

**Crime Stories Unveiled: How True Crime Podcasts Shape Public Perception of Criminality
and the Justice System**

Joel Gehring (s2770709)

Department of Psychology (BMS), University of Twente

202000377: Psychology of Conflict, Risk and Safety

Dr. Jiska Jonas van Dijk

Dr. Marielle Stel

16.01.2025

Abstract

True crime media is a largely growing genre of entertainment media, reporting cases of violent crimes and police work. One of these media formats is true crime media podcasts, which is a growing subgenre of true crime entertainment. Due to the sensationalist nature of true crime journalism and documentation, individuals might be exposed to narrations of extreme cruelty and violence. Therefore, this study focuses on the potential effects of true crime podcasts on the psychological factors of punitiveness, agreement levels with the legal system, perceived crime rates and fear levels. A cross-sectional study was conducted consisting of 114 participants filling out a survey on their frequency of true crime podcast consumption and individual perception of crime, crime prevalence and opinion on the legal system. A Person correlation analysis was conducted to assess relationships between consumption frequency and psychological factors. Contrary to expectations, no significant effects of consumption frequency on psychological outcomes were found. These findings challenge the narrative that true crime podcasts influence individual perceptions regarding crime prevalence, fear of crime and perception of justice. While this suggests that there may be limited societal impacts of true crime podcasts compared to other media, this study emphasizes the potential usefulness of true crime podcasts in shaping perception, providing education and journalistic value without the concern of adverse psychological impacts. Future research should focus on longitudinal designs and implement podcast-specific measures and scales finally extending the usefulness of podcasts as an educational medium without risk of distortion.

Crime Stories Unveiled: How True Crime Podcasts Shape Public Perception of Criminality and the Justice System

Crime media nowadays plays an essential role in shaping the public perception of criminality (Dowler, 2006). In recent years crime media and entertainment have established themselves to be a popular medium for entertainment, learning as well as just something to listen to, to keep one entertained while being occupied with different tasks (McCormack, 2024). Especially entertainment regarding true crime has been a growing business and has gained more popularity throughout recent years (McCormack, 2024). Such entertainment formats dealing with criminality and especially unsolved cases, enable the consumers to have access to deep insights into many criminal stories and the functioning of certain justice systems (Dowler et al., 2006). Therefore, there has been a rising trend in interest in true crime entertainment media.

Throughout recent years many people have also started to consume such entertainment via a different platform, so-called podcasts (Rime et al., 2022). Podcasts are usually audio recordings of one or multiple persons engaging in a conversation regarding a certain topic (Tobin & Guadagno, 2022). These recordings of conversations can then be downloaded and listened to by consumers via various platforms (Tobin & Guadagno, 2022). Some podcasts have also become important journalistic platforms for individuals to keep them up to date with regular everyday news as well as special individual journalistic and entertaining stories (Bruzzsprout, 2024). One of these genres is the true crime domain, which has been a rising genre in podcasts throughout recent years (McCullin, 2024). An increasing number of individuals tend to listen to podcasts that report on actual criminal cases and stories from either recent years, but also cases from the past (Casares, 2020). Crime podcasts and especially true crime podcasts give cases of criminality and violence more spotlight therefore making gruel and dark stories available for

vastly everyone (McCormack, 2024). Such stories often provide deep insight into specific cases, investigations and legal proceedings (Grundlingh, 2017). Therefore, listeners could adopt an objective opinion on such cases through the insights that the different podcasts provide, especially through descriptions of extreme cases allowing polarization (Bruzzi, 2016).

Despite much research on crime media and true crime entertainment, the domain of true crime podcasts still only includes a few studies, making it difficult to make sense of explanations of the societal influence such podcasts have on the public (Boling, 2019). Potentially, podcasts might extensively be able to polarize perceptions of crimes and their severity and frequency. One article by Dresow (2018) argues that true crime media plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions of criminal justice. Narrations of true crime cases often sensationalize crime to provide dramatic and engaging storytelling, which can result in distortion of listeners' views on justice and punishment, in a way that punishment is desired to be more extreme, and justice is harsher on perpetrators of crime. This narrative storytelling in true crime podcasts emphasizes certain aspects of the legal process or justice system (Dresow, 2018). More focus lies on emotional storytelling and sensational elements of cases resulting in an imbalanced view of legal complexities (Dresow, 2018). Dresow's research, however, focuses only on previous true crime media without focusing on podcasts as a medium for the true crime genre. Therefore, extensive research on the podcast medium must be made to gather insights into the potential distortion of perception regarding legal proceedings.

The sensationalism in true crime podcasts might also lead to higher expectations regarding crime prevalence. Another insight into the sensationalism present in true crime was discussed by Grundlingh (2017), where she argues that regular media consumption, for example by watching documentaries or series, can shape perceptions of crime. Sensationalism in media

often leads listeners to believe that violent crimes are far more prevalent than statistically proven, which contributes to higher fear and anxiety of crime which in turn also results in heightened expectations of crime and crime rates (Grundlingh, 2017). However, due to the small scope of analysis in this study the influence of other media, such as podcasts, on heightened fear levels and perceptions of crime rates, seems relatively unexplored making it difficult to explain a general phenomenon.

Increase in publicity of true crime podcasts highlight the process of legal prosecution in various cases, which might lead to heightened expectations towards a justice system and how it deals with violent crimes. Insight was brought by McCullin (2024) who elaborates on the so-called “Serial Effect”, which is the phenomenon where the success of certain popular true crime podcasts has led to a large increase in publicity and interest in that domain. This phenomenon was based on the public effect of the podcast “Serial”, which deals with true crime cases (McCullin, 2024). This podcast has brought large amounts of attention to specific cases, which even led to re-examination of certain cases or even exonerations (McCullin, 2024). However, as McCullin (2024) mentioned, this increase in attention to true crime cases also leads to negative effects such as increased expectations towards the justice system, especially heightened expectations of the speed of legal prosecution. This effect of the podcast “Serial” shows that true crime podcasts, can influence public expectations of the legal system. Now the question arises, whether regular consumption of true crime podcasts in general can shape other psychological factors such as fear and trust.

Sherrill (2020) adds to these insights and expands on the “Serial Effect” by exploring the fascination of true crime podcasts and their impact on journalism. As described above the Serial Effect resulted in a large increase in demand for true crime content. Therefore, leading journalists

to dive deep into investigative reporting of criminal cases, which could overshadow the journalist's motivation to report and lead to a misuse of the true crime genre to be a solely entertaining matter (Sherrill, 2020). Sherrill (2016) warns that such storytelling and interest in true crime could influence the perception of objective truth in criminal cases which could also result in misperceptions of justice in such cases and ultimately might increase fear or anxiety in individuals. Since this effect explains a large increase in interest in true crime podcasts, one must focus on the effect of this increase. McCullin (2024) and Sherrill (2020) both highlight the possible impact of regular consumption; however, no research has been done on this psychological effect. Therefore, exploring the psychological effects of true crime podcasts is the focus of this study.

Since true crime can serve multiple purposes of consumption, there might be influence on how such podcasts can influence perceptions on real cases from a perspective of justice. Bruzzi's insights (2016) add to the discussion about true crime entertainment by further examining true crime documentaries, which have a large overlap of features of true crime podcasts. In the true crime genre blending of entertainment and factual content is a common phenomenon, which can lead to a misinterpretation of the depth of the actual case, especially from a legal perspective (Bruzzi, 2016). Bruzzi (2016) describes that this blur between the lines of entertainment and journalism can result in viewers misperceiving the multifaceted system of justice as well as creating a ground for the evaluation of good and evil, which could lead to the same effect in true crime podcasts.

