



**A Criminological Study on Crimes in the Western Province of
Sri Lanka, During the covid 19 Lockdown Period**

D. D. D. Imalka* and B. V. N. Wijewardhana

Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka

Article Info

Article History:

Received 11 Nov 2021

Accepted 24 Dec 2021

Issue Published Online

01 January 2022

Key Words:

COVID 19

Criminal Tendency

Lockdown

Pandemic

*Corresponding author

E-mail address:

dulariimalka19@gmail.com

Journal homepage:

<http://journals.sjp.ac.lk/index.php/vjhss>

<http://doi.org/10.31357/fhss/vjhss.v07i01.13>

VJHSS (2022), Vol. 07

(01), pp. 207-222

ISSN 1391-1937

ISSN 2651-0367 (Online)

©Faculty of Humanities
and Social Sciences 2022

ABSTRACT

The novel coronavirus Covid 19 has become a worldwide public health pandemic that has induced Anomic conditions to influence daily routines. Crime is a constant phenomenon of society and it results in the necessity of maintaining crime prevention and controlling machinery during any situation to establish law and order. The study used the positivist paradigm to interpret the research problem "Has Covid 19 changed the crimes in Sri Lanka during the lockdowns in early 2020" while analyzing the relationship between crimes and Covid 19 induced lockdowns. The study followed a deductive approach; Primary data was collected from sixty-four police officers, who were selected according to the stratified sampling technique within the Western province. Questionnaires and interviews were the main primary data collection tools used in the study. Qualitative and quantitative mixed analytical tools were applied in identifying criminal tendencies during the lockdown period. The study revealed that property crimes in the year 2020 dropped by 44% more than the year 2019 and 63% of property crimes were committed during the first half of the year 2020 compared to the whole year. Sexual crimes noted a 0.99% drop and violent crimes stated a 50% drop compared to 2019. However, organized crimes have increased 11% more than in 2019. From all the categories of crimes, over 50% were committed during the first half of the year 2020. It further demonstrates that property crimes increased because of the economic instability induced by the lockdowns. However, drug-related crimes were committed continuously without considering the pandemic and lockdowns. The study further discovered that there was a decrease in regular street crimes and minor crimes such as pick-pocketing, vehicle theft, and spare parts robberies executed in the Pettah area during the Covid 19 lockdown period. The study recommends the application of a technological approach to detect criminal tendencies, and pandemic planning module, which can be implemented to the national emergency management system.

1. Introduction

Covid 19 first emerged as an outbreak of respiratory illnesses in Wuhan city, Hubei province, China. WHO initially reported the first Covid patient on December 31st of 2019 and on March 11th, 2020 Covid outbreak was considered a global health emergency. According to the WHO, Covid 19 is an infectious disease where most people infected with the virus experience mild to moderate respiratory illness. However, they can recover without requiring special treatment. Yet, older people and those with cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancers are more likely to develop serious illnesses (WHO, 2020).

The Covid, 19 pandemic impacted all aspects of society. With the enforcement of social distancing measures and lockdowns, the community became isolated and it negatively affected humankind. The negative impact of the pandemic became serious as it infected millions of people and caused widespread serious illnesses in a large population, resulting in thousands of deaths. It represented a serious threat not only to the population but also to the economy in terms of instability of the economy, long-term burden, increased poverty, and unemployment. The social impact of the Covid 19 was also severe with the enforcement lockdown measures. In Sri Lanka, the pandemic Covid 19 influenced all aspects of society crucially. Due to the need for social distancing measures, the government imposed island-wide police curfew from March 2020, hindering all the societal activities and gatherings.

People were isolated in their places (closing of schools, markets, religious places, cinema, etc.) and the government adopted community isolation measures to avoid contamination, and imposed alternative mechanisms for supplying essentials to the people, and implemented a piece of subsidiary machinery.

Medical emergency healthcare sectors dealt with treatment procedures and finding of medical remedies to the pandemic. Meanwhile, the governing bodies were associated with tasks such as imposing of social distancing measures, involuntary and voluntary restrictions, and preventing mass gatherings, so as to avoid contamination of people and spreading of the virus. The main law enforcement body of a government is the Police which carries out these functions. Other security agencies are also associated with particular preventive tasks proportionally. In this kind of condition, in which all the sectors and institutions were in a great slowdown and crisis, the criminal justice system faced a crisis. Bodies of the criminal justice system such as law enforcement, judiciary, and correctional institutions faced tragic outcomes due to the newly emerged pandemic. The slowdown of the criminal justice system and the unexpected environment affected criminality in many ways all around the world. Robbery, theft, and burglary declined significantly at 50% in most countries with strict lockdown measures (UNODC, 2020). The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime stated that not only did the reporting of crimes decline, but also the committing of crimes also declined proportionally. Homicide underwent a short-term decline of 25% in some countries, however, in most countries, there is no visible change or variability in the number of homicide victims. In the post phase of lockdowns, the economic downturn is caused by unemployability, economic stress, and limiting the economic opportunities which increase property crimes (UNODC, 2020).

