

Crime and deviance during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed the world and inevitably influenced people's behaviors including the likelihood of crime and deviance. Emerging empirical evidence suggests a decline in certain crimes (e.g., theft, robbery, and assault) but also proliferation of different violent behaviors and cybercriminal activity during the pandemic. To explain those trends, we draw on existent theories and elaborate on how crime and violence have been affected by the changes in people's daily routines and accumulated stressful conditions. However, as recent crime trends appear to be largely inconsistent and vary across social groups and contexts, we argue that social scientists need to pay particular attention to the differential experiences related to crime and violence during this global crisis. Specifically, because of the disproportionate experience of violence by vulnerable groups including minorities and women as well as the unique cross-national variations in deviance, more nuanced approaches to understanding causes of crime are warranted. We also discuss the limitations of present research and provide recommendations for the development of comparative and multi-disciplinary studies on criminal and deviant behaviors that are influenced by human crisis situations.

KEYWORDS

COVID-19, crime, criminological theory, deviance, inequality, pandemic, violence

1 | INTRODUCTION

In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020). Since then, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on every sphere of human life with emerging reports suggesting that criminal and violent behaviors have also been affected. News reports about intimate partner abuse during the enforced lockdowns (Taub, 2020), gun violence in major cities (Rector, 2021), as well as accounts of anti-Asian rhetoric towards Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (Chan et al., 2020), have been consistent features since March 2020. Moreover, the pandemic created more opportunities for cybercrime. With an unprecedented increase in the public use of technology, cybercriminals have increasingly infiltrated security networks and achieved unlawful access to personal data (INTERPOL, 2020).

In this paper, we explore the unique relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic and crime. Recent research has shown that during the pandemic, certain property crimes, robbery, and assault rates have decreased, while there have been increases in different violent behaviors and cybercriminal activity (Abrams, 2021; Buil-Gil et al., 2021; Langton et al., 2021; Schleimer et al., 2020). Drawing on existent theory and research, we discuss how those crime patterns are shaped by the unprecedented changes in people's daily routines and accumulated stress during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the evidence on current crime trends remains largely inconsistent with crime levels varying across time periods, contexts, and groups. As such, the pandemic has also prompted us to rethink the existent criminological approaches and, in the second part of this paper, we argue that there is a need to more systematically address differential vulnerabilities to crime and violence. Specifically, we discuss selected examples of such vulnerabilities including a rise in hate crimes towards the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community, a disproportionate burden of violence in Black communities, the role of the COVID-19 pandemic in intimate partner violence (IPV), and unique cross-national differences in crime. Finally, we address the limitations of present research and provide recommendations for future studies with a specific focus on the need for integrated, multi-disciplinary, and comparative perspectives. Importantly, considering the warnings from health experts about more potential pandemics, understanding the relationships between the pandemic-related experiences and crime will help plan for the future.

2 | EXPLANATIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND CRIME

2.1 | Changes in people's daily routines

Since the start of the pandemic, people have experienced drastic changes in their daily routines due to lockdown orders and social distancing measures. Many non-essential places (e.g., shopping malls) and weekend nighttime establishments and attractions (e.g., bars, restaurants, sporting events) have temporarily shut down for varying lengths of time to contain the spread of the virus. Given that these places typically generate larger gatherings of people, the temporary closure of establishments meant that fewer people were out in public spaces, hence limiting social contact. In turn, this reduction in social contact impacted the likelihood of people engaging in various deviant acts such as physical fights or DUI-related motor vehicle accidents (Calderon-Anyosa & Kaufman, 2021; Gerell et al., 2020).

Routine Activities Theory (RAT) by Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson provides an explanation of the recent changes in crime patterns during the pandemic. Cohen and Felson (1979) argue that criminal events occur when there is a convergence of three critical components in time and space: (1) a motivated offender, (2) a suitable target such as a person or property seen as fitting for an offender, and (3) an absence of guardianship such as having little to no people witnessing and preventing these criminal events (e.g., police, school officials, etc.). The authors emphasize that the occurrence of all three elements at once, or the convergence, increases the likelihood of a criminal event, whereas, in the absence of one of these factors, an opportunity for crime is less likely to arise (Cohen & Felson, 1979).

