

Editorial: Street Crime in Peshawar

Street crimes are an urban and suburban phenomenon. Since Peshawar is the capital city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province with a huge urban population, so street crimes are vastly prevalent. In the month of October 2022, Peshawar Police registered 42 robberies, 15 burglaries, and 36 cases of theft, 17 car lifting, and 20 motorbike lifting. One crime, which more often than not, makes the headlines when talking about street crimes, is rarely reflected in crime data by the police—mobile phone snatching. A November 2022 report of the *Daily Express Tribune* calculated around 1500 mobile phone snatchings per month in the city of Peshawar. They based this calculation on a verbal estimate by one police official who said that there are around 50 mobile phone snatchings on daily bases in a single police station jurisdiction. This is an alarming situation, which has never been the case in the city of Peshawar. Peshawar has 33 police stations. Here, one may raise two questions: (1) Why street crimes are more in urban areas? (2) Why are street crimes not properly reflected in Police data?

The first question has been researched by many a criminologist and sociologist around the world. It was the study on urban crimes, particularly delinquency, that led to the development of criminology as a separate specialized field of study. The prevalence of street crimes in urban set-ups has a lot to do with urban socio-cultural and physical infrastructure. In urban areas, one of the major issues is identity. People rarely know who is walking next to them. This alienation, as per social control theory, renders many free from the traditional social control. This weakening of social control gives rise to street crimes and other heinous crimes as well. The physical structure of urban areas, on the other hand, is such that the perpetrators can easily hide or escape through narrow streets. It provides a physical refuge to the perpetrators. The law-enforcement agencies have experienced this situation in the thickly populated urban centers in Karachi. Now replicated in Peshawar.

If on the one hand, urban areas provide social and physical space for street crime, the role of policing agencies in urban areas also needs to be questioned. The police have stopped using traditional crime prevention techniques. Rather, the police use snap checking, siege and search operations and combing operations on a certain days; often without proper

prior intelligence and preparation. The research on police snap checking, however, has raised serious questions on its effectiveness. It has been shown that instead of curbing street crimes, snap checking displaces the crime from one locality to another locality. There was a *chowkidari* system (watchman system) in villages and urban areas. It was effective in street crime prevention. It has almost vanished now. Moreover, the use of modern gadgets for city surveillance, CCTV, target hardening techniques and protective equipment against theft and robbery are somewhat costly, or are not widely known to the general public. The local police lacks in this respect. Another aspect of community policing and interacting with local population through a permanent Beat-System is now practically dysfunctional despite the considerable increase in the number of local police in the last two decades.

The second question also begs the answer. Why are street crimes, particularly mobile phone snatching, not properly reflected in police data? Burking is a term used in policing sciences to communicate the practice of suppressing the crime prevalence quietly. It is usually done through non-registration of FIR (First Information Report) by the police. An FIR is the state's mechanism through which the state measures the situation of law and order in a society. Why non-registration of FIR? Why burking? It has a lot to do with the performance of police officials. A police official's performance is usually measured by the crime rate or number of FIRs registered during his/her tenure. Since street crimes, particularly mobile phone snatching, make-up a significant portion of crime, therefore, they are suppressed through different means so that questions may not be raised on the performance of the police officials. Besides this, registration of an FIR also sets in motion the police investigation mechanism and other criminal justice processes. This takes a lot of energy, manpower, and resources. The police department is also short of human and material resources for investigation. This further leads to burking.

Forgoing in view, there is a need for more effective human and considerable material resources for police in urban areas. Besides, urban policing needs to be made part of the police training. Only those with specialized trainings in urban policing may be deputed in urban centers such as Peshawar.