According to Ben Stickle and Marcus Felson crime rates dropped all over the U.S.A during lockdowns as 43% in San Francisco, and 74% in Chicago (Stickle & Felson, 2020). In the last phase of April, Internet usage increased by 30%, which lead to more opportunities for cybercrimes (Corbett et al,2020). In Mexico and Latin America, the hate crimes towards health workers increased and violations of

pandemic regulations were deemed as new criminal tendencies (Sandberg& Fondveila, 2020). Fleetwood further argues that failure to act on early warnings, failure in providing essential personal protective equipment, failure in providing security to vulnerable groups, and prioritizing the economy over health can be deemed as forms of violence and state crime (Fleetwood et al, 2020).

John Boman and Owen Gallupe stated that weekly calls for service dropped at 12% across the U.S.A and 25% decline of crimes in Chicago and 20% in Washington (Boman & Gallupe, 2020). Corbett and other scholars further illustrated that there is no consistent pattern as to whether the crime had fluctuated or remained the same during the pandemic. During the lockdowns, peer dynamics have been altered due to stay-at-home orders and social distancing requirements. They were the driving forces behind the reduction of crime rates. It is specified that homicide and intimate partner violence would not change during lockdowns, especially in a climate charged with mental stress and anxiety associated with forced lockdowns. 15% of homicides and 33% of Intimate partner violence increased in Philadelphia compared to the year 2019(Corbett et al, 2020).

According to the study conducted by Sungida Rashid in Dhaka Bangladesh, there was a significant drop in arrests in arms dealing, and vehicle theft during stay-home orders. But with the case of illegal drug trafficking, the numbers seem to have climbed up rapidly

to 75% because law enforcement officers engaging in the pandemic prevention agendas and drug dealers have seemingly taken the advantage of the reduction in regular monitoring activities (Rashid,2020).

The criminological theories address the criminal tendency during a lockdown through the opportunity theory. The lockdown measures can potentially reduce the possibility of criminal offenses being perpetrated because of the restrictions on mobility and social interactions. Opportunity reduction can be expected as the reduction of committing crimes (Macit, 2021). The strain theory argues that socio-economic strains that affect a large stratum of the population, especially the most vulnerable groups have the potential to create an atmosphere of pressure that drives individuals to commit crimes. The strain was expected to manifest itself well after the introduction of lockdowns and curfews as people are negatively affected (Barrlett et al, 2021). The increasing of cybercrimes and intimate partner violence can be addressed according to this theological perspective. According to the theory of Anomie, society became more disorganized, and social relationships were suddenly cut, diminished, or altered. The anomic conditions can be increased due to fear for the future established in the minds of people as financial and physical fear. Additionally, punitive responses to crimes slowed or ceased altogether as courts closing can be identified as another factor of establishing deviance.

Table 1. Grave crime abstracts of Western province 2018, 2019 and 2020

Crime Category	2018	2019	2020	The first half of the year 2020
Property crimes	7993	7998	4462	2847
Sexual crimes	419	402	406	220
Violent crimes	1051	932	466	437
Organized crimes	33	43	48	25

(Police statistics division 2018, 2019and 2020)

There was an overall drop in crime reporting due to the Covid19 impact in the year 2020. Property crimes showed a 44% drop than 2019 and sexual crimes in 2020 decreased only by 0.99% compared to 2019. Violent crimes have decreased by 50% reducing the opportunities to violence. However, organized criminal activities in the Western province have increased by 11% more than in 2019. Even overall crime rate dropped in the year 2020 compared to the years of 2019 and 2018. The range of crimes committed during the first half of the year 2020 which is the period of lockdown that occurred in the Western province, demonstrates rates over 50% which provide basis to the research problem, Has Covid 19 changed the crimes in Sri Lanka during the lockdowns in early 2020? The research finding stated that Covid 19 made an environment for new criminal opportunities like cyber frauds, cyber hackings, hate crimes, and domestic violence (Miller & Blumstein 2020). The Western province of Sri Lanka is the area, affected seriously by Covid 19 pandemic (Health Promotion Bureau, 2020). The Western province reports a high prevalence of reported grave crime rates for 5 years (Grave crime abstracts, 2014-2019). When considering the dispersion of crimes and influence of Covid 19 pandemic on Western province, it is necessary to study how crime patterns shaped the Lockdown period under Covid 19.

