

**Crime in the Spotlight: The Impact of True Crime Entertainment in Shaping Public  
Attitudes Toward Criminal Justice and Punishment**

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## **Crime in the Spotlight: The Impact of True Crime Entertainment in Shaping Public Attitudes Toward Criminal Justice and Punishment**

### **Abstract**

This study examined how the public's opinions of criminal punishment are shaped by the consumption of true crime media, with a particular emphasis on how it affects attitudes toward the legal system. The study looked at two emotional variables, fear and anger, and whether they influence public support for harsher punishments as a consequence of consuming true crime media. Additionally, the relationship between the frequency of true crime media consumption and the perceived leniency of the criminal justice system was also investigated. A total of 123 participants participated. The results revealed a good correlation between the perceived leniency of the justice system and the consumption of true crime media, but it did not demonstrate a significant correlation between the combined experience of anger and fear and an increased desire for harsher punishment in relation to true crime consumption. These findings imply that although emotional responses to true crime media may not directly influence the support for harsher sentencing, frequent true crime media consumption does relate to how lenient the justice system is perceived by viewers.

*Keywords:* true crime media, criminal punishment, leniency, fear, anger, criminal justice system, media consumption, public opinion.

## Introduction

True crime entertainment has established itself as a highly popular genre and an influential type of media nowadays, shaping cultural trends and public understanding of criminal behaviour and the justice system (Wiltenburg, 2004). This is partially a consequence of widespread Internet access, the rise of the television and film industries, and the continued domination of streaming services (Irshad, 2021). Moreover, the shift in media consumption habits has played a significant role in the genre's evolution, emerging from a niche subgenre and quickly becoming a mainstream cultural phenomenon (Bruzzi, 2016; Soto-Sanfiel & Montoya-Bermúdez, 2022). Streaming services, in particular, have taken advantage of this development and have been providing audiences with a plethora of documentary series, podcasts, and films about high-profile criminal cases (Larke-Walsh, 2021).

As the genre has grown, specific formats such as podcasts and documentaries have been a major source of information on crime for readers and viewers alike, especially since they gained significant attention in 2014 (Boling & Hull, 2018). True crime content is consumed widely; examples include the high viewership of films and documentaries, such as *Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story*, *Making a Murderer*, and *Conversations with a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes* (Parrot Analytics, n.d.; Nededog, 2016; Cohen, 2022). Moreover, the general availability of various media platforms—such as Stephanie Soo's true crime-focused YouTube channel and the BuzzFeed Unsolved series—has positioned entertainment as one of the main ways through which viewers engage with crime stories. These shows have millions of viewers and listeners, on average, making it impossible to overestimate the impact they might have on public opinion (Revier, 2021).

The narrative approach of true crime entertainment, which asserts that it is based on real-life events rather than fictional stories, draws in readers and viewers. By presenting crime stories in a comprehensive, long-form manner, this format allows the audience to gain insight into actual cases while also providing entertainment (Sherrill, 2020). This compelling narrative style not only engages viewers, but also shapes public perceptions of crime and justice by emphasizing dramatic elements, simplifying investigative processes, and often focusing on extreme cases that may not reflect everyday realities (Garcia-Blanco & Bennett, 2018). True crime also distinguishes itself by conveying a unique perspective on criminal justice, as well as providing viewers with a supposedly legitimate glimpse into the actual processes of criminal investigation, punishment, and justice (Irshad, 2021; Flis, 2010; Barnes, 2023). Therefore, although true crime entertainment draws in audiences through its captivating storytelling and assertions of realism, it is necessary to examine it critically, recognizing how it has the potential to affect the public's opinion of crime and justice in deceptive ways.

