Nature of Crime and Challenges of Policing in Haor Areas of Bangladesh: A Study in Kishoreganj and Netrokona Districts

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A B S T R A C T

Green criminology is a multidisciplinary field that seeks to explain the relationship between crime and geography. Bangladeshi criminologists and crime preventionists are increasingly conscious of crime-location relationships. This study aims to explore with a new eye the lifestyle of the people of haor areas to find out the root causes of crimes and the challenges of policing in haors areas as well. This study is conducted based on the qualitative approach. The study employed an in-depth interview strategy and focus group discussions (FGDs) to gather information. The findings of the study reveal that the main causes for crime in hoar areas include economic insolvency, lack of education, detached communication system, lack of steady employment, lack of adequate land survey, and pedigree contention within families. The result also shows that the police of hoar areas face difficulties in performing their duties due to poor communication, lack of manpower, political influence, inadequate logistics, and modern weapons. It is essential to study this topic to identify the relationship between geography and crime, which will help to control the crime rate in hoar areas through an effective and modern policing system.

INTRODUCTION

Crime is a form of social subjugation that is detrimental to the well-being of the general population (Biswas & Basak, 2019). Crime is a significant issue in numerous developing nations (Khatun & Islam, 2018; Sharif & Uddin, 2021). According to the world economic system, Bangladesh is now an emerging and economically developing country. So, it cannot be out of this concern. However anecdotal evidence and selected information from crime victimization surveys suggest that crime is higher in developing countries than in developed countries and that there is a regionally big difference (Grote & Neubacher, 2016). Since its inception, Bangladesh has been grappling with the multifaceted issues of crime, criminality, and corruption (Islam, 2022; Hasan & Khatun, 2020).

Catastrophe sociologists claim that burglary rates rise after a disaster in areas with poor socioeconomic conditions before the accident and without legal and informal guardianship. Finally, it argues that societal disorganization, routine activity, and general strain theories help explain disaster burglary and offer prevention strategies (Frailing & Harper, 2017).

Natural disasters are increasingly prevalent in contemporary society. Several studies found that natural disasters especially floods lead to the rise violent of environmental laws (Sholihah et al., 2020). There is a considerable correlation between property crime and natural disasters like floods. An investigation that was carried out in Australia found that floods lead to an increase in property crimes (Zahnow et al., 2017). Another study of a similar nature conducted in Nigeria also found that floods increase property crime (Shabu & Mbanengen, 2018). Additionally, natural disasters function as catalysts for acts of terrorism. Thus, a nation's government must act swiftly following a natural

disaster to lessen the adverse effects of the catastrophe (Fisher & Dugan, 2021).

Human trafficking and natural disasters are linked. It is considered that disasters positively and significantly affect human trafficking. Disasters negatively affect economic outcomes, providing a mechanism by which they indirectly affect trafficking (Boria & Anukriti, 2016; Bowersox, 2018; Mbakogu, 2021).

A study in Nepal indicates that natural disasters have a significant impact on violence against women (Thurston et al., 2021; Bradley et al., 2023). Worldwide, intimate partner violence (IPV) is an extremely serious public health concern during natural disasters (Medzhitova et al., 2023). Additionally, a study conducted in India demonstrates a correlation between intimate partner violence and disaster (Rao, 2020).

A report was conducted based on a review of academic literature and practitioners between May and August 2015 in nine disaster-affected countries (Bangladesh, Bosnia-Herzegovina, El Salvador, Haiti, Malawi, Myanmar, Namibia, Romania, and Samoa) to provide regional perspectives. The report shows that domestic and sexual violence (assault, sexual abuse, and exploitation) increases after catastrophes and that HIV/AIDS can exacerbate GBV. Disasters impoverish people, which can lead to maladaptive coping techniques like transactional sex (Ferris et al., 2015). At the beginning of the COVID-19 epidemic, policymakers and news reports cautioned that limits on individual mobility and commercial activity could lead to an increase in domestic violence (DV) (Kashif et al., 2020; Kunasagran et al., 2024; Miller et al., 2024; Rocha et al., 2024).

On the other hand, there is evidence in the literature that suggests that poverty and income inequality are intrinsically linked to criminal behavior. According to the rational choice theory, individuals who commit crimes are considered to be rational actors since the decisions they make to commit crimes provide them with the greatest possible marginal benefit (Dong et al., 2020; Jonathan et al., 2021; Quednau, 2021).