True crime podcasts cannot be viewed as mutually exclusive servants of journalism, justice or entertainment. Boling (2019) argues that most podcasts aim to provide insights on wrongfully conducted cases of justice while other true crime podcasts serve solely for

entertainment. The confusion of purposes can lead to misperceptions of the criminal justice system by listeners (Boling, 2019). Boling (2019) argues that in some cases the entertainment purposes of a true crime podcast can overshadow the journalistic purposes, which could lead to a distortion of processing this information ultimately influencing the psychological factors such as fear or perception of individuals. However, this insight elaborates on the possible effects of regular consumption, but no actual insights focus on the potential perception of a legal system after regular true crime podcast consumption.

A further insight into the construction of crime narratives in media is provided by Dowler et al. (2006). They argue that the way crime is portrayed in popular culture can influence public attitudes toward punishment. Criminals are often presented as inherently evil or violent and deserving of harsh punishment, leading to more punitiveness within the public (Dowler et al., 2006). However, this effect has not been tested for podcasts. The argument of Dowler et al. (2006) could align with the narrative storytelling in podcasts, which focuses on sensationalized storytelling and could lead listeners to favour punishable justice over rehabilitative justice, but no essential research was done on this specific effect.

Reviewing the literature as mentioned above multiple questions arise on the effect that podcasts as a distinctive form of true crime media could have on public perceptions of crime. While previous studies of the effects of true crime media focus often on sensationalism and narrative bias, podcasts have a similar but distinct way of storytelling based on narrative intimacy and episodic storytelling. Podcasts also are mostly limited to audio-only formats in a conversational setting creating a different type of engagement in the listener, by making them listen to a “regular” conversation, which could potentially create different psychological effects in listeners as other media (McCullin, 2024). Therefore, this study aims to answer how regular

consumption of true crime podcasts shapes consumers' perceptions of criminality, punishment and attitudes towards justice systems dealing with crime. By gathering such insights, this research aims to contribute to a thorough understanding of the psychological impact of regular true crime podcast consumption. This paper aims to answer the research question: "How does regular true crime podcast consumption influence the public perception of criminality and attitudes towards the justice system?". Based on that research question and the review of literature on true crime entertainment consumption, as mentioned above, the following hypotheses were formulated to be answered:

H1: Individuals who more frequently consume true crime podcasts are more punitive towards perpetrators of crimes and violent crimes.

H2: Consuming true crime podcasts more frequently, results in having lower agreement levels with the legal system regarding criminality and the associated punishment.

H3: Consuming true crime podcasts more frequently, results in heightened expectations of crime rates and crime rates of violent crimes.

H4: Consuming true crime podcasts more frequently, results in higher levels of fear towards new crimes.

Methodology

Research Design

This research was conducted as a cross-sectional design study. Moreover, this study focused on a correlational survey design, that aimed to find out the relationship between the frequency of true crime podcast consumption and multiple different psychological factors. Therefore, the independent variable of this study was the *Frequency of true crime podcast consumption*, measured by participant indication of frequency of listening (Every week, 2-3,

times per week, Once a month, Occasionally and Never). This study aimed to test the effect of the independent variable *Frequency of true crime podcast consumption* on the dependent variables *Perceptions of punitiveness* (H1), *Attitudes toward the justice system* (H2), *Perception of crime rates* (H3) and *Fear of crime* (H4).

Participants

Including all responses to the survey, the total number of participants 133. Following data cleaning processes, 19 people were removed from the data: 2 participants did not consent to having their data collected, and 17 had incomplete responses. Thus, the final dataset included a total of 114 participants (23 males (~ 21%) and 89 females (~ 79%) aged between 18 and 27 (Mean age = 21.91, SD = 2.324). The participants were adults aged 18 and above. 18 of the participants had Dutch nationality (~ 16%), 60 were German (~ 53%), and 36 reported other nationalities (~ 31%).

The questionnaire was administered through the University of Twente's online SONA system, where students were able to access the survey. After completion, each participant was granted 0.25 SONA study credits. 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 utilized. 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.

Materials and Measures

The study was conducted using the online platform Qualtrics Experience Management (XM), which is used to collect data via a self-designable survey. The survey used in this research was designed to ensure reliable data collection on the effect of the independent variable on the

dependent variables. Qualtrics is a reliable and valid source of collecting empirical data, which was the reason this platform was used to create a survey that aims to answer all four hypotheses (*Experience Management (XM) Content Hub*, 2024).

The independent variable *Consumption Frequency* was measured with one self-report question that asked participants to indicate the frequency of their true crime podcast consumption ranging from “I have never listened to a true crime podcast before”, “Occasionally”, “Once a month”, “2-3 weeks per month” and “Every week”. This was deemed to be precise enough as the hypotheses indicated above test for the impact of frequent consumption and a review of podcast statistics showed that on average individual listens to podcasts once every one to two weeks (Buzzsprout, 2024).

To test *Punitiveness toward perpetrators of (violent) crimes* (H1), five items were used and partially adapted from the existing scale Attitudes toward the criminal legal system (ATCLS) (Martin & Cohn, 2004). Items to test for hypothesis 1, for example, consisted of “In many cases, perpetrators of crimes do not receive punishments harsh enough” or “Perpetrators of crime are usually given the right punishment”. To test for H1, participants were asked to indicate their Agreement/Disagreement level on a 1-7 Likert scale. *Strongly Agree* means high punitiveness and *Strongly Disagree* means low punitiveness. Since some of the items were posed in a different direction, these were reverse coded before doing any analyses and testing. The reverse coded items were “Perpetrators of crime are usually given the right punishments” and “The intensity of the punishment given usually fits the crime”. To ensure reliability and validity of the scale, Cronbach’s alpha and Factor analysis have been computed. Factor analysis has shown lower factor loadings for item 2 and 5 of the scale, which resulted in removal of item 2 “Perpetrators of crime are usually given the right punishments”. Reliability analysis has shown a raw alpha value

of 0.66, indicating moderate reliability. When removing said item “Perpetrators of crime usually are given the right punishment”, the alpha score becomes 0.69, indicating acceptable reliability.

For H2 to analyze the effect of *Consumption Frequency on agreement levels with the legal system regarding criminality and the associated punishment*, Pearson Correlation analysis was done. The items “Prosecuted offenders often given unfair punishments”, “Some laws are too “loose” and fail to punish a perpetrator correctly”, “Most of the laws are effective at protecting people”, “Judges tend to let bias and prejudice affect their decisions” and “Judges make unfair decisions most of the time”, were chosen from the ATCLS to collect scores for the dependent variable. The original scale consisted of a total of 30 items, however, most of these items were phrased in a way that would measure different factors, leading to removal for this research. Each participant had to indicate on a Likert scale ranging from 1-7 (1= Strongly Disagree to 7= Strongly Agree), to what extent they would agree with these statements, with *Strongly Agree* meaning high agreement and *Strongly Disagree* meaning low agreement. For this scale also one item was formulated differently, resulting in reverse coding this item for proficient testing. The reverse coded item was “Most of the laws are effective at protecting people”. Testing for reliability and validity, Cronbach’s alpha and Factor analysis have been computed. Factor analysis has shown factor loadings for the reverse coded item to be 0.20, which indicates insufficient validity, resulting in removal of the item. A raw alpha score of 0.58 has been calculated. After the item “Most of the laws are effective at protecting people” has been removed a moderate reliability with a Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.62 was ensured.

To measure *perception of rates of (violent) crimes* (H3), no existing scale was used. Therefore, a new scale was created to measure participants indication of perceived crime rates. For this, participants were asked the question “How often does crime occur in my close

proximity?” and were asked to indicate their perception, with one of the eight items “Every day”, “Weekly”, “Multiple times a month”, “Monthly”, “Multiple times a year”, “Yearly” and “Never”. Here eight options were chosen to be presented to the participant to ensure the most accurate indication of perception of crime rates, that allows to measure precisely, while measuring the effect of the independent variable. Higher scores on those options that indicate more frequent perceptions of crime, are expected to indicate higher perceived levels of crime and vice versa. Since only one item has been used to measure participants perceived crime rates there was no reliability and validity testing done.

