

Perceptions of Crime-Specific Recidivism Rates: A Comparative Analysis of U.S. Citizens and International Students

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Abstract: Recidivism, defined as the tendency of formerly incarcerated individuals to reoffend, remains a persistent challenge for the criminal justice system and carries important implications for public safety, resource allocation, and community stability. This study examines recidivism patterns across offense types and considers key factors linked to reoffending, including barriers to successful reintegration, mental health concerns, and prior criminal history. According to data from the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, property offenders exhibit the highest recidivism rates, with approximately 78% rearrested within five years, compared with 65% of violent offenders. To further explore perceptions of crime, a 2 x 2 factorial between-subjects design was used with a sample of 100 participants from a Midwestern university, including 50 international students and 50 U.S. citizens, with equal numbers of males and females in each group. Independent samples t-tests revealed statistically significant differences in fear of crime by both gender and nationality, while F-test results indicated significant differences in variance across groups. Overall, the findings suggest that gender has a more consistent influence on fear of crime than nationality, with greater variability observed among international participants. These results highlight the importance of comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration strategies that address the complex challenges faced by formerly incarcerated individuals. They also underscore the need for a deeper understanding of public perceptions of crime. By contributing to the study of recidivism and related factors, this research supports the development of more effective, evidence-based criminal justice policies aimed at promoting community safety.

Keywords: Recidivism, Crime, Fear of Crime, Public Perception, Criminal Justice, Comparative Analysis, Gender Differences, Risk Perception, Offender Reentry, Statistics Perception vs. Reality, Social Attitudes, Evidence-Based Policy

Introduction

Recidivism, defined as the return to criminal behavior following a prior conviction, remains a persistent challenge in the criminal justice system, affecting public safety, economic resources, and community stability. Rates of recidivism vary by offense type, with property offenders exhibiting the highest rearrest rates—approximately 78% within five years—compared to 65% for violent offenders, potentially due to longer sentences and older age at release (USA Facts Team, 2023; National Institute of Justice, 2023). Multiple factors influence reoffending, including barriers to social reintegration such as employment, family support, and adjustment to societal expectations, as well as mental health conditions,

substance use disorders, and prior criminal history (Duwe & Henry-Nickie, 2021; Zgoba et al., 2020). Understanding these interrelated individual and structural determinants is essential for developing evidence-based interventions, promoting successful reentry, and reducing recidivism, thereby enhancing both public welfare and community safety.

Literature Review

Statistics on Recidivism Rates

In the United States, recidivism remains a significant challenge for the criminal justice system. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, about 66% of individuals released from incarceration are rearrested within three years, and nearly 82% experience another arrest within ten years (Bureau of Justice Statistics, n.d.; USA Facts Team, 2023). These rates differ substantially across offense types, highlighting the need for detailed, disaggregated analyses to better understand patterns of reoffending and to inform the development of targeted interventions and policies.

Public Perception of Crime Rates

Public understanding of crime plays a critical role in shaping attitudes toward the criminal justice system and individuals affected by crime. However, a persistent disconnect exists between public perception and empirical evidence. For instance, survey data indicate that a substantial majority of respondents—approximately 78%—believe that crime rates are increasing, despite longitudinal data demonstrating overall declines in many categories of crime (Brenan, 2022; Gramlich, 2024). This discrepancy is often attributed, in part, to the nature of media coverage, which tends to emphasize sensational or violent incidents. Such reporting practices may amplify perceptions of risk and contribute to misinformed public beliefs about crime trends (Craver, 2023).

The Impact of Media

Media representations of crime play a significant role in shaping public perceptions regarding both its prevalence and severity. Repeated exposure to crime-related content has been shown to contribute to the overestimation of actual crime rates, thereby heightening fear and anxiety among the public. Such distortions in perception may also undermine confidence in institutions tasked with maintaining public safety (Myers, 2024). Moreover, the disproportionate emphasis on violent incidents within media reporting can further amplify fear of crime, even during periods characterized by declining rates of violent offenses (Craver, 2023; Gramlich, 2024).

Gender Differences in Fear of Crime

Gender-based differences in responses to crime have been consistently observed across diverse populations. Empirical research indicates that women generally report higher levels of fear of crime than men, a pattern that has important implications for behavior and decision-making in everyday contexts. These differences shape how individuals perceive and navigate their environments, often influencing routines, mobility, and engagement in public spaces. Notably, studies have found that international female students frequently express heightened concerns regarding personal safety, reflecting the intersection of gender and situational vulnerability within unfamiliar environments (Özaşçılar & Mawby, 2023; Xiong & Smyrnios, 2013).

