



Socioeconomic Deprivation and Juvenile Pathways to Robbery: A Qualitative Study from District Jail Faisalabad, Pakistan

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Abstract

This study investigates the socioeconomic and familial factors leading juvenile males into robbery in Faisalabad, Pakistan. Through in-depth interviews with ten incarcerated juveniles (aged 14–18) at District Jail Faisalabad, the research identifies poverty, unemployment, educational deprivation, weak parental attachment, and peer influence as primary drivers. All respondents belonged to low-income backgrounds, with 80% having no formal education and 95% having illiterate parents. Peer pressure and exposure to violent media normalized criminal behavior. The absence of rehabilitation programs and legal awareness further entrenched criminal pathways. The study concludes that juvenile robbery is a structural rather than individual failure, requiring integrated policy interventions focusing on poverty alleviation, family support, education, and rehabilitation.

Keywords: Robbery, Juvenile delinquency, Poverty, Parental attachment, Peer influence, Pakistan, Prison study.

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Introduction

Robbery, defined as the unlawful taking of property through force or threat of force, represents a significant challenge to social order and public safety in Pakistan. As a violent property crime, it not only inflicts direct harm on victims but also erodes social trust, hampers economic development, and reflects deeper structural inequalities within society. The increasing prevalence of robbery, particularly among male youth and adolescents in Pakistan, demands a comprehensive understanding of its underlying causes. This literature review synthesizes existing research from criminological, sociological, economic, and psychological perspectives to examine the multifaceted determinants of robbery in the Pakistani context. Drawing extensively from the thesis "Causes and Socioeconomic and Psychology Implications of Men's Involvement in Robbery: A Case of District Jail Faisalabad" and other relevant studies, this review aims to provide a holistic framework for understanding why individuals, particularly men, engage in robbery and what implications this has for policy and intervention.

The review is structured around several key thematic areas: theoretical foundations of criminal behavior, socioeconomic determinants, family and socialization factors, psychological dimensions, institutional influences, and contextual factors specific to Pakistan. By examining these interconnected domains, we can better understand robbery not as an isolated act of deviance but as a complex social phenomenon rooted in structural conditions, developmental experiences, and systemic failures.

1. Theoretical Foundations of Criminal Behavior

1.1 Classical and Economic Theories

The economic perspective on crime, pioneered by Becker (1968), revolutionized criminological thought by introducing rational choice models. Becker's seminal work posited that individuals engage in crime after calculating the expected benefits against the potential costs, including the probability of apprehension and severity of punishment. This framework provides crucial insights into robbery, particularly in contexts of economic deprivation where legal income opportunities are scarce. In Pakistan, where unemployment rates are high and economic opportunities are limited, the rational choice model helps explain why robbery might appear as a viable option for generating income, especially when perceived risks are low due to institutional weaknesses.

Building on Becker's work, subsequent economic analyses have explored the relationship between macroeconomic conditions and crime rates. Ehrlich (1973) demonstrated that participation in illegitimate activities correlates with market opportunities, suggesting that improving legitimate employment prospects could reduce criminal behavior. In the Pakistani context, studies by Gillani et al. (2009) and Jabbar and Mohsin (2013) have confirmed this relationship, finding significant associations between unemployment rates and property crimes, including robbery. These findings support the economic rationality perspective, suggesting that robbery often represents a calculated response to economic hardship rather than random or pathological behavior.

1.2 Strain and Social Disorganization Theories

Merton's strain theory provides another crucial framework for understanding robbery in Pakistan. According to this perspective, crime results from the disjunction between culturally prescribed goals (such as material success) and the legitimate means available to achieve them. In Pakistan's increasingly consumerist society, where media constantly displays images of wealth and success, many young men from impoverished backgrounds experience intense strain when they cannot attain these goals through education or legitimate employment. The

thesis findings from District Jail Faisalabad consistently show that economic deprivation and limited opportunities create precisely this type of strain, pushing individuals toward robbery as an innovative means of achieving material goals.