Fear Levels of crime were tested using the essential fear of crime scale as used by Rosenberger and Callanan (2012) in their research of the effect on media on penal attitudes. This fear of crime scale consists of eight distinctive items that try to measure a participant’s perceived fear of (violent) crimes. Originally, this scale asked respondents to indicate their level of fear on a 1-10 Likert scale, in which 10 indicates highest level of fear (Martin & Cohn, 2004). However, in this research the eight items were reformulated, and respondents were asked to indicate their Agreement/Disagreement on a 1-7 Likert scale. Items like “I am scared that a burglar will enter my house while I am away”, “I am fearing that a burglar will enter my house while I am still there” or “I am fearing to get assaulted on the street, were chosen. Furthermore, *Strongly agree* indicates high fear of crime levels and *Strongly disagree* indicates low fear of crime levels. A factor analysis has shown factor loadings for all 8 items to be between 0.67 and 0.84, indicating sufficient contribution to the measurement. A reliability analysis shows to conclude to a Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.91 indicating strong reliability.

Procedure

Starting the study, each participant was obliged to read 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 giving consent to their data being used for examination. All participants gave informed consent before participation, in compliance with the requirements of the BMS Research Committee. After informed consent, participants were asked to answer a demographic questionnaire. After collection of consent and general data, participants were taken to the main part of the online study, starting with some general questions regarding frequency of true crime media consumption, as indicated above. Following up, the main part of the survey was asked to be conducted, testing the hypotheses in chronological order and every participant was asked prior to each question to indicate their answer to each question truthfully and thought-out. After finishing all questions of the online survey, every participant was thanked again for their participation in this study and were presented the debriefing of the study that explained to them the detailed purpose of the study that they just participated in. The participation of this study was estimated to take approximately 10 minutes on average, after test running through the study multiple times by the researchers. After examining the data, the average procedure of taking the questionnaire took approximately 7 minutes.

Results

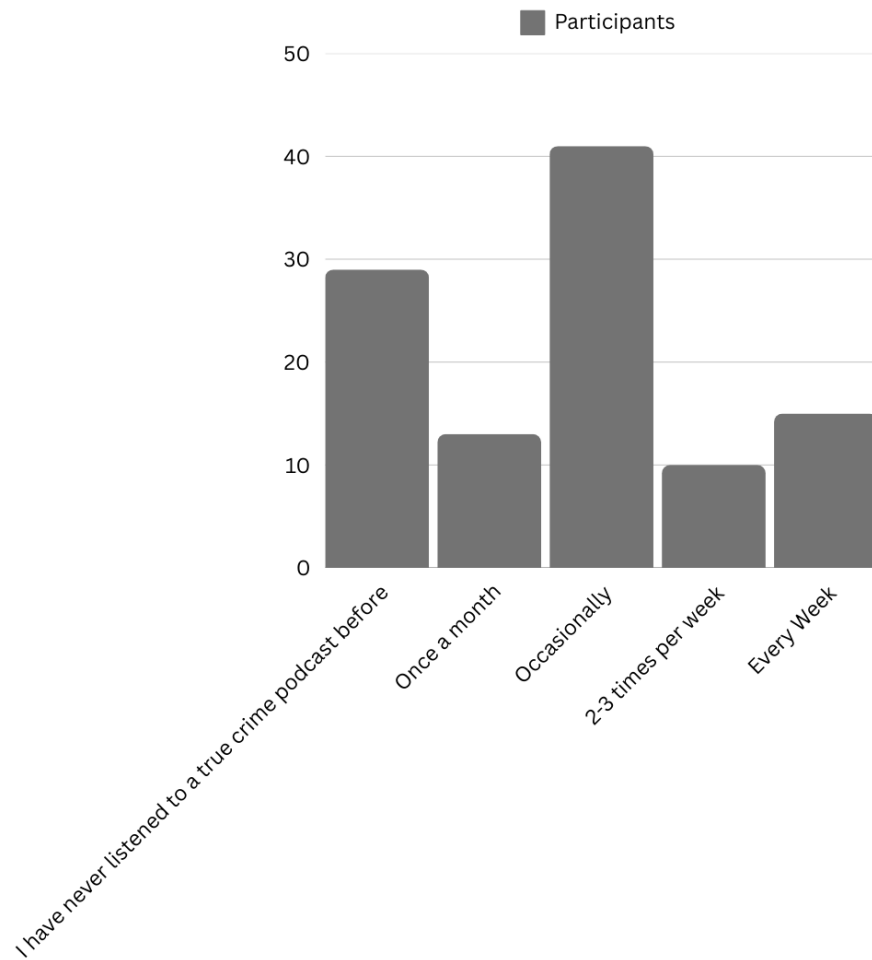
Descriptive Statistics

On average participants reported listening to true crime podcasts *Occasionally* with 41 participants indicating this score, while 29 participants indicated that they have never listened to a true crime podcast before. Figure 1 below shows the distribution of Podcast Listening Frequency. The computed mean score for *Punitiveness* was 4.068 ($SD = 0.835$). Computing the mean score for *Agreement* level, the results come to an average score of 4.312 ($SD = 0.749$). On

average participants reported having an agreement score of 3.465 ($SD = 1.834$) for *Perceived Crime Rates*. *Fear levels* were measured using an 8-item fear scale, resulting in an average fear score of 4.340 ($SD = 1.387$).

Figure 1

Histogram for Podcast Listening Frequency



Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1 stated that podcast listening frequency has a positive effect on punitiveness. Meaning the higher podcast listening frequency, the higher the punitiveness score of individuals will be. Therefore, a Pearson Correlation analysis was done to test the relationship between Podcast listening frequency and Punitiveness. The statistical analysis showed there is no

significant correlation ($r(114) = 0.144, p > 0.05$). The statistical analysis implies that the more frequently true crime podcasts are consumed, no effect on the punitiveness score will be measured.

For hypothesis 2, the more frequently participants listen to true crime podcasts, the lower the agreement score will be, also a Pearson Correlation test was run to check for the effect of podcast listening frequency on agreement levels. The statistical analysis showed no significant relationship ($r = 0.020, N = 114, p = 0.832$). This means that frequency of true crime podcasts has no influence on the degree of agreement level with the legal system.

The analysis of Hypothesis 3, the higher the frequency of true crime podcast consumption the higher are perceived crime rates, has shown by doing a Pearson Correlation test between podcast that there is no correlation between *Podcast Listening Frequency* and *Crime Rate Perception* ($r = 0.009, N = 114, p = 0.925$). These results indicate that there is no significant difference in perceived crime scores based on frequency of true crime consumption.

Hypothesis 4 stated that the more individuals consume true crime podcasts, the higher the reported fear levels regarding fear of crime will be. Therefore, a Pearson Correlation test was done to test the relationship of podcast consumption frequency on fear levels. The statistical analysis has shown not to be significant, ($r = 0.099, N = 114, p = 0.293$). This means that after analysis there is no relationship between *Frequency of true crime podcast consumption* on *Fear levels* of participants.

Discussion

This study focused on the potential influences of frequent true crime podcast consumption on psychological factors and mechanisms. Since, true crime entertainment is a popular form of entertainment nowadays, insights on the potential effects of consumption are

important. There is already a large amount of research on true crime entertainment media formats and its' effects on the perception of crime, however, as literature review has shown, true crime podcasts have been relatively unexplored regarding the perception of crime rates, fear levels, and attitude towards a legal system and perpetrators of crime, they could evoke.

Therefore, multiple hypotheses on the correlation between podcast consumption and such factors have been tested and analyzed. Hypothesis testing has shown that contrary to expectations no significant correlations for any of the four hypotheses was found. Scores for *Punitiveness, Agreement levels with the legal system, Perceived Crime Rates* and *Fear Levels* showed no significance in relation to frequency of true crime podcast consumption. These results mean that the crime entertainment media true crime podcasts result in no significant distortion of psychological factors regarding crime. Reconsidering the theoretical background for this study, these results contradict the expectations supported by relevant literature.