Bangladesh, beyond doubt is a land of rivers. Maximum regions of the country are beset with rivers as well as other water land. Bangladesh is comprised of natural ecosystems such as numerous species of forests, freshwater wetlands, and distinctive coastal and marine features. Certain protected areas, such as the Sundarbans, have been designated as international World Heritage sites. Additionally, the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the haors (wetland basins) in northeastern Bangladesh are significant habitats that are less well-known but nonetheless worth preserving. Enormous rivers have not only shaped the lifestyle and culture of this land but have also been involved with the greater economic system of a huge amount of the people of the country (Faroque & South, 2022).

Moreover, numerous studies have suggested that natural disasters and poverty have a major role in crime. However, some research showed that there is a relation between geographical locations and crime but to the best of the author's knowledge, this is the first study that has specifically focused on crime in hoar areas. This study intends to fill some of this gap by addressing two research objectives (a) To analyze the nature of crimes in hoar areas to find out the root causes of these crimes and (b) To identify the challenges of policing in haor areas in Bangladesh.

This study is also significant for several reasons. Historically the most remote areas like water land or haor areas have been above consideration in the criminological research. On the other hand, explanations of the relationship between crime and geographical location are one of the growing concerns in criminology. But this is a matter of great regret that there is no adequate academic research or studies in respect of riverine and other water land areas like haor areas and other water surrounding areas. That's why these areas have been marginal or remote as usual. Moreover, these areas are especially famous for another type of geographic character. Not only rivers but also some haors are here in some districts of the country which have enhanced the natural beauty and biodiversity of the country and also have a remarkable contribution to the greater national economy. The research has great socio-economic and policy value in the theoretical branches of knowledge as well as in the practical application. This study is fully problem-oriented research which is very much time demanding in the present age to control the crime rate in hoar areas through an effective and modern policing system.

METHODS
Study Design and Data Collection Process

This study employs a qualitative research methodology since it utilizes methods that generate a wide variety of thoughts and opinions from individuals on the topics at hand. Additionally, it aims to shed light on disparities in perspectives among different groups (Berg & Lune, 2017). The general people and police personnel are selected for collecting information for this study. For in-depth interviews, the police personnel have been selected by using purposively due to their availability in the police stations. The selected police stations are (a) Mohangong Police Station, Netrokona (b) Itna police station, Kishoreganj, and (c) Mithamoin police station, Kishoregong. The total number of police officers is 55. The distributions are as follows:

Constable	25
ASI	12
SI	15
Inspector	3
Total	55

Source: Field Data

The duration of each interview ranged from 20 to 25 minutes. Participants were encouraged to provide additional views and opinions through the use of probing questions. The interviews were taped in audio format and then transcribed verbatim before undergoing thematic analysis. To do FGD, general people with different professions have been selected accordingly. In the focus group discussion, the researcher played the role of facilitator to conduct the focus group discussions and has taken two assistants to code the information.

Study Area

Four Haor basin districts are Kishoreganj, Habiganj, Netrokona, and Sunamganj. Kishoreganj and Netrokona were chosen for this investigation. These locations are chosen for different reasons. Kishoreganj is a prominent haor-based district, and 7 upazilas are haor-based. Netrokona is notable for its haors and swamps, making it the country's lowest land area. More people live in Kishoreganj and Netrokona than in other haors. These research areas largely mirror the culture and crime of haor sections of the country.

Duration of the Research

Haor areas are not so connected with the mainstream communication of the country till now.

In some areas, it becomes difficult to communicate without some selected daytime. The anticipated duration of the investigation for data collection was from September to December of 2023.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Understanding Haor and Haor Areas

During the FGDs with local people, the participants were asked about their identity. In reply to the question of what is understood by Haor, a participant replied that "*chaca, haorboiltaamrabujihene mas paon jay, harabosordoirapanitaboirathaha*" (Haor is full of water, people go there to catch fish, and water is filled with all the year around). Other participants added this statement as Haor means wetland areas. Among the participants, 2 of them added that haor are ever-ending waters where people go and catch fish.

In reply to the question about social bonding, most of the participants replied that "*ekhana samajik bondoner mtatra onek besi, ekjon arekjoner bipoda apoda sobsomoy pase thaka*" (Here, the social bonding is very strong, and people come forward to each other during the well and woe).

