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Broken Pathways: Investigating the Causes and Consequences of Juvenile Delinquency in Punjab, Pakistan

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Abstract

This research investigated the causes and consequences of juvenile delinquency in Punjab Pakistan through methods and statistical evaluations carried out with SPSS Version 22.0. Information was gathered from 94 participants. Analysis was executed using Chi-square and Gamma tests to assess the intensity and orientation of relationships among essential variables. Results indicate that most offenders are male (76.6%) aged 15 to 17 years (48.9%) and generally possess education up to middle school level. Descriptive statistics show that peer influence ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.81$) and family environment ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.74$) are linked to behavior. Chi-square tests reveal relationships between delinquency and every independent variable, such as family environment ($p = 0.011$) peer influence ($p < 0.001$) socioeconomic status ($p = 0.039$) educational factors ($p = 0.009$) and substance abuse ($p = 0.002$). Gamma tests additionally show significant correlations with peer influence ($\Gamma = 0.62$) and substance abuse ($\Gamma = 0.48$) identified as the most powerful predictors. Overall, the findings highlight that juvenile delinquency in Punjab is shaped by interconnected familial, social, educational, and economic factors. The study emphasizes the need for comprehensive, multi-level interventions involving families schools, and communities to reduce delinquent behaviors and support at-risk youth.

Key Words: Causes, Consequences, Juvenile Delinquency, Punjab, Pakistan.

Introduction

Juvenile delinquency has become a global epidemic, spreading rapidly in both developed and developing countries in organized and semi-organized forms. In any civilized nation, the criminal justice system is crucial, as it safeguards the rule of law, justice and social order (Gondal et al., 2022). Economic development is impossible under the shadow of fear, violence, and civil unrest. While juvenile offenders may engage in antisocial behavior less severe than adult criminal acts, it still poses a serious threat to social stability. Factors contributing to juvenile delinquency are diverse, including broken families, communities with social disorder, negative peer and school influences, slum environments teeming with criminals, poverty, and unemployment. In Pakistan, factors such as disputes over money and land, sexual assault, illiteracy, honor killings, long-standing family feuds, and drug addiction significantly exacerbate juvenile delinquency (Ishaq et al., 2025). The rise of extremism has further exacerbated the situation, with some groups indoctrinating teenagers under the age of 18 with extremist ideologies and sectarian hatred. Similarly, the increasing use of digital platforms by teenagers has fueled gang involvement among youth globally, and Pakistan faces similar challenges (Lakhani et al., 2022). A major obstacle to understanding this issue in Pakistan is the lack of scientific literature and reliable data on juvenile delinquency. Given the severity of the problem, systematic research to identify the root causes of juvenile delinquency and propose effective interventions is crucial. Without timely action, this escalating trend will continue to undermine the nation's social and moral fabric. Families are increasingly unstable, and parents are constantly worried about their children's future (Perveen et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the surge in sectarian violence among teenagers exacerbates this problem, making juvenile delinquency a growing social stigma. Ignoring this issue will have profound socioeconomic consequences. Juvenile delinquency is widely recognized as a growing social problem affecting societies worldwide (Haq et al., 2025). Every country defines certain behaviors as illegal and punishes them to maintain social order. Crime refers to any illegal act committed by an individual under the age of eighteen that violates social norms and expectations. In Pakistan, nearly 49% of the population is under the age of eighteen, with 22% of that group between the ages of 10 and 18. Despite representing a significant proportion of society, this group has been consistently overlooked (Abbas et al., 2022). Many teenagers commit minor offenses, but due to a lack of adequate legal protection and rehabilitation facilities, they suffer severe consequences. Most juvenile offenders remain on trial, many imprisoned simply because their families cannot afford bail. Prison conditions are often appalling, and the environment in which juvenile offenders are placed not only fails to reduce their likelihood of becoming repeat offenders but actually increases it (Arslan et al., 2025). This study aims to explore the causes of juvenile delinquency in Punjab, Pakistan. Children are the future of any nation, and their vulnerability to poverty and exploitation seriously threatens national development. In Pakistan, numerous socioeconomic and psychological factors contribute to juvenile delinquency, especially since nearly half the country's population is under the age of eighteen (Hazra, 2021).

