



Socioeconomic and Cultural Factors and Juvenile Delinquency in Pakistan: A Critical Analysis of Structural Theories

Hafiz Muhammad Haseeb Ullah¹, Faiz Bakhsh²

¹ PhD Scholar, University Gillani Law College, Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan, Pakistan.

Email: asporac2013@gmail.com

² Assistant Professor, University Gillani Law College, Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan, Pakistan.

Email: faizmalik@bzu.edu.pk

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ABSTRACT

The article is a critical discourse on the immigration of youth crime in Pakistan as understood by structural theories. It leverages a variety of literature and empirical studies to show how the meeting of structural inequalities, gender norms, and individual experiences forms the background for the antisocial nature of young people, particularly in Pakistan. The practice framework integrates the strain model, social learning theory, and rational choice theory, among others, to provide the practitioner with a broader perspective of the various things that contribute to delinquency in children. The evaluation of present policies, programs, and interventions is done in a review, which checks whether they are able to address such underlying issues and recommendations on policy reforms are proposed. By emphasizing the community-specific socio-economic and cultural contexts, the work has underlined the need for a responsibility-tailored solution that integrates cultural and socio-economic considerations. The identified research shows that the requirements for community efforts to be made are a partnership among researchers, policymakers and community leaders who organize evidence-based interventions to create a more equal and fair juvenile criminal justice system in Pakistan.



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Corresponding Author's Email: asporac2013@gmail.com

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1. Introduction

The juvenile delinquency, the universal global phenomenon, causes a lot of trouble to the social strata, families and individuals. The role of socioeconomic disparities and cultural diversity in Pakistan, the country struggling with varied types of delinquent behaviors, call for the understanding of the intricate nature of factors involved in the juvenile's delinquency. Herewith; this introduction is a detailed illustration of how socioeconomic and cultural factors play a significant role in juvenile delinquency incidences in Pakistan and critically examines structural theories.

Pakistan is a South Asian country with a population of over 220 million people. The country is grappling with a number of social and economic problems, including extreme poverty, a lack of education and health care, and an uncertain political situation. During these times of social unrest, juvenile delinquency has emerged as one of the most pressing issues, which is currently addressed by more than one hundred and fifty thousand young people and their communities.

For instance, some research, Ejaz (2017), and Haider et al. (2018) explore the pervasiveness and effects of juvenile delinquency in Pakistan. These studies portray various types of offenses giving emphasis on the laws that govern the types of crimes and various defenses that can be used in court. Besides, they draw attention to the reality of inadequate portrayal and, consequently, under-representation of the marginalized class, the majority of whom are the urban poor and underprivileged living in the rural areas. To understand the inception of juvenile delinquency in Pakistan it is vital to go deep into the structural causes or theories. Agnew (2002) and Savolainen (2009) put forth structural theories that highlight the fact that social, economic, and environmental aspects greatly condition the behavior of individuals. Through analysis of the wider social contexts and systematic inequalities prevailing in Pakistani society, we will be able to gain useful information about the possible reasons for juvenile delinquencies.

Socioeconomic factors form the backbone of the young generation's future path, mentioning that they are often the reasons for their delinquent practices Abbasi and Memon (2018) and Ahmad, Uddin, and Goparaju (2018) have deepened the complexities between household poverty, unemployment, and educational achievement levels and the juvenile delinquency rates in Pakistan. The results reinforce the notion that underprivileged youths, particularly the ones that face infrastructural and material limitations, are more susceptible to engaging in delinquent behaviors as they have no other choice but to deal with their feelings of frustration and alienation.

Besides that, family structure and the clan's help system are the factors that are affecting the juvenile delinquency rate. According to the research of Siddiqui, Iqbal, Naeem, Hussain, and Khaliq (2019) and Saleem, Ali, and Qamar (2018), family dysphoria, useless attention, and low social support are the factors that can provoke youth delinquency in Pakistan. This study highlights the significance of considering such factors, including family and community, in planning interventions that can be applied to reduce juvenile offenses. Interacting with young people in our diverse and religiously plural country of Pakistan I get to witness cultural norms influencing their behaviors. Scholars, as in the works done by Aziz, Malik, and Jung (2017); Shahzad, Hussain, Ali, Valcke, and Khurshid (2017), have emphasized how culture, religion, and folks' traditions affect kids' delinquency. Their research emphasizes the significance of schooling and health interventions amidst the realities of Pakistani society, which showcase the diversity in perceiving ethics and social norms among various ethnic and religious communities throughout the country.