Consequences of Fear of Crime

Fear of crime extends beyond individual psychological responses, shaping social behavior and community dynamics. Heightened risk perceptions can lead to social withdrawal and reduced community participation, weakening social capital (Xiong & Smyrniotis, 2013). At the community level, pervasive insecurity may deter investment, lower property values, and hinder economic development (Myers, 2024). Understanding the interplay between crime, recidivism, and public perception is essential for developing evidence-based reentry strategies that reduce recidivism, enhance public safety, and strengthen community resilience and social cohesion.

Empirical Questions

The insights and observations gathered from the study generated several research questions that guided further scholarly inquiry:

1. To what extent did U.S. citizens and international students exhibit fear of similar types of crime?
2. How did gender and nationality influence individuals' knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes toward crime?
3. Did examining recidivism rates by crime type contribute to more effective coping strategies for fear of crime?
4. How might an understanding of the relationship between crime types and recidivism inform the development of more effective rehabilitation and reintegration programs?

These questions underscore critical dimensions of crime perception and recidivism that merit further empirical exploration to elucidate their impact on individual behavior, cross-cultural understanding, and the development of effective rehabilitation and reintegration strategies. By comparing U.S. citizens and international students, the study seeks to clarify how demographic factors such as nationality and gender shape fear of crime and attitudes toward reoffending, ultimately informing evidence-based policy and community interventions.

Data Analysis

Participants/Demographic

The study sample comprised 100 participants from a Midwestern university, including 50 international students (25 male and 25 female) and 50 U.S. citizens (25 male and 25 female), ensuring a balanced representation across gender and residency status. The study materials comprised 100 consent forms, 100 corresponding questionnaires, and 100 folders used to securely store each participant's consent form and completed questionnaire.

Methodology

Research Design/Data Collection

This study utilized a 2×2 factorial, between-subjects, non-repeated mixed measures design. The independent variables were gender and country of origin, captured through demographic questions in the questionnaire. The dependent variables included participants' knowledge of recidivism and attitudes toward formerly incarcerated individuals. Knowledge was assessed via a brief test embedded within the survey, while attitudes were measured using the FOSO scale (Feeling, Opinion, Sensation, Outcomes), a six-point Likert-type scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree," with lower scores reflecting higher levels of fear or more negative perceptions.

Hypothesis testing examined whether significant differences existed between U.S. male and U.S. female participants in their perceptions of crime, as well as between U.S. female and international male participants. The analysis also explored differences between U.S. female and international female participants, and between international male and female participants, regarding fear of crime perceptions. In addition, broader analyses assessed gender-based differences across all male and all female participants, and nationality-based differences between all U.S. citizens and international students, providing a thorough evaluation of how demographic factors influence crime-related knowledge and attitudes.

Procedures

Participants were first provided with a consent form that clearly outlined the voluntary and confidential nature of the study. They were informed that participation was entirely optional and that they could withdraw at any point without any consequences. To preserve anonymity, signed consent forms were securely stored separately from the completed questionnaires.

After providing consent, participants completed one of two brief questionnaires, depending on their residency status: one designed for U.S. residents and another for international participants. Both questionnaires included items assessing fear of crime within the United States and identifying the specific crimes participants perceived as most threatening. International participants also responded to additional items regarding their perceptions of crime in both the U.S. and their country of origin, as well as their knowledge of crime and recidivism across these contexts. All participants provided responses measuring their understanding of recidivism, attitudes toward working with formerly incarcerated individuals, and perspectives on the reintegration of ex-offenders into society. All responses were subsequently analyzed to examine patterns and differences across demographic groups, offering insights into variations in crime-related perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes.

Results

Data Analysis

Participants' perceptions of crime were measured using the FOSO scale, a six-point Likert-type instrument ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*. Responses were scored from 1 (*Strongly Agree*) to 6 (*Strongly Disagree*), with lower scores indicating higher levels of fear of crime and higher scores reflecting lower levels of fear. Thus, participants selecting lower values demonstrated greater fear of crime, whereas those selecting higher values exhibited less fear. These scores were subsequently analyzed to examine variations in crime perceptions across demographic groups.