As the primary institution of socialization, the family often fails to fulfill its responsibilities due to issues such as maternal illiteracy, lack of parental supervision, domestic violence, large family size, and poor economic conditions (Fatima et al., 2022). Physical or sexual abuse at home can further encourage delinquency in minors. When these adolescents

are incarcerated in poorly managed prisons and face an inefficient juvenile justice system, they often become more sophisticated offenders. Therefore, it is urgent to explore the root causes and consequences of juvenile delinquency and identify the underlying causes of the problem. The findings of this study will help policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and civil society organizations develop more effective strategies to address this growing threat (Islam et al., 2021). Juvenile delinquency generally refers to acts of minors violating criminal law. The term "juvenile offender" refers to a minor who repeatedly violates social norms or criminal law. Juvenile delinquency can be divided into two categories: criminal offenses and status offenses (Ahmad et al., 2020). Criminal offenses, such as rape, murder, arson, drug trafficking, and aggravated assault, are illegal regardless of the offender's age. These acts must be immediately addressed by the criminal justice system. Status offenses, on the other hand, refer to behaviors such as running away from home, going out late at night, smoking, or evading responsibility. These behaviors are not crimes for adults, but are considered juvenile delinquency when committed by minors (Khan, 2022). Youth crime is an escalating issue affecting all sectors of society. Adolescents from backgrounds are seen as the forthcoming leaders of their countries. When prominent figures within a community act inappropriately the development of that community is put at risk. Juvenile delinquency refers to crimes committed by individuals who're not yet adults (Faizan et al., 2022). Comprehending the causes behind these youths' conduct and illegal actions is essential. Juvenile delinquency denotes any actions undertaken by individuals, below eighteen years of age. An individual is described as delinquent when they engage in activities that breach state laws. The label delinquent applies when someone performs actions (Haq et al., 2025). Major crimes such as murder, rape, theft, robbery, arson and other illegal deeds are significant, within the system that provides mechanisms to handle these issues.

In Pakistan juvenile delinquency arises from prejudice, economic disparity, unbalanced urban development, joblessness, insufficient education and the failure of families and schools to properly fulfill their roles. In Punjab the closure of the Borstal Institution and Juvenile Jail in Faisalabad has left one juvenile-focused facility in Bahawalpur. Consequently many young offenders are kept with adult inmates increasing the risk of abuse and hindering rehabilitation efforts (Irfan & Rafique, 2022). The Juvenile Justice System Act (JJSA) of 2018 was designed to provide a framework, for offender rehabilitation. However its implementation remains inconsistent. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Juvenile Justice System Rules of 2023 promise the establishment of rehabilitation centers in each divisional headquarters, focusing on education, psychological development, and vocational training. Yet, the actualization of these centers is still pending (Bureau Report, 2023). Understanding the concept of juvenile delinquency and distinguishing between juvenile offenders and criminal behavior is crucial for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies (Anjum et al., 2025). Ultimately, criminal behavior refers to any illegal act committed by a child or adolescent under the age of 18, and continued engagement in such behavior leads to the labeling of an individual as a juvenile offender. Juvenile delinquency refers to the repeated engagement by minors in illegal or socially incompatible activities. Serious crimes such as murder, rape, theft, robbery, arson, and other offenses remain a focus of the Pakistani justice system, prompting the government to take various measures to prevent and control juvenile delinquency (Kaur, 2021).