The general objective of the study was to examine the criminal tendencies during the pandemic period. The objectives of the study are:

- To analyze the level of criminal tendency during the Lockdown period,
- To identify the crime variances during the lockdown period
- To examine the factors behind the fluctuations of crime rates
- To provide recommendations to concerned authorities toward predicted criminal tendencies and prevention and

controlling of criminality during an emergency.

Through addressing the roots of issues and preventive mechanisms by the research, it will be important to prevent and control the extraordinary criminal tendencies during a hazardous situation. These research findings will broadly be used for the proper awareness and education of law enforcement officials and community about the nature of this kind of pandemic and responses regarding law enforcement. The research will shed light on how to formulate agendas for educating and training programs for law enforcement officials on emergency management. This research would be a fundamental source document available for the researchers, academics, and scholars to use for future studies on the impact of a pandemic on law enforcement of criminal investigation. Further findings of this research would be a resource for the professionals who designed pandemic planning modules and emergency management modules for law enforcement. The revealing information of the research would facilitate the relevant authorities to conduct their studies on the particular field.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Study design and sample selection

This research study followed the positivist methodical approach which is directly associated with the deductive research approach. The independent variable can be identified as the lockdown measures implemented by the Sri Lankan Government and the dependent variable is criminal tendencies. Due to the qualitative nature that exists in this research the data collection and data analysis were associated with both qualitative and quantitative techniques.

The design of the research concentrates on the Western Province of Sri Lanka, which is the most affected area as 70% of the Covid patients had been reported by the 30th of June

2020; A continuous lockdown was imposed in this Province for a 3-month period.

The primary data collection involved police officers in the crime division throughout the western province. From the 111 police stations in the western province, of the 4 main police administrative divisions which are the Colombo division, Western South division, Western North division, and Kaluthara division, 16 police stations were selected using a stratified sampling technique to present a proportional representation to the sample.

Colombo police division - $24/111 \times 15=3$
 Western South police division - $24/111 \times 15=3$
 Kaluthara police division - $26/111 \times 15=4$

Western North police division - $37/111 \times 15 = 6$
 Number of all police stations = 16

The number of the sample includes the number of police stations as 3, 3, 4, and 6 respectively. From the 16 police stations selected, 4 police officers in each crime division were entitled with the data collection procedures as the officer's sample

Colombo division - $3 \times 4 = 12$
 Western South division - $3 \times 4 = 12$
 Kaluthara division - $4 \times 4 = 16$
 Western North division - $6 \times 4 = 24$
 Number of police officers - = 64

Table 2. Selected police stations from the Western province

Administrative Division	Police Station
Colombo	Pettah
	Keselwaththa
	Borella
Western South	Mirihana
	Homagama
	Mt Lavinia
Kaluthara	Mathugama
	Horana
	Bandaragama
	Wadduwa
Western North	Gampaha
	Minuwangoda
	Waththala
	Ja Ela
	Kadawatha
	Kochchikade

(Field Research, 2020)

2.2 Data collection and Data analysis

The applied data collection process consisted of two approaches; primary and secondary. Primary data was gathered through questionnaires, interviews, and observations, whereas, secondary data was accessed

through grave crime statistics of Sri Lankan Police. To identify the Level of criminal tendency and the factors behind the crime rates fluctuations, the researcher has used a Questionnaire and Interviews. To evaluate the crime variances, grave crime abstracts of

the Western Province have been used as a secondary source of data.

The gathered data was scrutinized in two segments, quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative data was collected through the study as well as other evidence-based facts. When analyzing the Level of criminal tendency and crime variances during the lockdown period, descriptive statistics were

used through SPSS software (version 21). The analyzed data and information were presented in an analytical order using tables/charts and graphs. In particular, qualitative data as factors behind the crime variances collected during the Interviews has been presented in a descriptive manner using the quotes with the informants' own words, in actual form.

Table 3. Operationalization plan of the criminal tendency level (n-64)

Variable	Indicator	Measurement	Source
Level of criminal tendency	1. rate of crime reporting	Five points Likert scale	Global initiative against transnational organized crime,2020
	2. development of types of crimes		
	3. Relationship between Covid 19 and criminal tendency		
	4. Relationship between social distancing and criminal tendency		

(Field Research, 2020)

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Level of criminal tendency during lockdown period

Crimes are a constant phenomenon in human societies in any emergency. crimes can emerge by exploiting the situation and resources. Covid 19 was a newly emerged hazardous situation in the world and scholars have identified what kind of criminal tendencies have been established in the world by exploiting the pandemic. In this study, researchers aimed to seek the criminal tendency in the Western province during the lockdown period. When

identifying the level of criminal tendency during the Covid 19 period in the Western Province, the four indicators examined through the research are:

