



Crime and Cinema: Exploring the influence of On screen Crimes on Real World Offenses

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Abstract

It is an inevitable fact that the cinema has an influence on the day to day lives of everyone either in a direct or in an indirect way. But the kind of influence, say whether it may be in a positive or negative manner totally depends on the kind of cinema (genre) and the state-of-mind of the individual who watches it. The current review primarily focuses on the criminological aspects of the impact of cinema in the daily lives of people i.e., how films/tv shows psychologically

influences people and how filmmakers are inspired from the real-life crimes to create movies/tv shows as well as how cinema inspires people to commit crimes in real life on the other hand. Furthermore, it discusses notable films that have contributed to positive societal changes, including legislative reforms and offers recommendations for responsible film making to minimize adverse impacts.

Keywords: *Cinema, crimes, crime movies/tv shows, criminological aspects, psychological impact, on-screen and off-screen crimes, legal aspects*

Introduction

“Cinema is the most beautiful fraud in the world”

– Jean-Luc Goddard

Right from its inception humanity has always been discovering different ways of recreations, and cinema is one such discovery. Cinema, often dubbed as the “*silver screen*,” has been a powerful medium of entertainment and expression since its very beginning. Apart from its primary perspective of entertainment, it has significantly impacted society, inspired changes and shaped culture in a very subtle and deep-seated way.

Allen et al. (1998) looked at the in-depth synopses of a sample of all the crime films that were released in the UK between the years of WWII and 1991, totaling almost 15,000 films. A film is classified as a "crime film" if "(a) the main protagonist is either an offender or a professional working in the criminal justice system, and/or (b) the central focus of the narrative is the commission and/or the investigation of a crime." The researchers discovered that, overall, the percentage of all films that might be classified as largely "crime films" stayed at about 20% over the period, albeit there were unavoidably some variations from year to year. It was discovered that

20% of films (again staying rather consistent) included some substantial crime material, but that crime was not their dominant theme. This finding is intriguing in and of itself since it refutes the idea that we are becoming more and more "saturated" with images of crime in popular films, a theory frequently advanced by cultural conservatives to explain the dramatic increase in documented crime that occurred after World War II. Shipley and Cavender (2001) conducted a similar study that looked at violent crime movie images over a four-decade span. They also concluded that throughout the course of four decades, there has been an increase in the portrayal of "violence, graphic violence, and death". These results point to a substantial change in the representational content of crime films, changes that could be linked to broader social and political transformations that occurred throughout the post-war era.

The influence of cinema is nothing new. However, now, the crime genre movies have gained a never seen before success, thanks to online platforms which offer a free flow of gore, and that, of late, has been a point of discussions and debates. A study by Muraleedharan, Moideen and Suryakanthi (2023) titled "The criminology perspective of crime films" stated that 73.9% of respondents enjoyed watching true crime shows. The common shows for the study included Conversations with a killer, The Ted Bundy tapes, Wax house, the Confession tapes, Anjaam Paathira, Mind hunter and so on. Further, the study also concluded that 14.29% were intrigued by criminals and 21.74% participants agreed that criminals deserve a platform. To add on, the researchers also found out that 70% of respondents asserted that the crimes do occur as movies influence individuals to commit and replicate the same crimes in real life.

Genres of Cinema & Rise of Crime Films

Film genres are classifications that characterize movies according to their narrative or stylistic features. A film's genre can influence the characters, setting, plot structure, and overall

tone. Action movies, for instance, generally feature combat sequences and slow-motion cinematography. Horror movies typically include jump scares and tend to have greater action than conversation. Main film categories consist of action, adventure, comedy, drama, fantasy, horror, musicals, mystery, romance, science fiction, sports, thriller and western. War movies and zombie movies serve as instances of themes that can cross multiple genres, such as action, drama, or thriller. The genre of crime (crime thriller, crime fiction, crime drama, crime investigative thriller and mystery) refers to stories that focus on illegal activity, particularly the investigation of a serious crime - typically a murder - by a professional or amateur detective. It occasionally also features other dramas about drug lords, terrorists, serial killers, gangsters, etc. The genre itself is regarded as fascinating, captivating, amusing and occasionally educational and well-informed. There are currently several films in this genre that are regarded as “classics,” and as films continue to advance, more classics will be produced as well in the future.

Numerous research examines the connection between violent films and actual behavior. According to some research, watching violent films increases the likelihood of short-term increases in aggressive behavior compared to watching non-violent films (Bjorkquist 1985; Black and Bevan 1992). As per other studies (Blumer and Hauser 1933; Snyder 1995), seeing violent films may contribute to long-term socialization and have effects ranging from criminal behavior to desensitization to violence.

The rise of crime films can be attributed to blend suspense, drama and moral dilemmas, making them appealing to wide audience. Crime films are the specialty of Alfred Hitchcock, Francis Ford Coppola, and Quentin Tarantino in Hollywood. Every director who is regarded as one of Hollywood's founding pioneers, including Daren Aronofsky, Martin Scorsese, Christopher

Nolan, David Fincher, and Steven Spielberg, has made at least one crime movie that is either a classic or won an Oscar.

Ram Gopal Verma, Sriram Raghavan (Andhadhun), and Anurag Kashyap (Gangs of Wasseypur) are the main producers of crime films in Indian Cinema. However, just like other genres, the criminal genre influences people. At the conclusion of a crime film, the filmmaker always depicts the finale, in which the criminal always suffers, even though movies were made for pleasure and educational purposes. They attempt to educate the audience about the repercussions of such heinous acts by doing this.