2.1.1 | Physical space, crime, and the COVID-19 pandemic

Applying RAT to the conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic, there may have been a lower likelihood of all three factors occurring in time and space. Different countries have enforced containment measures and lockdown orders to reduce the spread of the virus (Ashby, 2020; Campedelli et al., 2020a; Langton et al., 2021; Payne et al., 2020), which, in turn, resulted in decreased opportunities for offenders to commit criminal acts such as theft (Campedelli et al., 2020b). Balmori de la Miyar et al. (2021a) add that potential offenders might also be fearful of the virus and thus, avoid close interaction with people overall. In addition, as distancing measures have been in effect, people have generally spent longer periods at home, which suggests lower possibility of the presence of “suitable targets” as discussed by RAT. With numerous places closed and limits on indoor capacity for some establishments, the offenders' contact with possible targets have further diminished and thus, the opportunities for crime have been reduced (Campedelli et al., 2020a). Accordingly, the increased guardianship of one's property and home has further affected a reduction in residential burglary and other similar crimes at least for some time since the lockdown orders (Felson et al., 2020).

Consistent with these claims, recent research has found evidence of significant declines in robbery and property crimes including theft and residential burglary in the U.S. (Abrams, 2021; Ashby, 2020; Campedelli et al., 2020a; Mohler et al., 2020) and other social contexts including Australia, Canada, Mexico, England, and Wales (Balmori de la Miyar et al., 2021a; Hodgkinson & Andresen, 2020; Langton et al., 2021; Payne et al., 2021). The rates of certain violent crimes have also declined between 2 weeks to 1 month after stay-at-home orders were implemented in March 2020 (Abrams, 2021; Campedelli et al., 2020a). For example, focusing on 25 large U.S. cities, a study by Abrams (2021) has revealed a reduction in simple assault rates by 33.3% and aggravated assault rates by 15.9%. Similar decreases have been found across different countries after containment measures were in place between 1 month and 10 weeks after March 2020 (Balmori de la Miyar et al., 2021a; Gerell et al., 2020; Langton et al., 2021; Payne et al., 2020).

Whereas certain crimes have decreased since the pandemic started, other types of crime in physical spaces have increased, largely due to the lack of capable guardianship. Given that many businesses have been forced to shut down or have limited hours and less staff available, there have been fewer individuals to witness and deter likely offenders from committing acts of burglary in commercial and non-residential areas and vehicle theft in parking structures and garages (Ashby, 2020; Hodgkinson & Andresen, 2020). Accordingly, different studies have found increases in non-residential burglary (e.g., Abrams, 2021; Ashby, 2020), commercial burglary (e.g., Hodgkinson & Andresen, 2020), and motor vehicle theft (e.g., Abrams, 2021; Ashby, 2020; Mohler et al., 2020) in the U.S. and Canada. Notably, the stricter restrictions of the movement in physical space have been associated with more dramatic declines in crime (Nivet et al., 2021), whereas as these restrictions have been eased, increases in crime have been observed (Andresen & Hodgkinson, 2020).

2.1.2 | Cyberspace, crime and the COVID-19 pandemic

The Internet became the default mode of communication after strict lockdown measures were implemented during the first wave of the pandemic and it remains a major platform for work, classes, consultations, shopping, and socializing. As such, we have observed a “so-called” switch from the physical world to the digital world (Miró-Llinares & Moneva, 2019; Monteith et al., 2021; Plachkinova, 2021). This greater activity in the digital space has provided new economic opportunities for motivated offenders to exploit vulnerable groups and systems including infiltration of individual computers, health care systems, and video conferencing tools (Chawki, 2021; Collier, 2020; Collier et al., 2020; Monteith et al., 2021; Pawlicka et al., 2021). In fact, this proliferation of cybercriminal activity is suggested to be at least partially attributed to the boredom of offenders because of more leisurely time at home (Collier, 2020).

According to recent evidence, since the pandemic started, there has been an increase in such types of cybercrime as denial-of-service attacks, fraud, cyber-related harassment, hate crimes, media hacking, phishing, and online shopping fraud (Buil-Gil et al., 2021; Collier et al., 2020; Horgan et al., 2021; Kemp et al., 2021; Plachkinova, 2021). For example, drawing on victimization data, Sampson and Ojen (2021) find that phishing and hacking have been the commonly experienced cybercrimes in Nigeria. Notably, phishing emails on COVID-related topics such as asking for donations and sending malicious links to tax relief documents or free health advice have been particularly widespread (Fontanilla, 2020; see Pawlicka et al., 2021 for more examples).

Further, since the increased dependency on technology for most individuals during the pandemic, there have been growing concerns about the vulnerable victims of cybercrime. Certain individuals unaccustomed to technology may lack sufficient knowledge in recognizing fraudulent processes (Sampson & Ojen, 2021), and, therefore, are less likely to successfully take precautionary measures (e.g., software security, strong passwords, etc.). Many who are older, more impulsive, and unfamiliar with new technology are especially likely to be victimized by cybercrime including phishing scams and fraud (Monteith et al., 2021; Sampson & Ojen, 2021). Recent research also underscores the importance of paying closer attention to mental illness as another factor that can increase the vulnerability to cybercrime (Monteith et al., 2021).

