

Original Research Article

Social Grounds of Pickpocket in Metropolitan City: Attitude and Aftermath Effect among the Sufferer

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Abstract: The study delves into the complex phenomenon of pickpocketing, a global affliction that persists across nations like India, posing a familiar threat to individuals in crowded spaces. Despite its historical roots as an opportunistic crime, pickpocketing has evolved into an organized enterprise, often involving economically disadvantaged individuals forming groups. While prevalent in major cities worldwide, pickpocketing lacks explicit legal recognition in India's Penal Code, falling under broader theft laws. Leveraging data from automated fare collection systems and trajectory analysis, this research refines anomaly-detection applications to identify suspicious behaviors, shedding light on the environmental factors shaping pickpocketing trends. The study focuses on the social considerations of pickpocketing in Kolkata, India, exploring victim experiences and perceptions. Findings reveal the broader social impacts of pickpocketing, beyond just financial loss, with victims enduring significant social and psychological distress. Despite lacking specific legal penalties, pickpocketing remains a prevalent issue, highlighting the need for collective efforts from governments, law enforcement, and the public to combat it effectively.

Keywords: Pickpocket, Victim, Offenders, Attitude, Pocketpicker, Sufferings.

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INTRODUCTION

'Pickpocket', is a global affliction, persists across nations like India, posing a familiar threat (Deshotels, 2013). Perpetrated discreetly, pickpocketing inflicts varied miseries on victims, exploiting crowded spaces where they blend seamlessly to pilfer valuables (Nafsila & Abraham, 2021; Du *et al.*, 2016). Historically viewed as opportunistic, pickpocketing has evolved into an organized enterprise, often involving economically disadvantaged individuals forming groups (Staats, 1977). Originating as 'pick-purse' in late 14th century, pickpocketing surged in Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries, driven by economic need and unemployment (Palk, 2006; Hitchcock & Schoemaker, 2010). Despite its prevalence, pickpocketing lacks explicit legal recognition in India's Penal Code, falling under broader theft laws (Sharma, 2019). Distinguishing pickpocketing from theft, the former involves discreet extraction in

crowded locales, while theft entails overt seizure (Manaher, 2023). Globally prevalent pickpocketing incidents are reported in major cities worldwide (Breunig *et al.*, 2000). Barcelona, Rome, Prague, Madrid, and Paris are denoted as hotspots for pickpocket as per crime indicator (TheGlobalEconomy.com; Clever Travel Company, 2023).

Research on pickpocketing often focuses on public transit systems due to passengers' vulnerability in crowded environments. Leveraging data from automated fare collection systems (Nafsila and Abraham, 2021) refine anomaly-detection applications by identifying suspicious behaviors. Analysing trajectory data aids in detecting abnormal activities, distinguishing between ordinary passengers and potential suspects (Du *et al.*, 2016). In 2014, Newton highlights the challenge of apprehending criminals in moving transports, prompting innovative surveillance methods like hierarchical

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frameworks (Zhao *et al.*, 2019). Environmental factors also shape pickpocketing trends, with theft rates decreasing during extreme weather conditions and increasing in daylight (Peng, Hongyong, & Dengsheng, 2011). Air quality influences crime rates, with specific peak periods for pickpocketing identified in Beijing (Ding & Zhai, 2021). Bus stops and other public areas are prime locations for pickpocketing, influenced by location dynamics (Ceccato, Cats, & Wang, 2015). Infrastructure shortcomings and surveillance gaps exacerbate crime rates, driving the development of resource allocation models to mitigate incidents (Schlichera & Lurkin, 2022). Cost-effective solutions, like automatic suspect detection systems, are crucial for effective prevention (Bouma *et al.*, 2014), with offender demographics and behaviors influenced by age and regional characteristics (Deshotels, 2013). Understanding these factors informs strategies for prevention and law enforcement to combat pickpocketing effectively.

Present research is aim to address gaps in previous studies by focusing on pickpocketing in India, which lacked prior examination despite its susceptibility to the crime. Prior studies primarily concentrated on offender detection and crime reduction strategies, overlooking victim experiences and perceptions. This study is specifically designed to explore the social considerations of pickpocket in a Metropolitan city like Kolkata in India.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A total of 122 participants, who had experienced pickpocketing at least once in the Kolkata Metropolitan area, were purposefully selected for this study. Data collection involved structured interviews, with the frequency of pickpocketing incidents recorded from January to December 2023. Qualitative data were analyzed by coding and categorizing the phenomenon into themes. The analysis was conducted using IBM-SPSS 18, with descriptive statistics utilized to calculate frequencies and mean ± standard deviation. Inferential statistics, specifically the Chi-square test, were employed to assess the significant distribution of variables within the study group. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

RESULT

Sociodemographic Profile of Pickpocket Sufferer

Of 122 pickpocket sufferers, mean age of the participants were 37.26±14.24 years, irrespective of sex. However, female sufferers are dominating (50.82%) the study from last year. Majority of the participants were Graduate (40.16%) and married (60.66%). 52.46% participants were financially independent (service, business) whereas, students, home-maker and unemployed individuals are denoted as financially dependent (47.54%).

