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**Correspondence:** All correspondence should be addressed to: Editor, Bangladesh Sociological Studies (BSS), Bangladesh Institute of Social Research (BISR), 15/H/1 (3<sup>rd</sup> floor), Zigatala, Dhaka-1209, Bangladesh. Telephone: +88-02-8612916; Fax: 88-02-8629419; E-mail: [bisr@agnionline.com](mailto:bisr@agnionline.com); [khurshed@bkdc.net](mailto:khurshed@bkdc.net); Website: [www.bisrbd.org](http://www.bisrbd.org)

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## A Study on Released Prisoners in Bangladesh: The Case of Dhaka City

Mohammad Azizur Rahman\*  
Md. Omar Faruk\*

*Crime appears to be a major social, economic and political issue of today's Bangladesh. Most of its cities and towns are characterised by increased crime rates. Various socioeconomic factors can be attributed to high crime rates in both urban and rural areas. Existing laws and criminal justice system seem to be ineffective in crime control and prevention. However, imprisonment is supposed to be both punitive and corrective for the criminal. Released prisoners are found to get involved in recidivism committing crimes like hijacking, kidnapping, murder, and drug abuse. Poverty has not been found as a major reason for criminal career, rather drug abuse is found to be the main cause for recidivism. Released prisoners are not well-accepted by the people or employers. The present article intends to examine the situation of released prisoners in Bangladesh. The study includes socioeconomic profile of prisoners, causes of committing crime, time spent in jails, and criminal involvement after release. This article is based on a sample of thirty five released prisoners purposively selected from Dhaka City.*

### Introduction

Crime situation in Bangladesh is very alarming. Various political, economic and other factors are likely to influence crime rate in any given society. Dense population, high poverty level, lack of education, lack of support mechanism and relatively lower number of police force have negative impact on crime (The Bangladesh Observer, 11 April 2005). Weaknesses of law and lack of public awareness about crime are conceived as additional reasons for increased crime rates in Bangladesh.

According to a Bangladesh Police report, most common crimes of Bangladesh today are dacoity, robbery, murder, riot, burglary, theft, arms, women oppression, etc. (Police Week, 2005). Hijacking, theft, robbery, kidnapping, murder, drug abuse, etc. are common crimes in urban Bangladesh. Bangladesh is characterised by over-urbanisation accompanied by high level of rural-urban migration, low level of industrialisation, increased poverty, unemployment, deterioration of law

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\* Lecturer, Department of Criminology and Police Science, Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, Tangail, Bangladesh. E-mail: marahman1976@yahoo.com; ru\_faruk@yahoo.com

and order situation, social disorganisation, slums, etc. A sharp rise in the number of crimes like murder and dacoity in the city indicates the crime situation is going from bad to worse everyday. Crime has been appeared as the most widely discussed issue of today's Bangladesh.

Prisoners are convicted criminals, and imprisoned for a punishment. However, released prisoners are expected to get back to normal life. There is hardly any study on released prisoners. As mentioned earlier, there is no scientific study on the released prisoners in Bangladesh. However, there are some studies found on jails in Bangladesh. Kashem (1996, 1997) shows the conditions of jails characterised by overcrowding, poor physical conditions, absence of individual or group counseling, absence of parole for long-term inmate, absence of early release, ineffective educational and vocational programmes within jails, lack of jail facilities, health care services, etc. Therefore, very little is known about the profile of criminals and their situation after release from jails. The present study is an initiative to explore empirically the situation of released prisoners to understand their present state of situation and occurrence of recidivism.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The study is exploratory in nature aimed at examining the socioeconomic profile of released prisoners, social background of crime, implications of imprisonment and recidivism in the context of Dhaka City. The study tries to identify factors that influence people to enter into criminal life and socioeconomic context that causes recidivism.

Moreover, the study intends to explore what happens to a criminal before, during and after imprisonment, considering the possibility of understanding the nature of crime, criminal activities, and the situation of released prisoners. It may be noted that this study is not based on the representative sample of the population of released prisoners.

### **Methods and Sources of Data**

The study is based on primary data collected through a sample survey adopting a pre-designed interview questionnaire. The questionnaire was pre-tested.

The study included a small sample size of thirty-five released prisoners. Considering the nature of the problem, sampling was done purposively. A few (five) case studies were also undertaken in order to substantiate the survey data. For not disclosing the identity of the

respondents, pseudonyms were used instead of original names of the respondents.

Among the urban centres in Bangladesh, high crime rate is found in Dhaka City. Therefore, it is justified to select Dhaka City as the study area. The survey studied 35 respondents selected from the population of released prisoners in Dhaka City. The fieldwork was conducted during September – October 2005.