The relatability and fascination of the criminal genre are major contributors to its appeal. These films frequently reference actual occurrences, making it difficult to distinguish fact from fiction. They draw on the psychological interest in justice and deviance while offering a window into societal problems including poverty, corruption, and structural defects. Furthermore, the emergence of streaming services has increased accessibility to crime shows and films, allowing viewers to discover a variety of tales from all countries and eras. However, there is a chance that crime films will glamorize illegal activity even though they can also inform and amuse viewers. Sometimes, the romanticization of unlawful activity or the depiction of charming criminals can sway impressionable audiences and have unexpected repercussions. The last Batman trilogy film, *The Dark Knight Rises*, directed by Christopher Nolan and starring Christian Bale and Heath Ledger, attracted audiences from all around the nation in July 2012 for midnight showings. When 24-year-old James Holmes threw tear gas canisters into the crowd and started shooting, a night at the movies in Aurora, Colorado, took a sad turn, leaving 12 people dead and 70 injured. With analogies to Holmes's attire, his attack technique, and the booby-trapped apartment he left behind,

the news was rife with conjecture over whether the gunman's spree was inspired by Batman characters, books, or movies.

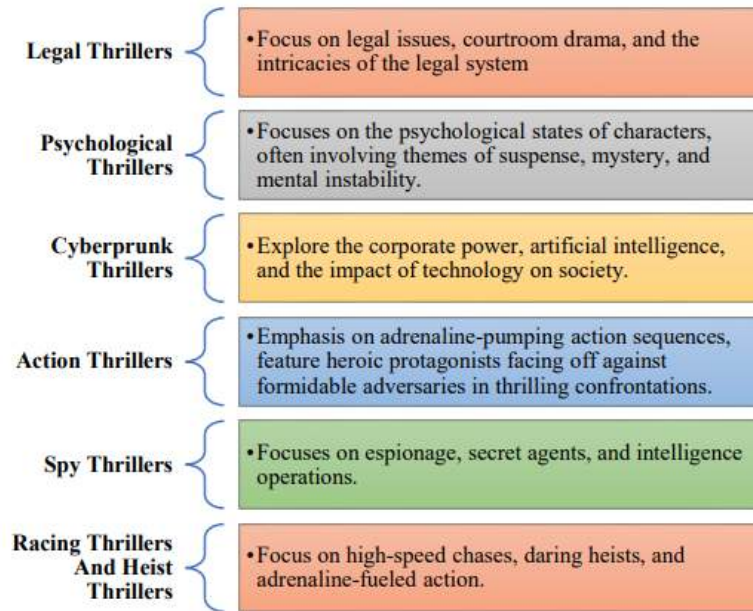


Figure 1 - Depicting the Categories of Crime Thriller Shows

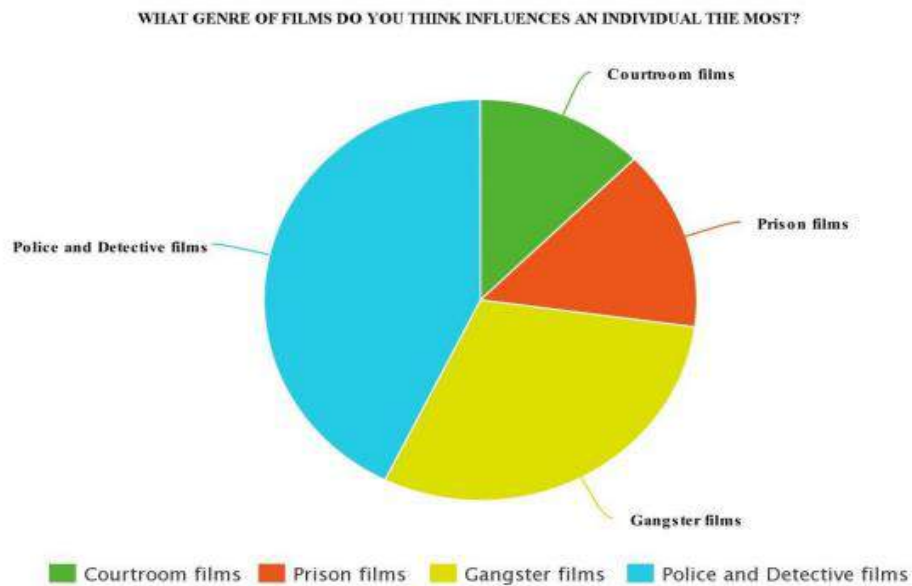


Figure 2 - Genre of films that influences an individual the most

Source - Muraleedharan, Moideen B and Suryakanthi (2023)

The above figure-2 depicts a study conducted among 65 individuals between the age of 14 - 45 years, according to which around 63.7% of respondents said that films with a police or detective theme tends to impact viewers more than those in other genres. According to 44.9% of respondents, gangster movies are more likely to draw interest than other genres. 21.7% believe that movies with an idea or prison environment have a greater impact on individuals. The remaining 18.8% believe that courtroom movies have an impact (Muraleedharan, Moideen & Suryakanthi, 2023).

Off-Screen to On-Screen

According to a survey conducted by Kaur and Sharma on 60 students of forensic science, legal system and psychology branch from Chandigarh University (Punjab, India) 80% of the respondents agreed that real-life crime and law enforcement practices are being accurately portrayed. It reveals how much viewers believe in crime thriller films and shows that can be discerned from the figure-3 below.

