

Psychological and behavioural impact of juvenile delinquency-associated crime (JDAC)-related media on young adult viewers' perceptions of safety, suspicion, and criminal justice in the relatively moderate-JDAC setting of Greece

Evangelou K¹, Pavlidou L¹, Belimezakis N¹, Hadjiphilippou M², Louka C³

¹ Department of Medicine, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece

² Department of Nursing, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece

³ Department of Chemistry, University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus

INTRODUCTION

Juvenile delinquency-associated crime (JDAC) has become a prominent theme in contemporary media, from fictional series and films to true-crime documentaries and podcasts. These products are now accessible via streaming platforms and social media, especially to young adults.

Although Greece and the wider Eastern Mediterranean region are characterised by moderate JDAC rates compared with high-crime jurisdictions, young audiences are increasingly exposed to dramatized narratives that focus on youth violence, repeat offending, and systemic failure. This raises questions about whether repeated exposure alters baseline perceptions of safety, interpersonal trust, and confidence in criminal justice, even when real-world risk remains comparatively low.

Research suggests that crime-focused media can heighten fear of victimisation and punitive attitudes, but findings are mixed and largely derived from high-crime or Anglo-American settings. There is limited empirical data from low-to-moderate JDAC contexts, and almost none focusing specifically on JDAC-themed content and its psychological impact on young adults.

We aim to explore how regular exposure to JDAC-related media in a low-to-moderate JDAC context influences the perceptions of safety, suspicion, and criminal justice of young adults in Greece.

METHODS

An anonymous, quantitative, cross-sectional survey was conducted with a convenience sample of 25 young adults aged 18-30 residing in a low-crime Eastern Mediterranean setting broadly comparable to Greece.

Eligibility criteria included regular consumption of JDAC-related content (fictional or non-fictional).

Data were collected via a 10-item multiple-choice questionnaire which was administered online.

Items assessed included the frequency and preferred format of JDAC media, perceived realism of portrayals, short-term emotional impact (fear, anxiety, distress), perceived changes in sense of safety, suspicion toward others, influence on views of the criminal justice system, and self-reported behavioural changes (e.g. locking doors, avoiding dark places).

Participant responses were analysed descriptively, focusing on proportions for each response option and on patterns linking media consumption habits with perceived psychological and behavioural impact.

Given the small exploratory sample, no formal hypothesis testing was attempted; results are interpreted as preliminary trends generating hypotheses for larger studies in Greek young adult populations.

RESULTS

Media habits indicated high but not excessive JDAC exposure: 52.0% of respondents watched JDAC content several times a week and 28.0% once a week, while 20.0% watched rarely and none reported daily, compulsive viewing. Fictional crime series were the dominant format (44.0%), followed by JDAC/crime movies (28.0%) and true-crime documentaries (20.0%); only 8.0% regularly consumed JDAC podcasts, suggesting that visual formats remain primary for this age group.

Fear and perceived safety were moderately affected. After viewing, 40.0% sometimes felt more fearful of becoming victims, 12.0% very often, and 28.0% rarely, while 12.0% never experienced such fear and 8.0% did not think about it. In terms of everyday safety, 52.0% felt more cautious but not necessarily unsafe, 16.0% felt less safe, 24.0% reported no change, and 8.0% actually felt safer due to feeling better informed. Overall, these patterns suggest a shift towards heightened vigilance rather than pervasive fear.

Suspiciousness and behavioural change were clearly linked to JDAC media exposure. Almost half (48.0%) became "a little more suspicious" of strangers, 12.0% became significantly more suspicious, whereas 32.0% noted no change and small minorities trusted

people more (4.0%) or did not pay attention (4.0%). Behaviourally, 44.0% reported some habit changes and 24.0% significant changes (e.g. locking doors more consistently, avoiding isolated or dark areas), while only 28.0% reported minimal or no impact. Thus, over two-thirds endorsed at least mild protective behavioural adjustments.

Attitudes to criminal justice also appeared influenced. Forty percent believed the criminal justice system is too lenient, 12.0% felt it is too harsh, 24.0% noted an effect but were unsure in what direction, and 20.0% reported unchanged views, with 4.0% expressing no opinion. A majority (52.0%) considered JDAC portrayals somewhat realistic but exaggerated, and a further 24.0% stated that realism depends on the specific show, indicating a relatively nuanced media literacy. Emotional distress was present but limited: 40.0% experienced occasional distress or anxiety after viewing, 32.0% rarely, 8.0% often, and 16.0% never. Importantly, 44.0% felt somewhat more informed about crime and prevention and 28.0% felt definitely more informed, whereas only 24.0% saw the content as mostly entertainment or not informative.

Overall and even in a moderate-JDAC setting, repeated exposure to JDAC-related media appears to heighten caution and perceived vulnerability without causing widespread distress or fear.

CONCLUSION

In this exploratory young adult sample from a relatively low-crime, moderate-JDAC context, JDAC-related media appears to exert a moderate psychological and behavioural influence. Regular viewing is associated with increased caution, selective suspicion, and adoption of protective habits, but does not produce widespread, disabling fear or pervasive emotional distress. At the cognitive-attitudinal level, JDAC media may contribute to perceptions that criminal justice responses are too lenient, while simultaneously enhancing perceived knowledge about crime and prevention strategies. These findings suggest a subtle recalibration of perceived vulnerability and justice expectations rather than simple "fear amplification." For forensic mental health and criminal justice professionals in Greece, JDAC media should be considered a background factor shaping young adults' attitudes to safety, suspicion, and punitiveness, warranting further research with larger, nationally representative samples and specific focus on juvenile offending narratives.

CORRESPONDENCE

Kyriacos Evangelou; National and Kapodistrian University of Athens; NKUA
evangeloukyriacos@gmail.com