The Pattern of White-Collar Crime in the Public Sector of Bangladesh: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

White-collar crime is one of the major obstacles to the development of Bangladesh. The main objective of the research is to assess the pattern of white-collar crime in the public sector of Bangladesh. This study involved qualitative interpretive meta-synthesis (QIMS) and focused on secondary data sources from the last 12 years (2012-2023). The study revealed that the main patterns of crime are corruption, embezzlement and misuse of public funds, political affiliations that can cause white-collar crime in the public sector, and banking sector officials who engage in white-collar crime through the approval of illegal loans. Despite many efforts to address these issues, the trend persists in many corners of public spaces. The findings provide important insight for policymakers, law researchers, criminologists, and law practitioners.

Keywords: Pattern, White-Collar Crime, Public Sector, Bangladesh

INTRODUCTION

White-collar crime is a serious global social problem (Flynn, 2022). Generally, crimes and criminals remain untouched and unpunished, as the crime itself is critical to define (Rorie, 2019). Even in developed countries, 90% of white-collar crimes remain unreported (Flynn, 2022). On the other hand, it can be assumed that very few of the reported white-collar criminals convicted and punished. White-collar crime is less commonly reported than all other crimes (Harrell & Langton, 2015). In general, robbers or illegal drug businessmen cause the most economic losses in the country. However, in fact, they are not! According to the research of Flynn (2022), white-collar criminals are liable for the most economic damage in the country. For unknown reasons, governments have ignored white-collar crime and criminals. As a result, they are misusing national property. Consequently, joblessness and shattering millions of lives in society are created (Flynn, 2022). Ultimately, this situation creates an obstacle to national development as a whole (Khatun & Islam, 2018).

As a negative result of globalization, the crime rate is increasing with the same pace of technology (Fahim, 2021). Although the crime rate has decreased during some periods in the history of Bangladesh since 1971 due to its unreported nature, the general trend of crime in the country is increasing gradually (Khatun & Islam, 2018). Under the global category of crime and security risk scale, Bangladesh has ranked 153rd out of 201 territories globally (Fitch Solutions 2022), which is also a good indicator of the overall crime scenario. We hypothesize that the increasing trend of white-collar crime in the public sector is because corruption is the leading crime and that all government offices are engaged with this unethical crime (Shajib, 2017).

Currently, white-collar crime in the public sector is common. Shajib (2017) found that this crime occurs in the judicial department as a form of corruption; even though corruption

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occurs, all the departments of government offices and the police department hold the highest position in terms of corruption (Shajib, 2017). Ironically, those involved in corruption are not needy persons or low-ranking officials. These were the creams of society and departments (Shajib, 2017). This crime has been less commonly reported and convicted; however, the original pattern of the crime is more acute than its represented scenario. Like police departments, several departments have been found to be engaged in the abuse of power and bribery. For instance, local government departments (the UNO Office, LGED, DC Office, Union Parishad), education departments, finance departments, and health departments (Shajib, 2017). The common types of white-collar crime are fraud, embezzlement, theft/larceny, forgery or counterfeiting, bribery, tax evasion, money laundering, racketeering or extortion and gambling/lottery (Flynn, 2022; Shajib, 2017). In Bangladesh, it is uncommon for all categories of white-collar crime to be properly addressed by the legal framework. For instance, in gambling, the study of Khan, Gani, and Islam (2021) showed that there is enough room to improve the legal framework to control gambling through legal mechanisms (Khan, Gani, & Islam, 2021).

The various SDGs 2030 goals address white-collar crime; for example, the indicator 16.5 of the SDGs targeted corruption and bribery. Since Bangladesh is committed to achieving the SDGs, defining the pattern of this crime, especially in the academic field, in all forms is the demand of the time. Otherwise, it would be irrational to say that the country has taken sufficient or insufficient measures to achieve the SDGs by 2030. Unlike other crimes, white-collar crime is critical for generating evidence to support final conviction against criminals. This motivation fuels the criminal to commit the crime. Truly, there is a considerable lack of judicial system, including the law itself, to generate evidence and prove guilt and to bring the culprit persons under the jurisdiction of this crime and criminals (Sarwar, 2015; Fahim, 2021; Khan et al., 2019). Irony is that white-collar criminals do not lose their status after committing the crime (Sarwar, 2015; Fahim, 2021). In this situation, it is crucial to unmask the pattern of white-collar crime in Bangladesh. The objective of this research is to explore the pattern of white-collar crime in the public sector of Bangladesh. A few studies have been conducted on white-collar crime in the private, industry and corporate sectors, but a focus on government departments is urgently needed. Since there is no single study conducted on white-collar crime in the public sector of Bangladesh focusing on the pattern of the crime, the main objective of this research is to examine the pattern of white-collar crime in the public sector of Bangladesh.