In addition to these narrative techniques, the broader societal impact of true crime entertainment warrants exploration. One appeal of true crime entertainment is that it makes it possible for viewers to learn about certain aspects of the legal system that the general population typically does not have access to, such as criminal profiling, courtroom protocol, investigation techniques, and the factors impacting punishment and sentencing (Dowler et al., 2006). A further element which contributes to its increasing appeal is the wider context of media expansion, which has made audiences more than simply consumers—they are now actively contributing to the conversation about criminal behaviour and criminal justice (Soothill et al., 2004; Nabi et al., 2003). An additional captivating aspect of these true crime narratives is their implied transparency; witnessing the developments of criminal investigations or revisiting cases that

have not been solved can give one a sense of being part of the realm of law enforcement (Bibas, 2006; Turnbull, 2010; Garcia-Blanco & Bennett, 2018). Because of the easy accessibility, audience involvement, and perceived transparency, true crime media could potentially affect the public's perception of crime.

Consumers of crime-related media, including true crime entertainment, may be more vulnerable to being affected by the "mean world syndrome," a term first used by Gerbner and Gross (1976). This syndrome refers to the phenomenon where heavy consumption of crime-related media can lead individuals to perceive the world as more dangerous than it actually is. This, in turn, influences an individual to hold the view that the world is dangerous and that offenders should be punished harshly (Kemp, 2023; Gerbner & Gross, 1976). As such, the graphic depictions of violence and the emotional storytelling of true crime media can intensify anxieties, such as fear of becoming a victim in criminal acts and mistrust regarding the police's capacity to deter and combat crime, which may shape public attitudes toward punishment and justice (Duffy et al., 2008; Callanan, 2012). In other words, regular consumers might raise critical questions about the role of punishment within the legal system, prompting a look into its fundamental purposes.

Within the framework of the law, criminal punishment has a number of purposes, such as deterrence, rehabilitation, and retribution (Osgood et al., 2017). The fundamental idea of retribution is a basic justification for punishment because this argument maintains that the severity of the punishment should correspond with the moral violation committed (Carlsmith, 2006). Moral proportionality, which emphasises retribution, entails that the punishment should be in line with the degree of the harm done, the offender's intentions, and any circumstances that mitigate the harm (Carlsmith et al., 2002; Warr, 1995). Research indicates that the general

public's viewpoint on punishment frequently adheres to the retributive approach, in which individuals typically base their decisions regarding sentences mainly on their desire for justice (Carlsmith, 2006; Gerber & Jackson, 2013). Moreover, the overall impression of the courts' perceived leniency can frequently be observed in public reactions, with a majority sharing the view that the sentences handed out for crimes are neither severe enough nor adequate (Warr, 1995; Cullen et al., 2000). True crime entertainment, in particular, might contribute to this perception by dramatizing criminal cases in a way that often portrays the legal system as too soft on criminals (Baranauskas & Drakulich, 2018). By emphasizing the extreme nature of crimes and the failures of the justice system, it might reinforce the public's belief that the punishments are insufficient.

Indeed, since entertainment media has historically offered the most readily available access to information on the legal system, public perceptions of offences and penalties are becoming steadily more influenced through these dramatized narratives (Doyle, 2006). Police dramas and other crime television shows, which highlight and depict dramatized heroes who work outside the bounds of the law, rose to prominence in prime-time television as early as the 1970s (Eschholz et al., 2002; Doyle, 2006). Extreme and brutal instances of criminal activity are frequently highlighted in true crime entertainment, which presents criminals as irredeemable and the legal system as incapable of carrying out proper justice (Ehrlich, 1996; Rosenberger & Callanan, 2011). This selective focus on sensational cases fosters the belief that the judicial system is ineffective and lenient, further cementing the idea that crime goes rather under punished (Ray & Kort-Butler, 2019).

In addition to all of this, consuming true crime entertainment may increase levels of fear and moral outrage, leading viewers to support harsher sentencing or punitive policies. (Comartin

et al., 2009). Previous studies have suggested that as fear of crime and feelings of anger rise, so will the desire for punishment (Hartnagel & Templeton, 2012; Ask & Pina, 2011). This effect may be linked to how true crime content often amplifies fears of victimization, which could contribute to greater support for punishment (Armborst, 2017). Furthermore, perceptions of moral violations tend to give an outlet for anger, which leads to a desire for punishment (Ask & Pina, 2011; Johnson, 2009).