The role of sensationalism within true crime media could vary, meaning that the purpose of storytelling within true crime podcasts could have different impacts on listeners compared to consumers of other true crime media, since this study shows no adverse psychological impact on consumers. In the research by Grundlingh (2017), however, she emphasized the role of sensationalism and its' role in modern media. She explains how across various forms of mainstream media as well as niche journalism on criminality and true crime, there is a large focus on sensationalizing stories or cases to make them more appealing (Grundlingh, 2017). Considering the findings of this study in relation to Grundlingh's research (2017), the insights do not align. However, no insights on the overlap of individuals who consume multiple media formats of true crime, were made. Therefore, there could be different psychological impact on those who solely listen to true crime podcasts without consuming any other form of media.

Future research could focus on this overlap and aim to explain the distinction between media formats.

Considering the rise in interest in true crime podcasts and the growing trend in consumption, the frequency of consumption shows no impact regarding certain psychological factors. This paper emphasizes the insignificance the frequency of consumption and the impact the presented sensationalism has on the listener. The insights provided by McCullin (2024) about the “Serial Effect”, however, contradict the findings of this research, as McCullin’s original insights (2024) emphasized the strong narrative influence of true crime media on the public’s perception of crime. She explained that true crime media, especially podcasts, have large influence on the societal perception due to the intensity of cases being elaborated on (McCullin, 2024). Considering the findings of this study, these findings extend on the insights by McCullin by introducing a different perspective, true crime podcasts could significantly be of entertainment nature, since no effect on psychological effects was found. True crime entertainment in the form of podcasts could emphasize the lacking risk of frequent consumption. Moreover, it could merge journalism and entertainment, focusing on narrative enrichment regarding criminal documentation.

The entertaining nature of thrilling true crime podcasts focuses on storytelling and entertainment, the impact of such entertaining stories could explain insignificance, as presented in this study. In alignment with these findings, Boling (2019) explains in her research the misleading narration in true crime podcasts resulting in missing directions for the content being produced. Due to the aim of being journalistic, providing entertainment and even functioning as an alternative form justice, there is often mixed approaches in true crime podcasts, resulting in unclear narratives and mainly thrilling stories (Boling, 2019).

This research suggest that true crime podcasts follow different narrative paths as conventional true crime media as well as the possibility of podcasts limiting the width of which sensationalism reaches the listener. Relating the results to the hypotheses this could mean that for punitiveness different factors might have larger influence on perception. The lacking correlation of frequency of consumption on agreement score for legal systems could suggest a lacking connection of information on structural legal systems and how listeners could acquire perceptions through such media. Furthermore, the results gained in this research could suggest that for true crime podcasts the prior research on sensationalism in convenient crime media does not apply. This suggests that podcasts may differ in their psychological impact. Also, the lack of effect of podcast consumption on fear levels, shows that regular true crime podcasts differ in their psychological impact compared to conventional media.

Potential explanations for the insights of this research could be the medium specific effects of true crime podcasts. As these podcasts usually are published in audio only formats, listeners might be more disengaged compared to true crime media with visual stimuli, like documentaries (Boling, 2019). Therefore, listeners could potentially have more difficulties to be emotionally engaged in the narratives being told in these podcasts, resulting in no psychological impact of listening to it (Tobin & Guadagno, 2022). Another potential explanation for no significant results in hypothesis testing could be the listener profile itself. Individuals consume podcasts by selecting which stories they want to listen to themselves (Tobin & Guadagno, 2022). This could result in self-selection bias, which leads to individuals that are already emotionally distanced or skeptical of such media to consume such content (Elston, 2021). Another possible explanation could be the large variability in focus that are present in different public true crime podcasts (Chan-Olmsted & Wang, 2020). The focus for each podcast is highly individual, which

could mean that the focus of each episode could be different to another, which could then have different psychological impacts, resulting in dilution of effects (Boling & Hull, 2018). Future research could emphasize the potential influence of specific contents presented in true crime podcasts and provide insights on distinctive contextual matters, each new episode could intel.

Limitations

To make this study able to contribute to future insights it is necessary to report on the limitations of this study. Firstly, the sample characteristic is difficult to use to infer a general population effect of this research. The sample consists of young students, predominantly female and culturally homogenous, which could explain a trend of homogeneity in the item responses leading to insignificant results and limiting the generalizability of the study. Furthermore, this study solely relied on self-reported measure scales not preventing possible response biases. Participants could be influenced by social desirability bias for example, which is the tendency to provide responses that individuals think to be socially acceptable and desirable (Grimm, 2010). Since the study tests agreement levels with the legal system as well as punitiveness towards perpetrators of crime, individuals could potentially let social desirability bias influence their responses regarding perceptions of legal proceedings and prosecution of criminals. Another aspect is the lack of validated scales for perceived crime rates, which reduces reliability for that measure. Since this was a first time use for this scale no inferences about its' usefulness to measure perceived crime rates could be made.

Another constraint in measurement could be the lacking specification on which legal system the items of the scales focus on. Respondents reported to consume mostly US American true crime podcasts, while being from Europe themselves, which could result in less relatability of the content and therefore no psychological impact. Finally, the study design itself could

potentially prevent inferences due to its' cross-sectional nature, which only collects data at that specific point in time. Participants that might only just started listening to true crime podcasts, could have different psychological impacts compared to those that listen regularly for a long time. Furthermore, no constraint on how long participants must have listened to true crime podcasts before, to participate in the study, were made which means no indication of intensity and duration of consumption could be made. Therefore, longitudinal effects which, might produce different outcomes based on consumption frequency. could not be considered.

Implications and Advice for Future Research

This study contributed to the general knowledge about psychological effects of consuming true crime podcasts, regularly. Since the findings conclude no significant negative impact of consumption, this study underlines the potential usefulness of podcasts becoming a true crime media format that could contribute to knowledge and understanding of real crime and legal proceedings without adverse negative effect. Future research could benefit from the insights provided by these studies and could potentially expand on the educational and entertaining possibilities of true crime podcasting.

To implicate this research into the field of true crime media influences on cognitive factors, it is necessary to make sense out of the findings. The results of this research suggest the need to differentiate between distinctive media formats of true crime entertainment. Therefore, highlighting the impact of audio storytelling and podcast narratives on shaping attitudes, fear and perceptions. However, the findings of this study suggest a challenge to concerns about the significant negative distortion of public perceptions regarding crime. This could mean a possible usefulness of podcast being potentially able to positively shape and influence public perceptions,

which aligns with Boling's (2019) previous findings. True crime podcasts could possibly focus on education and awareness without the risk of severe psychological effects.

Future research should therefore focus on larger generalizability of research on true crime podcasts. Potentially considering longitudinal studies to be able to track changes in perceptions and attitudes over a longer amount of time. This could result in more reliable data. Moreover, as the domain of true crime entertainment has multiple different media formats, one should potentially create validated scales for podcast-specific psychological factors. Furthermore, also focusing on the examination on podcast-specific characteristics such as the intonation and focus used by podcasters and the conversational nature by those doing the episodes, to better understand specific effects. Finally, one should expand on the diversity of the sample for more generalizable results.

Conclusion

To conclude, the research question: "How does regular true crime podcasts consumption influence the public perception of criminality and attitudes towards the justice systems?", was aimed to be answered by collecting quantitative data and testing four hypotheses. The results show that regular consumption of true crime podcasts does not significantly influence *Punitiveness, Agreement levels with the legal system, Perceived Crime Rates and Fear Levels*, answering the research question. The findings suggest limited societal impact of the true crime podcast genre as a part of true crime media. However, these findings contribute to the understanding of the impact true crime podcasts could make. True crime podcasts might advance on their functions as educational and journalistic platforms and potentially influence a beneficial use of documenting without the risk of psychological distortion. Future research should therefore

focus on additional psychological variables and exploring broader contents to extend on the research on potential influences of true crime podcasts and crime media in general.