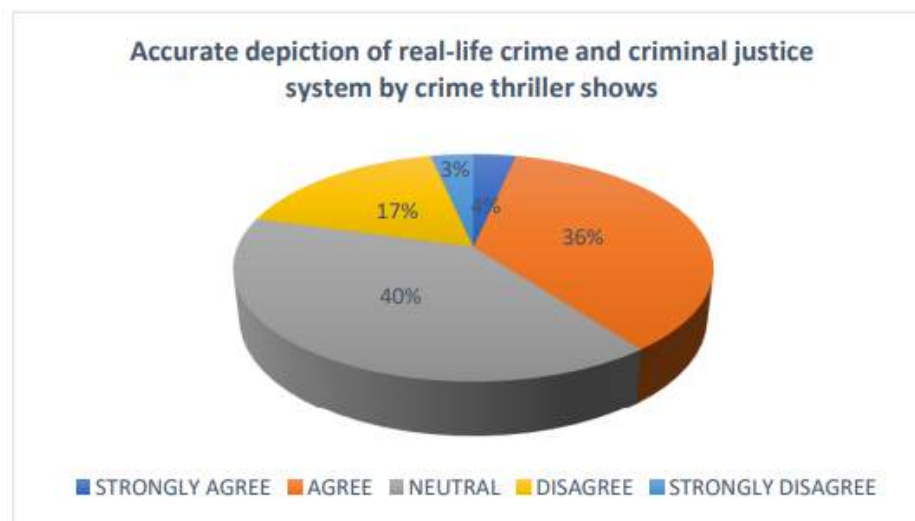
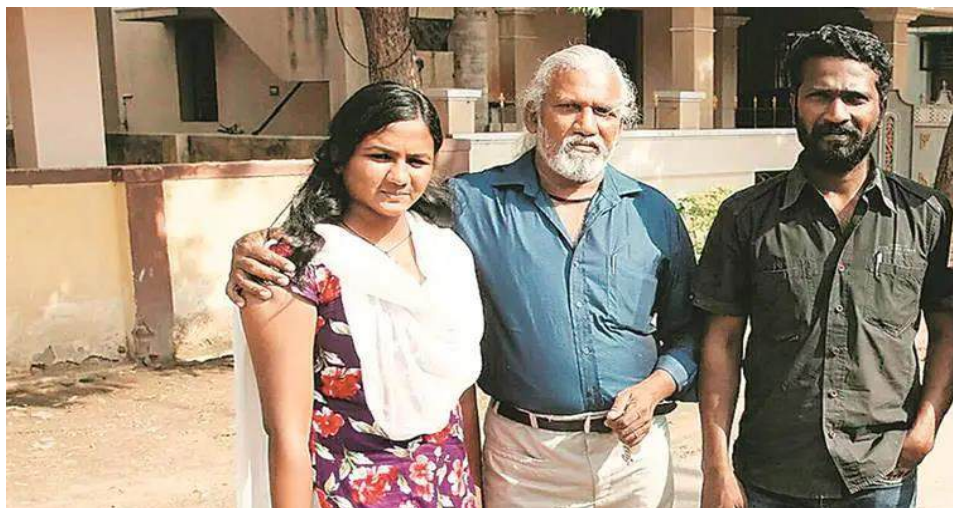


Figure-3

Source - Kaur and Sharma (2024)

Crime thrillers and their real-life inspirations:

1. Visaranai (Interrogation - 2015)



Auto Chandran (centre) with daughter Jeeva and director Vetrimaran

The 2015 Tamil film *Visaranai* is based on the life of M, Chandrakumar, also known as Auto Chandran. Chandran's life experiences were written in his 2006 novel *Lock Up*, which the film is based on. The film depicts the police torture of migrant workers from Tamil Nadu who are picked up in Guntur for no crime.

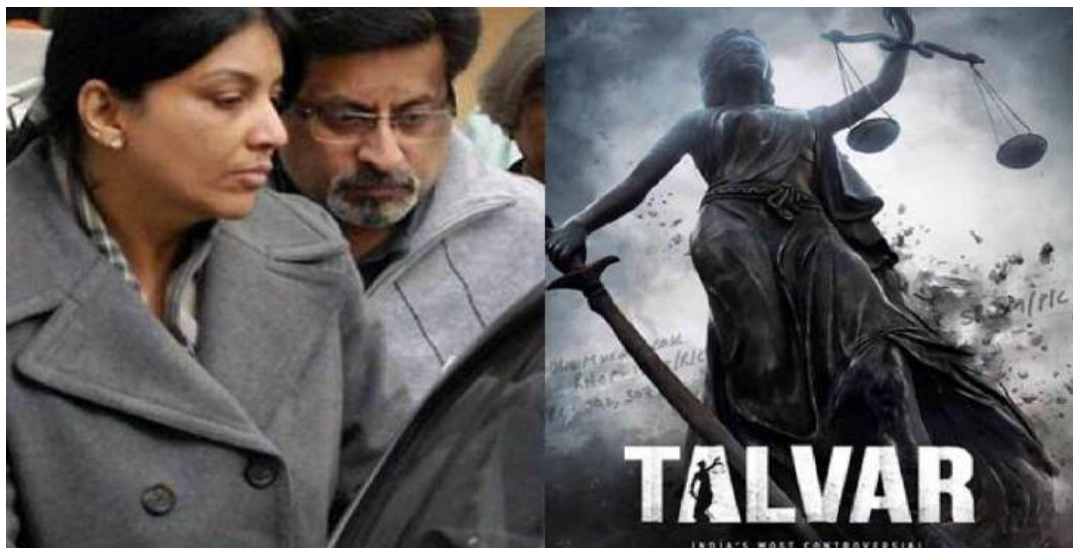
2. Theeran Adhigaaram Ondru (The Warrior: Chapter One - 2017)



DGP S. R. Jangid (centre) with wife and actor Karthi

The film is based on the Operation Bawaria case (operation by Tamil Nadu Police Squad led by DGP S. R. Jangid), which took place in 2005 in Tamil Nadu. The case involved a group of dacoits who killed several wealthy families near the National Highway.