Table 1: Sociodemographic profile of Pickpocket sufferer

Variables	Types	Frequencies (%)
Age	Range: 15 - 60 years	37.26±14.24
Gender	Men	60 (49.18)
	Women	62 (50.82)
Educational attainments	Primary education	03 (02.46)
	Secondary education	14 (11.48)
	Higher secondary	16 (13.11)
	Graduation	49 (40.16)
	Postgraduate and above	40 (32.79)
Marital status	Unmarried	44 (36.07)
	Married	74 (60.66)
	Others	04 (03.28)
Financial prominence	Dependent	58 (47.54)
	Independent	64 (52.46)

Exposure of Pickpocket

The mean exposure of the suffering due to pickpocket was 1.33 ± 0.81 times (Table-2). Last year, participants mostly suffered financially (72.95%) by losing with numerous elements like, mobile, jewellery, cash money however, mean monetary loss was 9104±2185. Mental distress (13.93%) and societal harm (12.11%) have been encountered by losing some official documents and antique elements.

Approaches of Sufferer toward Pickpocket

Significant differences of reactions (p<0.05) have been found among the family members of the victim, though prevalent reaction (62.30%) was consolation. After being pickpocketed, self-realization of the victims articulated both the feelings of being guilty and self-lenient (40.16%), while tendency of self-blaming was predominant among rest (34.43%). In case of the execution of crime, majority of the sufferers (41.80%) expressed their aggressiveness towards the pocket-picker however, 32.97% people want to treat them in a sympathetic ground. A significant differences

of approaches have found among sufferers toward miscreants.

Table 2: Exposures of Pickpocket and related behavior of the sufferer

Variables	Scales	Frequency (%)	Mean±SD	X ² df, p
Exposure of Pickpocket:				
Frequency of being pickpocketed	Range: 1 to 5 times		1.33 ± 0.81	11.62, 2, 0.001
Damages due to pickpocket	1=Financial 2=Emotional 3=Social	89 (72.95) 16 (13.11) 17 (13.93)	66.33 ± 36.4	14.05, 2, 0.001
Monetary loss	Range: INR 200 – 50,000		9104±2185	0.94, 2, 0.841
Approaches toward Pickpocket:				
Reactions of Family members after being Pickpocketed	1= Berate	27 (22.13)	1.93±0.61	13.41, 2, 0.001
	2= Console	76 (62.30)		
	3= Indifferent	19 (15.57)		
Self-reactions of the sufferers after being Pick-pocketed	1= Self-criticism	42 (34.43)	2.05±0.86	0.60, 2, 0.739
	2= Console	31 (25.41)		
	3= Both	49 (40.16)		
Attitude towards the Pocket picker	1= Aggressive	51 (41.80)	1.81±0.87	11.73, 2, 0.003
	2= Indifferent	32 (26.23)		
	3= Sympathetic	39 (32.97)		

DISCUSSION

Present research aimed to envisage an aftermath consequences of pickpocketing confronted by its prey. As per pickpocket sufferers, it is beyond a monetary crime rather it plays major role to portray the social image of victim and degree of social acceptance of both the crime and the criminals. Pickpocket portrays a forfeiture of monetary amount along with other agonies. Rarely recovered the pickpocketed elements in this metropolitan city as it doesn't have any codified law and penalties for such crime. Conversely, the crime results a series of inconveniences and prolonged sufferings which may be in various forms among the victims. The study shows that, execution of wrongdoing is not biased in terms of age and sex. After being mistreated irrespective of age and sex, the sufferers confronted different reactions from their family members. Several participants have alternatively confronted victim-blaming with abusive terms or triviality from their family, based on their damages though, sympathetic behaviour also noticeable. Significant differences are visible in case of the occurrence and damages of pickpocket. Numerous approaches of victim conveyed that, pickpocket indicates the grounds of low self-esteem, outdoor insecurity along with personal and familial humiliations. Nevertheless, attitude toward the pocket-pickers revealed reverse approaches of victims like, mostly highlighting aggressive and punishing mentality reflected among men. A significant differences were found in attitudes toward the pocket-pickers in respect to gender ($p < 0.05$). Differences of perception regarding pickpocket also noticeable among the sufferers. To them, currently pick-pocket become a stable profession for the miscreants. To avoid such unwanted harassments, people should wide awake at

outdoor. Ceccato, Cats, & Wang (2015) and Gupta (2020), mentioned, the bus stops and other public areas are prime locations for pickpocketing. Absences of legal infrastructure is one of the reasons for increasing crime rates (Schlichera & Lurkin, 2022). The studied group similarly stated, austere law and advanced security system may prevent such crimes. The attitude and endurance of the governments, the police and public play crucial role in rectifying the wrongdoers. The rigidity of time and studied area embrace lesser number of victims and comprehensive scenario of pickpocket and its aftermath effect among the sufferers.

CONCLUSION

The study delves into the repercussions of pickpocketing, showing its broader social impacts beyond just financial loss. It reveals that victims endure significant social and psychological distress, often leading to prolonged suffering. Despite lacking specific legal penalties, pickpocketing remains a prevalent issue in Kolkata, with victims facing challenges in recovery. Interestingly, the study finds that pickpocketing affects individuals of all ages and genders, with victims receiving varied reactions from family members, ranging from sympathy to blame. Attitudes towards pickpockets also vary, with many expressing a desire for stricter laws and better security measures. The study underscores the need for collective efforts from governments, law enforcement, and the public to combat pickpocketing effectively.

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