### **Current study**

This study primarily focuses on investigating the underlying factors that motivate individuals to advocate for harsher criminal sentencing—particularly, whether fear or anger drives this desire. The study further aims to examine the general public's perceptions of leniency within the justice system, all in connection to the level of consumption of true crime entertainment.

Thus, the current research will test three hypotheses. The first hypothesis is that *higher consumption of true crime media is positively associated with an increased desire for harsher punishment due to higher fear*. The second hypothesis states that *higher consumption of true crime media is positively associated with an increased desire for harsher punishment due to higher anger*. Lastly, the third hypothesis posits that *individuals who consume more true crime media are more likely to perceive the justice system as being more lenient*.

This study aims to contribute to the existing literature by elucidating the complex relationship between true crime entertainment consumption and public perceptions of justice and punishment. By investigating the emotional drivers behind support for harsh sentencing and perceptions of leniency, this research will help explain how media representations of crime and

punishment shape societal attitudes towards the justice system. Understanding these responses is crucial for exploring how true crime media can influence societal views on justice, potentially public opinion toward more punitive measures or fuelling debates about criminal justice reforms.

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

The original data had 139 participants. Following data cleaning processes, 16 people were removed from the data: 2 participants did not answer the consent question, and 14 people did not complete the entire questionnaire. Thus, the final dataset included a total of 123 participants (25 males (20.33%,  $M_{age} = 22.72$ ,  $SD = 1.72$ ), and 95 females (77.24%,  $M_{age} = 21.66$ ,  $SD = 2.35$ ), and 3 individuals chose not to disclose their gender ( $M_{age} = 21.33$ ,  $SD = 4.93$ ), age range = 18-27). The responses of all the participants were included in the analyses for the variables of support for harsh punishments and perceived leniency.

The participants were adults aged between 18 and 27. Out of all the participants, 66 had German nationality (53.65%), 19 were Dutch (30.89%), and 38 reported other nationalities (30.89%). The questionnaire was administered through the University of Twente's online SONA system, where students were able to access the survey and receive credits for their participation. Moreover, the participants were recruited from the researcher's social circle and were also asked to invite others from their circle to participate; thus, a snowballing sampling technique, as well as convenience sampling were utilised. A link with a short description was also posted on different social media websites. This research was approved by the BMS Research Committee of the University of Twente. All participants gave informed consent before participation, in compliance with the requirements of the BMS Research Committee.



## Materials

The study employed a correlational research design with a cross-sectional data collection method. The research made use of a self-administered, online questionnaire distributed through the Qualtrics platform, designed to gather insights into participants' perceptions of criminal punishment, the court system, and their consumption of true crime media.

The independent variable in this study was the frequency of true crime media consumption. To measure it, three variables were considered: Crime shows, YouTube videos, and Documentaries, each representing a different form of media exposure. A 6-point Likert scale ranging from “Never” (1) to “Every day” (6) was used to measure frequency. An example item for media consumption included: *“How often do you watch documentaries about true crime, serial killers, or specific criminal cases?”* Considering that the three media consumption variables represented distinct aspects of engagement with true crime content, it was decided to combine them into a single composite index to simplify analysis. This would reduce the dimensionality of the data and provide a more thorough assessment of participants' overall exposure to real crime media.

All the items for the dependent variables were rated on a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (7), allowing participants to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement. The first dependent variable was fear-driven support for harsh punishments. A set of four items was provided to measure the relationship between the emotional response of fear and a desire for more severe criminal sentencing. The statements were as follows: *“I feel afraid when criminals get out of prison early for good behaviour, regardless of their crime,”* and *“The stories I hear heighten my fear of*

*crime, making me want to see tougher punishments for offenders.*” A factor analysis for the variable of fear-driven support for harsh punishments was performed, which showed strong support for retaining all four items, with loadings between .66 and .88, accounting for a substantial portion of the variance. The scale’s reliability was confirmed with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.83, confirming high internal consistency.