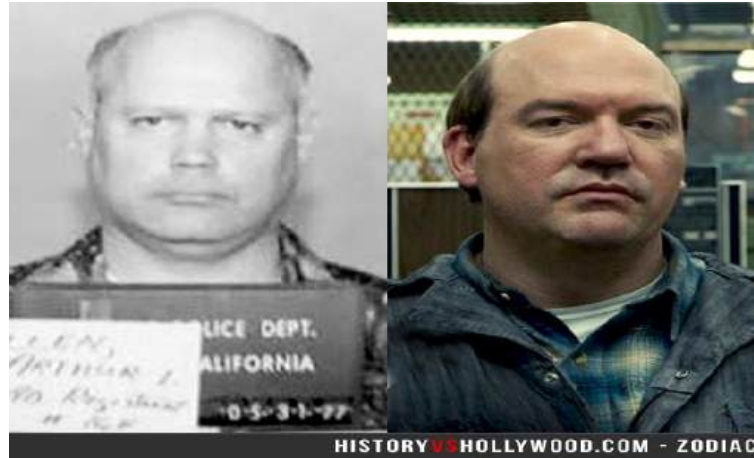
3. Talvar (Sword - 2015)



Nupur Talwar (Left) and Rajesh Talwar (Right) - Parents and Murder Convicts of the deceased Aarushi Talwar (Daughter) and Hemraj Banjade (family's domestic worker)

Talvar, released internationally as Guilty, is a 2015 Indian Hindi-language crime-thriller drama film directed by Meghna Gulzar and written by Vishal Bhardwaj. Produced by Bhardwaj and Vineet Jain, the film is loosely based on the 2008 Noida double murder case involving a teenage girl and her family's servant.

4. Zodiac (2007)



The real Arthur Leigh Allen (left) and actor John Carroll Lynch (right) in the movie. *Zodiac* is a 2007 American mystery thriller film directed by David Fincher and written by James Vanderbilt, based on the nonfiction books by Robert Graysmith: *Zodiac* (1986) and *Zodiac Unmasked* (2002). The film tells the story of the manhunt for the Zodiac Killer, a serial killer who terrorized the San Francisco Bay Area during the late 1960s and early 1970s, taunting police with letters, bloodstained clothing, and ciphers mailed to newspapers. The case remains one of the United States' most infamous unsolved crimes.

5. The Good Nurse (2022)



Eddie Redmayne (Left) and Charles Cullen (Right)

The Good Nurse chronicles the murders of American serial killer Charles Cullen during his sixteen-year nursing career working in the New Jersey and Pennsylvania medical systems before being arrested in 2003.

6. Catch Me If You Can (2002)



Frank Abagnale and Leonardo DiCaprio during filming of "Catch Me If You Can"

Directed and produced by Stephen Spielberg, *Catch Me If You Can* depicts the story of Frank Abagnale, one of the most notorious con artists in history. In his late teens and early 20s, Abagnale successfully posed as a pilot, teacher, lawyer, and doctor in cons that were worth millions, all while evading police capture. After his release from prison, Abagnale married, had 3 sons, and now works as a security consultant.

Leonardo DiCaprio and Tom Hanks star as Abagnale and FBI agent Carl Hanratty, respectively, in this 2002 biopic. The movie is often regarded as one of Spielberg's best comedic works, with DiCaprio and Hanks receiving praise for their performances. *Catch Me If You Can* is a humorous story of one of the world's most successful con artists and the FBI's wild chase to capture him.

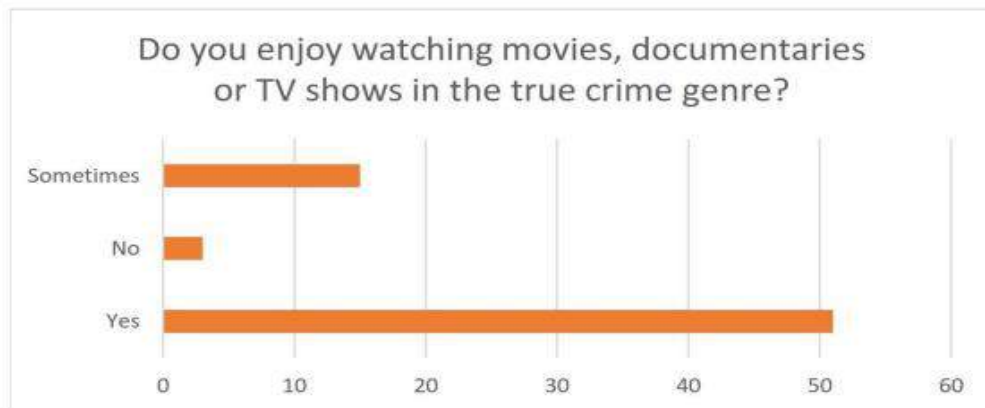
7. Special 26 (2013)



Akashay Kumar (Right) and Anupam Kher (Left)

The movie is based on a real-life heist that took place at the Opera House branch of Tribhovandas Bhimji Zaveri on March 19, 1987