1. The rate of reporting crimes was high during the Lockdown period.
2. There was a clear development displayed in one or more types of crimes in that period.
3. There was an impact of Covid 19 on the development of one or more types of crime.
4. Due to curfew and social distancing one or more types of crimes has increased

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of the level of criminal tendency (n-64)

Statement	Highly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	Highly agree	Mean value	Std deviation
The rate of reporting crimes was high during the Lockdown period	4.8%	14.3%	60.3%	17.5%	3.2%	15	4.016
There was a clear development displayed in one or more types of crimes in that period	4.8%	12.7%	38.1%	36.5%	7.9%	16.51	4.805
There was an impact of Covid 19 on the development of one or more types of crime	3.2%	28.6%	25.4%	38.15	4.8%	15.63	4.805
Due to curfew and social distancing one or more types of crimes has increased	5.5%	14.8%	46.7%	20.9%	12.1%	14.13	4.626

(Field Research, 2020)

According to table 4, the rate of reporting crimes was high during the lockdown period. 17.5% agreed with the statement while 14.3% disagreed. 60.3% remained neutral to the statement of reporting of crimes is high during the lockdown period in Western province. The mean value of 15 reflects that level of reporting crimes is at a moderate level and the standard deviation of 4.016 is close to 0 further positing that all the values are dispersed around the mean value. This statistically proven the rate of reporting crimes is at a moderate level during the Lockdown period.

The second statement " there was a clear development displayed in one or more type of crimes in that period" was agreed with by 36.5% of the sample while 12.7% disagreed. 38.1% were in a neutral position. The mean value of 16.51 lies in the range of neutral to high, which is close to neutrality.

The standard deviation of 4.805 reflects that all the values disperse around the mean value by confirming that there is moderate level development displayed in one or more types of crimes during the lockdown period due to the pandemic situation and curfew.

38.5% of the sample agreed with the statement that " there was an impact of Covid 19 on development of one or more type of crimes during lockdown period" while 28.6% disagreed. 25.4% were in a neutral position. The mean value 15.63 lies on the range of neutrality and standard deviation 4.805 close to the 0 confirms that all the values are dispersed around the mean value and it concluding that impact of covid 19 on developing particular category or categories of crime is at a neutral level.

'20.9 % of the sample agreed with the statement that "due to curfew and social distancing measures one or more types of

crimes has increased' while 12.1% highly agreed. 14.8% of the sample disagreed with the statement and 46.7% remained neutral. Mean value 14.3 lies on the neutrality and standard deviation 4.426 close to the 0 and it shows that all the values are dispersed around the mean value concluding that social distancing and curfew have affected the emergence of one or more types of crimes is in a moderate level. The grand mean of all the values given by police officers is 15.36, which statistically assumes that the level of criminal tendency during the Lockdown period in the

Western province is moderate, neither high nor low.

3.2 Crime variances and factors behind crime rates fluctuations

3.2.1 Property crimes during lockdown period

Table 05 displays the grave crime abstracts of the Western province throughout the years of 2018, 2019 and 2020.

Table 5. Property crimes abstract Western province 2018, 2019, and 2020

Property crime	2018	2019	2020	The first half of 2020
Housebreaking	2963	2677	1618	1069(66%)
Arson	63	123	35	20(57.4%)
Robbery	1061	1223	750	345(46%)
Extortions	64	36	32	20(62%)
Cheating, Misappropriation, Criminal Breach of Trust in respect of over Rs. 300,000/-	1718	2013	732	647(88%)
Cattle theft	128	39	74	41(55.4%)
Property theft over Rs 25,000	1996	1887	1221	705(57.7%)
Total	7993	7998	4462	2847(63%)

(Police statistics division, 2018-2020)

With regard to the property-related crimes such as housebreakings, arson, robbery, extortions, cheating and misappropriation, criminal breach of trust in respect of over 300,000/=-, cattle theft and property theft over Rs 25,000 can be identified. In 2018, Housebreaking was reported, as 2963 which is 37% of the total reported property-related crimes. In 2019, there were 2677 house breakings reported throughout the Western province which is 33% of total reported property related crimes. In 2020, 1618 housebreakings were reported and it represents 60% of the drop compared to the

year 2019 and a 54% drop compared to the year 2018.

As per analysis, the Number of Arsons reported in 2018, 2019, and 2020 respectively are 63, 123, and 35. When comparing the rate of reporting cases related to Arson in 2019 and 2020, there was a 28.4% decrease in reporting Arson cases in 2020. Robberies executed in the 3 years 2018, 2019 and 2020 respectively are 1061, 1023 and 750. With regard to the reported robberies in 2019 than 2018, a 3.6% reduction can be seen in the number of reported robberies. In 2020, there were 750

robberies reported throughout the year, which is a 73% drop compared to the year 2019 and a 70% drop compared to the year 2018. The range of committing extortion shown in the year 2018 is 64 and in 2019, it is 36, which is a 43% reduction compared to the year 2018. The extortions reported during 2020 are stated as 32 and it is a 5% reduction when compared to the extortions reported in the year 2019.