A participant has added that people who reside near haor areas are very cordial, and the relationship bond is good enough, even though they think that people who reside near the haor areas have stronger bonding relationships than other areas.

Nature of Crime and Criminal Gang

From the FDGs we wanted to know about the nature of crime in the hoar areas. When participants asked about what crime is meant to them, one said "*Crime is an unlawful act*". Another participant strongly agreed on the point that any unlawful act is a crime and most of the crime here is based on organized crime. Which crime occurs most in haor areas when asked them some agreed to identify conflict related to land and fish catching. The causes behind it as they believe that most of the land stays underwater here, and when that water dries conflict starts based on land ownership. Another pattern of crime is linked with drugs where causes are as availability of drugs and most girls and boys are out of control. On the other hand, the in-depth interview with police personnel also pointed out that the similar nature of crimes such as related to land, fish, and drug dealing is very common in hoar areas. Besides they also added that

there is little existence of criminal gangs who are involved in mostly dacoity and crime occurs highest in April again rise in November and lowest in December. On the other hand, about criminal gangs' existence, the FGD participants opinioned, "No criminal gangs exist here, before people had no work to do that's why people commit theft, robbery, and murder for money, now here everyone has less or more money so why there is any need to be involved?"

However most of the respondents admit it that there was a sign of criminal gang earlier at length but due to the expansion of the communication system and policing activities, the prevalence of gang activities was reduced.

Causes of Crime

From the interview it reveals that most of the respondents think that crime occurred due to the lack of specific land boundary, The other causes that are identified by the respondents are economic insolvency, lack of education, detached communication system, lack of permanent employment, lack of proper land survey, and pedigree contention among families respectively. According to our FGD respondents, there are different reasons for seasonal variations of crime in the study areas. They said that one of the most notable causes of crime is disputes over cutting crops and fishing boundaries. One of the respondents admitted that crime increases if crops grow well. Another participant opinioned that past hostile relationships within families have a great impact here even murder has still been committed based on this issue. From the discussion, it also reveals that crime is linked up with time and season in this point most of the participants agreed that "*borsha ar shitkale oporadh besi hoy* (crime occurs mostly in the rainy season and wintertime)

Services of Police

Thinking about the police where majority of FGD participants said, "*police to jonogoner bondhu, sob somoy tader pase thakar kotha kintu sob somoy tader paoya Jayna*" (Police are the friend of the public they need to be with people when they are in problem but in reality, they are not available all the time). The service to the public said to the participants that they will fight against wrong and always support the truth; they will always be with us for help.

The police and public relationship is good and people want to help the police as participants opinioned. They also added that in the case of community policing, they are quite disappointed as their work is still stuck on meetings. They identify the causes behind it as a lack of knowledge of public related to community policing even though they believe police themselves are not very interested in improving this kind of policing model. But the police officers said that they are always ready to help the general people. Besides their regular duties such as crime prevention, patrolling, public order management, and VIP security they also perform Alternative dispute resolution (ADR) related activities.

Problems Related to Police Work

Police are the most visible agents of crime prevention. In Hoar areas of Bangladesh is remote in the sense of communication and other services. Interviewees have identified the causes behind police not working effectively within three points. Some said that "communication is a big factor as if crimes occur it takes hours to arrive police on crime spot, so how they will catch the criminal then?" One interviewee said that low police manpower is another problem; another added that political influence is another big issue to work efficiently. In the case of no coordination, police personnel face different challenges. one of the interviewees said, "*Noncooperation is the major challenge for us sometimes the politically influential person they influence over us in the field of dispute resolution*". Besides they also pointed out that in the hoar areas, there are extreme lack of medical facilities and a proper nutritious diet and the police officers sometimes find it difficult to to collect and arrange evidence as many general people of the hoar areas refuse to provide evidence to the police.

Crime Prevention

To prevent crime and better policing FGD and interview respondents have given some recommendations. In FGD most people are disappointed about the unavailability of police in emergency needs, they also acknowledge that remote communication, manpower problems, and even political influences are a big barrier. Lack of understanding and inactive work of community policing further create questions.