The second dependent variable was anger-driven support for harsh punishments. Similarly, a set of four statements was offered in order to measure the relationship between anger and a desire for harsher criminal sentencing. Examples of such statements are: *“The cases I hear about heighten my feelings of anger, making me want to see tough punishments for the criminals,”* and *“When I hear that a criminal received a light sentence, I feel upset because I feel that justice was not served.”* This variable underwent the same analysis for reliability and validity as mentioned above. The items had factor loadings ranging from .53 to .78, and the scale demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.77.

The third and last dependent variable was the perceived leniency of the justice system, which was measured with five statements evaluating the participants’ views on the fairness and severity of the criminal justice system. An example of a statement for this variable is: *“I believe that the current sentencing guidelines for violent crimes are too lenient.”* The items assessing perceived leniency were partially adapted from Gelb (2008), with two statements directly inspired by their measures and others developed specifically for this study to align with its unique focus. A factor analysis was conducted to identify the underlying structure and correlations among the scale items. It has been determined that the first item showed low factor loading of -0.17, suggesting that it may not be as strongly related to the rest of the leniency items. After reverse coding the item, it still exhibited a low factor loading of 0.17, leading to the

decision to delete it due to its minimal contribution to the overall scale. After conducting another factor analysis with the rest of the items, the results indicated a one-factor solution, with factor loadings ranging from .66 to .78, demonstrating a sufficiently high positive relationship with the underlying construct. Cronbach's alpha was calculated at 0.79, indicating a good level of internal consistency and that the reliability is acceptable.

## **Procedure**

The survey was completed by the participants in their own time, in their own environment, and on their own technological devices. The questionnaire was made for both mobile devices and personal computers. To analyse the results of the questionnaires, the software program RStudio was used.

Starting the study, each participant was first presented to an introduction to the questionnaire to ensure sufficient informal briefing. Furthermore, every participant was asked to read an informed consent form thoroughly, and following up, they were asked to indicate whether they consent to participate in the study, as well as give consent to their data being used for examination. A summary of the study's overview, methods, and expected duration was given to participants before the questionnaire began. To put the responses from participants in context, the questionnaire started with demographic questions regarding gender, age, and nationality. The following questions evaluated participants' knowledge of and involvement with real crime media, including the kinds of media they listened/watched to (podcasts, TV series, documentaries, etc.) and how often they consume it. Following up, three sets of statements were provided, each measuring the three dependent variables of perceived leniency of the justice system, fear-driven support for harsh punishments, and anger-driven support for harsh

punishments, respectively. After finishing all questions of the online survey, each participant was thanked again for their participation in this study and was presented a debriefing of the study that explained to them the detailed purpose of the study that they just participated in. Participation in this study was estimated to take approximately ten minutes on average, after test-running through the study multiple times by the researchers. All the personal data was anonymised and stored safely; thus, no ethical issues were detected.

## **Analysis**

The statistics program RStudio was used for the data analysis. Descriptive statistics have been calculated to summarise the characteristics of the participants, such as age, gender, and nationality, in order to get insights into the means and standard deviations for those variables.

The responses of participants to the corresponding four-item scales for anger-driven and fear-driven support for harsh punishments, respectively, were averaged to develop these constructs. This was done to reflect people's emotional intensification of anger and fear leading to stronger support for tougher punishments.

Correlation matrices and factor analyses were performed separately on all the dependent variables to understand how the items are related, assess their internal consistency, and identify redundant items.