The cheating, misappropriations, criminal breach of trust in respect of Rs300,000/= committed during the year of 2018 is stated as 1718 and, in the year of 2019, it is 2013. It is a 17% increase compared to the previous year 2018. However, in the year 2020, the number of this crime type has decreased to 732 signalling a 63% reduction compared to the year 2019. With regard to property crimes like cattle theft, there was a 69% reduction in cattle theft executed in the year 2019 compared to 2018. Cattle Theft cases which have been recorded are 74 in the year 2020, which posits an 89% increase compared to the year 2019.

The property thefts over Rs. 25,000/= are recorded as 1996, 1887, 1221 respectively in the years of 2018, 2019, and 2020. The property thefts committed during the year 2020 show a 38% reduction than 2018 and a 35% reduction compared to the year 2019. When analyzing the property crimes committed during particular years collaboratively, in 2018, it was 7993 and 7998 in 2019 and, the total number of property-related crimes reported in 2020 was 4462. There was a 44.1% deduction showing within the property-related crimes in the year 2020 compared to 2018. The deduction range of the property-related crimes in 2020 compared to 2019 is posited as 44.2%. Based on the above data, property crimes during the first covid 19-lockdown period have decreased around the Western province of Sri Lanka. However, those changes remained only for a short period and

the numbers have quickly arisen as pre-pandemic situations.

The grave crime abstracts of the Western province in 2020 clearly show that 67% of crimes from all reported crimes throughout the year occurred in the first six months of the year 2020, which means that the period of Covid 19 First wave affected the country, where the 3 month- lockdown period continued in the Western province. When going through the statistical data presented by the police statistics division, it demonstrates that the rate of reporting crimes during the first six months in 2020, especially the period in which 3 month-lockdown was higher, compared to the total crime reporting of the whole year. Statistical data clearly shows that property crimes like housebreaking, robberies, extortions, cattle theft, property theft over Rs 25,000/= are comparatively high during the first six months than the other half of the year. Most housebreakings were reported during the first half as 1069 from 1618 of a whole crime report, which states that 66% of housebreakings were recorded in the first half of the year. 46% of the robberies were seen during the first half of the year. Extortions stated as 62%. praedial product theft rated as 30.7%, cattle theft stated as 55.4% and property theft over Rs 25 000/= stated as 57.7% collectively illustrates that property related crimes are comparatively high during the first half of the year 2020 which was the time of the 3 lockdown period in the Western province. 63% rate of property crimes were during the first 6 months of the year 2020, which suggests homogenous changes caused by differences and strict measures imposed during the lockdown period.

The Inspector (45years old) Homagama police station: *"Unavailability of work for daily wage labourers, and unemployment lead to economic difficulties. Those economic difficulties made an environment for property crime"*

Property crime rates have quickly returned to pre-pandemic levels after the initial months of Lockdown and it could further increase in the medium to long-term consequences of the economic downturn. According to crime investigative officers in Western province, poverty, inability to find labour, being deprived of daily wages and economic difficulties lead to the emergence of property crimes. Closure of bars, taverns, and restaurants made drug and alcohol addicts commit property crimes. Additionally, closure of business places and migration of urban residents to their hometowns, unable to attend to their living spaces for a long time,

and isolation of urban areas lead to committing of property crimes. Due to the closure of bars and taverns, manufacturing and marketing of illegal alcohol (*kassippu*) was a major trend that could be seen in urban and suburban areas of Western Province. Police officers further stated that victims might have also reduced their reporting to Police because of the difficulty in reaching police and delay of justice procedures during the pandemic.

3.2.2 Sexual crimes during lockdown period

Table 6. Sexual crimes abstract of Western province in 2018, 2019 and 2020

Sexual crimes	2018	2019	2020	The first half of the year 2020
Rape of women over 16 years of age	59	46	46	25(54%)
Statutory rape (women under 16 years) with the consent of the victim	190	179	202	102(50%)
Statutory rape (women under 16 years (without the consent	42	42	46	24((53%)
Unnatural sexual offenses	100	119	99	63(63%)
Sexual exploitation of children	28	16	13	6(46%)
Total	419	402	406	220((54.1%)

(Police statistics division, 2018-2020)

