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PREVENTING CRIMES INVOLVING INTENTIONAL INFLICTION OF MINOR BODILY HARM: A CRIMINOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF LEGISLATIVE REFORMS AND PUBLIC TRUST

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Abstract This article analyzes the criminological situation of intentional infliction of minor bodily injuries in Uzbekistan and the impact of recent legislative reforms on public trust. According to data from 2022–2025, the number of such crimes decreased by 46.9%, primarily due to the introduction of administrative prejudice. Simultaneously, the classification of domestic violence as an independent crime (Article 126-1) has strengthened victims' institutional trust in law enforcement agencies. A comparative analysis with the experiences of Russia and Kazakhstan highlights the dangerous consequences of unjustified decriminalization. The article concludes with practical recommendations for violence prevention based on the theory of procedural justice.
Keywords: minor bodily injury; decriminalization; domestic violence; procedural justice; public trust; victimology; Criminal Code of Uzbekistan.

Introduction

Acts involving the intentional infliction of minor bodily injury rank among the most widespread violent crimes threatening human life, health, and dignity globally. In criminology, such offenses—even if they do not result in severe consequences—are viewed as an early manifestation of violence-prone behavior in society; a significant portion of violent crimes worldwide begins with acts involving minor injury, serving as a precursor to more serious offenses.

Fundamental reforms have also been implemented in the criminal legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan regarding the classification of crimes against the person. Under a Law adopted on April 11, 2023, Article 126-1 ("Family (Domestic) Violence") was introduced into the Criminal Code. This move separated family disputes—which were previously addressed under the general Article 109 and often resolved through reconciliation—into a distinct category of crime, while significantly increasing the severity of penalties associated with them. In parallel, in 2024, instances of causing minor bodily injury—committed for the first time and not resulting in short-term health impairment—were reclassified from criminal offenses to administrative violations under Article 52 of the Code on Administrative Liability; this marked an expansion of the institution of administrative prejudice [1].

While these reforms aim to align the human rights protection system with international standards, there has been insufficient research into how the simultaneous partial decriminalization of offenses against health (in general cases) and their criminalization (in cases of domestic violence) affect the overall crime situation in society and public trust in law enforcement agencies. This research gap defines the central question of the study: does the fact that a perpetrator causing minor injury in a domestic dispute escapes with merely an administrative fine evoke a sense of injustice in the victim, or does the strict criminalization of domestic violence, conversely, foster trust? These issues are of significant importance not only for national criminology but also for the field of international criminology.

International experience in this regard presents varied results. Research conducted in developing countries indicates that the adoption of specific legislation against domestic violence significantly reduces the likelihood of women experiencing violence at the hands of their partners [2]. In the Central Asian region—specifically in the Republic of Kazakhstan—legislative reforms adopted in 2024 aimed to re-criminalize domestic violence, a move prompted by the acute problems of high rates of unreported domestic violence and women's lack of trust in law enforcement agencies [3]. In stark contrast, the 2017 decriminalization of domestic battery and the infliction of minor injuries in the Russian Federation drew sharp criticism from many criminologists, as studies showed that this decision led to an escalation of domestic violence and caused victims to lose hope in state protection [4]. The detection and early prevention of crimes depend directly on the willingness of victims to report incidents to law enforcement agencies. Tom Tyler's theory of "procedural justice" plays a significant role in this context: citizens' trust in law enforcement and their voluntary compliance with the law depend less on police outcomes than on whether citizens are treated with respect and impartiality during the process [5]. Rates of reporting domestic violence to law enforcement are also measured by this level of trust; conversely, an indifferent approach by the police toward domestic violence leads to secondary victimization and a lack of confidence in state institutions [6].

The aim of this study is to evaluate the impact of recent legislative reforms on procedural fairness and public trust, based on an analysis of the criminological state, dynamics, and determinants of crimes involving the intentional infliction of minor bodily injury. The study involves a comparative analysis of national statistical data against the experiences of foreign countries.

Research Methodology

A comprehensive and systematic approach was employed in the study. The empirical basis consisted of data collected from law enforcement and judicial bodies across all regions of the Republic of Uzbekistan between 2022 and 2025, as well as the results of studies conducted at the *mahalla* (local community) level [1].