## Findings and Discussion

### *Age, Marital Status and Education*

Table 1 shows that most of the criminals are in the 28-37 (54.3%) age group, followed by 18-27 (20%) and 38-47 (20%) age group. In Dhaka City young adults are most vulnerable who are physically strong are engaged in criminal activities as people of this age group highly ambitious, working age, if failed to get no work likely to get frustrated leading to engage in crime.

The majority of prisoners entered into criminal life at the age group 20-25 years (50 per cent), followed by below 10 (46 per cent) and 26-35 years (4 per cent). This finding indicates the vulnerability of youth to crime.

Regarding marital status, most of the respondents are unmarried (68%), followed by married (20%) and divorced (12%) (Table 1). This also indicates that unmarried persons select crime as career for livelihood or for drug addiction due to unemployment or differential association. It may be mentioned that in Orissa it is found that nearly three-fifth of the prisoners are married (Mohanty and Hazari 1990).

About 15 per cent of the released prisoners are illiterate, 20 per cent studied upto primary and about 46 per cent upto secondary level of education (Table 1). It indicates that low educational attainment is not related to criminality as reflected in occupational spheres.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of Released Prisoners (N=35)

Age	Frequency	Per cent
Age (Year)		
28-37	19	54.3
38+	9	25.7
18-27	7	20.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 1. (Continued)**

Mean age = 34		
<b>Marital Status</b>		
<b>Status</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
Unmarried	24	68.0
Married/divorced	11	32.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Education</b>		
<b>Educational Level</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
Secondary	16	45.7
Primary	7	20.0
Higher secondary/above	7	20.0
Illiterate	5	14.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Occupation</b>		
<b>Present Occupation</b>	<b>Per cent (n=35)</b>	
Service	20.0	
Unemployment	20.0	
Others	2.9	
Business	57.1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
<b>Income</b>		
<b>Monthly Income Level</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
5001-7500	10	28.6
7501+	10	28.6
2501-5000	8	22.9
No income	7	20.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Median monthly income = Taka 63,00.00		

*Occupation and Income*

The study revealed that 57 per cent of released prisoners' present occupation is business, followed by unemployed (20 per cent) and service (20 percent) (Table 1). The present status of unemployment explains, even after being released, they are not having job opportunities due to exclusion by the society, loss of acceptance, or trust by the employers. This fact also explains that labeling or social stigma negatively affects prisoners in adapting to their society on return.

The study also looked at occupational status before conviction. It revealed that 32 per cent of the respondents' previous occupation was business, followed by unemployment (42 per cent) and service (26 per

cent). It shows that unemployment might have influenced them to engage in crime before conviction. The study also found most of the respondents' (44 per cent) fathers are dead, which may affect criminality because of family disintegration.

Most of the respondents (54 per cent) have not changed their occupation, 12 per cent respondents have changed because of low salary, 14 per cent for bad working condition, 14 per cent for drug addiction and 6 per cent have changed their occupation for other reasons. Since the majority has not changed their occupation, it indicates the phenomenon of recidivism. After release from prison, they may again involve in crime as they are not provided with job. This data also support the prevalence of serious crime like drug addiction.

It is found that most of the released prisoners (28.6 per cent) earn monthly between taka 5,001 and 7,500 and 20 per cent respondents have no income (Table 1). It seems that no income due to unemployment of released prisoners leads them to involve in crime career again. Due to no income, unemployment and low income, most of them have no savings (74 per cent).

The study also showed that the released prisoners are located in five areas-Mohammadpur, Hazaribagh, Rayerbazar, Mirpur-12 and Shamoli in Dhaka City under jurisdiction of three metropolitan police stations, namely Mohammadpur, Labagh and Mirpur. These areas seem to be the most crime-prone areas in Dhaka City.

#### *Type of Offences, Causes of Crime and Organisation of Crime*

The study found that 31.4 per cent of the released prisoners convicted for mugging, followed by extortion/political violence/murder (17.1 per cent each) and drug addiction (11.4 per cent) and kidnapping (5.1 per cent). It is evident that typical offences like theft, dacoity, robbery, sex crime are not found in the sample of released prisoners in Dhaka City (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Type of Offences (N=35)

Type of Offence	Frequency	Per cent
Mugging	11	31.4
Murder	6	17.1
Extortion	6	17.1
Violence/political violence	6	17.1
Drug addict /Drug abuse	4	11.4
Kidnapping	2	5.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100.0</b>

It is found that 90 per cent of the released prisoners committed crimes jointly and 10 per cent committed individually (Table 3). This result

indicates the organisation of crime, and prevalence of gang crimes in urban areas.