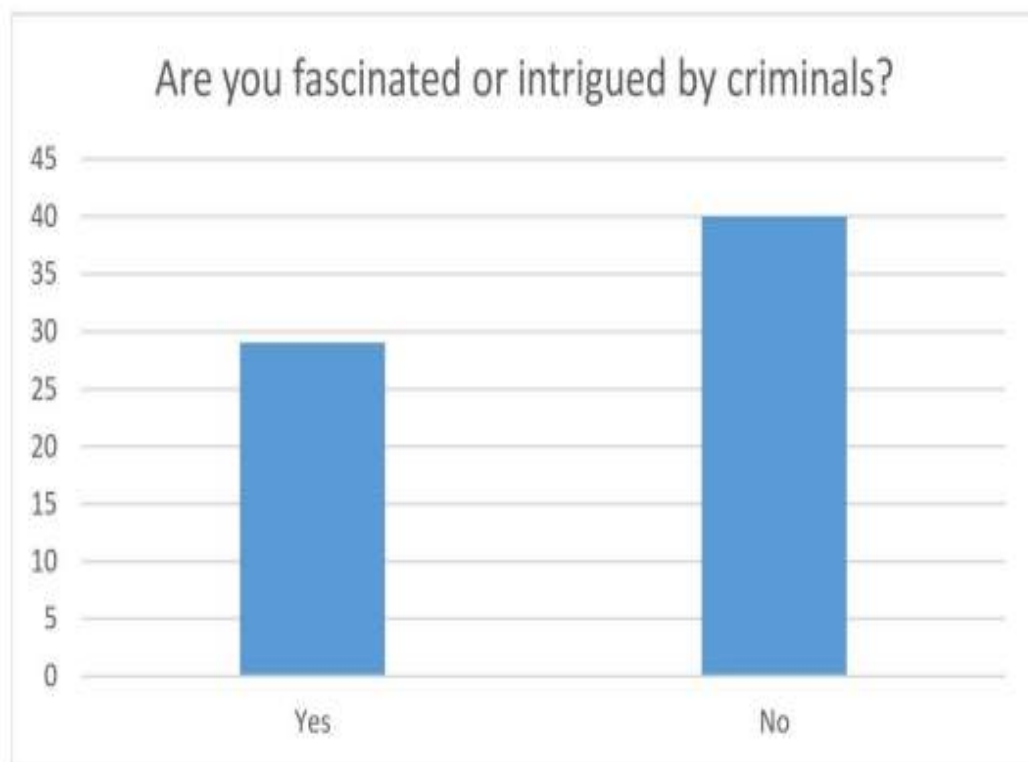
Psychological Impact of Crime Movies/TV Shows Off Screen



Graph 1 - Enjoyment watching true crime shows

Source - Muraleedharan, Moideen B and Suryakanthi (2023)

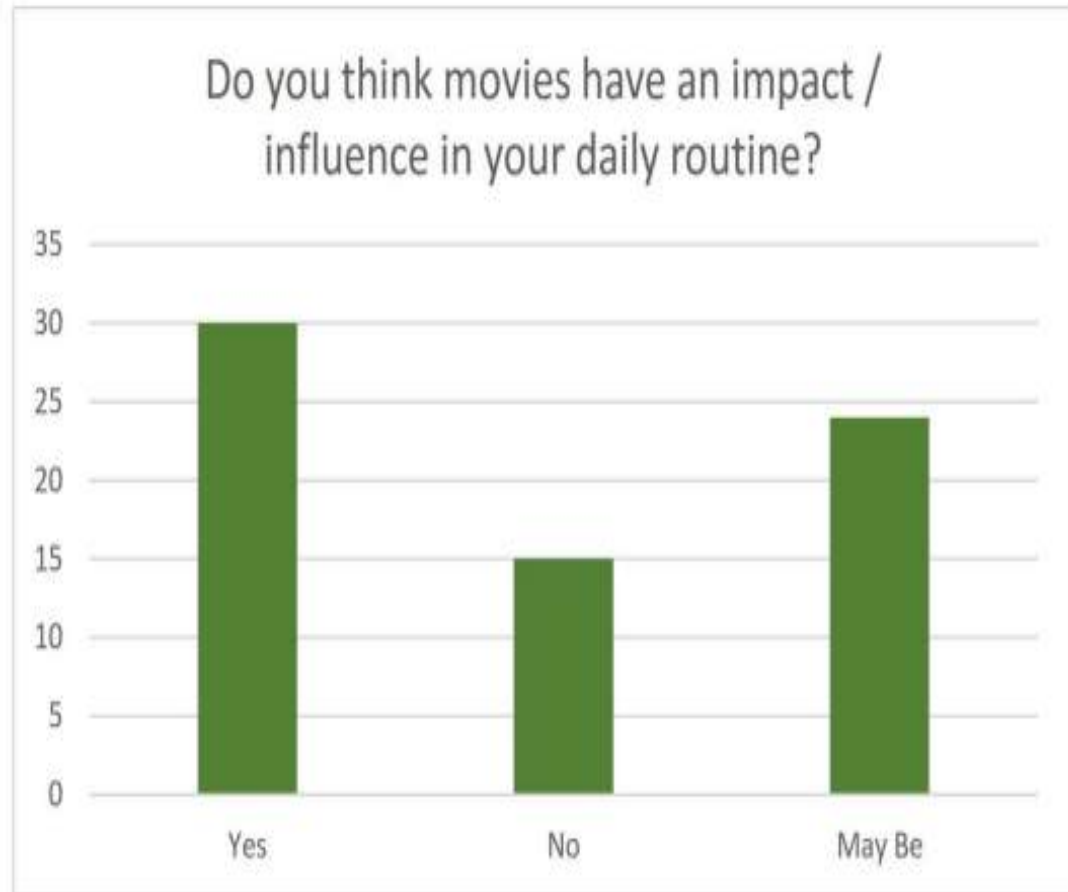
A study conducted among 65 individuals between the age of 14 - 45 years showed that 73.9% people enjoy watching true crime shows and 21.7% people occasionally enjoy watching true crime shows while 4.3% of the participants are not interested or enjoy watching the true crime shows as depicted in the Graph-1 (Muraleedharan, Moideen B & Suryakanthi, 2023).