Overall, consistent with RAT, the vulnerability to different cybercrimes, along with the lack of guardianship in cyberspace, make many individuals suitable targets for motivated offenders during the pandemic (Plachkinova, 2021). However, as the broader scope of cybercrime victimization remains largely unknown, more research is needed on understanding the process of convergence of the three factors outlined by RAT in cyberspace. Additionally, there have been calls to focus more on the “capable guardianship” component and, specifically, the appropriate strategies and guidelines promoting cybersecurity in the everchanging complexity of the cyberworld (Fontanilla, 2020).

2.1.3 | Implications for RAT and future research

Routine Activities Theory has been one of the most common frameworks used to explain how the differential distribution of motivated offenders, vulnerable victims, and capable guardians have shaped the decrease in some types of crime (e.g., assault, robbery, theft, residential burglary) and increase in other types of crime (e.g., cybercrime, non-residential, commercial burglary, vehicle theft) during the COVID-19 pandemic (Balmori de la Miyar et al., 2021a; Buil-Gil et al., 2021; Collier, 2020; Payne et al., 2020, 2021). Notably, however, recent studies have revealed the variation in crime across social contexts and regions, time periods, and types of deviance (Andresen & Hodgkinson, 2020; Ashby, 2020; Balmori de la Miyar et al., 2021a, 2021b; Hodgkinson & Andresen, 2020; Langton et al., 2021; Mohler et al., 2020; Payne et al., 2021). For example, the changes in crime rates have been inconsistent in the weeks and months following the lockdown orders (e.g., Hodgkinson & Andresen, 2020; Langton et al., 2021), and several studies have failed to discover any changes in certain crimes (Balmori de la Miyar et al., 2021a; Gerell et al., 2020).

This suggests that to better understand trends in crime during the COVID-19 pandemic, more research and theorizing are needed focusing on various interrelationships between the convergence of the three factors outlined by RAT, characteristics of social contexts, and different COVID-19-related policies and rules. For example, researchers could explore how characteristics of countries, such as their culture, economy, and policy choices, interact with the likelihood of convergence of motivated offenders, vulnerable victims, and capable guardians to shape a criminal opportunity. In addition, whereas RAT does not focus on causes of criminal motivation, it is important to further integrate RAT and other perspectives to explore how certain conditions could play a role in whether offenders will ultimately get motivated to engage in crime given the opportunity during the pandemic.

2.2 | Stress during the COVID-19 pandemic

Besides the drastic changes in daily routines during the COVID-19 pandemic, people around the globe have been experiencing increased stress (Brown et al., 2020; Campbell, 2020). Since the start of the pandemic, many individuals have faced numerous critical strains in daily lives including loss of employment, death of loved ones, social isolation, concerns about the vaccine, and many other pandemic-related issues (Everytown Research & Policy, 2021; Lyons & Brewer, 2021). As a result, many people have experienced negative emotions, which might have been further exacerbated by the inability to use healthy coping mechanisms such as talking to a loved one or using social services (Piquero et al., 2020). Thus, due to the increased stress and negative emotions coupled with the lack of legitimate coping strategies, it is possible that the global pandemic could both, directly and indirectly, cause issues with deviance and violence.

Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory (GST) provides an explanation of how stressful experiences may lead to violence and crime. Specifically, GST in criminology argues that people may experience different types of strain: (1) failure to achieve positively valued goals (e.g., the inability to get a job or education); (2) presentation of negative stimuli (e.g., experiencing undesirable events such as abuse); and (3) removal of positive stimuli (e.g., losing a family member or a close friend; Agnew, 1992, 2006). Most importantly, Agnew (1992) emphasizes that these strains lead to strong negative emotions (e.g., anger) as well as mental health issues (e.g., depression). Agnew (1992) further outlines multiple coping strategies with strain including emotional (e.g., substance abuse), cognitive (e.g., minimizing the importance of adversity), and behavioral (e.g., seeking social support, criminal behavior). The behavioral coping mechanisms in particular encompass individuals actively seeking legal or illegal actions to eliminate sources of strain (Agnew, 2006). When appropriate and legitimate coping strategies are absent and certain conditions are present, individuals are particularly likely to engage in violent and criminal behaviors. Notably, the accumulation of different strains tends to have the strongest crime-inducing effect (Agnew, 2006).

The conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic have undoubtedly contributed to producing various types of strains. The financial and economic constraints, such as minimal employment opportunities and limited income, can be described as a failure to achieve goals as well as the removal of positive stimuli due to being laid off (Kim & Phillips, 2021). In addition, legislative responses to the COVID-19 virus, such as stay-at-home orders and social distancing restrictions, could be perceived as various forms of negative stimuli. Negative relationships between partners or family members can also be more apparent as people have become limited in their mobility and social interaction (Payne et al., 2020). The removal of positive stimuli is also evident when people lose their loved ones or are unable to interact with others. With limited interaction, coupled with multiple hardships, individuals may seek new forms of coping strategies as other forms may no longer be accessible during the pandemic.

Recent empirical studies have elaborated on the consequences of stressful conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. As individuals have become more socially isolated and stressed, this exacerbated different mental health problems including depression and anxiety among both adolescents and adults (Cianfarani & Pampanini, 2021; Coiro et al., 2021; Czeisler et al., 2020; Diaz-Martinez et al., 2021; Magson et al., 2021). Further, consistent with GST, studies have found an increased use of alcohol and cannabis among young people and adults to cope during the pandemic (Diaz-Martinez et al., 2021; Dumas et al., 2020; Grossman et al., 2020; MacMillan et al., 2021). For example, drawing on the survey among adults in the U.S. and Canada, MacMillan et al. (2021) have shown that such stressful conditions as being personally affected by COVID-19 and experiencing childcare challenges increase the risk for substance use during the pandemic.

In addition to increased mental health issues and substance use, recent research has suggested that the pandemic-related stressors are related to deviant and violent behaviors. For example, COVID-19-related stress has been found to increase parental neglect and harsh disciplinary practices towards children (Connell & Strambler, 2021) as well as engagement in such deviant behavior as cyberbullying (Barlett et al., 2021) among U.S. adults. Moreover, following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been increases in reports of different violent behaviors (Mohler et al., 2020; Piquero et al., 2020, 2021) including the escalated gun violence in large metropolitan areas

(Hatchimonji et al., 2020; Kim & Phillips, 2021; Schleimer et al., 2020; Sutherland et al., 2021). For example, a significant surge in gun violence including non-fatal and gang-related shootings was observed about 29 weeks after the stay-at-home orders were implemented in New York state (Kim & Phillips, 2021). In fact, gun purchases in the U.S. increased by \$2.1 million between March and May 2020 only (Schleimer et al., 2020). Consistent with GST, growing concerns and fears for oneself and others during the pandemic can be conceptualized as stressors that have influenced the use of firearms and ammunition as means of protection (Kravitz-Wirtz et al., 2021).

2.2.1 | Implications for GST and future research

As various deviant behaviors have increased since the COVID-19 pandemic (Hatchimonji et al., 2020; Kim & Phillips, 2021; Mohler et al., 2020; Schleimer et al., 2020; Sutherland et al., 2021), particular attention should be paid to a broad range of the pandemic-related strains as potential precursors of violent and deviant acts (Barlett et al., 2021). Although only a few studies have directly examined the role of stress as a factor underlying increased violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, further research is warranted to comprehensively test GST accounting for a broad range of strains (e.g., financial hardships, limited interactions, concerns about the vaccine, and fears related to new virus variants).

Additionally, to better understand the relationship between the pandemic-related stressors and deviance, other important factors must be considered including levels of social support and resources (Payne et al., 2020) and decision-making (Timmer et al., 2021). The consequences of the pandemic-related stressors can also differ across socio-demographic groups. For example, literature shows that racial and ethnic minorities can be more vulnerable to certain stressors including discrimination and prejudice (Brown et al., 2021; Kaufman et al., 2008; Leeper Piquero & Sealock, 2010; Pérez et al., 2008) and thus, may be at higher risk for violence and substance abuse during the pandemic. Finally, it is important to examine the changes in stress-crime relationships during and after the pandemic to provide a more nuanced picture of crime changes over time.

3 | DIFFERENTIAL VULNERABILITIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Whereas recent studies have shown unique crime trends during the pandemic, they have also suggested that crime and its causes may vary across regions, time periods, and contexts, with some research providing mixed evidence on crime levels overall. This, in turn, calls into question the generality of existent theories and suggests the need to refine theoretical frameworks and research to better explain criminal behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic. We argue that a closer evaluation of the differential vulnerabilities related to violence and crime across social groups and contexts will help us provide a more comprehensive explanation of causes of crime during and post pandemic.

Since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic distress, erosions of social support, and feelings of hopelessness fueled by the lockdown orders and containment measures have created a sense of public anxiety around the world (Dastagir, 2020; Muhammad, 2020). However, the negative outcomes associated with the global health crisis have not been experienced equally and issues like social isolation, fear, uncertainty, an unprecedented use of cyberspace, and incrementing vulnerabilities have affected certain communities more than others. In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic-related conditions have exacerbated the existing institutional biases and structural inequities in the access to healthcare, housing, education, and employment (Muhammad, 2020), which in turn, created differential impacts on opportunities and resources for certain marginalized groups including outcomes related to crime and violence. In the next sections, we discuss the disproportionate effects of violence-related issues on Black communities, hate crimes towards the AAPI community, the impact of COVID-19 on IPV, and cross-national differences in crime as illustrations of differential vulnerabilities in contemporary society.

