29. Sample size was determined by using Fisher's statistical formula of sampling. The formula is

$$n = Z^2 pq \, N / e^2(N-1) + Z^2 pq$$

Z= Standard variance at a given confidence level = 1.96 (Standard variance at 95% confidence level)

Table 1 *Covariates and Their Categories*

Covariates	Categories
Gender of the respondents	1= Male, 0= Female
Age of the respondents	1= More than 30, 0= Less than 30
Religion of the inmate	1= Islam, 0= Others
Marital status of the inmates	1= Married, 0= Others
Educational qualification	1= Literate, 0=Illiterate
Social class of the respondents	1=Upper to Medium, 0=Lower medium to Lower
Monthly income of the respondents	1= More than 10000, 0= Less than 10000
Monthly expenditure of the respondents	1= More than 7000, 0= Less than 7000
Religiosity of the inmate	1= More religiosity, 0= Less religiosity

According to frequency of the offences the criminals can be classified into two categories and those are first time offender and the recidivists. In Tangail Jail most of the offender was the first time offender. From Table 2 it is observed that out of 29 offenders 25 (86.2%) were first time offenders and 4 (13.8%) were the recidivist. Most of the offences were less serious in nature and it is 13.8% and rests of the amount of serious offences were 86.2%. In the issues of religiosity, 79.3% offenders were highly religious and 20.7% were less religious in nature. The socio-demographic data also presented in Table 2 and it shows that 86.2% of the inmates were male and others (13.8%) were female. 89.7% inmates belong to the age limit of 30 to above and 10.3% belong to the age limit of less than 30. As Bangladesh is a Muslim dominated country so most of the inmate's religion was Islam (86.2%) and 13.8% inmates belong to other religion. On the ground of marital status, 72.4% inmates were married and they remained married after imprisonment, and other 27.6% inmates were unmarried or widowed or divorced. Out of 29 prisoners 12 (41.4%) had no educational qualification and 17 (58.6%) were literate.

72.4% of the inmates belonged to lower/lower medium class and rest of the inmates (27.6%) belonged to upper/medium class into the social boundary. Before the time of commission of offence and imprisonment 41.4% prisoners earned 10,000/more than 10,000TK per month and

58.6% earned less than 10,000TK per month and among the whole inmates 10.3% inmate's monthly family expenditure was more than 7000TK and rest of them (89.7%) were less than 7000TK.

Table 2 *Distribution of Response Variable and Covariates*

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Nature of the offender		
Recidivist	4	13.8
First time	25	86.2
Grievousness of the offence		
More serious or serious	4	13.8
Less serious or petty	25	86.2
Gender of the respondents		
Male	25	86.2
Female	4	13.8
Age of the respondents		
More than 30	26	89.7
Less than 30	3	10.3
Religion of the inmate		
Islam	25	86.2
Others	4	13.8
Marital status of the inmates		
Married	21	72.4
Others	8	27.6
Educational qualification		
Literate	12	41.4
Illiterate	17	58.6

Social class of the respondents		
Upper to Medium	8	27.6
Lower medium to Lower	21	72.4
Religiosity of the inmate		
More religiosity	23	79.3
Less religiosity	6	20.7
Monthly income of the respondents		
More than 10000	12	41.4
Less than 10000	17	58.6
Monthly expenditure of the respondents		
More than 7000	3	10.3
Less than 7000	26	89.7

Bivariate Analysis

To examine and identify the nature of relationship between the response variables and covariates independently, bivariate analysis has been performed. The variables were categorized into two categories before statistical bivariate analysis and one group contains more frequency and other group contains less frequency. The results are summarized in the following tables.