When legal means fail to provide an equivalent standard of living, some people resort to illegal means to obtain economic security. However, education plays a crucial role in reducing crime because it equips individuals with the skills needed to earn higher incomes through legal channels (Ijaz et al., 2021). In Pakistan, child labor and juvenile delinquency remain widespread problems. Child labor rates are alarmingly high, particularly in rural areas, although a significant number of children also work in urban centers. A major problem with the criminal justice system is that juvenile offenders are often treated the same as adult offenders, despite differences in maturity, criminal intent, and understanding of crime (Khosro & Kousar, 2022). Treating children as adult offenders subjects them to harsh punishment and rehabilitation, causing long-term psychological trauma. Once children experience this punitive treatment, they may adopt criminal behavior as a permanent way of life after their release. One of the main reasons for youth dropping out of school is child labor (Fatima et al., 2025). Due to poverty or the belief that work is more conducive to future success, many families prefer their children to work rather than attend school. Getting children back into school requires significant reforms, including changing parental attitudes and removing social and economic barriers through welfare programs, employment opportunities, accessible social services, and campaigns to raise awareness of the importance of education. In the workplace, child laborers often face physical abuse, overwork, lack of rest, and, in many cases, sexual exploitation (Jokhio & Soomro, 2022). Due to their young age and lack of awareness, they are powerless to resist this abuse, leading to trauma, psychological distress, and depression.

Therefore, many child laborers are vulnerable to criminal networks such as sex trafficking, theft gangs, and drug cartels, who exploit their despair and emotional instability (Khurshid et al., 2025). Child labor is prevalent globally, with millions of children working long hours for meager wages. This not only harms their physical health but also negatively impacts their psychological development. Poverty and lack of education are the main contributing factors. In Pakistan, the continued existence of child labor reflects both economic hardship and parental choices that prioritize children's work and education over their education (Rehman et al., 2022). This results in low enrollment rates, particularly at the primary school level, perpetuating a vicious cycle of poverty, exploitation, and juvenile delinquency.

Child labor not only deprives children of their potential by placing them in appalling and inhumane conditions, but also significantly exacerbates juvenile delinquency. Children possess the power to reshape and reform society, yet many are driven to crime by forced circumstances (Saeed et al., 2020). This review of literature, including books and academic articles related to child labor and juvenile delinquency, highlights the intertwined nature of these issues. Given the large number of children affected, law enforcement and government agencies often place the blame entirely on families for negligence, ignoring broader systemic flaws. The powerful influence of religious groups and lobbying groups makes governments hesitant to implement reforms at the level of madrassah. There is an urgent need to redesign the curriculum of madrassah and immediately close all unregistered institutions. Their funding sources and sponsorship models must also be thoroughly investigated (Shah et al., 2020). Only through these measures can the well-being of future generations be guaranteed and the foundation for a safe society be laid. Unfortunately, extremist ideologies continue to spread, and the number of madrasahs continues to increase (Singh, 2021). Children,

especially those who have run away from home or are forced into labor or minor offenses, are highly vulnerable to such propaganda. For impoverished families, the promise of a bright future and freedom from drug abuse is incredibly attractive, leading many to willingly send their sons to such organizations. However, these young members are subjected to extremely brutal treatment: solitary confinement in shackles; beatings for failing tasks; and frequent physical abuse. In a country where religion is often used as a tool of exploitation, where inter-ethnic competition for power is fierce, and where crime and deception are deeply entrenched, child labor and juvenile delinquency have become major threats to national stability, peace, and well-being (Warraitch et al., 2021).

Pakistan continues to suffer from insurgency and armed conflict; economic indicators such as investment, stock market stability, and the balance of payments are severely impacted (Lakhdar et al., 2021). Intellectuals are targeted, ethnic minorities face extreme vulnerability, and social cohesion is rapidly disintegrating. Mised children alienated, exploited, and manipulated often harbor resentment towards society, believing that Pakistanis have abandoned them or are colluding with their oppressors. Consequently, they may resort to violent retaliation (Riaz et al., 2021). This deep-rooted infiltration of crime and extremism among children is weakening the foundations of society and could jeopardize the entire social structure if left unchecked. In Punjab, Pakistan, juvenile delinquency has become a significant social challenge, highlighting deep-seated socioeconomic and cultural issues affecting youth development. Despite an increase in juvenile crime cases in recent years, comprehensive, region-specific research remains lacking to explore the root causes and long-term consequences of juvenile delinquency. Peer pressure, family breakdown, poverty, limited access to quality education, and deficiencies in the juvenile justice system all play crucial roles in this growing social problem. Understanding these determinants is essential for developing targeted interventions and effective prevention and rehabilitation strategies. This study aims to provide empirical evidence to guide government agencies, educational institutions, and social organizations in reducing juvenile delinquency and providing better support for vulnerable youth in the region.