3.1 | Disproportionate impact of violence on Black communities

Emerging evidence has indicated a continual increase in gun-related deaths and injuries during the pandemic (Abdallah et al., 2021; Hatchimonji et al., 2020; Kim & Phillips, 2021; Police Executive Research Forum, 2021; Schleimer et al., 2020; Sutherland et al., 2021). The Black community continues to bear the greatest burden of this crisis suggesting a disproportionate and deepened impact of violence on this community. Notably, pre-pandemic in 2019, the homicide rate among Black men was more than 20 times higher as compared to their White counterparts including a high rate of gun-related deaths among Black teens and adults (Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence and Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, 2021). The disproportionate risk for violence in the Black community is argued to continue during and post-pandemic (Muhammad, 2020; Schleimer et al., 2022; Weil, 2021).

Consistent with RAT, this higher risk for violence can be at least partially explained by the increased likelihood of criminal events in vulnerable communities, especially due to more vulnerable targets. Importantly, to better understand the increased vulnerability of the Black community, it is important to place this community's experiences in the larger economic and political contexts of different societies (Wilson, 1987, 2009). For example, Black individuals in the United States have historically had differential access to societal privileges such as upward mobility and job placement, which further contributed to large class inequalities across racial groups (Wilson, 2009). These socioeconomic inequalities have interacted with other major life barriers faced by Black people including discrimination in laws and policies to cause persistent poverty and lack of resources (Wilson, 1987, 2009), which in turn increased their vulnerabilities in society including risk for violence and victimization. In other words, the larger opportunity for violent behavior and risk for victimization in Black communities can largely be attributed to income inequality and limited economic opportunities (Kim, 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these vulnerabilities. As a result of the lockdown measures, thousands of businesses were forced to temporarily close or shift to remote operations, with many of these shut-downs remaining permanent (Fairlie, 2020). The occupations that needed to be significantly reduced were various nonremote, frontline positions, which are professions Black Americans are largely represented in (Rapier, 2020). Thus, Black Americans have been extremely burdened by the vast number of layoffs, with this groups' employment-population ratio being at 50.8% in March 2020 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Drawing on GST, these unemployment consequences, socioeconomic disparities, and racial inequality along with economic hardships can be understood as severe strains (Agnew, 1999; Kaufman et al., 2008; Leeper Piquero & Sealock, 2010; Pérez et al., 2008), which can disproportionately affect violence and victimization in the Black community. A high risk for firearm-related incidents in communities of color (Kim, 2019) and suicide (Kawohl & Nordt, 2020) also demonstrate support for these claims. In addition, a recent study by Brown et al. (2021) reveals the association between racial discrimination during the pandemic and increased substance use among Black Americans as well as other minority groups.

Further, research has found that arrests for violent crime tend to be concentrated in Black disadvantaged neighborhoods during the pandemic (Moise & Piquero, 2021). The disproportionate arrests and mistreatment of racial and ethnic minorities by the criminal justice system is an ongoing problem in the U.S. as well as globally (Toure et al., 2021). Recently, the garnered attention to police violence and mass sharing of the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor have produced trauma and emotional numbness in these communities (McCoy, 2020), which is likely to further intensify their vulnerability to violence and victimization (Anderson, 2021; Broidy & Santoro, 2018). Thus, it is particularly important to study how the disproportionate financial and health burden of the COVID-19 pandemic, exposure to police violence, and racial inequality combine to exacerbate important life outcomes including crime and violence in the Black community.

In sum, the evidence to date suggests that the history of discrimination and repeated victimization along with differential access to resources have had a negative impact on the well-being of the Black community including putting this community at a higher risk for violence and crime. Notably, we must consider that trauma experienced by the Black community can be passed through generations such as maternal trauma impacting children's fundamental behavioral mechanisms irrespective of their own trauma exposure (Stenson et al., 2021). As such, future research

must continue to explore how the complex interactions of historical and current victimization of Black individuals along with the forced societal changes in response to the pandemic can shape deviant and violent behavior.