References

- Alitavoli, R., & Kaveh, E. (2018). The U.S. Media's Effect on Public's Crime Expectations: A Cycle of Cultivation and Agenda-Setting Theory. *Societies*, 8(3), 58. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc8030058>
- Boling, K. S. (2019). True crime podcasting: Journalism, justice or entertainment? *Radio Journal International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media*, 17(2), 161–178. https://doi.org/10.1386/rjao_00003_1
- Boling, K. S., & Hull, K. (2018). Undisclosed Information—Serial is my favorite murder: Examining motivations in the True Crime podcast audience. *Journal of Radio & Audio Media*, 25(1), 92–108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19376529.2017.1370714>
- Bruzzi, S. (2016). Making a genre: the case of the contemporary true crime documentary. *Law And Humanities*, 10(2), 249–280. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17521483.2016.1233741>
- Buzzsprout. (2024). *Podcast Statistics and Data [September 2024]*. <https://www.buzzsprout.com/blog/podcast-statistics>
- Casares, D. R. (2020). Embracing the Podcast Era: Trends, Opportunities, & Implications for Counselors. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 17(1), 123–138. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2020.1816865>
- Chan-Olmsted, S., & Wang, R. (2020). Understanding podcast users: Consumption motives and behaviors. *New Media & Society*, 24(3), 684–704. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820963776>
- Dowler, K., Fleming, T. R., & Muzzatti, S. L. (2006). Constructing Crime: Media, Crime, and Popular Culture. *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 48(6), 837–850. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cjccj.48.6.837>

- Dresow, M. (2018). *The true crime genre and public perception of the criminal justice system*.
Marin County Bar Association. <https://marinbar.org/news/article/?type=news&id=347>.
- Elston, D. M. (2021). Participation bias, self-selection bias, and response bias. *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaad.2021.06.025>
- Experience Management (XM) Content hub*. (2024, June 27).
[Qualtrics. https://www.qualtrics.com/experience-management/](https://www.qualtrics.com/experience-management/)
- Grimm, P. (2010). Social desirability bias. *Wiley International Encyclopedia of Marketing*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444316568.wiem02057>
- Grundlingh, L. (2017). Identifying Markers of Sensationalism in Online News Reports on Crime. *Language Matters*, 48(2), 117–136.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10228195.2017.1341543>.
- Kornhauser, R. (2013). Reconsidering predictors of punitiveness in Australia: A test of four theories. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 46(2), 221-240. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0004865812470381>
- Martin, T. A., & Cohn, E. S. (2004). Attitudes toward the criminal legal system: Scale development and predictors. *Psychology Crime and Law*, 10(4), 367–391. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10683160310001629265>
- McCormack, J. (2024, January 25). *Why are we fascinated by true crime?* The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <https://www.unc.edu/posts/2024/01/11/why-are-we-fascinated-by-true-crime/#:~:text=People%20are%20drawn%20to%20these,solving%20a%20real%20life%20whodunnit>.

- McCullin, M. (2024, April 19). The “Serial Effect” — unpacking the phenomenon of the True-Crime podcast. *Georgia State News Hub*. <https://news.gsu.edu/research-magazine/the-serial-effect>
- Oliver, M. B., Raney, A. A., & Bryant, J. (2019). *Media effects: Advances in Theory and Research*.
- Rime, J., Pike, C., & Collins, T. (2022). What is a podcast? Considering innovations in podcasting through the six-tensions framework. *Convergence the International Journal of Research Into New Media Technologies*, 28(5), 1260–1282. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13548565221104444>
- Rosenberger, J. S., & Callanan, V. J. (2011). The influence of media on penal attitudes. *Criminal Justice Review*, 36(4), 435-455. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0734016811428779>
- Sherrill, L. A. (2020). The “Serial Effect” and the True Crime Podcast Ecosystem. *Journalism Practice*, 16(7), 1473–1494. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2020.1852884>
- Spinelli, Martin and Dann, Lance (2019), *Podcasting: The Audio Media Revolution*, New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Tobin, S. J., & Guadagno, R. E. (2022). Why people listen: Motivations and outcomes of podcast listening. *PLoS ONE*, 17(4), e0265806. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0265806>
- Wiltenburg, J. (2004). True Crime: The origins of Modern Sensationalism. *The American Historical Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/109.5.1377>