- To investigate the influence of family environment on juvenile delinquency in Punjab, Pakistan.
- To identify the extent to which peer influence contributes to juvenile delinquency in the study area.
- To assess the impact of socioeconomic status (SES) on the likelihood of juvenile delinquency in Punjab.
- To examine the role of educational factors in shaping juvenile delinquency among youth in Punjab.
- To analyze the contribution of substance abuse of juvenile delinquency in Punjab, Pakistan.

Methodology

This research study based upon a sample of 94 respondents who were selected to provide statistically reliable and representative results. To determine the data that is used to attain varying views regarding juvenile delinquency in Punjab, purposive sampling was employed to select Juvenile Jail Faisalabad and Borstal Institute. The respondents were chosen using the criterion of direct exposure or interaction with juvenile delinquency

including the adolescents who have engaged in delinquency behaviour, parents and teachers who observe youth behavior, professionals (social workers, psychologists and law enforcement officials) who handle a juvenile cases. Descriptive analysis has been used to explore the research objectives.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Gender Wise Percentage of the Respondents.

Gender	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Male	72	76.6%
Female	22	23.4%
Total	94	100%

The table 1 shows that out of 94 respondents that took part in the study on the causes and consequences of juvenile delinquency in Punjab, Pakistan, a large majority of the respondents are males (72 respondents, 76.6%), whereas a small proportion is made up of females (22 respondents, 23.4). This is a large gender imbalance that indicates that juvenile delinquency as it is observed in the sample is more widespread among males; this is in line with what the world and the region at large depicts because boys are usually the ones most engaged in delinquencies than girls. The majority of the male respondents could be attributed to social, cultural, and environmental issues in Punjab including disparities in parental control, exposure to peer pressure, social pressure, and access to risky activities. This gender imbalance is important in understanding how to implement specific interventions since it will show how gender-sensitive interventions and prevention strategies should be implemented to ensure that the underlying factors leading to male youth delinquency are addressed as well as the vulnerability and protective factors peculiar to females.

Table 2: Age Wise Percentage of the Respondents.

Age Group	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
12–14 years	18	19.1%
15–17 years	46	48.9%
18+ years	30	31.9%
Total	94	100%

The table 2 data shows that age structure of the respondents used in the research on the causes and effects of juvenile delinquency in Punjab, Pakistan, reveals that most juveniles are between the 15-17 years of age with 48.9 percent of the research population belonging to this age bracket. The next ones are 18+ years 31.9% and the youngest 12-14 years which constitute 19.1. This trend indicates that the occurrence of delinquent behavior becomes more pronounced in the mid-to-late adolescent years, which is in line with international researches that show that peer pressure, identity formation, and exposure to risk risk factors are more

pronounced during the years. The large proportions of people age 18 and older indicate that the issue of juvenile delinquency in Punjab may continue through the early adulthood and its implication is that the gaps in the early intervention and rehabilitation programs exist. The fewer percentage of 12-14 years old would indicate that although the youths are less engaged, the early preventive care is essential to lessen the rate of delinquent behavior development as the youths advance to the late adolescence stage. In general, the statistics point to the necessity of implementing interventions and policy-based actions aimed at adolescents aged between 15 and 17 and also watch younger children in order to avert the evolution of delinquent behaviors.

Table 3: Educational Qualification Wise Percentage of the Respondents.