## **Results**

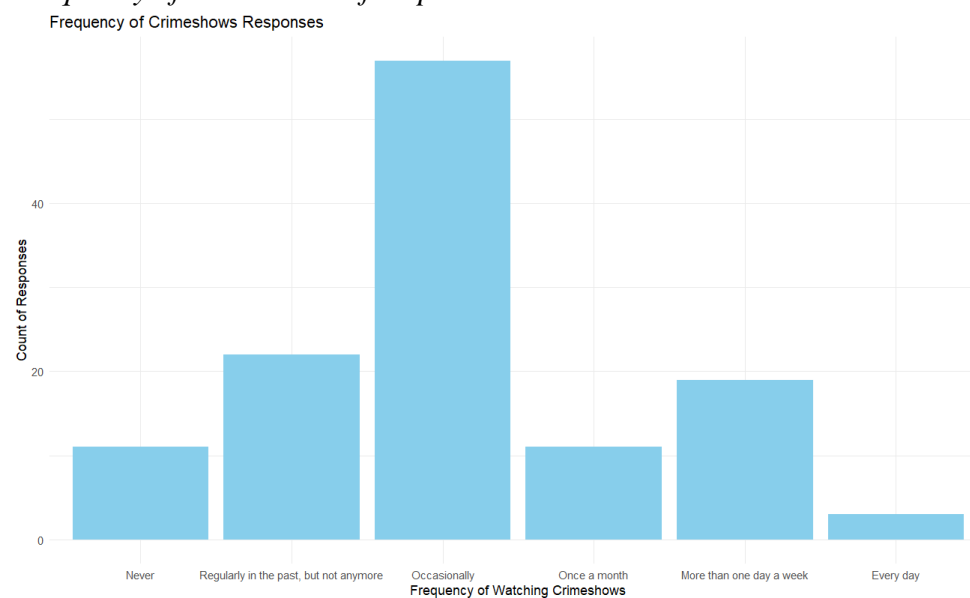
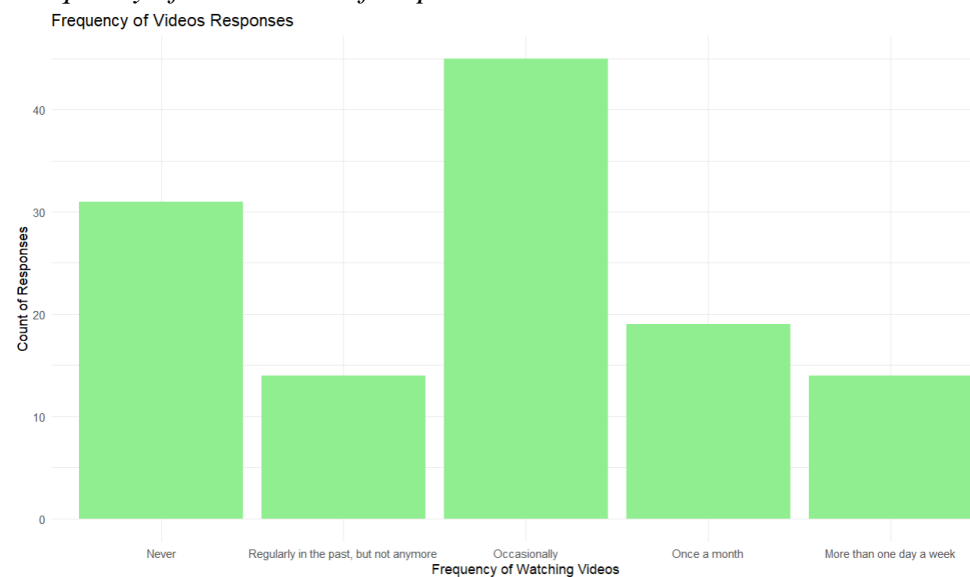
Descriptive statistics were first examined to assess the frequency of true crime media consumption. The variables representing this frequency were averaged into a single composite variable, with a mean score of 2.94 (SD = 0.83), suggesting a moderate level of consumption