Table 3 *Bivariate Association between Nature of the Offender and Covariates*

Covariates	Nature of the offender		Chi-Square
	Recidivist	**First time**	**(P-value)**
Gender of the respondents			
Male	4(16.00)	21(84.00)	0.742
Female	0(0.00)	4(100.00)	(0.533)
Age of the respondents			
More than 30	4(15.38)	22(84.62)	0.535
Less than 30	0(0.00)	3(100.00)	(0.629)
Religion of the inmate			
Islam	4(16.00)	21(84.00)	0.742

Others	0(0.00)	4(100.00)	(0.533)
Marital status of the inmates			
Married	4(19.05)	17(80.95)	1.768
Others	0(0.00)	8(100.00)	(0.252)
Educational qualification			
Literate	2(16.67)	10(83.33)	0.142
Illiterate	2(11.76)	15(88.24)	(0.556)
Social class of the respondents			
Upper to Medium	1(12.5)	7(87.5)	0.016
Lower medium to Lower	3(14.29)	18(85.71)	(0.700)
Monthly income of the respondents			
More than 10000	2(16.67)	10(83.33)	0.142
Less than 10000	2(11.76)	15(88.24)	(0.556)
Monthly expenditure of the respondents			
More than 7000	0(0.00)	3(100.00)	0.535
Less than 7000	4(15.38)	22(84.62)	(0.629)
Religiosity of the inmate			
More religiosity	4(17.39)	19(82.61)	1.210
Less religiosity	0(0.00)	6(100.00)	(0.373)

The table 3 depicts that the association between nature of the offender and covariates are highly insignificant. The analysis has been performed at 95% level of significance. Here, it is clear that nature of the offender and the religiosity of the inmate is not correlated. In this section

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82.61% respondents belong to high religiosity and they are the first-time offender and 4 of them (17.37%) were recidivist. The offenders, who are less religious in nature, are also the first-time

offender. In the section of demographic characteristics of the respondents it is asserted that there is less insignificance (p= 0.252) between marital status and nature of the offender. So, based on this result it can be assumed that there may have a negligible relation between marital status and nature of the offender. In married offenders, 80.95% of the offenders were first-time offenders. The other associations are highly insignificant.

Table 4 *Bivariate Association Between Grievousness of the Offence and Covariates*

Covariates	Grievousness of the offence		Chi-Square (P-value)
	More serious or serious	Less serious or petty	
Gender of the respondents			
Male	21(84.00)	4(16.00)	0.742
Female	4(100.00)	0(0.00)	(0.533)
Age of the respondents			
More than 30	22(84.62)	4(15.38)	0.535
Less than 30	3(100.00)	0(0.00)	(0.629)
Religion of the inmate			
Islam	21(84.00)	4(16.00)	0.742
Others	4(100.00)	0(0.00)	(0.533)
Marital status of the inmates			
Married	18(85.71)	3(14.29)	0.016
Others	7(87.5)	1(12.5)	(0.700)
Educational qualification			
Literate	10(83.33)	2(16.67)	0.142
Illiterate	15(88.24)	2(11.76)	(0.556)
Social class of the respondents			
Upper to Medium	6(75.00)	2(25.00)	1.167
Lower medium to Lower	19(90.48)	2(9.52)	(0.300)
Monthly income of the respondents			
More than 10000	10(83.33)	2(16.67)	0.142
Less than 10000	15(88.24)	2(11.76)	(0.556)
Monthly expenditure of the respondents			
More than 7000	3(100.00)	0(0.00)	0.535
Less than 7000	22(84.62)	4(15.38)	(0.629)

Religiosity of the inmate			
More religiosity	20(86.96)	3(13.04)	0.053
Less religiosity	5(83.33)	1(16.67)	(0.627)

The analysis has been performed at 95% level of significance. Table 4 asserted that all the associations are insignificant. The association between religiosity of the inmate and grievousness of the offence is highly insignificant (p= 0.627). So, it can be uttered that there is no causal relation between religiosity and grievousness of the offence. The relation between demographic characteristics and grievousness of the offence are also insignificant in nature. But, the relation between social class and grievousness of the offence is less insignificant (p=0.300) than the other demographic characters. There may have less relation between them.