WHITE-COLLAR CRIME IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR OF BANGLADESH: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

An investigation of the literature revealed that there is plenty of literature available in the academic field related to white-collar crime around the globe, but in Bangladesh, there is a considerable lack of related literature. In general, research on white-collar crime in Bangladesh is available; however, more specifically, white-collar crime in the public sector of Bangladesh is rare according to a literature review. From a global perspective, significant research has been conducted; for example, in the studies of Shahbazov, Afandiyev, and Balayeva (2023), the authors examined the types of crime reporters' attitudes regarding white-collar crime and found that there is a relationship between the crime reporting attitude and the financial loss of white-collar crime victims through the use of a nationwide victimization survey (Shahbazov, Afandiyev & Balayeva, 2023); on the other hand, Shonhadji and Maulidi (2022) discussed the Indonesian local government's white-collar crime control strategy viz. focused on the public sector but not on the trend of crime in the public sector in Indonesia (Shonhadji & Maulidi, 2022). In the Asian region, Sagar (2019) investigated the mechanisms of anticorruption, civil society, and political will and its relationship with white-collar crime and found that individuals are exercising the power of the mechanism through which they are supposed to be institutions

(Sagar, 2019). If the research widened its area of white-collar crime in general, white-collar crime in Bangladesh was found. For instance, in the corporate sector, Fahim (2021) researched the main causes of corporate crime in Bangladesh and found a threatening factor for the economic reform of Bangladesh, which is an indication of a similar type of white-collar crime prevailing in the private sector of Bangladesh (Fahim, 2021). On the other hand, Chowdhury (2014) conducted research on white-collar crime in industries in Bangladesh and found that the type of crimes that exist is nothing but white-collar crime in nature (Chowdhury, 2014a). Furthermore, the RMG sector is also a dominant field where white-collar crime is found. Chowdhury (2014) conducted another study on the RMG sector in Bangladesh using qualitative methodology and a case study following the interview method and found white crime in the RMG sector (Chowdhury, 2014b). In addition, crime is common in the stock market—the private and public sectors work simultaneously—as Mr. Haque, Chakraborti, and Mahbuba (2022) examined the stock market of Bangladesh, focusing on its root causes and finding that the relation between white-collar crime and power is strong (Haque, Chakraborti, & Mahbuba, 2022). In the banking sector, Ghosh, Sen, and Riva (2020) found that white-collar enterprises crime in the form of nonperforming loans in Bangladesh but did not mention whether the type was public or private.

More specifically, Islam and Paul (2019) investigated the public sector of Bangladesh through the corruption of government officials and related implications and related functions, focusing on more legal aspects of the crime (Islam, & Paul, 2019). To some extent, Faysal (2022) evaluated the existence of white-collar crimes in Bangladesh and found a lack of judicial legal measures to combat the crime concerning the elite class of the community of Bangladesh (Faysal, 2022), which is a closer look at the judicial system and its implications. Similarly, Chowdhury (2016) examined the relationship between error of judgment and white-collar crime in Bangladesh and found considerable negligence (Chowdhury, 2016), which is also a part of the white-collar crime in the Bangladesh Judicial system. Like the judicial system, which is an autonomous institution of Bangladesh, Rashidul (2023) investigated the role of the Anti-corruption Commission in combating white-collar crime and found that it lacked independence in nature in both jurisdiction and implementation (Rashidul, 2023). Khatun and Islam (2018) researched the history of contemporary crime in Bangladesh and its underlying reasons and showed an increasing trend in crime (all crimes) over time; however, they covered the time frame until 2009, immediately after the liberation war of Bangladesh (1972); hence, they also did not focus on white-collar crime in the public sector; rather, they discussed the general crime trend in the history of Bangladesh, focusing on its nature and causes (Khatun & Islam 2018). Finally, Fahim (2021) briefly examined the latent causes and manners of corporate crime in the public and private sectors of Bangladesh but did not specifically discuss the trend of the public sector of white-collar crime in Bangladesh (Fahim, 2021).