The possible way to prevent crime found in the interview is to build awareness among the public as

they lack knowledge about the punishment of crime, even what is right and wrong. Some participants agreed that the light of education and communication, establishing police outposts in distant areas of Haor can help to prevent future crimes and police need to provide the freedom and facilities necessary to prevent crime.

The main objective of this study is to examine the lifestyle of haor residents to determine the reasons for crimes and policing issues. It appears that fishing is one of the main causes of crime in hoar areas. A similar study indicated that fishing is a major cause of wetland crime. The research shows that small-scale fishermen engage in illegal fishing. This requires stunning equipment and boat transportation in rivers, lakes, and swamps. (Mispansyah et al., 2019).

Research conducted in Zambia also reported that over the past thirty years, the Kafue flats floodplain fishery on the Kafue River in Zambia has experienced growing exploitation. This is mostly due to an increase in the number of people settling in the area and seasonal tourists getting access to the fishery during the flood season (Musutu & Phiri, 2023) which supports the findings of our research.

The respondents of our findings have highlighted additional causes for crime in hoar areas including economic insolvency, lack of education, detached communication system, lack of steady employment, and pedigree contention within families. The findings of the study also revealed that lack of adequate land survey is another reason for conflict in hoar areas. We found a similar research paper that also claims that there is an association between land use and crime (Sadeek et al., 2019). A study of the same nature also found that lack of manpower, remote communication, inadequate logistics, and modern weapons are the challenges normally faced by police in wetland areas (Osman et al., 2023; Phethi & Gumbo, 2019; Marambanyika & Beckedahl, 2017; (Islam et al., 2017). A study carried out in Indonesia revealed that in regions with wetlands, there is a prevalence of clashing interests and active local politics (Harrison et al., 2020). Our research also reveals that the police are unable to enforce their decisions due to the impact of local politics. An investigation conducted by (Okechukwu et al., 2019; Schaffer, 2023) emphasizes the significance of community policing in the prevention of crime in river areas,

which aligns with our findings. Several members of the FDG expressed the significance of community policing in addressing crime in hoar regions, while the local residents are not entirely content with the effectiveness of community police efforts. There are also some studies that rarely relate crime and geography in Bangladesh (Khatun & Islam, 2018; Hitchcock, 2017; Khan & Talukder, 2021). Besides International studies as such in India, Indonesia, and the USA also found positive results in crime with geography (Phayal et al., 2024; Widyastaman & Hartono, 2023; Carter et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

With the increasing rate of population, the crime rate is also increasing in river-related areas. To combat the crime, factors behind crime must be explored. This study aims to explore with a new eye the lifestyle of the people of haor areas. The main purpose is to analyze the nature of crimes in those areas to find out the root causes of these crimes and the role of policing as well. The findings of the research show that the main causes of crime in hoars areas are illegal money gain, property, and fish-related disputes. The result also shows that lack of defined boundaries, education, economic insolvency, and lack of jobs as causes of seasonal crime. The basic duties of the police are administrative, legal, investigative, and operational. Challenges come when public expectations get high about police as prevention of crime and criminal, immediate response, and quick services. However, lack of manpower, remote communication, inadequate logistics, and modern weapons are the challenges normally faced by the police. To prevent crime and better policing, awareness among the public has become essential. The study found various recommendations that will improve the issue, including:

A post of police in native areas for immediate response.

1. Alternative systems to dispute conflict over the area as Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) or Restorative Justice.
2. Community police can be the best tool for public awareness.
3. Tourist police need to be more concerned about securing public safety.
4. Increase manpower and logistic support of police.

5. Using present manpower in a planned way to connect with the remote areas, innovative policing methods such as beat or hotspot policing can help in this case.
6. Involvement of technology to detect, analyze, and prevent crime based on geo-mapping.
7. Root level awareness and amendment related to environmental laws as in future our climate is in the threat that hopefully led to end up people conflict over.

So above all the discussion and analysis of the study, we can conclude that as haor areas as Netrokona and Kisorganj can differ from other areas such as hills or plain land, so the above recommendations can help to detect or prevent crime. This study come to an end where more emphasis needs to be put on both police and public education. Not only haor areas but also the spots that are more prone to disaster, or areas such as sea, and wetland is needed to put on the radar of environmental/green criminology. Those areas also can be good sources of future research where the newest dimension time yet to discover. The study has some limitations as it is conducted on a qualitative approach. However further study can include large quantitative samples or mixed method approach.

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