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
Primary	28	29.8%
Middle	34	36.2%
Matric	20	21.3%
No Schooling	12	12.8%
Total	94	100%

The table 3 data shows that educational level of respondents included in this study of juvenile delinquency in Punjab, Pakistan, demonstrates that most adolescents have only achieved primary (29.8%) or middle level (36.2%) education, while fewer have achieved completing matriculation (21.3%) and nearly thirteenth percent (12.8%) of adolescents have received no formal education. This suggests that very low educational attainment may be strongly associated where youth are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior in this region. Minimal theater of education can delay cognitive development, lower the knowledge of social constructs, and restrict opportunities for positive engagement in activities can increase vulnerability to negative peer influence, delinquent activities, and criminal activity. Also, low levels of education are often linked with weaker economic status, leading the youth to be more vulnerable to environmental stress factors associated with delinquency. These findings suggest the need for educational interventions, school retention initiatives, and community support systems as preventive interventions to address the issues concerning youth engagement in juvenile delinquency in Punjab.

Table 4: Family Type Wise Percentage of the Respondents.

Family Type	Frequency	Percentage
Nuclear	56	59.6%
Joint	38	40.4%
Total	94	100%

The table 4 data shows that family type data shows that 59.6% (56 out of 94) respondents belong to nuclear families, and 40.4% of the respondents (38) are from joint families. This indicates that, in Punjab Province, Pakistan, a larger number of juveniles

experiencing delinquency are reared in nuclear family settings where parents are less likely to provide required supervision, as may be afforded by extended family support in joint family systems. Therefore, it can be expected that nuclear families are often burdened with issues such as both parents working, less interaction with extended family members, and less time for the monitoring of adolescents' social activities, which might put juveniles at risk of bad company, observation of delinquency, or antisocial activities. On the other hand, children belonging to joint families-that is, where more generations are usually living together in the same house-enjoy additional guidance, social control, and emotional support; however, the proportion of 40.4% of delinquent juveniles from joint families shows that even familial conflict, neglect, or inconsistent discipline within these large households are also significant factors in juvenile delinquency. Overall, data indicates that even though family structure seems to be a significant area that influences adolescents in their behavioral roles, both nuclear and joint family environment has potential risk and protective factors influencing the causes and consequences of juvenile delinquency in Punjab.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics.

Variables	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)
Family Environment	3.62	0.74
Peer Influence	3.89	0.81
Socioeconomic Status (SES)	3.41	0.69
Educational Factors	3.55	0.72
Substance Abuse	3.12	0.84
Juvenile Delinquency	3.76	0.78

The table indicates that mean scores indicate that peer influence is the strongest factor among the respondents, with a mean of 3.89 ± 0.81 , which would support that juveniles' interactions with their peers play an important role in delinquent behaviors, perhaps through mechanisms like peer pressure or modeling antisocial behavior (Bhatti et al., 2022). In Pakistan, the emergence of juvenile delinquency is the result of a combination of social, economic, and psychological factors, including social discrimination, class inequality, urban-rural development imbalances, unemployment, illiteracy, and inadequate roles in the family and school systems (Jabeen, 2021). Among all influencing factors, the family environment is considered one of the most influential. Numerous studies have demonstrated a close link between family circumstances and children's involvement in criminal activities (Murtaza et al., 2021). Factors such as parental crime, overly strict discipline, parental neglect, physical and psychological abuse, lack of proper supervision, early childhood exposure to violence, early parental marriage, parental behavior, substance abuse, mental disorders, birth order, family size, family structure, parental education level, and family economic stability all have a crucial impact on the formation of children's behavior (Sajid et al., 2020). Juvenile delinquency itself is relatively high, with a mean of 3.76 ± 0.78 , which points out that delinquency is high among the responded population (Suryaningsi et al., 2022).