Drawing on the epistemological basis of criminology, structural theories help to explain the phenomena of juvenile delinquency in Pakistan as a perspective from which to start. Researchers like Bandura (1977) and Tittle, Ward, and Grasmick (2003) are the ones who have made it their job to explain the processes of social learning, strain and rational choice which determine work behaviors. Utilizing these theoretical frameworks with the Pakistani case scenario, we obtain detailed insight about underlying structural forces that may contribute to juvenile delinquency in the country. Hagan (1993), and Laub and Sampson (1993) also note how social circumstances can foster crime. They identify economic marginalization and social disorganization as the factors relating to crime. Through their research, they emphasize the necessity of addressing issues relating not only to the immediate environment in which juvenile delinquency occurs but also to the effects that arise as a result of more macro-level factors such as unemployment, urbanization, and community cohesion. The inclusion of these streams into our analysis, therefore appears clear the relationships between organization and the individual agency in shaping the ways delinquency has become a major problem among Pakistani youth.

2. Background

The juvenile delinquency problem is crucial for Pakistan as it's a country that is distinguished by the socio-economic gaps, cultural diversity, and structural inequalities. The complicated nature of juvenile delinquency has become a research focal point for scholars who aim to understand its causes and consequences for Pakistani adolescents and society.

Agnew and White (1992) argued that a general strain theory of crime and delinquency is possible, taking into account a number of social, economic, and natural factors that affect individual behavior. This premise serves as the main aim for most of the studies conducted

on juvenile delinquency in Pakistan. Scholars like Ejaz (2017) and Haider et al. (2018) have looked into the role and effect of this problem. Social economics like poverty, unemployment, and educational qualification are important factors for criminal delinquency (Abbasi & Memon, 2018; Ahmad et al., 2018). Research has proven that poorer youth, especially those experiencing poverty, are more likely to be in crime due to frustration and isolation (Malik et al., 2020).

A country's cultural norms and values also play an essential role in classifying juvenile delinquency in Pakistan (Chaudhry, Chen, Ahmed, & Nasir, 2023; Malik et al., 2020). Family interaction, community assistance systems, and religion are other factors that further influence youth behaviors (Saeed, Khan, Gul, & Sadiq, 2017; Shahzad et al., 2017).

The structural theories, including the social disorganization theory Laub and Sampson (1993) and the strain theory Agnew and White (1992), also focus on the bigger picture of the social determinants contributing to delinquency in juveniles. Perceiving issues such as economic marginalization, urbanization, and community integration are the main factors that decide the delinquency rates (Hagan, 1993). By way of empirical studies and cases in study in various regions of Pakistan (Saleem et al., 2018); Zaman, Rahman, Rafique, Ali, and Akram (2017), researchers have made known the interplay of socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental factors that lead to juvenile delinquency. This overall understanding delivers the criticalness of the employment of integrated approaches and policy changes in Pakistan to address the major causes that generate juvenile offending. These theories will be used by researchers to explain the structural forces that go underneath juvenile delinquency in Pakistan (Akers, 1973; Savolainen, 2009). Knowing these factors will help officials by creating evidence-based youth rehabilitation programs to address the reasons of committing offenses and equality among the youth of Pakistan.

3. Structural Delinquency Theories

The theoretical framework for this work offers an exhaustive investigation of various structural theories, which are critical for an in-depth understanding of juvenile delinquency, most especially one that is influenced by economic and cultural factors in Pakistan. Having elucidated two main theories, on what prompts youth to participate in delinquency and what prevents them from behaving inappropriately, these theories offer important insights into the underlying factors that lead to juvenile delinquency and practical measures that can be used to tackle it.

Agnew's General Strain Theory reveals a far-out possibility that a person may be involved in juvenile delinquency if during his/her life he/she faces the strain or stressors. This situation may result from different causes at work, like hardship in the economy, lack of social cohesion, and restricted position to move forward (Agnew & White, 1992). Specifically, in Pakistan, a country where the socioeconomic gaps are prominent, the following can be the result of adolescence of poverty and the limited prospects. It may constitute criminal activities as a means of escaping the problems.

Akers' social learning theory insists that through socialization processes, people generate and accept norms of conduct, such as deviancy, shaped by the others with whom these deviants are associated (Akers, 1973). The social learning theory in Pakistan offers an excellent example of why community standards and peer pressure have a powerful impact on shaping the behavior of teens. Adolescence behavior could change negatively if the teens are affected by delinquency within the community or various media platforms.