Appendices

Appendix A

Complete R Script

```
## R SCRIPT
```

```
# Loading data set and packages & Data cleaning
```

```
setwd("~/Documents")
```

```
install.packages(c("tidyverse", "psych"))
```

```
library(tidyverse)
```

```
library(psych)
```

```
data <- read.csv("CrimeStoriesUnveiledBSc.csv", stringsAsFactors = FALSE)
```

```
data <- data[, !names(data) %in% c("StartDate", "EndDate", "Status", "IPAddress",  
"Duration...in.seconds.", "RecordedDate", "ResponseId", "RecipientLastName",  
"RecipientFirstName", "RecipientEmail", "ExternalReference", "LocationLatitude",  
"LocationLongitude", "DistributionChannel", "UserLanguage", "Q3.1", "Q4", "Q5", "Q18",  
"Q23_1", "Q23_2", "Q23_3", "Q23_4", "Anger.harsh.punish_1", "Anger.harsh.punish_2",  
"Anger.harsh.punish_3", "Anger.harsh.punish_4", "Q23_1.1", "Q23_2.1", "Q23_3.1",  
"Q23_4.1", "Q23_5")]
```

```
data$IPAddress <- NULL
```

```
filtered_data <- na.omit(data)
```

```
filtered_data <- data[data$Progress == 100, ]
```

```
filtered_data <- filtered_data[-c(1, 2, 3), ]
```

```
head(filtered_data)
```

```
#Reliability and Validity testing
```

```
install.packages("psych")
```

```
library(psych)
```

```
#Correlation Matrix
```

```
install.packages(c("corrplot"))
```

```
library(corrplot)
```

```
data_subset <- correlation_data[, c("Punitiveness_Score", "Agreement_Score", "Fear_Score",  
"Perceived_Crime_Rates")]
```

```
cor_matrix <- cor(data_subset, use = "complete.obs")
```

```
print(cor_matrix)
```

```
corrplot(cor_matrix, method = "circle", type = "upper", order = "hclust", addCoef.col = "black",  
tl.col = "black", tl.srt = 45)
```

```
#Reliability and Validity H1
```

```
scale_data1 <- H1Analysis[, c("Q15_3", "Q15_5", "Q15_7", "Q15_8", "Q15_10")]
```

```
alpha_result1 <- alpha(scale_data1, check.keys = TRUE)
```

```
print(alpha_result1)
```

```
fa_result <- fa(scale_data1, nfactors = 1, rotate = "varimax")
```

```
print(fa_result1)
```

```
#Reliability and Validity H2
```

```
scale_data2 <- H2Analysis[, c("Q15_1", "Q15_2", "Q15_4", "Q15_6", "Q15_9")]
```

```
alpha_result2 <- alpha(scale_data2, check.keys = TRUE)
```

```
print(alpha_result2)
```

```
fa_result2 <- fa(scale_data2, nfactors = 1, rotate = "varimax")
```

```
print(fa_result2)
```

```
#Reliability and Validity H4
```

```
scale_data4 <- H4analysis[, c("Q22_1", "Q22_2", "Q22_3", "Q22_4", "Q22_5", "Q22_6",  
"Q22_7", "Q22_8")]
```

```
alpha_result4 <- alpha(scale_data4, check.keys = TRUE)
```

```
print(alpha_result4)

fa_result4 <- fa(scale_data4, nfactors = 1, rotate = "varimax")

print(fa_result4)

# Participants and Demographics
filtered_data$Q20 <- as.numeric(filtered_data$Q20)

summary(filtered_data$Q20)

sd(data$Q20, na.rm = TRUE)

data$Duration..in.seconds. <- as.numeric(data$Duration..in.seconds.)

summary(data$Duration..in.seconds.)

table(filtered_data$Q2.1)

table(filtered_data$Q2)

table(filtered_data$Q3)

table(filtered_data$Q20)

H1Analysis <- filtered_data
```

```
H2Analysis <- filtered_data
```

```
H3Analysis <- filtered_data
```

```
H4Analysis <- filtered_dat
```

```
#Listening frequency histogram
```

```
filtered_data$Frequency <- recode(filtered_data$Q2.1, "I have never listened to a true crime  
podcast before" = 1, "Once a month" = 2, "Occasionally" = 3, "2-3 weeks per month" = 4,  
"Every week" = 5)
```

```
hist(filtered_data$Frequency, main = "Podcast Listening Frequency", xlab = "Distribution")
```

```
# H1 Analysis
```

```
H1Analysis <- filtered_data[, !names(filtered_data) %in% c("Progress", "Duration...in.seconds.",  
"Finished", "Consent", "Q20", "Q2", "Q3", "Q3_3_TEXT", "Q15_1", "Q15_2", "Q15_4",  
"Q15_6", "Q15_9", "Q20.1", "Q22_1", "Q22_2", "Q22_3", "Q22_4", "Q22_5", "Q22_6",  
"Q22_7", "Q22_8")]
```

```
H1Analysis$Duration..in.seconds. <- NULL
```

```
H1Analysis$Q1 <- NULL
```

```
H1Analysis <- H1Analysis %>%
```

```
mutate(Q15_3 = case_when(  
  Q15_3 == "Strongly disagree" ~ 1,  
  Q15_3 == "Disagree" ~ 2,
```

```
Q15_3 == "Somewhat disagree" ~ 3,  
Q15_3 == "Neither agree nor disagree" ~ 4,  
Q15_3 == "Somewhat agree" ~ 5,  
Q15_3 == "Agree" ~ 6,  
Q15_3 == "Strongly agree" ~ 7  
))
```

```
H1Analysis <- H1Analysis %>%  
mutate(Q15_5 = case_when(  
  Q15_5 == "Strongly disagree" ~ 1,  
  Q15_5 == "Disagree" ~ 2,  
  Q15_5 == "Somewhat disagree" ~ 3,  
  Q15_5 == "Neither agree nor disagree" ~ 4,  
  Q15_5 == "Somewhat agree" ~ 5,  
  Q15_5 == "Agree" ~ 6,  
  Q15_5 == "Strongly agree" ~ 7  
))
```

```
H1Analysis <- H1Analysis %>%  
mutate(Q15_7 = case_when(  
  Q15_7 == "Strongly disagree" ~ 1,  
  Q15_7 == "Disagree" ~ 2,  
  Q15_7 == "Somewhat disagree" ~ 3,  
  Q15_7 == "Neither agree nor disagree" ~ 4,  
  Q15_7 == "Somewhat agree" ~ 5,  
  Q15_7 == "Agree" ~ 6,  
  Q15_7 == "Strongly agree" ~ 7  
))
```

```
))
```

```
H1Analysis <- H1Analysis %>%
```

```
  mutate(Q15_8 = case_when(  
    Q15_8 == "Strongly disagree" ~ 1,  
    Q15_8 == "Disagree" ~ 2,  
    Q15_8 == "Somewhat disagree" ~ 3,  
    Q15_8 == "Neither agree nor disagree" ~ 4,  
    Q15_8 == "Somewhat agree" ~ 5,  
    Q15_8 == "Agree" ~ 6,  
    Q15_8 == "Strongly agree" ~ 7  
  ))
```

```
H1Analysis <- H1Analysis %>%
```

```
  mutate(Q15_10 = case_when(  
    Q15_10 == "Strongly disagree" ~ 1,  
    Q15_10 == "Disagree" ~ 2,  
    Q15_10 == "Somewhat disagree" ~ 3,  
    Q15_10 == "Neither agree nor disagree" ~ 4,  
    Q15_10 == "Somewhat agree" ~ 5,  
    Q15_10 == "Agree" ~ 6,  
    Q15_10 == "Strongly agree" ~ 7  
  ))
```

```
library(dplyr)
```

```
str(H1Analysis[, c("Q15_3", "Q15_7", "Q15_8", "Q15_10")])
```

```
summary(H1Analysis[, c("Q15_3", "Q15_7", "Q15_8", "Q15_10")])
```

```
H1Analysis$Punitiveness_Score <- rowMeans(H1Analysis[, c("Q15_3", "Q15_7", "Q15_8",  
"Q15_10")], na.rm = TRUE)
```

```
H1Analysis$Frequency <- recode(H1Analysis$Q2.1, "I have never listened to a true crime  
podcast before" = 1, "Once a month" = 2, "Occasionally" = 3, "2-3 weeks per month" = 4,  
"Every week" = 5)
```

```
summary(H1Analysis$Frequency)
```

```
summary(H1Analysis$Punitiveness_Score)
```

```
sd(H1Analysis$Punitiveness_Score, na.rm = TRUE)
```

```
table(H1Analysis$Q2.1, H1Analysis$Frequency)
```

```
cor.test(H1Analysis$Frequency, H1Analysis$Punitiveness_Score)
```

```
cor_matrix <- cor(H1Analysis$Frequency, H1Analysis$Punitiveness_Score)
```

```
plot(H1Analysis$Frequency, H1Analysis$Punitiveness_Score, xlab = "Podcast Listening  
Frequency", ylab = "Punitiveness Score", main = "Relationship Between Podcast Listening  
Frequency and Punitiveness")
```

```
cor(H1Analysis[, c("Q15_3", "Q15_7", "Q15_8", "Q15_10")], use = "complete.obs")
```

```
fa_result1 <- fa(H1Analysis[c("Q15_3", "Q15_7", "Q15_8", "Q15_10")], nfactors = 1, rotate = "varimax")
```

```
# H2 Analysis
```

```
H2Analysis <- filtered_data[, !names(filtered_data) %in% c("Progress", "Duration...in.seconds.", "Finished", "Consent", "Q20", "Q2", "Q3", "Q3_3_TEXT", "Q15_3", "Q15_5", "Q15_7", "Q15_8", "Q15_10", "Q20.1", "Q22_1", "Q22_2", "Q22_3", "Q22_4", "Q22_5", "Q22_6", "Q22_7", "Q22_8")]
```

```
H2Analysis$Duration..in.seconds. <- NULL
```

```
H2Analysis$Q1 <- NULL
```

```
H2Analysis <- H2Analysis %>%
```

```
  mutate(Q15_1 = case_when(
    Q15_1 == "Strongly disagree" ~ 1,
    Q15_1 == "Disagree" ~ 2,
    Q15_1 == "Somewhat disagree" ~ 3,
    Q15_1 == "Neither agree nor disagree" ~ 4,
    Q15_1 == "Somewhat agree" ~ 5,
    Q15_1 == "Agree" ~ 6,
    Q15_1 == "Strongly agree" ~ 7
  ))
```

```
H2Analysis <- H2Analysis %>%
```

```
  mutate(Q15_2 = case_when(
    Q15_2 == "Strongly disagree" ~ 1,
```

```
Q15_2 == "Disagree" ~ 2,  
Q15_2 == "Somewhat disagree" ~ 3,  
Q15_2 == "Neither agree nor disagree" ~ 4,  
Q15_2 == "Somewhat agree" ~ 5,  
Q15_2 == "Agree" ~ 6,  
Q15_2 == "Strongly agree" ~ 7  
