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# EFFECT OF STEREOTYPES ON THE IDENTIFICATION OF CRIMINALS

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## INTRODUCTION

Stereotypes are preconceived and prejudiced notions that we form which can help us access and categorize information in our brain easily. While stereotypes help in facilitating information processing, they can also interfere with forming judgements which can lead to and inaccurate decisions. In the judicial arena, there have been incidents where someone was wrongfully accused of committing a crime due to underlying prejudices such as race and gender. This research focused on the study of society's perception of criminals.

## AIM

This study aimed to determine if any visual characteristics found in suspects can be stereotypically used by people/systems to define criminals and whether factors like the type of crime and physical appearance/traits of the criminal can influence the subject's decision.

The study also aimed to see if certain demographic factors of the subject like their age, gender, and occupational status would influence their perception of a criminal.

## METHODOLOGY

For this study, a questionnaire was prepared which entailed 10 hypothetical case studies that were based on 5 types of crime – murder, drug trafficking, sexual assault, money laundering, and hacking. The case studies were followed by a photo line-up which had the images of 2 suspects provided to the subjects, in which one fit the stereotype of a criminal of that type of crime while the other did not. A link was generated, and the questionnaire was distributed via the social media platform. People of various age groups and occupational backgrounds were provided with the questionnaire for collecting responses. A total of 318 responses were collected and analyzed. The responses were segregated and arranged based on different parameters and the results were tabulated. Pie charts and bar graphs that showed the distribution of responses based on different parameters were generated using MS Excel.

## OBSERVATIONS

Findings showed that an individual's stereotype about a criminal can vary depending on the type of crime given. The study also showed that other factors like age, race, and sex of the suspect can also trigger stereotypes affiliated with a criminal of that particular type of crime. For example, one of the hypothetical scenarios given was a household poisoning case where a man was found dead on his couch because of poisoning. The suspect line-up provided was that of two suspects, one male, and the other female. The majority of the participant pool chose the female to be the probable suspect and from this response, we learned that people often associate crimes like poisoning with females stereotypically.

## CONCLUSION

Further in this study, after observing the results we were able to conclude that demographic factors of the subjects like their age, gender, and occupational status did not have any significant impact on their choice of suspect in each case study/scenario that was provided.

Ultimately, this study was done to show that an individual can hold such stereotypes unconsciously and these stereotypes can influence the person's decision-making.

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