Statistical analysis methods were used to quantitatively examine the dynamics and regional distribution of crimes committed during the 2022–2025 period, along with the socio-demographic characteristics of offenders and victims. Document analysis methods were utilized to conduct a legal and psychological analysis of actual criminal cases drawn from judicial practice—specifically, offenses committed out of hooliganism, within a family context, or while under the influence of alcohol. The comparative-legal method served as one of the most important research tools. Amendments to Articles 109 and 126-1 of the Criminal Code of Uzbekistan were compared with the decriminalization processes under Article 116.1 of the Russian Federation's Criminal Code, Kazakhstan's re-criminalization practices, and the systems for addressing intimate partner violence (IPV) in the USA and European Union countries [2]. Furthermore, sociological and victimological methods were used to classify victim behavior (based on criteria such as provocation, carelessness, or innocence), while a conceptual analysis was conducted within the framework of procedural justice theory to assess public trust in law enforcement agencies [5].

Results

According to the analysis, in 2022–2025, crimes of intentional infliction of light bodily harm (Article 109 of the Criminal Code) accounted for an average of 6.3% of the total number of crimes committed in the republic, however, during the period under study, this indicator decreased significantly, and the number of crimes decreased by 46.9% in total. The main reason for this positive

dynamics is the transfer of Part 1 of Article 109 to administrative liability in 2024 (decriminalization) and the strengthening of preventive work within the framework of Article 1261 [1].

The territorial distribution showed that almost two-thirds (64.1%) of crimes fell on five regions - Tashkent city, Fergana, Tashkent, Kashkadarya and Samarkand regions. Of these, 23.7% were recorded in Fergana region, which indicates the need to reconsider preventive methods in this region. The spatial and temporal characteristics of the crimes are presented in Table 1, which confirm that they are mostly committed in open public places and during the day, confirming that violence does not occur secretly, but openly in crowded places [1].

Table 1. Spatial and temporal characteristics of crimes of intentional minor bodily injury (2022-2025)

Indicator	Share (%)
Street and public places	58,0%
Apartments / residences	24,0%
Other places	18,0%
Daytime (06:00–18:00)	66,2%
Evening (18:00–00:00)	29,0%
Night time (00:00–06:00)	5,5%
Peak Season (June–July)	21,0%

The majority of crimes (87.8%) were committed by men, but the share of women (12.2%) was significantly higher than for other violent crimes, contradicting the idea that minor injuries mainly occur within the framework of conflicts between close relatives, spouses, or in-laws. The highest criminogenic risk falls on the active working age group: 38.4% of criminals are aged 18-30, 45.1% are aged 30-45 (Table 2). The high risk of crime among people with a low level of education (73.1% - general secondary/vocational education) and low employment (26% unemployed) indicates the role of material deprivation and a marginal lifestyle in the formation of aggression [1].

Table 2. Socio-demographic and criminological indicators of persons who intentionally cause minor body injuries

Indicator	Category	Share (%)
Sex	Men	87,8%
	Women	12,2%

Age	Ages 18–30	38,4%
	Ages 30–45	45,1%
	Other age groups	16,5%
Information	General secondary / vocational	73,1%
	Highly educated	26,9%
Social status	Unemployed / seasonal worker	26,0%
	Previous conviction (recidivism)	3,9%
Execution status	Under the influence of alcohol	5,7%

From a psychological perspective, offenders can be classified into three types: the situational type (those who commit crimes in a state of heightened emotion—affect—due to stress or provocation), the marginal type (habitual alcohol consumers), and the aggressive type (individuals with low empathy who view violence as the sole method for resolving problems). It is this latter category that constitutes the primary perpetrators of violence.

Although men account for 79.4% and women for 20.6% of the total number of victims, it has been noted that women are the primary victims in cases of domestic and family-related conflicts. Victims are categorized into three types based on their behavior: provocateurs (10.3%)—those who incite the offender's anger through insulting or unlawful actions; the reckless—those who voluntarily enter dangerous situations; and innocent victims—those who fall prey to random acts of aggression [1]. Often, the perpetrator and the victim are well-acquainted; altercations resulting in minor bodily injury frequently stem from pre-existing disputes—such as mutual grievances, insults, conflicts over property or territory, or the victim's own inappropriate conduct.