Descriptive Statistics

Analysis of fear of crime perceptions among U.S. and international participants revealed notable differences in both mean scores and variances across demographic groups. The mean fear perception scores were highest for U.S. males (C1 = 54.12), followed by international males (C3 = 51.72), U.S. females (C2 = 47.32), and international females (C4 = 46.24).

Independent samples t-tests indicated statistically significant differences in fear of crime perceptions across several group comparisons: U.S. males versus U.S. females ($t = 1.67, p = 0.004$), U.S. males versus international females ($t = 2.45, p = 0.008$), U.S. females versus international males ($t = 1.74, p = 0.004$), international males versus international females ($t = 1.67, p = 0.004$), and all male versus all female participants ($t = 3.02, p = 0.0015$). These results suggest that both gender and nationality are significantly associated with variations in perceived fear of crime.

F-tests examining differences in variance further highlighted significant heterogeneity across groups: U.S. males versus U.S. females ($F = 3.14, p = 0.003$), U.S. females versus international males ($F = 0.29, p = 0.001$), U.S. females versus international females ($F = 0.24, p = 0.0005$), and U.S. citizens versus international students ($F = 0.61, p = 0.04$). Collectively, these findings indicate that while both gender and nationality influence fear of crime perceptions, gender appears to exert a more consistent and robust effect across participant groups.

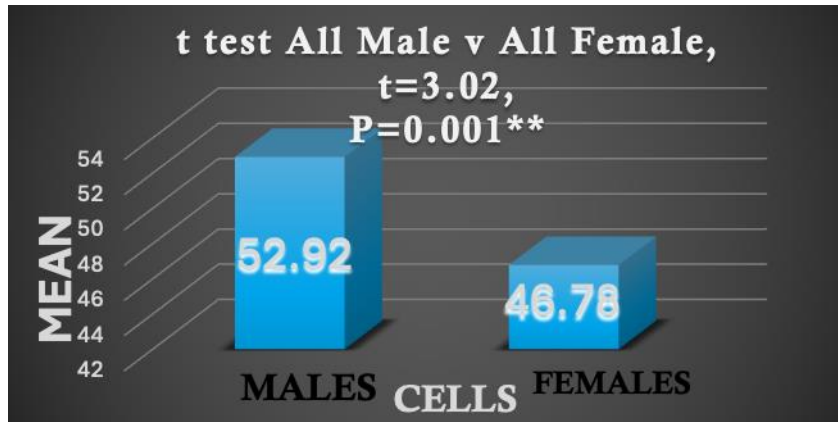


Figure 1. Gender Effect

NOTE: This figure illustrates the most pronounced gender effect on fear of crime perceptions across both nationality groups, with males reporting consistently lower levels of fear. This difference is statistically significant ($t = 3.02, p = 0.0015$).

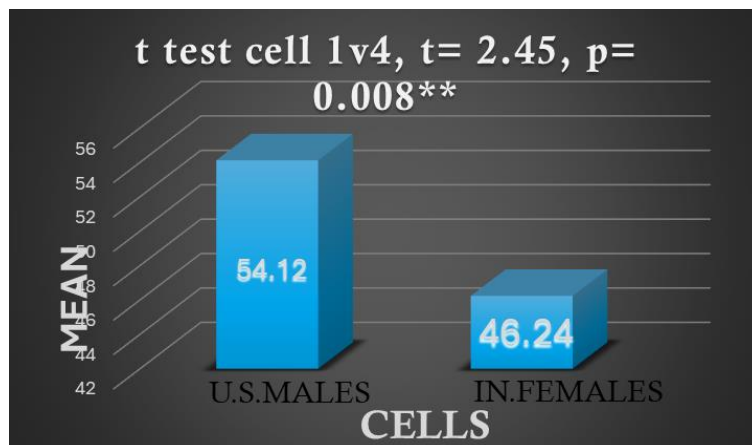


Figure 2. Fear of Crime

NOTE: This figure depicts the largest observed mean difference in fear of crime scores, with U.S. males ($M = 54.12$) reporting higher levels than international females ($M = 46.24$), a difference that is statistically significant ($t = 2.45, p = 0.008$).