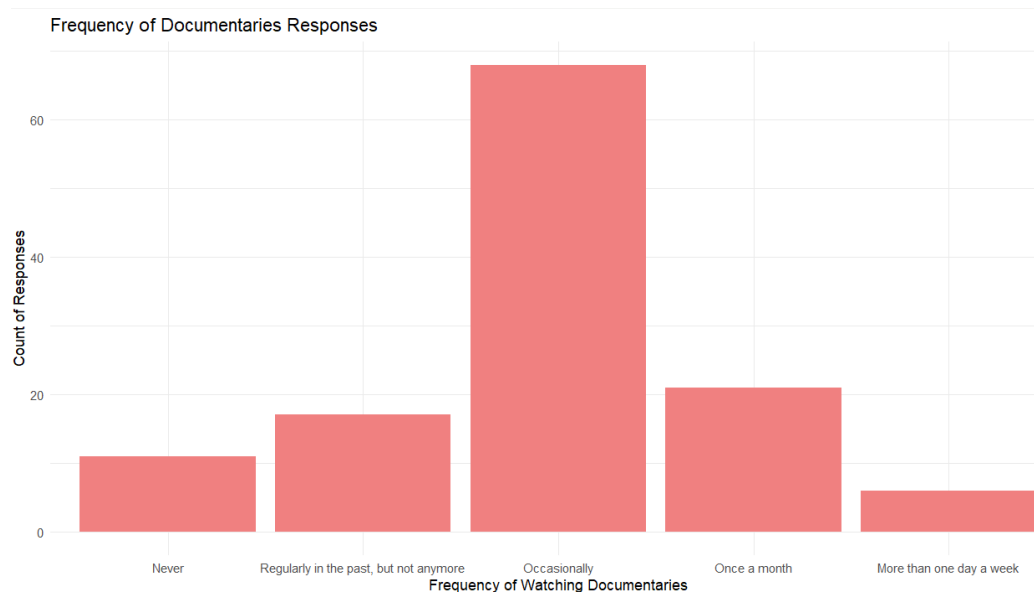
with true crime content. For a visual representation of the distribution of responses across different types of media, see Figures 1-3 below. In order to test the hypotheses and assess the relationship between various emotional reactions and perceptions and the frequency of true crime media consumed, a series of Pearson correlations were carried out.

First, to test the first hypothesis that higher consumption of true crime media is positively associated with the combined experience of fear and an increased desire for harsher punishment, a Pearson correlation was conducted. The results revealed a nonsignificant trend that higher consumption of true crime was related to the combined experience of fear and an increased desire for harsher punishment ( $r = .15$ ,  $N = 123$ ,  $p = 0.09$ ). Thus, the first hypothesis was rejected.

Next, to examine the second hypothesis that higher consumption of true crime media is positively associated with the combined experience of anger and an increased desire for harsher punishment, another Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. As with the previous analysis, the results proved a nonsignificant trend that higher consumption of true crime media was related to the combined experience of anger and an increased desire for harsher punishments ( $r = .16$ ,  $N = 123$ ,  $p = 0.07$ ). Consequently, the second hypothesis was also rejected.

Lastly, in order to evaluate the third hypothesis, which states that people who watch more true crime media are more likely to believe that the legal system is more lenient, a final correlation analysis was carried out. The findings showed a statistically significant, moderately positive association ( $r = .29$ ,  $N = 123$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). In other words, the third hypothesis is supported by this investigation, providing evidence that people tend to regard the legal system as more forgiving towards criminals the more true crime media they consume.

**Figure 1***Frequency of distribution of responses related to crime shows***Figure 2***Frequency of distribution of responses related to true crime YouTube content***Figure 3***Frequency of distribution of responses related to true crime documentaries*



## Discussion

The goal of the current study was to investigate the relationship between the frequency of true crime media consumption and two significant constructs: perceived leniency of the legal system and support for harsh punishments. This examination was important because it shed light on how widespread consumption of true crime media may relate to public perceptions of justice, potentially shaping opinions on criminal justice reform and policy. Three hypotheses concerning the impact of true crime media on emotional responses (fear and anger) in connection with harsh punishments and perceived leniency were tested using a correlational methodology.

This research showed that true crime media consumption was not related to either fear-driven or anger-driven support for harsh punishments, which was not expected. According to previous research, it was argued that when fear of crime and perceptions of moral violations rise, so does the desire for punishment (Hartnagel & Templeton, 2012; Ask & Pina, 2011; Armbrorst, 2017). As a result, it was reasonable to anticipate participants to answer similarly, with higher