However, from the above critical analysis of the literature, one thing is very clear: research on white-collar crime in the public sector of Bangladesh has been conducted insignificantly. However, most of those studies focused on the institutional level, corporate level, and industry level. There is no significant academic work on white-collar crime in the public sector in Bangladesh, as a literature review might open the door for further in-depth research in this crucial government field. Therefore, the main research gap (evidence and knowledge gap) is the recent white-collar crime trend in the public sector of Bangladesh, which will attempt to fill the existing knowledge gap in academia. For this reason, this article investigates the pattern of white-collar crime in Bangladesh from 2012 to 2023.

METHODOLOGY

This study involved qualitative interpretive meta-synthesis (QIMS) and focused on secondary data sources. The nature of the study is descriptive. When any research field lacks academic research, which might be the basis for further study, it is crucial to conduct a literature review (Islam, 2019). The study firmly followed a search of available literature in journals published between 2012 and 2023. However, all other popular sources, such as daily newspapers, books, research reports, and periodicals, were carefully avoided. The primary data are not collected because the objective of the study is to summarize the existing knowledge of journals to examine the real research scenario in this field of study and to show the contemporary trend of white-collar crime in the research published in journals. However, there is a strong research gap (evidence and knowledge gap) identified in the academic field of white-collar crime in the public sector of Bangladesh. During the data analysis, a critical technique was used, along with the descriptive nature of the explanation, to incorporate the social constructivist approach (Blanche, Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006). Finally, this research provides the basis for quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION

White-Collar Crime

Like for white-collar crime, the definition of such crime is complex (Friedrichs, 2002). Even after eight decades of study, this topic has remained unresolved in the academic field. However, the definitions of white-collar crime critically differ from one another.

In general, crime refers to any person who breaks the rule of law. On the other side, a crime is perpetrated by a person or a group of persons from the elite class; this sort of crime is called white-collar crime (Sutherland, 1949). Here, Sutherland focused on two things: the cream of society and the social respect associated with offenders. He does not separate the organizational or personal workplace. These findings are slightly different from those of Edelhertz and Overcast (1982), who argued about the workplace and social respect for the people who committed the crime (Edelhertz & Overcast, 1982). Shapiro (1990) defied the crime in a way that wrongdoers commit the act but are difficult to trace, as they intentionally dismiss the proof or evidence as if it is not possible to prove (Shapiro, 1990). In this definition, she tried to concentrate her focus on evidence and intention and dismissed the evidence because the criminal holds a high rank in society or the organization. According to the study of Hill and Hill (2005), white-collar crime was defined as when it was associated with the business, whether it was embezzlement, cheating with the customers, commercial fraud, distortion of the stock market or any other business dishonest approach (Hill & Hill, 2005). The main concern of the Hill and Hill definition is business and its association with crime. The state agency in the USA defined the crime associated with the organizational setup (FBI, n.d.). Here, committing a crime in an organizational setting is important for labeling the crime a white-collar crime. However, from the above definition, white-collar crime can be defined as a crime committed by a high level of officials or individuals for economic benefit. Hence, they have a high level of social status, and the nature of the crime is nonviolent (Chowdhury, 2014b).

In summation, all nonviolent offenses are white-collar crimes involving the cream of society, whether it be a person or a group of people in professional or corporate context.

Public Sector

According to the WordWeb dictionary, the word "public sector" defines the part of the economy controlled by the government‡. This means that a government is controlling all of its

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‡ https://www.wordwebonline.com/search.pl?w=public+sector+

units from local to central as well as regional. It also incorporates institutional units. The main issue of government control is providing services to citizens. All of the measures are made feasible by public funds from taxes and other government sources. Examples of the public sector, viz. institutions or departments such as the military, police or public health departments. It also includes public transportation, public libraries and museums. All these departments provide important services to their inhabitants at no cost or at the lowest rate specified by the government. [§]

However, in this article, white-collar crime refers to a crime committed by government officials working in government departments who have a high status in society and an upper position in departments.