Graph 2 - Fascination with Criminals

Source - Muraleedharan, Moideen B and Suryakanthi (2023)

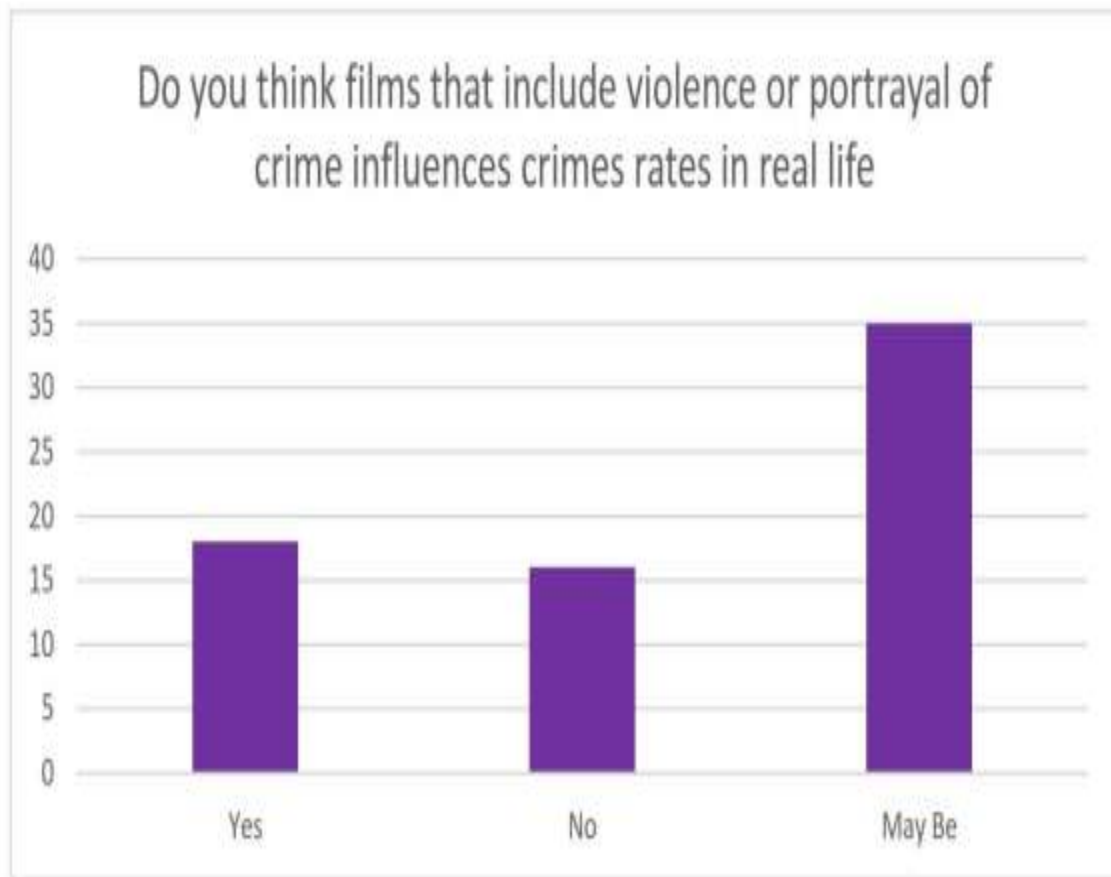
According to graph-2, 40.58% of participants find criminals fascinating, whilst 59.42% do not. When asked why they are fascinated, 28.75% of interviewees said they would like to understand the psychology underlying the criminals and their mental processes. 14.29% of participants expressed interest in learning more about the criminals' motivations for committing crimes and how they were able to defend them (Muraleedharan, Moideen B & Suryakanthi, 2023).



Graph 3 - Movies influencing daily routine

Source - Muraleedharan, Moideen B and Suryakanthi (2023)