**Table 3.** Organisation of Crime (N=35)

Crime Organisation	Per cent
Jointly	90.0
Individually	10.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 4.** Use of Arms (N=35)

Use of Arms	Per cent
Yes	80.0
No	20.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The study also shows that 80 per cent of the released prisoners use arms in committing crime, while 20 per cent do not use arms (Table 4). This finding indicates the seriousness of crime, and that the arms are available and highly used in urban areas.

Table 5 shows that 28.6 per cent of the released prisoners' had 1-3 case partners, 24.3 per cent had 4-9 case partners, 22.9 per cent had 10-12 case partners and 20 per cent had more than 13 case partners. This situation indicates most of the crimes (76 per cent respondents' case) involve more case partners, reflecting nature of collective organisation of crime.

**Table 5.** Number of Case Partner (N=35)

Number	Frequency	Percent
1-3	10	28.6
4-9	12	24.3
10-12	8	22.9
13+	5	14.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The study also looked at who are the case partners (Table 6). It revealed that 76 per cent of the released prisoners' case partners are their friends or political peers, followed by 4 per cent released neighbours (4 per cent), family members (18 per cent) and unknown persons (2 per cent).



**Table 6.** Case Partners (N=35)

Case Partner	Per cent
Friends/political peers	76
Family members	18
Neighbours	4
Other	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

From the study it is found that political patronage and poverty contribute similarly to first time involvement in crime (28 per cent), followed equally for bad company and drug (20 per cent) (Table 7). The study also generated the fact that there are many other causes, including drugs, no social support, and politics, that are responsible for crime. This result also indicates that there is influence of godfather/patrons and political leaders for committing crimes by released prisoners.

**Table 7.** Causes of Crime (N=35)

Cause	Per cent
Political patronage	28.0
Poverty	28.0
Bad company	20.0
Drug	20.0
Other	4.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

It is found that poverty does not contribute significantly to crime, as 26 per cent respondents think that poverty is the main cause of crimes whereas 74 per cent do not think so (Table 8).

**Table 8.** Poverty as the Main Cause of Crime (N=35)

Cause	Per cent
Yes	26.0
No	74.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### *Confinement and Recidivism*

The study revealed that 52 per cent (18 out of 35) of the released prisoners were convicted for committing new crimes. That is, recidivism rate is 52 per cent.

The study also showed that drug addiction is the cause of recidivism for most of the released prisoners (83 per cent), followed by political reason (11 per cent) and unemployment (6 per cent) (Table 9).

**Table 9.** Causes of Recidivism (N=18)

Cause	Per cent
Drug	83.0
Politics	11.0
Unemployment	6.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Most of the released prisoners (48 per cent) spent 1 to 3 years in jails, followed by 4 to 6 years (34 per cent), 7 to 9 years (8 per cent), 10 years and above (6 per cent) and below 1 year (4 per cent).

**Table 10.** Time Spent in Jails (N=35)

Duration	Per cent (n=35)
1-3 Years	48.0
4-6 Years	34.0
7-9 Years	8.0
10 Year and above	6.0
Below 1 Year	4.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

It is found that most of the released prisoners (64 per cent) were convicted for more than one time (Table 11).

**Table 11.** Number of Prior Conviction (N=35)

Times	Per cent
1-3	34.0
4-6	36.0
7+	30.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

#### *Attitude of the People towards Prisoners and Perception of the Prisoners*

The study revealed that most of the released prisoners are not well-received by the society. It is also observed that 76 per cent of the released prisoners find problems in building relation with others, and 24 per cent do not face any problem. It indicates people treat them negatively even after being released and this stigmatisation is likely to motivate the released prisoners to get involved in crime again.

From the study it is also revealed that 40 per cent of the released prisoners think that punishment is adequate for correction while 60 per cent do not think so. It only indicates that in the country's prison system

correctional facilities are inadequate. Negative prison subculture often makes a minor offender to become a major offender after being released.