According to table 06, the rape of women over 16 years of age displayed in the years of 2018,2019, and 2020 are respectively 59,46 and 46. The rape of women over 16 years of age remained the same as the year 2019 in 2020 without displaying gradual fluctuation. When taking statutory rape with the consent of the victim, 190 cases were reported during the year 2018 and 179 cases were reported in the year 2019. However, there were 202 cases reported in the year 2020 and it was a 12.8% increment compared to the cases reported in 2019. The statutory rape without consent of the victim has also displayed high

values compared to the previous years 2018 and 2019. The unnatural sexual offenses have been reported in 2018, 2019, and 2020 as 100,119 and 99 respectively. Cases recorded during 2020 showed only a 16.8% decrease compared to the year 2019. Sexual exploitation of children was reported during the three years 2018, 2019, and 2020 as 28, 16, and 13 respectively. The rate of reporting this particular type of crime has decreased 18.7% in 2020 compared to 2019 and a 35% decrease in 2020 than 2018. When taking the collective number of sexual offenses reported during the year 2020, it is 406 and it

represents a 0.99% increment compared to the year 2019. These high values further demonstrate that sexual offenses were not deducted with the influence of Covid 19 or lockdown measures. There was a trend in increasing sexual offenses during the period of the Covid 19 despite the pandemic and lockdown measures. Over 50% of sexual offenses committed during the first half of the year 2020 declared that the lockdown period affected the rising of sexual crimes. Investigative officers claimed that exposure to family members for a long period and isolation led to unnatural sexual offenses and domestic violence.

Kochchikade police station; Inspector of Police (49 years old): *Being with family members for a long period free from the society lead to depressing of peoples' thoughts and*

unnatural sexual desires have emerged. Violence and coercive sexual offences could be seen due to this.

The study further discovered that lockdown measures have affected violence against women in numerous ways, as women spend more time in isolation with violent partners and were vulnerable. They were more exposed to sexual offenses or domestic violence. With the reduction of social interaction and strict measures governed to prevent the disease spreading, arousal of abnormal psychological conditions paved the way to increase of sexual violence and sexual offenses around the Western province of Sri Lanka.

3.2.3 Violent Crimes during lockdown period

Table 7. Violent crime abstracts in Western province 2018, 2019, and 2020

Violent crimes	2018	2019	2020	The first half of 2020
Grievous hurt	275	214	146	92(63%)
Homicide	184	128	123	61(49%)
Attempt to murder/abetment to commit suicide	48	19	14	12(85%)
Cruelty to children	21	28	18	6(33.3%)
Voluntarily causing hurt	523	543	465	266(57%)
Total	1051	932	466	437(93%)

(Police statistics division, 2018-2020)

According to the grave crime abstract of the Western province, violent crimes like Grievous hurt, Homicide, Attempt to murder, abetment to suicide, cruelty to children and voluntarily causing hurt fluctuated within years. There were 275 grievous hurt cases reported during the year 2018 and 214 cases reported in 2019 while 146 were reported in 2020. It is a 46% drop compared to the year 2018 and a 31% drop compared to the year 2019. When taking homicides rates into account, there were 123 homicides reported during the year 2020 displaying a 33% drop

than 2018 and a 3% drop than 2019. Attempt to murder or abetment to suicides were recorded as 14 in the year 2020. There were 48, 19 of which were recorded in the year 2018 and 2019 respectively. However, in the year 2020, it displayed a 70% drop of abetment to suicides and attempt to murder compared to 2018 and only 5% drop compared to the year 2019. Cruelty to children stated as 21, 28, and 18 during the years 2018, 2019, and 2020 respectively. In the year 2020, it shows a 35% decrease compared to the year 2019. The violent crime

Voluntarily causing hurt stated as 523,543 and 465 in the years of 2018,2019 and 2020 respectively. It can be seen as a 14.3% drop of voluntarily causing hurt in 2020 compared to the year 2019 and an 11% drop compared to the year 2018. Collective reporting of violent crimes declined during 2020. According to observation low level of public altercations, collapsing of gang activities and responses to pandemics may have caused this drop. However, with time habitual criminals adapted to the situation and committed violent crimes like before.

Violent crimes like Homicides were reported as 49% while attempt to commit murder and abetment to commit suicide were 85% during the first six months of the year 2020. The crime- voluntarily causing hurt by dangerous weapons- was 57% and grievous hurt

recorded as 63% during the first six months of 2020, which specifies the lockdown period in the Western province. Criminal investigative officers further stated that during the focussed group discussions, it revealed that conflicts emerged due to loneliness and distancing from the society between family members and siblings. The exposure of family members or close associates for a long period can cause reactance, which is psychologically unpleasant motivational arousal that tends to do the opposite of what they request and breaching rules, and regulations can have caused conflicts and other unnatural behaviors of people during the lockdown period.