consumption of true crime media leading to increased support for harsh punishments due to fear or anger. However, the data did not show support for the first two hypotheses, as the correlations between fear-related support and anger-related support for harsh punishments and true crime media consumption were weak and statistically insignificant. Although fear and anger have frequently been linked to the violent and dramatic material in true crime media (Drakulich & Baranauskas, 2021), previous research implies that support for harsher punishment may be influenced by other factors as well. These factors could potentially explain the non-significant results observed in this study, though further investigation would be needed to determine their impact. The way people respond to true crime media and develop punitive attitudes may be influenced by additional elements, such as personal characteristics, past criminal experiences, or cognitive assessment processes. For instance, how true crime media material is interpreted may be influenced by an individual's cultural context, variations in national crime rates, or the procedures of the justice system of the individual's country, which can shape their understanding of justice and punishment. (Gollwitzer & Bücklein, 2007). Differences in national crime rates might also influence how seriously people view crime, as individuals in areas with higher or lower crime rates may perceive crime as more or less prevalent and feel more or less strongly about punishment (Soares, 2003). This implies that fear or anger alone may not be sufficient to explain the support for harsher punishments among those who consume true crime media. Additionally, it is critical to note that the items used to test the first two hypotheses were designed to combine a desire for harsh punishments with a high level of fear or anger. This could have influenced the responses of individuals. It would have been better to test these variables separately, as some individuals might support harsher punishments without necessarily feeling fear or anger.



In contrast, the results of the study supported the third hypothesis. The positive relationship between consumption of true crime media and perceived leniency suggests that regular exposure to true crime content may possibly imply an impact on viewers' perceptions of the leniency of the legal system. This result is consistent with the increasing amount of evidence indicating that watching true crime media can distort people's opinions about the legal system. In true crime media, the shortcomings of the legal system, the laxity of court proceedings, and the fallout from alleged ineffectiveness in combating crime are frequently highlighted (Carlsmith, 2006; Gerber & Jackson, 2013). Such depictions have the potential to strengthen unfavourable opinions about the legal system, particularly among people who regularly watch true crime media. Even when their opinions do not match reality, these people may grow increasingly critical of the legal system because they believe it to be too lenient or too harsh (Baranauskas & Drakulich, 2018).

## **Limitations**

This study showed some interesting results, but they should be interpreted with some limitations in mind. The first limitation is that the study's sample primarily consists of individuals who watch or have watched true crime media, with only a small number of participants who have never engaged with such media. As a result, the findings may not fully represent the views of individuals who do not consume true crime content. Including individuals who do not watch true crime content would have been valuable, as it could have provided a comparison between those who consume crime-related content and those who do not, thus offering insights into whether media consumption plays a central role in shaping punitive attitudes. Additionally, determining whether true crime content actively creates new viewpoints

on crime, justice, and punishment or only reinforces preexisting beliefs may be possible by looking at the responses of non-viewers. To explore this, participants could first complete a survey about their opinions on these topics to establish a baseline. The sample could then be divided into two groups: viewers, who regularly consume true crime media, and non-viewers, who do not. After exposing the viewer group to specific true crime content, both groups would complete the same survey again. By comparing the pre- and post-exposure responses, it would be possible to determine whether true crime media influences viewers' viewpoints, while non-viewers' unchanged responses would suggest whether their beliefs remain consistent. Another limitation is that the sample primarily consisted of individuals in their 20s. While this demographic offers insights into the trends of true crime media consumption, including older individuals could have provided a broader perspective towards crime and punishment due to personal beliefs, social media savviness, or historical changes in the legal system.

A third limitation is that this research relied on self-reported information, which is frequently susceptible to social desirability bias. Particularly when talking about sensitive issues like their opinions on crime and punishment, participants might have positioned themselves in a way they felt was more socially acceptable. Given that respondents may have given responses that reflect social standards or expectations rather than their actual feelings, this might have had an impact on the data's accuracy.

The cross-sectional design of the study additionally limits its capacity to prove causality. Although it is able to detect correlations between the public's perceptions of crime and punishment and the consumption of true crime media, it is unable to conclusively ascertain whether media consumption leads to a shift in attitudes or whether people who already hold certain beliefs simply are more likely to watch true crime media.