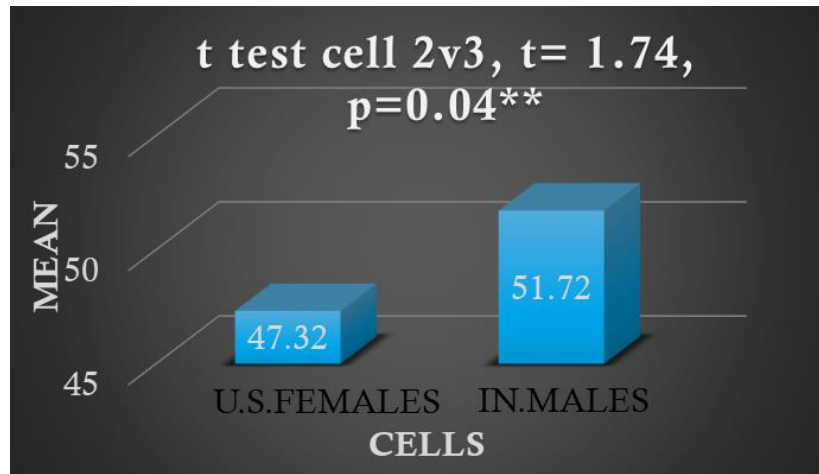


Figure 3. Nationality-Gender Interactions

NOTE: This figure illustrates a significant interaction between nationality and gender ($t = 1.74$, $p = 0.004$), specifically highlighting differences between U.S. female and international male participants.

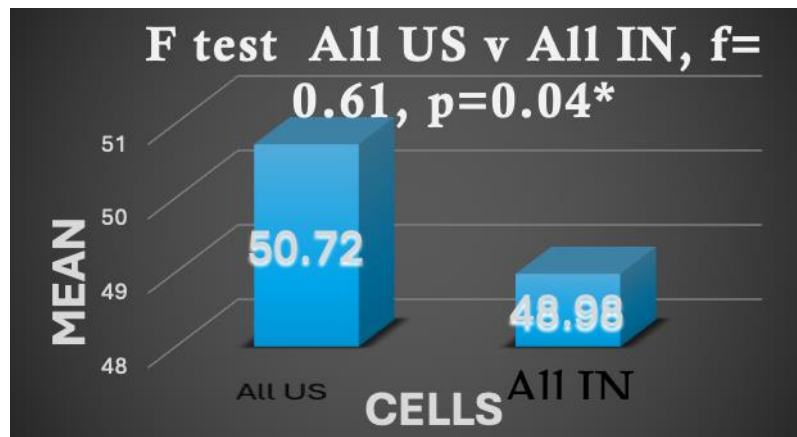


Figure 4. Fear of Crime Perception

NOTE: This figure depicts notable differences in overall perceptions of fear of crime between U.S. citizens ($M = 50.72$) and international students ($M = 48.98$), providing empirical support for the primary hypothesis that fear of crime varies by nationality.

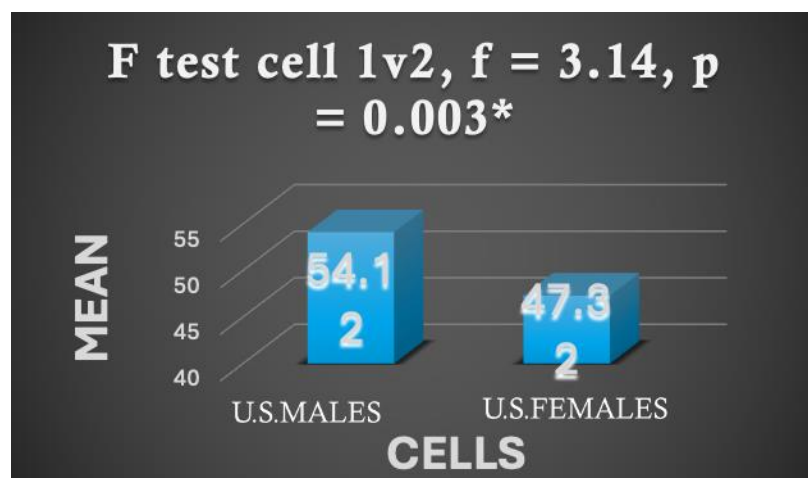


Figure 5. Variance Among U.S. Citizens

NOTE: This figure depicts significant differences in variance among U.S. citizens, indicating heterogeneity in responses ($F = 3.14$, $p = 0.003$).