))
```

```
H2Analysis <- H2Analysis %>%  
mutate(Q15_4 = case_when(  
  Q15_4 == "Strongly disagree" ~ 1,  
  Q15_4 == "Disagree" ~ 2,  
  Q15_4 == "Somewhat disagree" ~ 3,  
  Q15_4 == "Neither agree nor disagree" ~ 4,  
  Q15_4 == "Somewhat agree" ~ 5,  
  Q15_4 == "Agree" ~ 6,  
  Q15_4 == "Strongly agree" ~ 7  
))
```

```
H2Analysis <- H2Analysis %>%  
mutate(Q15_6 = case_when(  
  Q15_6 == "Strongly disagree" ~ 1,  
  Q15_6 == "Disagree" ~ 2,  
  Q15_6 == "Somewhat disagree" ~ 3,  
  Q15_6 == "Neither agree nor disagree" ~ 4,  
  Q15_6 == "Somewhat agree" ~ 5,  
  Q15_6 == "Agree" ~ 6,  
))
```

```
Q15_6 == "Strongly agree" ~ 7
))

H2Analysis <- H2Analysis %>%
  mutate(Q15_9 = case_when(
    Q15_9 == "Strongly disagree" ~ 1,
    Q15_9 == "Disagree" ~ 2,
    Q15_9 == "Somewhat disagree" ~ 3,
    Q15_9 == "Neither agree nor disagree" ~ 4,
    Q15_9 == "Somewhat agree" ~ 5,
    Q15_9 == "Agree" ~ 6,
    Q15_9 == "Strongly agree" ~ 7
  ))

str(H2Analysis[, c("Q15_1", "Q15_2", "Q15_6", "Q15_9")])

summary(H2Analysis[, c("Q15_1", "Q15_2", "Q15_6", "Q15_9")])

H2Analysis$Agreement_Score <- rowMeans(H2Analysis[, c("Q15_1", "Q15_2", "Q15_6",
"Q15_9")], na.rm = TRUE)

H2Analysis$Frequency <- recode(H2Analysis$Q2.1, "I have never listened to a true crime
podcast before" = 1, "Once a month" = 2, "Occasionally" = 3, "2-3 weeks per month" = 4,
"Every week" = 5)

summary(H2Analysis$Frequency)

summary(H2Analysis$Agreement_Score)
```

```
sd(H2Analysis$Agreement_Score, na.rm = TRUE)
```

```
table(H2Analysis$Q2.1, H2Analysis$Frequency)
```

```
cor.test(H2Analysis$Frequency, H2Analysis$Agreement_Score)
```

```
plot(H2Analysis$Frequency, H2Analysis$Agreement_Score, xlab = "Podcast Listening  
Frequency", ylab = "Punitiveness Score", main = "Relationship Between Podcast Listening  
Frequency and Punitiveness")
```

```
#H 3 Analysis
```

```
library(psych)
```

```
library(dplyr)
```

```
H3analysis <- filtered_data
```

```
H3analysis <- H3analysis[, !names(filtered_data) %in% c("Progress", "Finished", "Consent",  
"Q3_3_TEXT", "Q1", "Q18", "Q3.1", "Q4", "Q5", "Q15_1", "Q15_2", "Q15_3", "Q15_4",  
"Q15_5", "Q15_6", "Q15_7", "Q15_8", "Q15_9", "Q15_10", "Q22_1", "Q22_2", "Q22_3",  
"Q22_4", "Q22_5", "Q22_6", "Q22_7", "Q22_8")]
```

```
H3analysis$Duration..in.seconds. <- NULL
```

```
H3analysis$Listening_Frequency <- recode(H3analysis$Q2.1, "I have never listened to a true  
crime podcast before" = 1, "Once a month" = 2, "Occasionally" = 3, "2-3 weeks per month" = 4,  
"Every week" = 5)
```

```
H3analysis$Perceived_Crime_Rates <- recode(H3analysis$Q20.1, "Never" = 1, "Yearly" = 2,  
"Multiple times a year" = 3, "Monthly" = 4, "Multiple times a month" = 5, "Weekly" = 6, "Every  
day" = 7, "Multiple times a day" = 8)
```

```
summary(H3analysis$Perceived_Crime_Rates)
```

```
sd(H3analysis$Perceived_Crime_Rates, na.rm = TRUE)
```

```
anova_model <- aov(H3analysis$Perceived_Crime_Rates ~ H3analysis$Listening_Frequency,  
data = data)
```

```
summary(anova_model)
```

```
cor.test(H3analysis$Listening_Frequency, H3analysis$Perceived_Crime_Rates)
```

```
boxplot(H3analysis$Perceived_Crime_Rate ~ H3analysis$Listening_Frequency, data = data,  
main = "Crime Rate Perception by Podcast Listening Frequency", xlab = "Podcast Frequency",  
ylab = "Perceived Crime Rate")
```

```
#H 4 Analysis
```

```
H4analysis <- filtered_data
```

```
H4analysis <- H4analysis[, !names(filtered_data) %in% c("Progress", "Finished", "Consent",  
"Q20", "Q3_3_TEXT", "Q1", "Q18", "Q3.1", "Q4", "Q5", "Q15_1", "Q15_2", "Q15_3",  
"Q15_4", "Q15_5", "Q15_6", "Q15_7", "Q15_8", "Q15_9", "Q15_10", "Q20.1")]
```

```
H4analysis$Duration..in.seconds. <- NULL
```

```
H4analysis <- H4analysis %>%
```

```
mutate(Q22_1 = case_when(  
  Q22_1 == "Strongly disagree" ~ 1,  
  Q22_1 == "Disagree" ~ 2,  
  Q22_1 == "Somewhat disagree" ~ 3,  
  Q22_1 == "Neither agree nor disagree" ~ 4,  
  Q22_1 == "Somewhat agree" ~ 5,  
  Q22_1 == "Agree" ~ 6,  
  Q22_1 == "Strongly agree" ~ 7  
))
```

```
H4analysis <- H4analysis %>%
```

```
mutate(Q22_2 = case_when(  
  Q22_2 == "Strongly disagree" ~ 1,  
  Q22_2 == "Disagree" ~ 2,  
  Q22_2 == "Somewhat disagree" ~ 3,  
  Q22_2 == "Neither agree nor disagree" ~ 4,  
  Q22_2 == "Somewhat agree" ~ 5,  
  Q22_2 == "Agree" ~ 6,  
  Q22_2 == "Strongly agree" ~ 7  
))
```

```
H4analysis <- H4analysis %>%
```

```
mutate(Q22_3 = case_when(  
  Q22_3 == "Strongly disagree" ~ 1,  
  Q22_3 == "Disagree" ~ 2,  
  Q22_3 == "Somewhat disagree" ~ 3,  
  Q22_3 == "Neither agree nor disagree" ~ 4,
```

```
Q22_3 == "Somewhat agree" ~ 5,  
Q22_3 == "Agree" ~ 6,  
Q22_3 == "Strongly agree" ~ 7  
))
```

```
H4analysis <- H4analysis %>%
```

```
mutate(Q22_4 = case_when(  
  Q22_4 == "Strongly disagree" ~ 1,  
  Q22_4 == "Disagree" ~ 2,  
  Q22_4 == "Somewhat disagree" ~ 3,  
  Q22_4 == "Neither agree nor disagree" ~ 4,  
  Q22_4 == "Somewhat agree" ~ 5,  
  Q22_4 == "Agree" ~ 6,  
  Q22_4 == "Strongly agree" ~ 7  
))
```

```
H4analysis <- H4analysis %>%
```

```
mutate(Q22_5 = case_when(  
  Q22_5 == "Strongly disagree" ~ 1,  
  Q22_5 == "Disagree" ~ 2,  
  Q22_5 == "Somewhat disagree" ~ 3,  
  Q22_5 == "Neither agree nor disagree" ~ 4,  
  Q22_5 == "Somewhat agree" ~ 5,  
  Q22_5 == "Agree" ~ 6,  
  Q22_5 == "Strongly agree" ~ 7  
))
```

```
H4analysis <- H4analysis %>%  
mutate(Q22_6 = case_when(  
  Q22_6 == "Strongly disagree" ~ 1,  
  Q22_6 == "Disagree" ~ 2,  
  Q22_6 == "Somewhat disagree" ~ 3,  
  Q22_6 == "Neither agree nor disagree" ~ 4,  
  Q22_6 == "Somewhat agree" ~ 5,  
  Q22_6 == "Agree" ~ 6,  
  Q22_6 == "Strongly agree" ~ 7  
))
```

```
H4analysis <- H4analysis %>%  
mutate(Q22_7 = case_when(  
  Q22_7 == "Strongly disagree" ~ 1,  
  Q22_7 == "Disagree" ~ 2,  
  Q22_7 == "Somewhat disagree" ~ 3,  
  Q22_7 == "Neither agree nor disagree" ~ 4,  
  Q22_7 == "Somewhat agree" ~ 5,  
  Q22_7 == "Agree" ~ 6,  
  Q22_7 == "Strongly agree" ~ 7  
))
```

```
H4analysis <- H4analysis %>%  
mutate(Q22_8 = case_when(  
  Q22_8 == "Strongly disagree" ~ 1,  
  Q22_8 == "Disagree" ~ 2,  
  Q22_8 == "Somewhat disagree" ~ 3,
```

```
Q22_8 == "Neither agree nor disagree" ~ 4,
```

```
Q22_8 == "Somewhat agree" ~ 5,
```

```
Q22_8 == "Agree" ~ 6,
```

```
Q22_8 == "Strongly agree" ~ 7
```

```
))
```

```
H4analysis$Listening_Frequency <- recode(H4analysis$Q2.1, "I have never listened to a true  
crime podcast before" = 1, "Once a month" = 2, "Occasionally" = 3, "2-3 weeks per month" = 4,  
"Every week" = 5)
```

```
H4analysis$Fear_Score <- rowMeans(H4analysis[, c("Q22_1", "Q22_2", "Q22_3", "Q22_4",  
"Q22_5", "Q22_6", "Q22_7", "Q22_8")], na.rm = TRUE)
```

```
summary(H4analysis$Fear_Score)
```

```
sd(H4analysis$Fear_Score, na.rm = TRUE)
```

```
hist(H4analysis$Fear_Score, main = "Distribution of Fear Score", xlab = "Fear Score")
```

```
H4analysis <- H4analysis %>%
```

```
mutate(Q2.1 = case_when(
```

```
  Q2.1 == "I have never listened to a true crime podcast before" ~ 1,
```

```
  Q2.1 == "Occasionally" ~ 2,
```

```
  Q2.1 == "Once a month" ~ 3,
```

```
  Q2.1 == "2-3 weeks per month" ~ 4,
```

```
  Q2.1 == "Every week" ~ 5,
```

```
))
```

```
str(H4analysis$Q2.1)
```

```
cor.test(H4analysis$Q2.1, H4analysis$Fear_Score)
```

```
model <- lm(H4analysis$Fear_Score ~ H4analysis$Q2.1, H4analysis = H4analysis)
```

```
summary(model)
```

```
plot(H4analysis$Q2.1, H4analysis$Fear_Score,
```

```
  main = "Podcast listening frequency explaining Fear Score",
```

```
  xlab = "Podcast listening frequency",
```

```
  ylab = "Fear Score")
```

```
abline(lm(H4analysis$Fear_Score ~ H4analysis$Q2.1, H4analysis = H4analysis), col = "red")
```

```
#Exploratory analyses
```

```
filtered_data$Q20
```

```
cor.test(H1Analysis$Q20, H1Analysis$Punitiveness_Score)
```