DISCUSSION AND DATA ANALYSIS

White-Collar Crime in the Public Sector of Bangladesh

Although the overall ranking of crime in corruption has decreased over the last two decades, the trend of crime in Bangladesh, in general, has been increasing daily since the liberation war of 1971 (Islam & Paul, 2019; Khatun & Islam, 2018; Hossain et al., 2021). For example, extrajudicial killing by law enforcement agencies is increasing daily (Hossain et al., 2021). It can be inferred that white-collar crime is also increasing daily since there is no significant research available in the academic field to defend against such claims. On the other hand, there is no national database on white-collar crime for examining whether trends are increasing or decreasing. However, there is a significant research gap in the research on white-collar crime in the public sector of Bangladesh, whether through a literature review, empirical research or even theoretical research. Critically, research has shown that white-collar crime occurs in the public sector. Unfortunately, there is no specific research found in the academic literature on white-collar crime in the public sector of Bangladesh. Finally, the study has shown that the patterns of white-collar crime are basically corruption, embezzlement and misuse of public funds; political affiliations that make possible white-collar crime in the public sector; and banking sector officials who engage in white-collar crime through the approval of illegal loans.

White-Collar Crime Occurring in the Form of Corruption in the Public Sector of Bangladesh

There is a strong relationship between white-collar crime and corruption. The study indicated that white-collar crime takes the form of corruption in Bangladesh's public sector. For instance, Islam and Paul (2019) found that mega contracts in the public sector are associated with corruption (Islam, & Paul, 2019). Among the world communities, the corruption index has decreased in Bangladesh compared with that in the last decade (Islam, & Paul, 2019). However, there are no data on whether the overall corruption rate in the country is decreasing or increasing. Moreover, there is no database available for comparing white-collar crime in the form of corruption. A study by Islam and Paul (2019) revealed that the majority of people reported that they faced corruption while receiving services from government departments (Islam & Paul, 2019). However, the study could not mention the prevalence of corruption in the public sector separately. Among the government departments, the most corrupt agencies are law enforcement agencies. It represents a seventy-three percent out of a hundred percent of the agency (Islam & Paul, 2019). The second position was for the passport department, which received a score of sixty-three percent out of a hundred. Similarly, the BRTA score was sixty-five percent. On the other hand, the most important sector, judicial

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[§] https://study.com/academy/lesson/public-sectors-overview-examples.html

services, also scored more than half, which is sixty-one percent of its corruption index (Islam & Paul, 2019). Currently, corruption is widespread and covers the most moral department—the education department—which comprises almost forty-five percent of the country (Islam & Paul, 2019). Furthermore, public health departments are not free from the influence of corruption. It was also found that the department received a forty-three percent score (Islam & Paul, 2019). Finally, the heart of the country is the agriculture department, which also received forty-two percent of the money in terms of corruption (Islam & Paul, 2019). In summary, concluding that all public departments are full of corruption might not be wrong (Islam & Paul, 2019). The main type of corruption in these sectors occurs through paying bribes. As shown by Mr. Islam and Paul (2019), fifty percent of clients experienced bribery in their service transactions with public departments (Islam & Paul, 2019). More shockingly, only eleven percent reported that they did not pay the bribe for their requested services. This means that almost eighty-nine percent of service receivers paid bribes (Islam & Paul, 2019). However, this proves that, without the involvement of high-level officials, receiving bribes in public departments is not possible.

White-Collar Crime as a Form of Embezzlement and Misuse of Trust Funds

The study has shown that white-collar crime is prominent in the public sector because of embezzlement and misuse of trust funds. For example, the misuse of trust funds by the Sonali Bank of Bangladesh, a leading government bank, is a great incidence of such public sector white-collar crime (Fahim, 2021). The same pattern is also found for other banks, such as Janatan Bank (Allchin, 2016). In addition, 57 state-owned Basic Banks have been identified as banks jointly acting to misuse bank funds in the form of loans (Islam, & Paul, 2019). The same pattern of crime has also existed in the mega-development project of Bangladesh. For instance, misuse of the budget of the Padama Bridge has been observed by public sector employees (Fahim, 2021).

White-Collar Crime Occurring through Political Affiliation, which Influences the Public Sector to Commit the Crime

The study found that white-collar crime occurs in the form of political affiliation that influences the public sector to commit the crime, which is nothing but a white-collar crime. Fahim (2021) reported that the historical disaster of a garment factory (Rana Plaza[**]) was possible through the occurrence of a number of white-collar crimes in different public sectors. The study showed that the factory was built for a shop but was later used for a factory that was subject to relevant government department permission and that was systematically approved illegally. On the other hand, the construction of buildings also violated the national building code, and unethical permission was secured (Fahim, 2021). However, whatever the situation was, the presence of white-collar crime in the relevant departments made deadliest accidences possible, and the main motive for those crimes in the public sector was the political affiliation that influenced the public departments (Fahim, 2021).