Family environment and educational factors show a remarkable influence, with a mean of 3.62 ± 0.74 and 3.55 ± 0.72 , respectively, indicating that weak supervision, guidance, and educational support can make a juvenile vulnerable to commit delinquency (Faizan et al., 2022). Socioeconomic status, with a mean of 3.41 ± 0.69 , suggests that low economic condition moderately contributes to juvenile behavior, reflecting tensions and reduced opportunities that children from a disadvantaged background may encounter (Malik et al., 2023). Researchers, experts, and policymakers agree that the family is a key determinant of juvenile delinquency. Characteristics such as antisocial parents, drug-addicted parents, or parents with mental illness significantly increase the likelihood of child delinquency (Ashraf et al., 2020). When parents exhibit antisocial behavior or substance abuse, children are more susceptible to criminal tendencies. Similarly, parental mental health problems create an unstable environment, increasing the risk of child delinquency. Peer influence is another major factor contributing to juvenile delinquency. Adolescents who associate with delinquent peers are more likely to engage in illegal behavior. Even adolescents with no prior criminal record may develop criminal tendencies after exposure to delinquent peer groups (Faraz, 2022).

Substance abuse, while showing the lowest mean among the variables, still presents a meaningful role, with a mean of 3.12 ± 0.84 , which indicates that involvement in drugs or alcohol contributes to delinquent activities. Collectively, these findings suggest that juvenile delinquency in Punjab is complex and influenced by a combination of social, familial, economic, and behavioral elements, with peer dynamics and family support emerging as the most critical determinants in developing and maintaining delinquent behavior (Rehman, 2023). Delinquent peers are more likely to be detained early and exhibit higher levels of aggression. A variety of social factors contribute to the development of violent or aggressive behavior (Azhar et al., 2025). When children experience academic failure or social exclusion, they often feel frustrated, leading to conflicts with parents, teachers and friends. Over time, these children tend to spend more time with other unruly peers exhibiting similar aggressive tendencies. Social factors such as poverty, living in chaotic communities, weak social support systems, inadequate supervision, exposure to violent media, and interaction with criminal peers all contribute to juvenile delinquency (Iqbal et al., 2025). Economic inequality is also closely linked to criminal behavior. Members of low-income families often feel deprived compared to wealthier groups.

Conclusion

The meaningful insights into the factors associated with juvenile delinquency. The mean score for juvenile delinquency indicates a relatively high prevalence of delinquent tendencies among juveniles, reflecting the seriousness of the issue within the study population. Among the independent variables, peer influence emerged as the most prominent factor, suggesting that association with delinquent peers plays a critical role in shaping deviant behavior during adolescence. The family environment and educational factors also showed relatively high mean values, highlighting the importance of family dynamics, parental supervision, and school-related experiences in influencing juvenile behavior. These findings suggest that weak family support systems and unfavorable educational environments may contribute significantly to the development of delinquent tendencies.

Furthermore, socioeconomic status demonstrated a moderate influence, indicating that economic constraints and social inequality may indirectly contribute to juvenile delinquency by limiting access to resources, education, and positive social opportunities. In contrast, substance abuse recorded the lowest mean score, though the relatively higher standard deviation suggests considerable variation among respondents, implying that while substance abuse may not be universal, it remains a significant risk factor for certain groups. Overall, the descriptive findings underscore that juvenile delinquency is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by social, familial, educational, and peer-related factors. These results emphasize the need for integrated intervention strategies focusing on family strengthening, peer group regulation, educational reforms, and targeted substance abuse prevention programs to effectively address juvenile delinquency.

Recommendations

- Community parenting education programs in positive discipline, effective communication, active monitoring of children's activities, and building emotional bonds should be formulated and widely disseminated by the government and NGOs. The programs should be adapted to the local culture and provided in community settings and schools.
- Access to free or subsidized family therapy and counseling services should be expanded to resolve domestic conflicts, marital discord, and parent-child relationships before situations reach a crisis point.
- Initiate community support networks for nuclear families to overcome isolation. This may lead to community-based parent-support groups and childcare cooperatives. Train teachers in positive behavioral interventions and restorative justice to help create a supportive, rather than punitive school climate that can lessen disengagement and alienation.
- Strengthen broader social safety nets and poverty alleviation programs aimed at the most disadvantaged families, given the fact that improving the general economic well-being of the household is a primary protective factor.

Note: This research article has been derived from my M.Phil. research thesis titled “Causes and consequences of juvenile delinquency in Punjab, Pakistan.”

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