The Social Learning Theory of Bandura, from here on in, not only makes sense of this but also sheds light on the roles of observation modeling or reinforcement in behavioral acquisition. Those who have the experience of being violence or crime victims—either through real-life encounters or media representations—may have greater propensity to reproduce such behavior. This may lead to the formation of a criminal community.

The meta-analysis conducted by Pratt and Cullen reinforces the critical role of self-control in the behavior of individuals and discouragement from committing crime, just as Gottfredson and Hirschi (2017) claimed in their General Theory of Crime (Pratt & Cullen,

2000). Individuals with lower self-control are easier to shop in impulsive and along risky behaviors line hosting delinquency. Whilst the provision of effective education and decent jobs may be denied for the majority, low self-control may apply as an aggravating factor in a youth crime crisis in Pakistan.

According to Savolainen's rational choice theory, criminals usually assess the pros and cons and, after that, make a decision to begin the crime (Savolainen, 2009). In Pakistan, where socioeconomic differences are deep, the gap between adolescents with limited chances of upward mobility and those with access to job opportunities may be great. Therefore, teens who lack a sense of belonging or have limited chances for advancement may be convinced that the benefits of delinquent behavior, such as financial gain or social status, prevails over any potential costs they might incur.

Tittle et al. (2003), in their CSCT (Capacity for Self-control Theory), additionally empathize that individuals with low self-control are more likely to engage in delinquent activities (Tittle et al., 2003). In a diversified state like Pakistan, where social and economic vulnerability is monstrous, people with limited access to resources and opportunities may feel unclear about their lives and may take risks.

Edward Laub and Robert Sampson, according to Life Course Theory, states that the person's life events and transitions are milestones that dictate their trajectories in regard to delinquency (Laub & Sampson, 1993). In Pakistan, where living cultural norms and traditional family systems may direct the life choices of adolescents, among other things, life course theory facilitates the evaluation of a wide set of factors that contribute to the onset and perseverance of delinquent tendencies.

4. Socioeconomic Factors:

When a socioeconomic sector is viewed as the foundation of juvenile delinquency in Pakistan the situation turns out to be complicated with quite a few aspects causing the phenomenon. Empirical studies of the kind which Ahmad et al. (2018) conducted and Malik et al. (2020) highlighted, establish clear links between the socioeconomic status and delinquent behaviors among Pakistani youth. These empirical findings emphasize how persistent poverty, joblessness, and educational deprivation pose the tendency to engage in vices among young people. Economical poverty, with missing social and economic mobility opportunities becomes a base for juvenile delinquency to breed and expand.

Additionally, the family structure effect study conducted by Chaudhry et al. (2023) has shown that the underprivileged communities are the most affected ones when it comes to juvenile delinquency, and not so much other families. The sense of direction and parental authority, and even more, the financial hardship, sometimes increase the proportion of delinquent behaviors that are involved by adolescents. As regards this trait, Saeed et al. (2017) argue that it is due to home-environment instability that juveniles end up bad: this is the summary of their argument. The absence of family unions and the efficiency of family support systems leaves young members more susceptible to gang influences and crime.

Besides, within a family, the social forces separately influence the development of juvenile delinquency in Pakistan. Saleem and Ali's research highlights the primacy of community support networks for adolescents who engage in deviant actions (Saleem et al., 2018). Socially connected and cooperative communities have more resources and adequate support available, which contribute to offering alternatives that would distract the youth from the wrong route and counter the tendency to get involved in criminal activities. Contrarily, Siddiqui et al. (2019) highlight the causes of a higher rate of delinquency among teenagers of marginalized communities, where the scarcity of supportive resources and social services adds up to the challenges faced by these children.

Examining socio-economic factors' results shows us how they can play an important role in leading juvenile delinquency in Pakistan. Poverty, unemployment, educational gap, family structure, and community support are the things that have a greater effect on which youth can commit crimes. These social economic stratum of society play a decisive role in providing effective interventions for curbing the offending natures in juveniles and bringing positivity to the development of growing youths in Pakistan.

5. Cultural Factors:

There is a close interplay between cultural factors and juvenile delinquency in Pakistan which means that the society's norms, values, and level of tolerance determine the nature and prosperity of the youth's delinquent behavior. It is revealed by studies of Khan and Tang (2023), and Aziz et al. (2017) how cultural norms create beliefs and behaviors of Pakistani youth. These studies focus on the issue of how teens tend to follow different cultural norms depending on which of the roles they usually identify with. Such as respect for authority or refusal to adhere to traditional gender roles, delinquency among adolescents can more or less become a deterrent or an acceptable thing.