3.2.4 Organized crimes during the lockdown period

Table 8. Organized crimes abstract Western province in 2018.2019 and 2020

Drug-related crimes	2018	2019	2020	The first half of 2020
The Manufacture of any quantity of Heroin, Cocaine, Morphine, Trafficking, Import, Export or possession of dangerous Drugs of and above 2gms of Heroin, 2gms or more of Cocaine, 3gms or more of Morphine, 500gms or more of Opium, 5kgs or more of cannabis and 1kgs of Hashish.	2143	2057	1703	1516(89%)
Organized crimes	2018	2019	2020	The first half of 2020
Procuration and trafficking of persons	4	2	0	0
Offenses under the offensive weapons act	22	33	34	18(52.9%)
Possession of automatic repeater shotguns	7	8	14	7(50%)
Total	33	43	48	25(52%)

(Police statistics division, 2018-2020)

When taking drug-related offenses into account as manufacture, trafficking, import, export of dangerous drugs in 2018, 2019, and 2020, they were recorded as 2143, 2057, and 1703. Compared to drug-related offenses in 2018 and 2020 there was a 20.5% drop of

drug-related offenses in 2020 than in 2018.17.2% drop of drug-related offenses reported during 2020 than 2019. There were no procuration and trafficking of persons, cases reported during 2020. Offenses under the offensive weapons act saw 34 cases

during 2020. In 2018 and 2019, it is recorded as 22 and 33. In 2020, a 38.7% increment displayed in this category of crime compared to 2018. Cases related to possession of automatic repeater shotguns were recorded as 7,8 and 14 in the years 2018,2019 and 2020. There was a 50% increment and 42% increment in this category of crime compared to 2018 and 2019 in 2020.

Offenses under the offensive weapon act reported in the first half of the year 2020 are 52.9%. Manufacture, trafficking, import, export, and possession of dangerous drugs were reported as 1516 of 1703 which states that 89% of total reported cases during the first half of the year is in the period of lockdowns.

Keselwaththa police station, Sergeant of Police (43 years old): *Many prisoners were released during the Covid 19 period under bails. Those released persons used to commit the regular criminal activities again.*

Crime investigative officers claimed that releasing prison inmates under bail could lead to the emergence of their previous deviant behaviors and increase crime rates. Increasing of organized criminal activities and Acts under the dangerous weapons act can be considered as a result of this releasing of habitual criminals. Investigative officers further stated that there was a drop in organized criminal activities during the initial phase of the lockdown period. However, criminal activities have gradually increased by exploiting the pandemic and lockdown measures.

Police station; Inspector of police (39 years old): *Usual crimes of hijacking of three-wheelers and motor bicycles, spare parts robberies and pickpocketing and other street robberies minimized during the lockdown period.*

The police officers working in urban areas like Pettah, and Keselwaththa, which are the areas, deemed as hubs of street criminal

activities and minor offenses, stated that there was a clear reduction of street crimes, and other street-related minor crimes during the Lockdown period. According to that, the usual criminal pattern has changed in the urban areas.

Borella Police station The Inspector of police (44 years old): *Due to health issues police officers were unable to maintain close association and continue community-policing activities caused emergence of criminal tendencies within the community.*

Community policing aims to maintain relationships with the community to prevent and control crimes in society before they are committed. According to the argument of police officers, the decline of community policing functions lead to the emergence of criminal tendencies when police officers are entitled to pandemic preventive tasks. In this case, community policing functions had collapsed leading to criminality within the community.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Crimes can be present in any societal context. The crime variations during the newly emerged Covid 19 pandemic were a pivotal topic among criminologists because of the Covid 19 pandemic. Disease-associated preventive measures were new to criminal justice systems in the world. The crimes were affected by this pandemic negatively and positively. Some crime, types were reduced due to lack of opportunities and on the other hand, there were criminal tendencies that emerged with the adaptation to the situation. According to the primary data given by the police officers throughout the Western province, at the initial phase of the lockdown, the crime rates have undergone the isolated measurements implemented by the government. However, with time passing, criminality adapted to the situation and started to exploit the Covid 19 pandemic

situation, which made the environment to criminality as previous.

When concerning the indicators of measuring the level of criminal tendency during the lockdown period, there was no significant increase or decrease of criminal tendency during the lockdown period. Police officers who provided data for the survey further clarified that property crimes and drug-related crimes were high during this period. Unemployment, inability to earn a daily wage, economic issues, and drug and alcohol addiction paved the way to the increase of property-related crimes. Apart from the property-related crimes, manufacture, import, export, and possession of dangerous drugs reported during the Covid first wave period is 1516, from the whole year report, which presented 89%. There was no significant effect of the Covid 19 pandemic on drug-related offenses as a gradual increase or decrease. Police officers stated that while they were engaging in the Covid prevention tasks, it could be an opportunity for criminals to commit drug-related offenses and other types of crime.