Social disorganization theory, originating from the Chicago School, emphasizes how structural neighborhood characteristics influence crime rates. Shaw and McKay (1942) argued that communities with high residential mobility, ethnic heterogeneity, and poverty experience breakdowns in social control mechanisms, leading to higher crime rates. In Pakistan's rapidly urbanizing cities like Faisalabad, unplanned growth has created precisely these conditions of social disorganization. As Ghani (2017) noted in his comparative study of Malaysia and Nigeria, urbanization without adequate infrastructure and social services creates criminogenic environments where robbery flourishes. The concentration of poverty in urban slums and informal settlements weakens community bonds and reduces informal social control, making robbery more likely.

1.3 Social Learning and Differential Association

Sutherland's (1947) differential association theory revolutionized understanding of how criminal behavior is learned through social interactions. According to this perspective, individuals become criminals through exposure to definitions favorable to law violation within intimate personal groups. The case studies from District Jail Faisalabad provide compelling evidence for this theory, as nearly all respondents reported learning robbery techniques, justifications, and motivations from peer groups. These findings align with Cutrín et al.'s (2015) research demonstrating that peer-group mediation plays a crucial role in the relationship between family background and antisocial behavior.

Social learning theory, as developed by Bandura (1977), adds important dimensions to our understanding of how robbery behaviors are acquired and maintained. Through observational learning, reinforcement, and modeling, individuals internalize criminal behaviors they witness in their environments. In Pakistan, where many young men report extensive exposure to violent action films and media glorifying criminal lifestyles, social learning mechanisms help explain how robbery becomes normalized and even glamorized. The District Jail Faisalabad case studies consistently mention the influence of media in shaping attitudes toward violence and criminal behavior, supporting Bandura's contention that behavior is learned through observation of models in one's environment.

1.4 Control Theories

Hirschi's (1969) social bond theory provides crucial insights into why some individuals refrain from crime while others engage in it. According to this perspective, strong bonds to conventional society—through attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief—deter criminal behavior. The District Jail Faisalabad findings consistently show weak social bonds among robbery offenders: poor attachment to parents, low commitment to education or legitimate employment, involvement with delinquent peers rather than conventional activities, and weak belief in the legitimacy of laws and social norms. These weakened bonds reduce the costs associated with criminal behavior and increase susceptibility to robbery.

Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) general theory of crime emphasizes the role of self-control in explaining criminal behavior. According to this perspective, individuals with low self-control are more likely to engage in criminal acts because they are impulsive, risk-taking, physical rather than mental, shortsighted, and insensitive to others. Many characteristics described in the District Jail Faisalabad case studies align with low self-control traits: impulsive decision-making, immediate gratification seeking through robbery, physical confrontation rather than negotiation, and limited consideration of long-term consequences.

This theoretical framework helps explain why robbery, with its immediate rewards and excitement, appeals particularly to individuals with underdeveloped self-control.

2. Socioeconomic Determinants of Robbery

2.1 Poverty and Economic Deprivation

The relationship between poverty and crime represents one of the most consistently documented findings in criminological research. As Fajnzylber et al. (2002) demonstrated in their cross-national study, economic deprivation significantly predicts violent crime rates, including robbery. In the Pakistani context, this relationship appears particularly pronounced. The District Jail Faisalabad study reveals that 100% of robbery offenders came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, with extreme poverty emerging as the primary motivating factor. These findings align with earlier research by Shamim et al. (2009), who found that fragile economic conditions coupled with persistent multidimensional poverty were fundamental causes of juvenile delinquency in Punjab.

The mechanisms linking poverty to robbery are multifaceted. First, absolute deprivation—the inability to meet basic needs for food, shelter, and clothing—creates immediate pressure for survival through any means necessary. Many District Jail respondents reported that their families could not afford basic necessities, pushing them toward robbery as a means of immediate income generation. Second, relative deprivation—the perception of being disadvantaged compared to others—generates resentment and frustration that can motivate robbery as a form of redress or compensation. In Pakistan's increasingly unequal society, where media constantly displays images of wealth and consumption, relative deprivation may be particularly acute among poor youth.