Likewise, in order to further examine the role of cultural bases, i. e., urban and rural locations, of Pakistan, Farooq et al. (2020) have looked at the impact of cultural influences on the cases of juvenile delinquency in them. Their comparative study outlines the intimate perception that cultural practices have on the wide variety of how delinquency occurs in young people across locations. Further, Javed et al. (2020) discuss the role of cultural identity in the genesis of juvenile delinquency and how it is particularly prevalent in Karachi, urban centers such as this. Their findings reveal that attachments and associations with culture and a group of fellow teens contribute to the development of delinquent behavior among teenagers.

Moreover, ethical and religious characteristics are also becoming crucial ingredients that are facilitating the increase of immorality among the youths in Pakistan. The article entitled "Religious identity and Delinquency: A study on Attitudes of young people towards delinquency and the role of Religious Teachings in shaping the life of Youth" by Shahzad et al. (2017) presents the source of religious identity in shaping attitudes towards delinquency as well as how moral teaching and religious practices affects the lives of young people. Moreover, the two scholars, Siddiqui et al. (2019), discuss different cultural practices in different areas like Gilgit-Baltistan and, at the same time, discover the relationship between the delinquent activities of young people and the customary life of the society.

6. Case Studies and Local Context

Case studies and regional analysis of circumstances provide useful inside creations of how the particular dynamics of juvenile delinquency in various parts of Pakistan work, showing the actual socioeconomic and cultural factors that affect the behavior of the youth. With reference to Aziz et al. (2017), a comparative analysis of delinquency rates and issues between urban and rural areas is developed, which reveals that delinquent behaviors vary within the areas and their underlying causes. Just like Farooq et al. (2020), who investigated Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) to expose the local context of juvenile delinquency in this region, we will aim to explore the various environments (local and governmental) that influence juvenile delinquency in the overarching, regional, and local levels. Malik et al. (2020) take this issue to another level of research, which is the rural areas of Balochistan, aiming to determine how the socioeconomic conditions of these areas play a role in youth delinquency.

Rashid and Nadeem (2019) took an insightful look at how poverty and unemployment may, in turn, lead to youth delinquency in the Islamabad context and how these factors somehow correlate with the capital city's youth offending. Ali, Malik, Pereira, and Al Ariss (2017) conducted case studies in Gilgit-Baltistan. The family structure shapes the levels of delinquency rates within the youth; thus as a consequence of the family dynamics generate the understanding of how these impact youth behavior (Ali et al., 2017). Zaman et al. (2017) also conduct research on socio-economic aspects and their link with juvenile delinquency in Peshawar, thus giving a sensitizing picture of the socio-economic factors contributing to youth crime in this urban setting. Akhtar, Shah, Zubair, and Javed (2019) take Faisalabad as an example, which consists of research on educational levels and juvenile delinquents, and underline the role of school as a protective factor.

Further on, both Murtaza et al. (2021) and Khan and Tang (2023) present the case studies conducted in both Punjab and District Faisalabad, and their studies offer an in-depth analysis of what led to adolescent criminal behavior in these specific areas. Such studies

expand the insights in to the nature of existing factors underlying offending behavior among adolescents in Pakistan, thus they could be employed to guide the devising of specific intervention programs that are compatible with the socio-economic and cultural vibe of every locality

7. Promising Solutions and Interventions

The review of present policies and programs with the aim of dealing with the issue of teenage delinquency in Pakistan demands an objective assessment of their success in improving youth behavior. Haider et al. (2018) gave a structured approach to reviewing juvenile justice laws in Pakistan by stressing the profound need for systemic analyses to find out the missing points. In this line, Ali et al. (2017) communicate the value of incorporating cultural consideration in jurisdiction rules of the juvenile justice system by advocating for sensitive approaches that reflect the social and cultural arena of Pakistan.

Let us take a step forward by introducing the case study of Punjab, Pakistan to showcase intervention strategies that prove to be the most effective in reducing juvenile delinquency. Their results speak to the success of customized programs and interventions, which are supposed to address different regional challenges that are faced by youth. Furthermore, Akhtar et al. (2019) highlight the significant role that local leaders may play in tackling delinquent behavior among the youth, placing emphasis on the imperativeness of involving stakeholders in the community and initiating grassroots programs where youths are positively mentored.