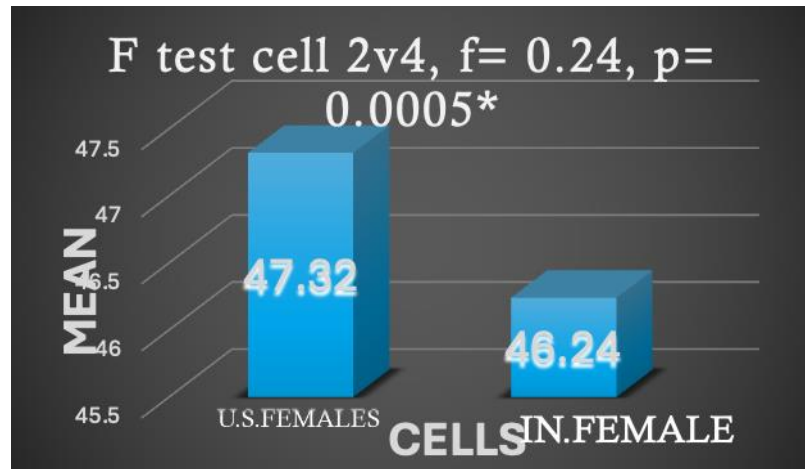


Figure 6. Female-Specific Nationality Variance

NOTE: This figure highlights significant variance differences in fear of crime perceptions among females across nationalities ($F = 0.24$, $p = 0.0005$).

Implications of Findings

Future research should involve participants from multiple universities and more diverse demographic backgrounds—including variations in age, socioeconomic status, and geographic location—to enhance generalizability and provide a more comprehensive understanding of fear of crime across populations. Studies should also investigate how gender, race, immigration status, and prior victimization interact to shape perceptions of crime and recidivism, offering a more nuanced analysis of individual differences. Providing participants with standardized definitions of key terms, such as “recidivism,” would reduce misinterpretation and improve measurement reliability. International students should be analyzed by region or cultural background rather than as a single group, given that differences in cultural norms, home country crime rates, and experiences with authority may influence fear perceptions. Finally, future work should examine how media consumption—including news sources, social media use, and exposure to crime reporting—affects public perceptions and misperceptions, informing strategies to promote more accurate understanding and mitigate unwarranted fear.

Limitations

The study’s reliance on a sample of 100 participants from a single university limits the generalizability of the findings to broader populations, as university students may not reflect the diversity of age, socioeconomic status, cultural background, or crime exposure in the general population. Participants’ interpretations of “recidivism” may also have varied based on prior knowledge or cultural context, introducing potential inconsistencies in responses. Additionally, grouping all international students together may have obscured meaningful cultural differences in fear of crime perceptions, as students from different countries experience distinct crime rates, media environments, and social norms. These factors may limit the precision and applicability of the study’s conclusions regarding gender and nationality effects.

Discussion

This study examined the intersection of gender, nationality, and fear of crime perceptions among U.S. citizens and international students, situating these perceptions within broader frameworks of recidivism and public understanding of crime trends. Findings revealed

significant differences in fear of crime across gender and nationality, consistent with the gender–fear paradox, wherein women report higher fear despite lower victimization rates (Köseoglu, 2021; Jacobsen, 2024). Gender emerged as a more consistent predictor than nationality, although cultural background influenced perceptions in specific comparisons (Özaşçılar & Mawby, 2023; Piscitelli & Perrella, 2017).

The study also highlighted a divergence between public perception and empirical crime data. Despite declining crime rates, many participants perceived crime as increasing, a discrepancy likely reinforced by media emphasis on violent or sensational incidents, which can sustain fear and erode trust in law enforcement (Beshay, 2024; *The Impact of Media on Public Perception of Crime and the Criminal*, 2024; Wilk & Fibinger, 2020). Fear of crime further contributed to social isolation, weakened neighborhood cohesion, and economic consequences such as reduced investment and property values (Reichert & Konefal, 2017; Di Rocco, Vasiljevic, & Ivert, 2023; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2022).

These findings underscore the need for multifaceted interventions. Gender-sensitive strategies, culturally competent approaches for international and minority populations, and rehabilitation programs tailored to specific offense types can enhance safety, support reintegration, and reduce recidivism (Arbour, Lacroix, & Marchand, 2024; USA Facts Team, 2023). Overall, the study illuminates how gender and nationality intersect to shape fear of crime, while emphasizing broader systemic challenges. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to assess evolving perceptions and evaluate targeted interventions aimed at fostering safer, more inclusive communities.

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