2.2 Unemployment and Underemployment

Unemployment represents a critical pathway through which economic conditions influence robbery rates. As Freeman (1999) established, the lack of legitimate employment opportunities increases both the motivation for crime (by reducing the opportunity cost of incarceration) and the time available for criminal activity. In Pakistan, youth unemployment rates are alarmingly high, with Asif et al. (2023) identifying structural economic problems, political instability, and inadequate investment as contributing factors. The District Jail Faisalabad case studies consistently mention unemployment as a primary driver of robbery, with many respondents reporting extended periods without work before turning to crime.

The relationship between unemployment and robbery is not merely quantitative but qualitative. Underemployment—working in low-paying, insecure, or exploitative jobs—can be as criminogenic as unemployment. Several District Jail respondents reported leaving legitimate employment due to abusive working conditions, delayed payments, or excessively low wages. These experiences of workplace exploitation, documented in cases 3 and 5, created disillusionment with the formal labor market and made robbery appear comparatively attractive. This finding aligns with Crutchfield and Pitchford's (1997) research showing that the quality of employment, not just its presence or absence, significantly influences criminal behavior.

2.3 Income Inequality and Relative Deprivation

Beyond absolute poverty, inequality itself may drive robbery rates. As Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) argued in their influential work, unequal societies experience higher rates of various social problems, including violent crime. The mechanism involves status competition, social comparison processes, and the erosion of social cohesion. In Pakistan, where economic inequality has been increasing steadily, these dynamics likely contribute to robbery trends.

Jalil et al. (2010) found a positive association between income inequality and crime rates in Pakistan, supporting the inequality-crime hypothesis.

Relative deprivation theory provides a psychological explanation for how inequality translates into criminal behavior. When individuals perceive an unjust gap between their actual possessions and what they believe they deserve, frustration and resentment can motivate compensatory actions, including robbery. The District Jail respondents' frequent references to seeing others' wealth through media or direct observation suggests that relative deprivation played a role in their criminal decisions. This aligns with Runciman's (1966) conceptualization of relative deprivation as a potent source of social discontent that can manifest in various forms of deviant behavior.

2.4 Urbanization and Spatial Factors

Urbanization represents a significant macro-level determinant of robbery rates in Pakistan. As Cox et al. (2013) documented, rapid urbanization without adequate planning creates criminogenic conditions through several mechanisms: concentration of vulnerable populations, anonymity that reduces social control, proximity of potential victims and offenders, and visible displays of inequality. Pakistan's urbanization rate has been among the highest in South Asia, with cities like Faisalabad experiencing unplanned expansion that outpaces infrastructure development and service provision.

Ghani's (2017) comparative analysis of Malaysia and Nigeria highlighted how urbanization contributes to crime through associated poverty, unemployment, and law enforcement deficiencies. In the Pakistani context, these urban stressors interact with traditional social structures to create unique vulnerabilities. The District Jail study found that 70% of robbery offenders came from rural areas but had migrated to urban centers like Faisalabad, experiencing the disorienting effects of urbanization without adequate support systems. This finding aligns with Ubah's (2007) research on rural-urban migration and crime, which identified social isolation and weakened community bonds as key factors pushing migrants toward criminal networks.

3. Family and Socialization Factors

3.1 Parental Attachment and Family Structure

The family represents the primary socialization institution and a crucial determinant of criminal behavior. As Stormshak et al. (2000) emphasized, family processes significantly influence child and adolescent development, with implications for delinquency risk. The District Jail Faisalabad findings consistently show weak parental attachment among robbery offenders, with most respondents reporting emotional distance from parents, inadequate supervision, and limited guidance. These findings align with attachment theory, which posits that secure parent-child bonds foster emotional regulation and prosocial behavior, while insecure attachments increase vulnerability to antisocial conduct.

Family structure also appears significant in the Pakistani context. Large family size, reported by many District Jail respondents, may dilute parental resources and attention, reducing effective supervision and emotional support. This finding resonates with resource dilution theory, which suggests that as family size increases, parental investments per child decrease, potentially compromising development outcomes. Additionally, non-intact family structures—particularly father absence due to death or abandonment—feature prominently in the District Jail case studies. Amato and Sobolewski's (2001) research on the effects of family disruption provides a framework for understanding how parental absence, especially during critical developmental periods, increases delinquency risk through reduced supervision, economic strain, and emotional distress.