## **Case Studies**

### **Case 1**

Ahmed, 37 years old, is residing at Jaker Hossain Road, Mohammadpur, Dhaka. In his school life, Ahmed was often engaged in quarrelling with the local friends. In 1983, when he was a student of class IX, he tried to kidnap a schoolgirl and for that he was expelled from his school. His father had an export-import business and in this connection, he used to go to many embassies with his father as an aid. In 1995, he was involved in a conflict with Pakistan embassy, and having been angry he with some of his friends charged bombs on the embassy. He was caught by the police along with his associates. A case was filed and he was imprisoned for three years. In prison life, he was introduced to many hardened criminals and terrorists, and he got addicted to drugs. After completing his imprisonment, he was fully involved in criminal activities including extorting, mugging, bombing, kidnapping and drug business. In 1990, he tried to rape a woman, he was again caught red handed and imprisoned for two years. After release, he murdered a terrorist by chopping in Abahoni playground. In 1993, he got married and within 4 years he became a father of two children. In 1997, he got involved in politics of ruling party and with his political peers he killed a political leader of rival party. On this occasion, he was again arrested and imprisoned for five years. During his stay in prison, his wife with two children left his family, divorced him and got married to another person. The physical situation inside the prison as he states, "You can get everything without woman in lieu of money. If you are unable to bribe the jailor you will be tortured. If you are able, the prison is haven to you." He also claims that homosexuality in the prison is a common and big problem. Sometimes the young prisoners are sexually assaulted by the aged prisoners. In 2002, when he got released, the financial condition of his family was not good. His family members did not like to accept him cordially because his family spent a huge amount of money for his release. For him, the family had to sell their two storied building. After return to family he tried to get a job but nobody helped him rather treated him as a criminal and drug abuser. Realising that he should support his family, he decided to leave drug abuse habit. With this realisation, he joined an anti drug campaign launched by an NGO. He gradually became fully capable of leaving drug and had a job in an NGO. Now, he is leading a simple life with a new wife and with the parents.

### Case 2

Rana, 24 years old, is a resident of Hazaribagh, Dhaka. When he was only 4, his mother had died and his father got married again. His aunt has reared him up. In 1995, he was engaged in a service in tannery. After three years, his salary had been increased to TK. 3,000. His aunt always said to him, "Save money for your future, you need not spend for my family." In 1999, on an occasion, he was offered by his local friends in a group to take an abusive substance on test, and he abused it. It was first experience and unfortunately it continued until now. However, when it was disclosed to the office, he was discharged from his job. After losing the job, he was running short of money, particularly for managing drugs. In such situation, his local friends insisted him to join them in extorting, mugging and other terrific activities. In 2001, the godfather/gangster was murdered by the rival group. To take retaliation, one day they attacked the opposition rival groups with pistols, rifles, 5-star, chopper, weapons, etc. and murdered two persons. After three days, they in a group murdered a police informer but on this occasion they were caught red handed by the police. In this case, along with others he was imprisoned for 3 years. He mentions, "Prison life is miserable and if you are able to bribe the jailor, everything you will find favourable to you." He also says about the homosexuality in prison and tells the experience of being attempted to rape by a prisoner. He claims that sexual harassment of a younger prisoner by others is a horrible experience in prison life. He got release in December 2002, but he was again involved in mugging, extorting, bombing and other violent criminal activities to collect money and materials for managing drugs. He, however, states, "Sometimes I think, I will be back to normal life, but nobody trusts me. I have no social or financial support. Who will finance me for treatment or give me a job?" Now, he remains involved in many types of criminal activities mentioned above.

### Case 3

Hasan, 32 years old, is residing at Pathshala Road, Rayer Bazar, Dhaka. After completing B. Com in 1998, he got a job in a travel agency. His father is a retired government service officer. During the middle of 1999, some local young people who were addicted to drugs and gambling became his friends. Sometimes, he took drugs and in this way he became drug addicted. He got married in November 1999. His wife completed her M.Sc. in Eden College. During this period, their group leader Montu was engaged in a conflict with the local MP. The MP filed a false case against them, and he was, among others, arrested on 4<sup>th</sup> December. After he got release, his local terrorist friends

welcomed him with flowers, money and arms. He accepted the reception but his newly married wife discouraged him. He felt shy to face his neighbours. He remained unemployed and his wife encouraged him to start a business. His wife sold her gold necklace and gave capital money and then he started a trade in market of chicken. Now he has developed his business and own two shops. He states "When I got release, my neighbours did not behave cordially with me." According to him, the management system of prison in the country is not positive or effective rather it leads a normal person to become a criminal.