## **Future research**

One course of action for future research could be a longitudinal research to gain a better understanding of whether exposure to true crime media causes long-term shifts in perceptions of retribution, fear, or the judicial system's perceived leniency by tracking individuals over a longer time frame. Moreover, broadening the sample's demographic range may provide light on whether the consequences of consuming true crime media are the same for various age, gender, and location-based groups.

It would be particularly interesting to investigate if emotions like anger and fear serve as mediators for a desire for harsh punishments. Clarifying whether the public's demand for harsher sentencing is influenced by these emotional reactions could help explain how policy preferences may be influenced by how crime is portrayed in the media. When developing opinions about justice, such study might be helpful in distinguishing between rational arguments and emotional reactions. Examining different types of media or content in future research would be highly insightful and could provide a more nuanced understanding of how various forms of true crime media influence attitudes toward crime and punishment. The current study focused on general true crime media consumption, but specific content such as documentaries, podcasts, or news coverage, might influence individuals differently. To examine this, future research could have participants engage with distinct types of true crime content, such as watching a documentary or a movie based on true crime events. Afterward, participants could complete surveys to assess any changes in their attitudes toward crime and punishment. By comparing the effects of each type of content, researchers could determine if certain formats have a stronger or more distinct impact on individuals' perceptions.

Other prospective study topics could include investigating how the dramatic presentation of criminal cases influences empathy towards either the victims or the offenders, and how frequent exposure affects desensitization to violent crime. Empathy is important because media portrayal might influence whether individuals lean toward supporting victim rights or offender rehabilitation (Anastasio & Costa, 2004). This could have significant consequences for public opinion, as individuals who are more empathetic toward victims may advocate for harsher punishments, while those who empathize with offenders may emphasize rehabilitation over retribution. Furthermore, desensitization to violent crime could impact emotional responses, making individuals more accepting of harsh punishments or less empathic towards victims or offenders (Mrug et al., 2014).

## **Implications**

The results of this study have significant ramifications for policymakers and the media industry. The study draws attention to how true crime entertainment may affect how the general population perceives crime and punishment. Thus, content creators and true crime media producers might want to revisit how they present these subjects, given that this type of media frequently sensationalizes criminal activity and presents the legal system as ineffectual or excessively lenient (Ray & Kort-Butler, 2019).

Previous research also suggests that when the public demands tougher punishments, it can influence policymakers' decisions, especially when it comes to laws regarding sentencing and the larger criminal justice system (Van Gelder et al., 2011). Although the present study found no significant link between true crime media consumption and support for harsh punishments, it would be important for policymakers to understand the complex factors

influencing public views on justice. Likewise, educational programs that encourage a more accurate understanding of the criminal justice system are necessary. Programs for media literacy could lower the risk of false information by educating viewers in critically interacting with true crime content. Thus, it is crucial for true crime media creators and legal professionals to work together to guarantee accurate portrayals of crime and justice.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to gain more insight on how the frequency of consumption of true crime media is connected to the public's attitudes of criminal punishment and the criminal justice system. The results showed a significant relationship between the frequency of watching true crime entertainment and the perception of leniency in the legal system. However, it did not demonstrate a strong association between emotions like fear and anger and a desire for harsher sentencing from the frequent viewing of true crime media. Public opinion is strongly influenced by the media; nonetheless, it is essential to be aware that how crime and punishment are portrayed might be distorted.

It is critical to recognize the limitations of the study, including the measuring methods, sample size, and potential confounding variables that might have affected the outcomes of the study. Regardless of these limitations, the results add to the expanding corpus of research by highlighting the nuanced connection between the public's perceptions of criminal punishment and the consumption of true crime media. The study establishes and enables more research aimed at refining methodologies and exploring other facets that could offer a more thorough understanding of the relationships between the perceptions of the criminal justice system and the consumption of true crime media.

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## Appendix 1

## Full Questionnaire

The next few questions are about the Criminal Justice System as a whole (the police, the courts, the people that prosecute offenders, and the prison system). To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

[illegible]

The following questions explore your attitudes towards criminal punishment. To what extent do you agree or disagree with these statements?

[illegible]

To what extent do you agree or disagree with these statements?

[illegible]