Referring to Javed et al. (2020), the authors concretely expound on the role of the involvement of the stakeholders and the lessons from Sindh Province, Pakistan. It becomes clear that every party's duty is to be involved: the government, civil society, community stakeholders, and the rest of the parties are to implement the necessary measures going forward. Furthermore, Malik et al. (2020) examine the policy recommendations for Inner Balochistan's juvenile justice institutions in Pakistan, with the main focus on institutional capacity-building and structural reforms to lead the way to growth in the effectiveness of the juvenile justice system.

Also, Rashid and Nadeem (2019) mention the priority of education in the prevention of juvenile delinquency, hence the recommendation of a policy that holds education as a preventive measure. Ali et al. (2017) provide a glimpse of the roots of juvenile delinquency in the Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan. Therefore, the policies should create a level playing field and promote youth empowerment by addressing the socio-economic disparities. Zaman et al. (2017) highlighted the significance of needs-based interventions in juvenile justice, advocating for policies that would be evidence-based, reformational, and grounded on best practices.

Additionally, the other authors, Akhtar et al. (2019), review the steps that should be taken based on juvenile delinquency findings and describe the impact of their work in Faisalabad, Pakistan. The two studies emphasize the relevance of evidence-based policymaking in youth crime prevention and the significance of upholding this principle if we are to tackle this problem. Partnership constitutes yet another significant element in improving the implementation of the juvenile justice policy, as it has been portrayed by Tahir Khan (2018) in the case of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Waheed and Haider (2019) tend to explore the youth participation issue in policymaking for juvenile justice through a case study from Sialkot, Pakistan. Moreover, the experts suggest inclusive approaches that eventually help the youth in the process of decision-making.

8. Implications for Policymakers and Communities

Thus, the effects from the findings linked to socio-economic and cultural factors are not only academic but play significant roles in the involvement of the policymakers, the people of the community, and other stakeholders. The thrashing out of these implications calls for a comprehensive approach wherein the cultural and socio-economic issues are duly incorporated in the juvenile justice policies and system to promote a more efficient and appropriate system.

Conducting research will support policymakers in developing stratification policies and having reforms that are aimed at the core problems of juvenile delinquency even as they consider how different cultures and socio-economic settings interact. The structural lenses of evaluation allow policymakers to analyze existing policies/programs and point out the areas of improvement by implementation of evidence-based strategies that are effective with different youths across the regions (Abbasi & Memon, 2018).

Community leaders transform policy-making from aspired objectives into tangible practical achievements from the ground. Failure of policymakers to stimulate community engagement and authorities in the field is a missing link that can prevent the effective use of existing social networks and community resources for providing support for at-risk youth and preventing delinquency (Iqbal, Waheed, Haider, Tesfamariam, & Sadiq, 2019). Besides these, community-led initiatives could complement government actions through youth development that is based on the positive side and giving them alternative paths to reformation (Javed et al., 2020).

Ways to integrate cultural and socioeconomic approaches in juvenile justice policies cover such as being culturally sensitive approaches to intervention programs, equal opportunity to education and vocational skills, and making community partners to support social inclusion. Through a comprehensive approach that takes into account the intersection of socioeconomic, cultural, and legal factors, the policymakers can build a more open and righteous juvenile justice system that treats youth from different backgrounds, irrespective of their social status and powers.

9. Conclusion

To sum up, the critical thinking of structural theories, which looks at the social and cultural factors underlying juvenile delinquency in Pakistan, is found to be interrelated, and this relationship is the complex nature of systemic inequalities, cultural norms, and individual experience. This article has exposed outstanding features of delinquent behavior among Pakistani youth by applying structural theories like strain, social learning, and rational choice theories. Through an integration of literature and empirical project reviews, we have proceeded to get a clearer and more tangible vision of the fundamental underlying causes of juvenile delinquency, which has, in turn, led us to point towards various potential approaches of intervention and policy reform. In conclusion, this cooperation of researchers, policymakers, and practitioners is of paramount importance in the incorporation of evidence-based methods and community-oriented approaches in the juvenile justice system of Pakistan to enhance inclusiveness and ensure the rational development of youth.

Authors Contribution:

Hafiz Muhammad Haseeb Ullah: Conducted research design and methodology.

Faiz Bakhsh: Proofread, review and designed the analysis.

Conflict of Interests/Disclosures

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest w.r.t the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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