Discussion

The 2024 shift in Uzbekistan—reclassifying first-time incidents of minor bodily injury that do not result in short-term health impairment as administrative offenses (under Article 52 of the Code on Administrative Liability)—aims to liberalize the criminal justice system and spare citizens the social stigma of a criminal record arising from trivial domestic disputes. However, from a criminological perspective, the decriminalization of violent acts is a highly sensitive issue. The Russian Federation's 2017 experience with decriminalizing the offense of "battery" serves as a cautionary example in this regard. Criminologists note that this decision led to an increase in the level of domestic violence and repeat offenses, as well as causing victims to refrain from reporting incidents to law enforcement agencies, since offenders could escape with a minor fine and continue the abuse [4]. This phenomenon, termed "criminal decriminalization" in academic literature, sharply eroded public trust in the police.

In contrast, the situation in the Republic of Kazakhstan took the opposite turn; against the backdrop of high rates of unreported domestic violence and the vulnerability of women, criminal liability for such acts was reinstated and made more severe in 2024 [3]. Uzbekistan's reforms of 2023–2024 demonstrate a balanced solution between these two extremes. While cases of minor bodily injury occurring in general contexts, between strangers, or under situational circumstances (when committed for the first time) were shifted to the realm of administrative prejudice, domestic violence (Article 126-1) was not decriminalized; on the contrary, it was reinforced as a more serious criminal offense. This approach simultaneously protects society from excessive criminalization while placing the most vulnerable groups—women and children—under state protection.

According to Tyler's theory of procedural justice, citizens comply with the law based not on the severity of police decisions, but on the respect and impartiality shown to them during the process [5]. The likelihood of intimate partner violence victims turning to law enforcement agencies also depends on this level of trust; conversely, a dismissive police attitude toward domestic disputes—viewing them merely as "internal family matters"—leads to secondary victimization and a lack of confidence in state institutions [6].

In this context, the introduction of Article 126-1 and the separation of minor injuries resulting from domestic violence from the general offense category are significant for three reasons. First, the state's firmer stance boosts institutional trust among victims; second, female victims can move past the stereotype that "the police won't help anyway" and begin to seek assistance without fear. This initially leads to a temporary rise in statistics (as previously hidden crimes come to light) but subsequently contributes to a reduction in actual violence; furthermore, taking family dynamics into account ensures impartiality in law enforcement practice. At the same time, to prevent offenders from perceiving the reclassification of minor injuries as an act of "impunity," the actions of prevention inspectors must be transparent and consistent. Otherwise—as demonstrated by the experience in the UK—the misuse of administrative measures or a lack of adequate oversight could negatively impact procedural justice and police legitimacy [8].

The root causes of crimes involving the infliction of minor bodily injury are often linked to economic inequality, unemployment, and social marginalization; low income and a lack of employment foster aggression and hopelessness, causing even minor domestic disputes to escalate into violence—a fact corroborated by the finding that 26 percent of the perpetrators are unemployed [1]. Alcohol consumption also serves as a significant catalyst for such crimes. This problem cannot be resolved solely through the application of criminal penalties; comprehensive social prevention mechanisms are required.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Research findings indicate that preventing crimes involving the intentional infliction of minor bodily injury requires a comprehensive and multi-stage approach. To avoid undermining public trust during the process of liberalizing criminal legislation, and to ensure the full protection of victims in sensitive matters such as domestic violence, the following measures are proposed:

1. Given that approximately 60 percent of crimes occur on streets and in public places, implement AI-based video surveillance systems ("Smart Surveillance") in crowded areas to automatically detect aggressive behavior and ensure rapid response [9];

2. 2. Develop an electronic "Crime Risk Map" that identifies crime hotspots at the *mahalla* (neighborhood) level and strategically deploy patrol forces to the highest-risk areas;

3. Organize specialized psycho-legal training for crime prevention inspectors and patrol officers on communicating with victims, resolving disputes through mediation, and operating in a spirit of procedural fairness [5]; 4. Systematically implement interactive sessions on victimological prevention among youth and students, explaining the consequences of provocative and victim-prone behavior;

5. Strengthen control over the sale of alcoholic beverages in areas prone to domestic crime and improve mechanisms for engaging unemployed individuals in employment programs;

6. Continuously monitor legislation regarding administrative liability for first-time offenses involving minor injuries; if recidivism rates rise and public trust declines (as observed in the Russian experience), reconsider the conditions for administrative prejudice; and, regarding domestic violence cases, strictly limit the application of the "reconciliation mechanism" while expanding the system of protection orders.

In conclusion, it must be emphasized that the prevention of crimes against human health and dignity is ensured not merely by the severity of punishment, but by its inevitability, fair and transparent police operations, and a healthy socio-economic environment. Reforms involving decriminalization and differentiation will justify public trust only if these conditions are met.

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