Logistic Regression Analysis

The logistic regression method has been performed to identify the effect of most important and significant factors which are associated with response variables (nature of the offender, and grievousness of the offence). In this section of analysis the binary logistic regression method has been used. The results are presents in following tables:

Table 5 *Logistic Regression Estimates of Parameters of Nature of the*

Offender and Some Selected Covariates

Covariates	Estimated	Standard	Wald	P-value

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	Coefficient	Error		
Gender of the respondents	-20.172	40192.968	0.000	1.000
Age of the respondents	0.217	44089.646	0.000	1.000
Religion of the inmate	-20.265	15786.781	0.000	0.999
Marital status of the inmates	-20.638	11865.328	0.000	0.999
Educational qualification	-1.810	1.551	1.362	0.243
Social class of the respondents	-0.489	2.060	0.056	0.812
Monthly income of the respondents	-0.363	1.668	0.047	0.828
Monthly expenditure of the respondents	-20.942	20799.785	0.000	0.999
Religiosity of the inmate	-19.113	14074.390	0.000	0.999

The test was carried out at the 95% level of significance. The table 5 shows that all the relation between nature of the offender and all of the covariates are insignificant. The relation between religiosity and the response variable (nature of the offender) is highly insignificant (p=0.999). So, it can be asserted that religiosity doesn't influence the nature of the offender. Gender and age is absolutely insignificant in relation to nature of the offender (p=1.000) and religion, marital status, social class, monthly income and monthly expenditure in highly insignificant to the relation of response variable (p= 0.999, 0.999, 0.812, 0.828 and 0.999 respectively). But there is less insignificant relation between educational qualification and nature of the offender (p= 0.243). So, it can be assume that education influences the nature of the offender.

Table 6 *Logistic Regression Estimates of Parameters of Grievousness of*

the Offence and Some Selected Covariates

Covariates	Estimated	Standard	Wald	P-value

	Coefficient	Error		
Gender of the respondents	19.647	40192.980	0.000	1.000
Age of the respondents	0.134	45426.727	0.000	1.000
Religion of the inmate	19.354	18370.259	0.000	0.999
Marital status of the inmates	1.162	1.794	0.419	0.517
Educational qualification	0.836	1.508	0.307	0.579
Social class of the respondents	1.873	1.727	1.176	0.278
Monthly income of the respondents	0.883	1.544	0.327	0.567
Monthly expenditure of the respondents	20.902	22859.381	0.000	0.999
Religiosity of the inmate	0.169	1.603	0.011	0.916

The table 6 reveals the insignificant relations between the response variable (grievousness of the offence) and the covariates. Here, all of the relations are insignificant. This test was also performed at 95% level of significance. The calculated value denied the relation between religiosity and the dependent variable. The value (p=0.916) asserted that religiosity and grievousness of the offence is strongly not associated to each other. So, it can be uttered that religiosity doesn't promote grievousness of the offence. Gender and age is absolutely insignificant (p= 1.000) in relation to the dependent variable. The relation of religion and monthly expenditure is highly insignificant (p=0.999) to grievousness of the offence. Marital status, educational qualification and monthly income is moderately insignificant (p=0.517, 0.579 and 0.567 respectively) to the relation of response variable. The above mentioned covariates have no relation to the dependent variable. But, the relation is less insignificance (p= 0.278) between grievousness of the offence and the covariate- social class.

CONCLUSION

This study mainly tried to explain the link between religiosity and the nature of offences along with socio-demographic characteristics of convicted prisoners at Tangail Jail. According to socio-demographic characteristics of the convicted prisoners, most of them were male (86.2%), medium aged (89.7%) on 30 years scale, believed in islam (86.2%), lived in urban area, married (72.4%), literate (58.6%) and belongs to lower/lower medium class (72.4%). Most of the respondents (82.61%) belong to high religiosity and they are the first time offender and four of

them were recidivist. They were situational offender rather than occupational or habitual. Generally sociologist tried to establish the negative relations between religious belief and their offences. All the inmates were religious. But here it cannot be concluded that, religiosity promotes crime. The result explains that, there is no relation between religiosity and crime. Though it is common and prevailing knowledge in national and international academic arena that religion promotes extremist ideology and terrorist activities in third world, but present study revealed that there is no relations between religiosity and crime particularly in ordinary crime. Most of the offenders are committed crime not by the influence of their religious beliefs but by the others factors such as age, gender, poverty and education. To understand the nature of relations between religiosity and crime in a comprehensive way, more research is needed under social sciences in future, which may open the door of knowledge on this matter.

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