A High Level of Banking Sector Officials Engaged in White-Collar Crime

The study showed that high-level banking sector officials are engaged in white-collar crime. A study by Ghazi-Tehrani et al. (2013) revealed that Sonali Bank, a leading public bank for high-level Bangladeshi officials, intentionally approved almost 500 million US dollars and loans. It is also found that the national authority's purpose to conceal white-collar crime encourages white-collar crime in any country. For instance, Ghazi-Tehrani et al. (2013)

[**] Deadliest Rana Plaza accident- a garment factory building collapsed- which killed almost 2500 employees on 24th of April of 2013.

inferentially claimed that the hiding attitude of the public authority in Bangladesh, as in other countries, helps to make such crimes possible. However, in the study of Sarwar (2015), such affiliation with high authority, which is equally liable to performing crimes in the public sphere in Bangladesh, remains unexplored (Sarwar, 2015). In summary, a high number of bank officials are engaged in crime because of historical remedies and exemptions at the national level.

In addition to the aforementioned pattern of white-collar crime in the public sector of Bangladesh, there are other types of white-collar crime available in Bangladesh. Research by Fahim (2021) revealed that the patterns are 'cybercrime, human trafficking, intellectual property theft, illicit trading activities and accounting fraud as a form of economic fraud' (Fahim, 2021). However, the specifics of the crime could not be explored using this evidence. On the other hand, another scholarly work on white-collar crime discussed the pattern, which ranges from "electricity and gas, transport, insurance, banking law enforcement agency, health, education, judicial services, passport and immigration, local government, and even foreign revenue earning projections, especially ready-made garments sector" (Islam, & Paul, 2019). Similarly, this work lacks evidence-based research on the details of white-collar crime in the public sector of Bangladesh.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the summary of the findings, it can be argued that the literature on white-collar crime in the public sector of Bangladesh is lacking. Hence, after the Liberation War of 1971, there was a considerable lack of research on white-collar crime, as indicated by a literature review in which the trend of white-collar crime was discussed either in the public sector or private sector or even both. The findings of the study assume that white-collar crime prevails in the public sector—all of which are mostly all sectors—of Bangladesh. This study identified a number of fields in which white-collar crime patterns have occurred in the public sector of Bangladesh: corruption, embezzlement and misuse of public funds; political affiliations that cause possible white-collar crime in the public sector; and banking sector officials who engaged in white-collar crime through the approval of illegal loans. Thus, it can also be assumed that the pattern of white-collar crime lies down in many other forms, such as cybercrimes, money laundering, collusion and collapsing regulatory compliance and nepotism.

This research tries to determine the pattern of white-collar crime in the public sector of Bangladesh. From this research, it can be hypothesized that white-collar crime hinders the smooth development of the country and leads to massive violations of rules and order. On the other hand, nationally, this crime should be controlled, which is a prime responsibility of the judicial department and the Anti-Corruption Commission of the country. Therefore, it is vital for decision makers to create a conducive environment in which all types of crimes are controlled by the autonomy of the judicial system alone and free of all from political influence.

However, a comprehensive literature review is needed to determine the general trend of white-collar crime from 1971 to the present day. This topic might be interesting for further research, as it will provide insight into the many common and specific research ideas in the academic field of criminology and corruption. Unexplored sources such as daily newspapers can be interesting sources of data collection for comparing reported crime trends in Bangladesh, especially in recent decades. Since this area is untouched by researchers and academicians, it might be another topic for further research.

Recommendations

1. A comprehensive national database on white-collar crime, whether public or private sector, should be maintained by the government.
2. The government should take adequate measures to create a conducive environment to control this crime. Political influence should not be tolerated in any way.
3. The judicial system should be more autonomous in punishing guilt if a crime occurs.
4. The Anti-Corruption Commission should be more neutral in investigating whether public or private sector high officials engage.
5. Public awareness should be created, and NGOs can take a leading role in this regard to make aware of the masses of people and create a social movement against this crime everywhere.
6. Digitalization and system-generated service supply can effectively minimize white-collar crime in the public sector.
7. Finally, dedicated tribunals should be formed to accelerate the punishment of cases on white-collar crime in all sectors.

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