**Crime deterrence**

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Deterrence—the crime prevention effects of the threat of punishment—is a theory of choice in which individuals balance the benefits and costs of crime. Flooded with news of assault and violence, social media in Pakistan is once again demanding an increase in the severity of punishment for the offenders involved in crimes against women and children.

Some policymakers and practitioners believe that increasing the severity of the prison experience enhances the ‘chastening’ effect, thereby making individuals convicted of an offense less likely to commit crimes in the future. Last year, President Arif Alvi approved the country’s new anti-rape law that will ensure speedy trials and allow for the chemical castration of convicted offenders. Despite this, the crimes against women and children are unabated in the country, challenging the efficacy of this approach as a result.

Research, on the other hand, shows clearly that the chance of being caught is a vastly more effective deterrent than draconian punishments. The police deter crime by strengthening a criminal’s perception of the certainty of being caught, inability to influence the investigation and walk with impunity. Strategies that use the police as ‘sentinels’, such as hot spots policing, are particularly effective. A criminal’s behavior is more likely to be influenced by seeing a police officer with handcuffs and radio than by a new law increasing penalties.

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Daniel Steven Nagin, an American criminologist and Professor of Public Policy at Carnegie Mellon University’s Heinz College, states in his research, ‘Deterrence in the Twenty First Century’, that laws and policies designed to deter crime by focusing mainly on increasing the severity of punishment are ineffective partly because criminals know little about the sanctions for specific crimes. More severe punishments do not chasten individuals convicted of crimes, and prisons may exacerbate recidivism. According to the National Academy of Sciences, “Research on the deterrent effect of capital punishment is uninformative about whether capital punishment increases, decreases, or has no effect on homicide rates.” Long-term sentences are believed to be less effective and rather harmful for society as inmates learn ways to dodge the law and learn sophisticated manners of crimes in the future.

Prisons are effective for punishing criminals and keeping them off the street, but longer prison sentences are unlikely to deter future crime. Prisons actually may have the opposite effect; inmates learn more effective crime strategies from each other, and time spent in prison may desensitise many to the threat of future imprisonment. There is substantial evidence that supports the visibility of the police by hiring more officers and allocating existing officers does materially heighten the perceived risk of apprehension and can deter crimes.

[UK's COVID-19 infections surpass 50,000](https://nation.com.pk/16-Jul-2021/uk-s-covid-19-infections-surpass-50-000)

An incarceration-based sanction policy that reduces crime solely by incapacitation will necessarily increase the rate of imprisonment. In contrast, if the crime control policy also prevents crime by deterrence, it may be possible to reduce both imprisonment and crime; successful prevention by any mechanism, whether by deterrence or otherwise, has the virtue of averting not only crime but also the punishment of perpetrators.

The rising trend of crimes in Pakistan can only be checked through modern policing which is currently missing in the country. The lethargic response-time, unprofessional behaviour, corruption and low conviction rate works as encouragement for the offenders. The culture in police stations according to which the offender feels safe results in silencing the victims or the continuation of their exploitation at the hands of the offenders.

In the Usman Mirza case too, several FIRs were already lodged against him before he committed the crime which brought him to light. The criminal justice system dispenses justice by apprehending, prosecuting, and punishing individuals who break the law. These activities may prevent crime by three distinct mechanisms: incapacitation, specific deterrence, and general deterrence.

[German military on alert after severe floods](https://nation.com.pk/16-Jul-2021/german-military-on-alert-after-severe-floods)

It’s time the policymakers and the society must look away from the eyewash and resolve to find solutions based on modern policing, research and the ground realities of Pakistan. Mere lip service on social media and paperwork in the parliament will not bear the desirable fruits. The government must know that a lackadaisical approach without fixing the root cause of the problem will not help solve this issue.