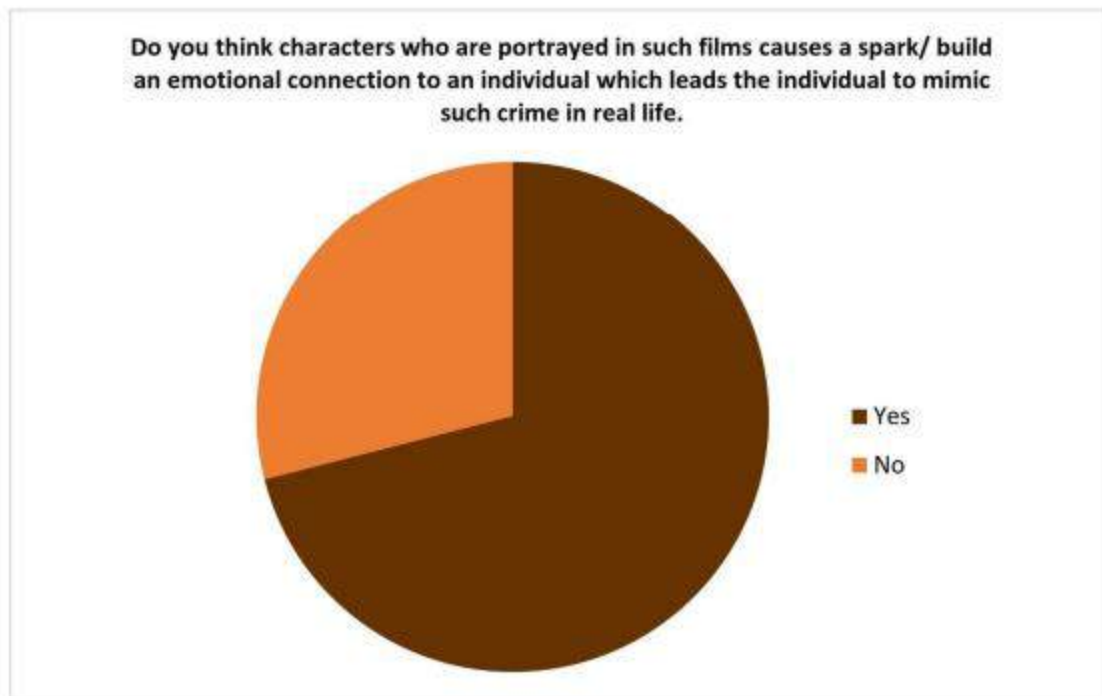
It can be deduced from graph-3, which examines the impact of movies on people's daily routines and their enjoyment of real crime shows, that 43.4% of participants concur that movies do have an impact on their daily routines. Conversely, however, 34.7% of respondents say that movies have some influence over them. Furthermore, it is evident that 21.7% of respondents claim that there is no influence (Muraleedharan, Moideen B & Suryakanthi, 2023).



Graph 4 - *Portrayal of crime or violence influencing crimes rates in real life*

Source - Muraleedharan, Moideen B and Suryakanthi (2023)

Graph-4 shows that 26% of participants believe that how crime or violence is portrayed affects actual crime rates. 50.7% of them say that actual life has some effect. It was observed that some real-life actions can be related to film scenes in some manner. According to 23.1% of participants, there is no impact (Muraleedharan, Moideen B & Suryakanthi, 2023).



Graph 5 - *Building a connection with characters on screen*

Source - *Muraleedharan, Moideen B and Suryakanthi (2023)*

When asked if they believe that characters in these kinds of movies ignite a spark or create an emotional bond with a person that encourages that person to commit the same crime in real life, 71.01% of the participants responded yes. Whereas 28.9% begs to differ from that opinion (Muraleedharan, Moideen B & Suryakanthi, 2023).

On-Screen to Off-Screen

Because web series and over-the-top (OTT) content are not properly censored in India, they frequently feature violent and sexual content, which has a significant negative influence on today's youngsters. People from all walks of life have committed numerous crimes and murders because of being motivated by such content. Some of the examples that proves the latter statements are,

1. Pushpa (2021)



To become gangsters, the Delhi youths murder an innocent person. They allegedly killed an innocent person to establish themselves as gangsters after seeing the movie "Pushpa" and being motivated by it. In another instance, a smuggler who was influenced by Allu Arjun's "Pushpa" attempts to deceive the authorities by attempting to smuggle sandalwood.

2. Bhaukaal (Web Series – 2020)



Inspired by the 2020 Hindi language crime drama web series 'Bhaukaal', a few horrible incidents took place in the nation's capital. Though the series is said to be based on a police officer's life, its stylish making encouraged one to commit a real-life crime similarly.

3. KGF 2 (2021)



Shiva Prasad, 19, was inspired by KGF2 to become a serial murderer and murder five people in order to get notoriety in his community. According to reports, he murdered four security personnel while they were sleeping. It is later revealed that he reportedly wanted to become famous like Yash in real life and was inspired by the Pan-India Kannada movie "KGF2." In the KGF theater in Karnataka, another man shot his fellow patrons.

4. Kabir Singh (2019)



In Uttar Pradesh, a man named Ashwini Kashyap, also known as Johnny Dada, killed a flight attendant named Nitika Sharma, who lived in Dubai and whom he was in love with. Shortly after the murder, Kashyap allegedly uploaded a video to his Tiktok account reciting the well-known line from the movie Kabi Singh: "Jo Mera nahi ho Sakta, use Kisi aur ke hone ka mauka nahi doonga." 'Kabir Singh' and its original version, Arjun Reddy, were linked to a number of other crimes.

5. Drishyam



Because of its gripping plot, the Mohan Lal-starring Malayalam crime thriller "Drishyam" has been adapted into several other languages and, regrettably, has served as an inspiration for a real-life murder by a guy from Bhopal. Inspired by the movie, Indrapal Singh and his nephew disposed of a corpse in the Hathaikheda Dam in 2015.

6. Money Heist (Web Series - 2017-21)



Inspired by the crime-based web series "Money Heist" on Netflix, a guy and his crew organized a robbery in Goati Nagar, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. On Sunday, he allegedly robbed a jewelry store. Later, though, the police solved the case and took them into custody.

7. Anthima Teerpu (1988)



The prime suspect in the assassination of former Anantapur TDP MLA Paritala Ravi, Julakanti Srinivasa Reddy, also known as Moddu Srinu, told the TV news channel that he was motivated to sacrifice and carry out the aforementioned murder of Paritala in broad daylight by the 1988 Telugu

film "Anthima Teerpu." This is not the only group of professional killers who looked to movies for inspiration.