#### Case 4

Islam, 32 years old, is a resident of West Katashur, Mohammadpur, Dhaka. In his childhood, his mother died and father got married again. He was not able to complete secondary level of his study. In 1990, he got a job in a garment factory. He was frustrated in his family life due to conflict between his father and mother. As a result, he began to take drug with his local friends. At the beginning of 1997, he was caught red handed by police at the time of taking drugs. He was incarcerated in the jail. He got release after seven months. In the meantime, due to long absence without notice he was discharged from the job. He then started earning engaging in illicit drug trade. Within two years, he earned huge money. In 2000, he with his friends was involved in a conflict with the rival group regarding the trade of drugs. He with his group attacked the opposite group at *beribhand* (embankment) and he murdered one of his opponent group members. Then he was arrested and imprisoned for two years. He states, "I continued my drug trade in jail and earned TK. 6,000 per month. There everybody took bribe." When he got released, he found that his rival group took the control over drug trade in his area. He was then seeking for a job, but did not manage to get any. In his own words, "Nobody trusted me because I was drug addicted." In the middle of 2002, a local elder brother Jahir, who has special love for him, insisted him to join *tablig* (religious preaching) with him. He agreed and went to *tablig* and realised the principles of Islam. As he says, after coming from *tablig*, he wanted to come back to normal social life. Then Jahir Bhai encouraged him to start snacks (first food) business. Now, he is leading simple living with his wife and one son. He states, "Religious practices helped me to come out of criminal activities, I was involved."

#### Case 5

Babu is 35 years old. He is residing at West Katashur, Mohammadpur, Dhaka. From his childhood, he helped his father in their shoe making business. So, he was unable to continue his study after primary level.

His father was a drug addict. Since 1986 like his father he also started taking drugs with his local friends and then he began to steal money from the shoe shop. He was also involved in criminal activities such as extorting, mugging at night, etc. with his local friends under the influence of a local godfather. He learned how to make a bomb and blast it. In 1999, he went to get the money by extortion from a building contractor. One day a contractor refused to give him money, so he murdered him by shooting. As a result, he was imprisoned for seven years. In 1997, when he got released, his local godfather was an MP. So, his power was then unlimited and he took the control over drug trade of Hazaribagh. At the beginning of 1998, he was injured by an anti group force and was hospitalised for six months. After being released from hospital, he was accused for illicit drug trade and was arrested again, and imprisoned for another two years. By this time, the political party with which he was associated lost their power and then he was detached from politics. As a consequence, he became frustrated and began to take drugs regularly. Now, he has become drug addict and he can do any thing wrong just for the sake of earring money for buying drugs.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of thirty-five interviews and five case studies, the situation of released prisoners was explored in terms of some socioeconomic variables.

In the case of released prisoners of Dhaka City, most vulnerable age range to criminality is 28-37 years. Majority (about 70 per cent) of released prisoners involved in crime for the first time when they were not married. Poor educational background seemingly has no relationship to criminality, as most (about 50 per cent) of the released prisoners have secondary level of schooling. Unemployment is still significant in regard to their occupational status. Majority of the released prisoners (about 50 per cent) are having no change in occupation, that is, most of the released prisoners are still continuing criminal career. More the half of the released prisoners have TK. 2,500-7,500 monthly income.

Most of the convicted offences are mugging, violent crimes like murder and extortion and drug abuse. Most of these offences are organised, that is, gang crime, which involves more than one partner. Besides, majority of released prisoners used arms (80 per cent).

Most of the released prisoners (about 70 per cent) spent in jail for a short period of time (between 2 and 6 years), and most of them (around 65 per cent) have had more than fours times of punishment.

Most of the released prisoners (about 50 per cent) got involved in crime after their release from jail. Among the major causes of

recidivism, drug addiction and unemployment are found to be dominant in the study. Drug addiction mostly accounts for recidivism (about 46 per cent), followed by lack of social support (about 20 per cent).

Released prisoners are not well-accepted by the society. Majority of released prisoners find problems in having normal life with family, neighbours and employers.

The findings of the case studies demonstrate the background characteristics of released prisoners, their criminal career and present situation, jail experience, and attitudes towards them after release. One of the common findings is that they are recidivists and were engaged in violent and serious crimes like extortion, murder, mugging, rape, drug abuse, etc. Another observation is that they were sheltered by either political leaders or godfathers and often used by them against rival groups. It was also noticed from the case studies that influence of peers and broken family led them to join criminal career. Drug addiction was another finding which they mostly adhered to during prison life. It was also explored through case studies that the negative attitude by relatives/neighbours and employers towards released prisoners is dominant.

Existing laws and criminal justice system need to be reformed for crime reduction and control. Inadequacy and failure of reformative techniques, psychological treatment, clinical arrangements, drug availability in the jails and mismanagement have to be addressed for proper functioning of prison system and punishment. Awareness raising through media and community campaign for changing attitudes of neighbours and employers for reintegration of the released prisoners for leading a non-criminal life is important.

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