3.2 | Violence towards Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities

Since the early outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, anti-Asian discrimination and hate crimes have dramatically increased (Chen et al., 2020; Li & Nicholson, 2021; Woo & Jun, 2021). The coalition Stop AAPI Hate reported about 3795 known cases of hate incidents between 19 March 2020, and 28 February 2021 (Jeung et al., 2021), and some of these incidents even went viral across social media platforms. In early 2021, the security footage of the deadly attack of Vicha Ratanapakdee, an 84-year-old Thai American man, has generated national attention and outcry for the brutal assault (Fuller, 2021). In addition to physical attacks, fear and anxiety continue to persist among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, particularly women, as six Asian women were murdered in the Atlanta, Georgia spa shootings in March 2021 (Lang & Cachero, 2021).

This increase in hate violence suggests that Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have increasingly become vulnerable targets to prejudice and violence amid the pandemic (Chen et al., 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Zhang et al. (2021) find that Asian Americans are more likely to be victimized in places where they are not local residents. This suggests the importance of understanding the locality where the convergence between vulnerable targets and motivated offenders occurs. In addition, Asian Americans are less likely than other groups to report their victimization to officials (Lantz & Wenger, 2021), which means that there may be less law enforcement intervention or, as stated by RAT, lack of “capable guardians” to prevent re-occurring criminal and violent events. Further, research has shown that motivated offenders, when presented with the opportunity, are highly likely to use that opportunity to commit crimes against racial minority groups (Green et al., 2001). Notably, hate violence is found to be often perpetrated by strangers (Zhang et al., 2021) and those who are “thrill-seekers” (Levin & McDevitt, 2013).

Scholars have argued that to understand hate violence today it is important to address how it is rooted in the anti-Asian rhetoric associating all Asians, regardless of ethnicity, as carriers of the COVID-19 virus (Tessler et al., 2020). In fact, these recent experiences of xenophobia and racial violence of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are all but novel and profoundly rooted in how Asians were scapegoated during times of health crises. In the 19th century, the “Yellow Peril,”—the vilifying of Asian immigrants as uncivilized and threatening to the Western world—has led to the widespread perception of Asian immigrants as contagions, which resulted in dehumanizing measures to contain certain infectious diseases such as burning neighborhoods in Chinatown (Chen et al., 2020). In more recent periods, during the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome in 2003 Asian Americans were also depicted to be distrustful and frightening, which created severe economic implications for Asian businesses (Chen et al., 2020; Tessler et al., 2020). Not just limited to those of Asian heritage, marginalized racial and ethnic groups overall were outcasted when societies faced public health crises, such as Italian immigrants during the 1916 polio outbreak in New York City (Kraut, 2010).

Thus, to understand and address increased violence towards marginalized communities during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to dig deeper into the concepts of racial hatred, the ideas of “otherness” or “foreignness,” and the historical and structural context of the formation of individual beliefs about race and ethnicity (Gover et al., 2020; Li & Nicholson, 2021). Future research should examine sources of the continued perception of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders as outsiders during the pandemic along with the idea of the so-called “reemergence of the Yellow Peril” (Tessler et al., 2020), and, further, test empirically how those perceptions contribute to the proliferation of hate crimes. Another important avenue to explore is how hate crimes are a reaction based on the animosity towards Asians as “model minority,” where Asian individuals' success in multiple fields is perceived as a threat by members of other racial groups (Levin & McDevitt, 2013; Zhang et al., 2021). The feelings of threat and competition can be conceptualized as strains, which consistent with GST (Agnew, 2006) can serve as significant explanatory factors in hate crimes. Overall, a better understanding of the roots and processes related to hate crimes during the COVID-19 pandemic will help provide a more comprehensive explanation of the nuances of violent crimes at the time of public health crises.

3.3 | COVID-19 and intimate partner violence

Intimate partner violence has rapidly emerged as a major concern during the COVID-19 pandemic (Campbell, 2020; Ilesue et al., 2021; Lyons & Brewer, 2021; Piquero et al., 2021). In a systematic review of existent studies during the pandemic, Piquero et al. (2021) have indicated that, overall, there has been at least some increase in reports of domestic violence compared to pre-pandemic levels. In China, for instance, the reports of domestic violence tripled, and, in Brazil, they increased by about 40%–50%, while in France, by nearly 30% (Campbell, 2020; United Nations, 2020). Drawing on data including both reported and unreported cases of domestic violence, a study by Arenas-Arroyo et al. (2021) found that the IPV incidents increased by about 23% during the lockdown in Spain.

Due to stay-at-home orders and limited physical interactions, the increased time indoors can cause more arguments and conflict and worsen relationship conditions (Kaukinen, 2020). Consistent with GST, research has found that both the lockdown conditions and economic stress are factors that have increased IPV during the pandemic (Arenas-Arroyo et al., 2021). Notably, there have been reports of higher severity of IPV since the pandemic started, with the increased incidents of IPV disproportionately affecting different marginalized groups (Peitzmeier et al., 2021). Researchers have also emphasized that the constant combination of such stressful conditions as longer periods indoors, unemployment, and other concerns coupled with lack of social support and substance use, will further dramatically intensify IPV over time (Campbell, 2020; Hoehn-Velasco et al., 2021).