8. Darr (1993)



Devendra, a Snapdeal employee, disclosed in 2016 that he kidnapped Deepti Sharma after being influenced by Shah Rukh Khan's 1993 movie "Darr," in which SRK portrayed a psycho stalker of his beloved.

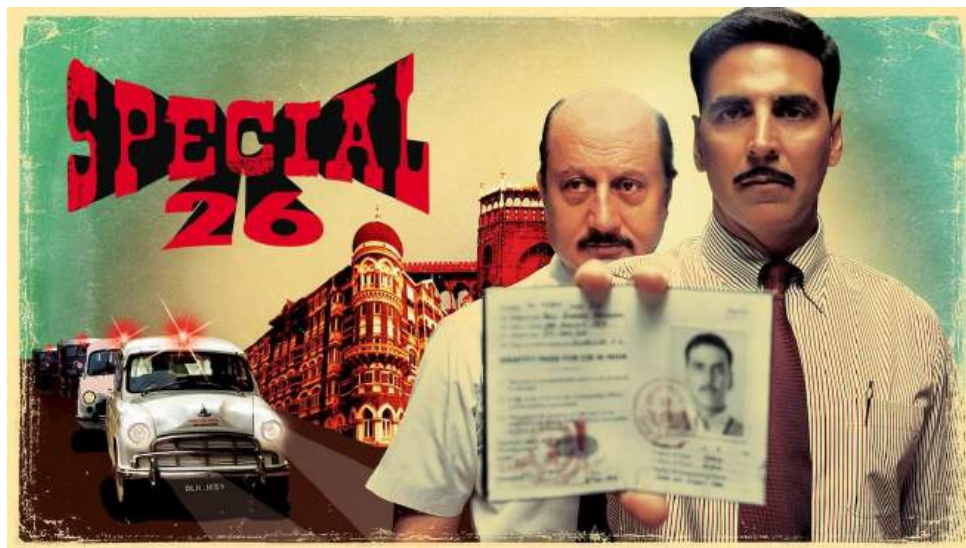
9. The Dexter Show (Web Series - 2006-13)



The chef from Mumbai was inspired by the American crime series to cut up his lover Shraddha Walker and throw her in different parts of Mumbai. Aaftab Amin Poonawalla was a fervent

follower of such crime content, particularly the "Dexter," which served as the impetus for the dramatical murder, according to the police investigation into him.

10. Special 26 (2013)



A few phony CBI agents stole more than 40 kg of gold from the Muthoot Finance branch in Hyderabad. Their response during the interrogation startled everyone since it was influenced by the movie "Special 26," which had Akshay Kumar in the major role.

Films that had contributed to a change in law (Positive Impact):

Some movies appear in the theater, amuse their audience, earn their money, and then silently fade into obscurity, only to sometimes be seen on television. However, sometimes a film has at least some influence on a future change in the legislation, and sometimes one comes along that has a lasting effect.

Here, we'll have a look at a few instances of it as we look at several movies that have had an influence that goes beyond their box office earnings.

1. Scum (1979)

How direct a change in the law Scum was responsible for is open to debate, but the government of the time abolished the Borstal system in 1982's Criminal Justice Act, renaming the institutions as Youth Custody Centres (now Young Offender Institutions).

2. Rosetta (1999)

Hugely acclaimed on its release, Rosetta came to the attention of the Belgian legislature, aided by it winning the Palme D'Or at Cannes. Consequently, the law in Belgium was re-examined, and fresh legislation was introduced that made it illegal to pay teenage workers less than the statutory minimum wage.

3. JFK (1991)

The film's success in 1991 led to a great deal of attention on the assassination of John F Kennedy, but also the ongoing allegations of a cover-up. In 1992, the year after JFK was released, the John F Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act of 1992 became law in the US, bringing with it the Assassination Records Review Board. This Board then brought together the records relating to the JFK assassination, and gradually began releasing them into public record. The process, however, still won't be complete until 2017, over a quarter of a century since the release of Stone's film.

4. Street of Shame (1956)

The film found a sizable audience on its original release, and it was just a few months later that the Japanese government introduced a new anti-prostitution law. Again, it's a matter of debate as to how much this was down to the film itself. But at the very least, Street of Shame – now available via the Criterion Collection – appears to have accelerated the process.

5. A Handful of Ash (2005)

Amin and Ahmed tackled a subject very much taboo in Kurdistan, encountering many courageous people willing to speak up about the impact and consequences of female genital mutilation. The resultant film, A Handful Of Ash, was shown in the Kurdish parliament. The horrific practice has now been outlawed in Kurdistan, as a direct consequence of the filmmakers and their film.

Conclusion

This essay examines the complex ways that crime films affect society, highlighting both their ability to encourage constructive change and their tendency to harm those who are already at risk. Crime films are an effective storytelling medium that teach viewers about human nature, society ills, and the legal system. Their accessibility through digital platforms and glamorization of criminal activity, however, have sparked worries about their potential to encourage crimes in the real world. The significance of responsible filmmaking is emphasized by the dual effects of crime films. While maintaining the genre's instructional and entertainment value, the negative consequences can be lessened with the support of media literacy programs, stricter censorship laws, and ethical storytelling. In the end, crime film's survival depends on finding a balance between artistic freedom and social duty to make sure that this powerful medium keeps educating and entertaining viewers without sacrificing moral principles.

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