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SPECIAL ISSUE EDITORIAL:

Contemporary Crime Frontiers: Systematic Reviews and Qualitative Meta-Syntheses of Emerging Criminal Justice Issues

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The nature of crime continues to evolve alongside rapid technological innovation, globalisation, changing economic systems, and shifting social and cultural environments. Contemporary criminology is therefore challenged not only to explain emerging forms of offending but also to understand how victimisation, criminal opportunity, and justice responses are being transformed across digital, transnational, and institutional settings. This special issue brings together five scholarly contributions that collectively address these questions through systematic reviews and qualitative meta-syntheses. Although each paper focuses on a distinct crime problem, together they offer a comprehensive picture of the changing frontiers of criminal justice research.

The opening contribution, Peyton Reese and Praveenrao Bolli, in *What Do We Know About Dark Web Sexual Abuse Crimes Against Minors After COVID-19?*, examines one of the most disturbing manifestations of cybercrime. Their review demonstrates that child sexual abuse material on the dark web is sustained not

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merely by technological anonymity but also by organised online communities, trust networks, and offender interaction. By highlighting the challenges of international cooperation, inconsistent legal definitions, and rapidly evolving digital platforms, Reese and Bolli remind us that effective intervention requires coordinated global responses rather than isolated national efforts.

The second paper, authored by Shani Allen and Praveenrao Bolli, shifts the focus from offender communities to victims of technology-facilitated abuse. In *What Do We Know About Cyber Harassment Among Females?*, the authors identify four recurring themes across contemporary literature: gendered harassment, psychological harm, victim vulnerability, and barriers to reporting. Their work illustrates how cyber harassment has become deeply embedded within online social interaction and demonstrates that digital violence cannot be separated from broader issues of gender inequality, power, and social norms. The study offers an important victimological perspective for both researchers and policymakers seeking to create safer digital environments.

Moving beyond cybercrime, Makari Carter and Praveenrao Bolli explore the complex relationship between culture, inequality, and violence in *What Do We Know About Ritual Crime?*. Their systematic review argues that ritual crime should not be viewed simply as an isolated cultural practice but as a socially embedded phenomenon shaped by poverty, structural disadvantage, weak institutional oversight, and belief systems. By integrating deprivation and conflict perspectives, Carter and Bolli demonstrate how structural inequalities influence both offending and victimisation, while emphasizing the need for stronger investigative capacity and community-based prevention strategies.

The fourth contribution, by Kimberly Garcia and Praveenrao Bolli, expands the special issue into the domain of transnational crime. Their review of import and export crimes synthesises evidence on smuggling, counterfeit trade, human trafficking, corruption, and organised criminal networks operating within global markets. Garcia and Bolli argue that legal ambiguities, bribery, uneven economic development, and fragmented regulatory systems create fertile conditions for cross-border offending. Their study highlights the importance of international legal integration, coordinated enforcement, extradition mechanisms, and anti-corruption initiatives in addressing increasingly interconnected forms of transnational crime.



The final contribution, authored by Caesura Dennis and Praveenrao Bolli, examines financial crime through the lens of stock market offending. Their paper presents stock market crime as a sophisticated category of white-collar and financial offending that disproportionately affects investors while exploiting technological and institutional complexities within modern financial markets. By drawing attention to the growth of stock market crimes during the COVID-19 period, Dennis and Bolli broaden the scope of this special issue beyond conventional criminal justice topics and underscore the growing importance of financial literacy, regulatory oversight, and investor protection.

While these five papers investigate different crime categories, several common themes emerge across the collection. First, contemporary crime increasingly transcends traditional geographical and institutional boundaries. Whether operating through encrypted digital platforms, international trade routes, cultural networks, or financial markets, offenders exploit environments where regulation, surveillance, and enforcement struggle to keep pace with change.

Second, vulnerability remains central to understanding crime. Children, women, economically disadvantaged communities, migrants, and investors experience different forms of victimisation, yet each study demonstrates that vulnerability is shaped by broader structural conditions rather than individual characteristics alone. This reinforces the importance of integrating victimological perspectives into contemporary criminological research.

Third, the collection highlights the continuing importance of institutions. Weak governance, inconsistent legislation, limited investigative capacity, fragmented international cooperation, and inadequate reporting mechanisms appear repeatedly across these studies. Effective crime prevention therefore requires not only stronger policing and prosecution but also institutional reform, international collaboration, and evidence-informed public policy.

An equally significant contribution of this special issue is methodological. All five studies employ systematic review or qualitative meta-synthesis approaches, demonstrating the value of evidence synthesis in emerging areas of criminology where primary empirical research remains fragmented. By identifying recurring themes across diverse bodies of literature, these authors provide stronger foundations for future empirical inquiry and policy development.

I am particularly pleased that this special issue showcases the scholarship of emerging researchers working alongside an experienced academic mentor. The collaboration between undergraduate and graduate students with Dr. Praveenrao Bolli, Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology & Criminal Justice, Virginia State University, USA, reflects the importance of research mentorship in advancing criminological knowledge. These contributions demonstrate that rigorous scholarship can emerge from collaborative academic environments where methodological training and intellectual curiosity are encouraged.

The International Journal of Justice and Police Sciences has always sought to publish research that bridges theory, policy, and practice. This special issue continues that tradition by presenting studies that are academically rigorous while addressing real-world criminal justice challenges. From the hidden networks of the dark web to the complexities of transnational trade and financial markets, the papers collectively illustrate that understanding contemporary crime requires interdisciplinary thinking, global perspectives, and sustained commitment to evidence-based justice.

I commend Peyton Reese, Shani Allen, Makari Carter, Kimberly Garcia, Caesura Dennis, and Praveenrao Bolli for their valuable contributions to this special issue. I hope these studies stimulate further research, informed policy debate, and innovative criminal justice responses to the evolving challenges of the twenty-first century.