Furthermore, evidence suggests that the conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic provide opportunities for abusers to maintain control. Abusive behaviors, including coercive control, may amplify as preparators can deprive victims of COVID-19-related needs (e.g., masks, hand soaps, cleaning materials) and use technological devices for surveillance and to control access to online communication (Slakoff et al., 2020). In fact, in a qualitative study with survivors, women described how their abusers controlled their access and use of phones by allowing them to only speak with certain individuals, at particular times of the day, and for a certain duration (Havard & Lefevre, 2020). This limited virtual contact with others can leave victims susceptible to further harm from perpetrators.

It is important to note that there has been mixed evidence regarding the degree to which incidents of domestic violence and interpersonal violence have been a response to the restrictions and lockdown orders (Abrams, 2021; Balmori de la Miyar et al., 2021a; Bullinger et al., 2021; Campedelli et al., 2020a; Mohler et al., 2020; Piquero et al., 2020). Research studies also may underestimate the true impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on IPV due to the issues of reporting and fear among victims (Piquero et al., 2021). As such, future studies should take a comprehensive approach to understanding the issue of IPV. This can be accomplished by drawing on different data sources including victimization studies and qualitative interviews with the victims globally. In addition, more attention should be paid to the strategies employed by the perpetrators to maintain control over the victims including novel ways to incorporate technology and different psychological dimensions of coercion.

3.4 | Cross-national differences in crime during the COVID-19 pandemic

Research has overall suggested that different patterns of violence and crime have been relatively consistent cross-nationally (Wilkins et al., 2019; Wolf et al., 2014). For example, rates of assault and burglary significantly decreased after the containment measures were implemented across various locations including Mexico, Sweden, England, Wales, and Australia (Balmori de la Miyar et al., 2021a; Gerell et al., 2020; Langton et al., 2021; Payne et al., 2020, 2021). Similar consistent decreases have been observed in different types of theft across Mexico, Canada, Australia, England, and Wales (Balmori de la Miyar et al., 2021a; Hodgkinson & Andresen, 2020; Langton et al., 2021; Payne et al., 2021).

On the other hand, there have been differential trends in rates of certain types of violence cross-nationally, and specifically, lethal violence. Research on homicide rates in countries across Latin America has shown that, whereas there were decreases in violent crime in Colombia, Guatemala, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, and Honduras, levels of

violent crime increased in Brazil and Mexico, though changes were only temporary (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2020). Further, short time decreases in homicide rates have been observed in Italy, Moldova, Spain, Kazakhstan, and South Africa with variations based on different pandemic periods (UNODC, 2020). These differences globally indicate that there could be complex country-level processes at play that interact with the COVID-19 pandemic-related conditions to influence changes in the rates of violence. For example, in addition to being affected by the pandemic lockdown measures, lethal violence could be attributed to the police-gang interactions (BBC News, 2020; Hoehn-Velasco et al., 2021) and organized crime activity (Balmori de La Miyar et al., 2021a; Calderon-Anyosa & Kaufman, 2021). Studies have also observed the increase of gun export from the U.S. to several countries including Mexico, Thailand, and the United Arab Emirates within the first 5 months of 2020, which is suggested to contribute to growths in homicides and violence in those countries during the COVID-19 pandemic (Hyder et al., 2021; Lindsay-Poland, 2020). These different characteristics of countries and the relationships among them can further combine to shape the occurrence of different types of violence such as homicides (UNODC, 2019). Overall, we call for more cross-cultural research and cross-national criminological theory testing to better understand the role of social and cultural processes in violence and crime during the pandemic.

4 | LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH ON VIOLENCE AND CRIME DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Several limitations of existent research on the COVID-19 pandemic and crime relationship need to be noted. First, much of the existent research focuses on the short-term changes in crime after lockdown orders were in effect. Although altered routine activities of individuals may explain the immediate changes in crime rates, this may not be consistent as the pandemic progresses through the year (Felson et al., 2020). Moreover, as countries and states in the U.S. have begun to administer vaccinations and adjust their mandates, more longitudinal research is needed to evaluate how this continuously affects criminal occurrences.

