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To Examine the Relationship Between Employment Status and Attitudes Towards Criminal Behaviour of Young Adult Males in Jamaica

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Abstract

Youth unemployment has been identified as an important socioeconomic concern in Jamaica, but employment status alone may not explain attitudes toward criminal behaviour. This quantitative, cross-sectional study examined whether attitudes toward criminal behaviour differed by employment status among 85 Jamaican males aged 18–30 years recruited through convenience sampling from Manchester, Clarendon, and St. Catherine. Participants completed an adapted 24-item attitude measure drawn from the Entitlement and Antisocial Intent scales of the Measures of Criminal Attitudes and Associates (MCAA), together with demographic and unemployment-impact items. Items were interpreted in the keyed direction used in the study, with higher composite scores representing stronger endorsement of pro-criminal attitudes. An independent-samples *t* test showed that employed participants ($n = 37$, $M = 40.38$, $SD = 4.13$) had significantly higher criminal-attitude scores than unemployed participants ($n = 48$, $M = 28.73$, $SD = 2.99$), $t(83) = 15.10$, $p < .001$, mean difference = 11.65, 95% CI [10.11, 13.18], Hedges' $g = 3.27$. Age was not significantly associated with criminal-attitude scores, $r = .075$, $p = .497$. The findings indicate that employment status was associated with criminal-attitude orientation in this sample, but in the opposite direction from a simple protective-employment assumption. The results underscore the need to examine employment quality, economic strain, peer and neighbourhood context, and other factors rather than treating employment status alone as an explanation of criminal attitudes.

Keywords: employment status; labour market participation; behavioural economics; criminal attitudes; youth unemployment; socioeconomic conditions; antisocial behaviour