Collaboratively on the discussion of criminal tendencies during the lockdown period in the first half of the year 2020, property crimes, alcohol, and drug-related crimes increased compared to other types of crime. Sexual crimes and organized crimes have existed at a moderate level while other types of criminal activities underwent their rates due to the lockdowns.

However, the rate of 67.2% crime reporting during the first half shows that there was no clear effect on decreasing the crime rates during the Lockdown period. However, prevailed crime patterns changed during the lockdown period. Street robberies, and other regular criminal activities underwent change and patterns of sex-related crimes, property crimes, and drug-related offenses changed. It can be assumed that criminal behaviour

adapted to the pandemic situation within a certain period.

Officers argue that the lack of technological development and scarcity of technological knowledge of police officers could lead to an increase in crimes and there is a serious need for a technological approach to the Sri Lankan police machinery. The suggestions can be identified as below to predict the criminal tendencies and prevent criminality during this kind of medical emergency:

1. Identification of areas that can be easily exploited for emerging deviance, and establishing a technological approach to Law enforcement functions and criminal investigative functions such as data entering, evidence collections, maintaining investigations, and other typical functions of criminal investigation to detect and prevent criminality easily.
2. Formulating an effective emergency planning module for the Police department, which should include a strategic approach in emergency planning to reach the effectiveness and balancing of multi-tasks of operational continuation and performing regular functions
3. Incorporating an emergency response training program for newly recruited police officers as well as existing police officers accordingly; the emergency planning module should be designed to train police officers with skills and knowledge of decision making in an emergency, emergency responses and balancing the original function with extraordinary functions
4. Increasing human resources of the police department can lead to reducing the stress on policing machinery which will result in effective performance in both operational continuation and management of the emergency
5. Adopting stress management therapies and counselling sessions for police

officers regularly and advancing stress management during an emergency

6. Improvement of education and awareness regarding the pandemic on the community using printed and digital media platforms
7. Improving the collective responsibility of police officers towards this kind of emergency response

Acknowledgement: This work is a part of the Research study "Impact of Covid 19 on the criminal investigative process with special reference to Western Province, Sri Lanka" which is funded by *The Multi-Disciplinary Research Centre of the Faculty of Humanities and Social sciences, the University of Sri Jayewardenepura* under Grant no: MRP/MDRCFHSS/2020/01/04. The authors thank all the academic and non-academic staff who supported the project, and the anonymous reviewers for the constructive comments.

5. References

- Barlett, C. P., Rinker, A., & Roth, B. (2021). Cyberbullying perpetration in the COVID-19 era: An application of general strain theory. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 1-11.
- Boman, J. H., & Gallupe, O. (2020). Has COVID-19 changed crime? Crime rates in the United States during the pandemic. *American journal of criminal justice*, 45(4), 537-545.
- Corbett, R. W., Blakey, S., Nitsch, D., Loucaidou, M., McLean, A., Duncan, N., & Ashby, D. R. (2020). Epidemiology of COVID-19 in an urban dialysis center. *Journal of the American Society of Nephrology*, 31(8), 1815-1823.
- Fleetwood, J., Lea, J., Bromberg, S., & Kindynis, T. (2020). Coronavirus and changing conditions for crime. *Discover Society*. <https://archive.discoverociety.org/2020/05/13/coronavirus-and-changing-conditions-for-crime/>
- Health promotion bureau. (2020 June 30). <https://hpb.health.gov.lk/covid19-dashboard>
- Macit, R. (2021). The impact of COVID-19 on crime. *The societal impacts of COVID-19: A transnational perspective*, 163-171.
- Miller, J. M., & Blumstein, A. (2020). Crime, justice & the COVID-19 pandemic: Toward a national research agenda. *American journal of criminal justice*, 45(4), 515-524.
- Rashid, S. (2021). Impact of COVID-19 on selected criminal activities in Dhaka, Bangladesh. *Asian journal of criminology*, 16(1), 5-17.
- Sandberg, S., & Fondevila, G. (2020). Corona crimes: How pandemic narratives change criminal landscapes. *Theoretical Criminology*, 1362480620981637.
- Sri Lanka Police. (2021 April 15). *Grave Crime Abstracts 2018-2020*. <https://www.police.lk/index.php/item/662-covid-19>
- Stickle, B., & Felson, M. (2020). Crime rates in a pandemic: The largest criminological experiment in history. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 45(4), 525-536.
- United Nations Organization of Drugs and crime. (2021, June 2). *Crimes during Covid19*. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2020/December/unodc-research-reveals-drop-in-reported-property-crime-and-homicide-during-covid-19-lockdown-is-only-short-lived.html>
- World Health Organization. (2021 June 01). *Corona Virus*. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>