In addition, numerous initial studies on crime during the COVID-19 pandemic have generally relied on police recorded data, with only a few studies using victimization data including in-depth interviewing of the victims (e.g., Havard & Lefevre, 2020; Lantz & Wenger, 2021; Sampson & Ojen, 2021). Certain offenses such as IPV and cybercrime are often unreported (Boman & Gallupe, 2020; Cheng et al., 2018; Payne et al., 2020; Piquero et al., 2021). For example, individuals experiencing domestic violence during the pandemic may underreport due to their inability to contact friends who would have encouraged reporting or arrange a feasible refuge after reporting (Payne et al., 2020), and victims of cybercrime may be unaware for at least some period of time that they have been victimized as well as distrust law enforcement (Buil-Gil et al., 2021; Monteith et al., 2021). As such, it is critical to compare findings from official and victimization data and further analyze which pandemic conditions reflect changes in reporting and which changes in behavior. Many existent studies have also relied on convenience samples; hence their generalizability remains limited. In addition, most existent research has not tested criminological and sociological theories directly, and thus, we need to include standardized measures representing theoretically based factors to better explain the causes of crime and violence during this global crisis.

5 | FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Due to the novelty of the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, there is an urgent need for more research on criminal behaviors accounting for the widespread changes in social contexts and individual lives during global crises. First, it is important to integrate social scientific frameworks to provide a more nuanced explanation of different types of crime. For instance, future studies can integrate GST and approaches from sociology, social psychology, and public health to better explain the conditions under which the pandemic-related stress can lead to crime including levels of

substance use, residential location, association with deviant friends, decision-making, and other factors. Importantly, it is critical to address more systematically the differential vulnerabilities related to crime and violence across social groups and contexts. Although in this paper, we focus on a few selected examples of experiences of different populations, we call for more theorization and research of crime and violence among other vulnerable groups including children, immigrants, incarcerated individuals, and others differentially impacted by these unprecedented times. Further, it is important to examine the role of different theoretically based factors shaping crime during the pandemic including lack of social attachment, increased association with deviant others, and unstructured socializing among others.

Next, focusing on the social, cultural, and political contexts within each country can also provide supplementary evidence on how crime and justice operate differently across settings and groups. For example, a cross-national study by Vazsonyi et al. (2018) has underscored the importance of incorporating several micro and macro-level factors including family and peer activities, employment, life expectancy, and academic involvement to better understand the occurrence of criminal events across cultural contexts. Given the unique conditions produced by the pandemic, there may be differential experiences on individual, community, and national levels. Thus, it is important to assess how the convergence of suitable targets, motivated offenders and capable guardians vary based on these conditions across countries and social contexts.

There are also several other novel areas to explore. The first one is related to the so-called "crime shift" from physical spaces to the cyberworld during the pandemic. Although the current research on this topic is preliminary, a few studies provide some evidence of the potential relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic-related conditions and shifts in crime types (e.g., Buil-Gil et al., 2021; Collier et al., 2020; Miró-Llinares & Moneva, 2019). Additionally, more research is warranted on how violence can develop as a result of different pandemic-related conditions such as anti-masks and anti-vaccination movements. For example, Taylor and Asmundson (2021) point to the fact that individuals who are against wearing masks tend to react with anger and frustration when forced to wear them. Given that these emotions are associated with violence (Agnew, 2006), more research is needed to explain how refusal to wear masks in different places including airplanes, stores, and schools can lead to violent and criminal behavior.

Finally, there is the need for interdisciplinary approaches that combine standardized psychological scales, measures of deviant behaviors, and different factors that have distinctly or collectively increase the risk of psychosocial atypicality and could serve as mediating or moderating mechanisms in the relationship between the pandemic-related conditions and crime (e.g., emergence of unhealthy coping mechanisms, employers and the government, fears, paranoia, etc.). Overall, to provide evidence-based policies on crime prevention, more research should be conducted exploring the complex interrelated causes of crime during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as addressing the differential vulnerabilities during the public health crisis through multidisciplinary and comparative studies across social groups and nations.

6 | CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an overwhelming effect on individual lives and communities. As global society continues to live through these unprecedented times, it is particularly important to acknowledge issues related to violence, crime, and justice more broadly. Present research has revealed that crime during the COVID-19 pandemic is at least partially shaped by the changes in people's daily routines and experiences of stressful conditions. Yet, given that crime trends remain to be largely inconsistent and contingent on various factors, we need to reevaluate existent approaches and include more interdisciplinary studies on criminal and violent behavior. Future research should focus on how and why crime and its sources vary across social contexts with the specific focus on vulnerable groups including racial and ethnic minorities, women, adolescents, children, and immigrants among other populations. As different countries are starting to reopen and shift back to pre-pandemic routines, we need to further investigate how the new social realities continue to shape crime and violence. Overall, these novel times call for the development of systematic multidisciplinary and cross-national approaches to help better understand and prevent contemporary crime and violence.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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