Appendix B

Full Qualtrics Survey

Crime Stories Unveiled

Start of Block: Introduction

Informed Consent Thank you for taking part in our survey. This document provides you with information about the study on consumption of true crime entertainment. Before you start the questionnaire, it is important that you take note of the method used in this research and that you agree to voluntary participation. Please read this document carefully. Your participation is completely voluntary. Your personal information will be anonymised, so that your answers won't be traced back to you. You can refuse to participate without having to give any reasons or substantiation. You can also quit participating in the study at any given time. After participating in the questionnaire, you can still decide (within 24 hours) if your data can be used for the research or if you no longer want to participate. If you choose to withdraw from this study, you can contact one of the researchers and your data will be deleted from the dataset. If you have any other questions about the study, you can reach out to the researchers through email: Mihaela Gutu (m.gutu@student.utwente.nl) and Joel Gehring (j.gehring@student.utwente.nl) Thank you for your participation!

Consent I hereby consent to participate in the following study. Furthermore, I'll allow that all my mentioned data can be used for examination

- I consent (1)
- I do not consent (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If I hereby consent to participate in the following study. Furthermore, I'll allow that all my menti... = I do not consent

End of Block: Introduction

Start of Block: Leniency - Mihaela

Start of Block: Fear/harsh punishments - Mihaela

Q23 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?

In my
opinion,
many
punishments
imposed by
the justice
system are
insufficient
to bring
justice to
victims (8)





Anger/harsh punish To what extent do you agree or disagree with these statements?

End of Block: Fear/harsh punishments - Mihaela

Start of Block: General Questions

Q23 First we would like to gather some general information and demographics. Please insert your data below.

Q20 What is your age?

Q2 What gender do you identify with?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Other/Prefer not to say (3)

Q3 What is your nationality?

- Dutch (1)
- German (2)
- Other (Specify) (3) _____
-

Page Break

Page Break

Q1 Have you ever listened to a True Crime Podcast (Podcasts that report on actual crimes or crime stories for Entertainment purposes) before?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
-

Q18 Have you ever watched or listened to any other true crime media (such as TV dramas, movies, or documentaries) ?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
-

Page Break

Q2 How often do you listen to True Crime Podcasts?

- I have never listened to a true crime podcast before (1)
 - Occasionally (2)
 - Once a month (3)
 - 2-3 weeks per month (4)
 - Every week (5)
-

Q3 How often do you watch crime drama TV shows or movies (such as Law & Order, Criminal Minds, Mindhunters, Zodiac, etc.)?

- Never (1)
 - Regularly in the past, but not anymore (6)
 - Occasionally (2)
 - Once a month (3)
 - More than one day a week (4)
 - Every day (5)
-

Q4 How often do you watch Youtube videos about true crime (e.g., Mystery Files, BuzzFeed Unsolved True Crime, Stephanie Soo's Rotten Mango) ?

- Never (1)
 - Regularly in the past, but not anymore (6)
 - Occasionally (2)
 - Once a month (3)
 - More than one day a week (4)
 - Every day (5)
-

Q5 How often do you watch documetaries about true crime, serial killers, or specific criminal cases?

- Never (1)
- Regularly in the past, but not anymore (6)
- Occasionally (2)
- Once a month (3)
- More than one day a week (4)
- Every day (5)

End of Block: General Questions

Start of Block: Punitiveness and Agreement with Justice System - Joel

Q15 In the following multiple statements concerning a general attitude towards criminality are presented. Please read every statement carefully and indicate to what extent you Agree/Disagree.

Judges should give harsher punishments to offenders and perpetrators of crimes (8)

Judges make unfair decisions most of the time. (9)

The intensity of the punishment given usually fits the crime. (10)

End of Block: Punitiveness and Agreement with Justice System - Joel

Start of Block: Perception of Crime Rates - Joel

Q16 Please have a thorough thought about the next question and indicate truthfully.



Q20 How often does crime occur in my close proximity?

- Multiple times a day (1)
- Every day (2)
- Weekly (3)
- Multiple times a month (4)
- Monthly (5)
- Multiple times a year (7)
- Yearly (10)
- Never (9)

End of Block: Perception of Crime Rates - Joel

Start of Block: Fear of Crime Levels - Joel

Q22 In the upcoming section multiple situations will be presented to you. Please read every statement carefully and indicate to what extent you Agree/Disagree.

I am scared
that a
family
member or
friend will
become a
victim of
crime. (8)



End of Block: Fear of Crime Levels - Joel

Start of Block: Block 7

Q23 Thank you for participating in this study. This survey aimed to explore how regular consumption of true crime entertainment—across various media such as podcasts, documentaries, and TV shows—shapes individuals' perceptions of crime in daily life and influences their judgments regarding the decisions made by the justice system. If you have any other questions about the study, you can reach out to the researchers through email: Mihaela Gutu (m.gutu@student.utwente.nl) and Joel Gehring (j.gehring@student.utwente.nl). Have a nice day!

End of Block: Block 7