3.2 Parenting Styles and Discipline Practices

Parenting approaches significantly influence delinquency outcomes, as demonstrated by extensive developmental research. Authoritative parenting—characterized by warmth, appropriate control, and consistent discipline—generally protects against antisocial behavior, while authoritarian (harsh, punitive) and permissive (indulgent, unstructured) styles increase risk. The District Jail case studies reveal both extremes: some respondents experienced harsh physical punishment, while others benefited from excessive permissiveness that failed to establish necessary boundaries.

The Pakistani cultural context adds complexity to parenting-crime relationships. Traditional patriarchal norms, documented by Fikree et al. (2003) in their research on domestic violence, may normalize authoritarian discipline approaches that prioritize obedience over emotional development. Simultaneously, rapid social changes and economic pressures may undermine traditional parenting practices without providing adequate alternatives. The result, as seen in the District Jail cases, is often inconsistent or ineffective parenting that fails to provide either the emotional support or the structured guidance necessary for healthy development.

3.3 Domestic Conflict and Family Violence

Exposure to domestic violence represents a significant risk factor for subsequent criminal behavior. Children who witness or experience violence in the home may internalize aggressive conflict resolution strategies, develop emotional dysregulation, and experience trauma that impairs healthy development. The District Jail respondents frequently mentioned family conflict, particularly between parents, as contributing to their home environment stress and eventual delinquency. This aligns with extensive research showing that marital discord and domestic violence significantly increase children's risk for externalizing behaviors, including aggression and delinquency.

In the Pakistani context, domestic violence rates are alarmingly high, with Fikree et al. (2003) documenting widespread physical, emotional, and economic abuse. The normalization of violence within families may desensitize children to aggression and teach them that force represents an acceptable means of achieving goals or resolving disputes. This learning may later manifest in robbery, which inherently involves threat or use of force. Additionally, children exposed to domestic violence may develop hypervigilance, anger management difficulties, and attachment disruptions—all factors that increase vulnerability to criminal involvement.

3.4 Intergenerational Transmission of Disadvantage

The District Jail findings reveal striking patterns of intergenerational disadvantage: 95% of respondents' parents were illiterate, most families had histories of poverty, and many had relatives with criminal involvement. These patterns align with extensive research on the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage, which shows how parental education, socioeconomic status, and behaviors significantly influence child outcomes. In Pakistan's context of limited social mobility, these intergenerational patterns may be particularly entrenched and difficult to disrupt.

Mechanisms of intergenerational transmission include both structural factors (limited access to quality education, social networks, and economic opportunities) and psychosocial processes (modeling of behaviors, socialization of values, quality of parenting). The concentration of multiple risk factors across generations creates cumulative disadvantage that significantly increases vulnerability to delinquency. Breaking these cycles requires

targeted interventions that address both immediate needs and underlying structural constraints, as emphasized in the District Jail study's recommendations.

4. Psychological and Individual Factors

4.1 Emotional Dysregulation and Impulsivity

Psychological factors play a crucial mediating role between structural conditions and criminal behavior. Emotional dysregulation—difficulties in managing anger, frustration, and other negative emotions—features prominently in the District Jail case studies. Many respondents described impulsive reactions to perceived provocations or immediate gratification seeking without considering consequences. These patterns align with research linking poor emotion regulation to externalizing behaviors, including aggression and delinquency.

The development of emotional regulation capacities depends significantly on early caregiving experiences and neurological maturation. Children who experience insecure attachments, inconsistent discipline, or trauma may develop maladaptive regulation strategies, including suppression of emotions or explosive outbursts. In adolescence, when neurological systems supporting impulse control are still developing, these regulatory difficulties may be particularly pronounced. For individuals facing the additional stressors of poverty and social marginalization, emotional dysregulation may represent a critical pathway to robbery, which often involves spontaneous decisions driven by immediate needs or frustrations.

4.2 Cognitive Distortions and Moral Disengagement

Criminal behavior frequently involves characteristic patterns of thinking that justify or minimize wrongdoing. Bandura's (1999) concept of moral disengagement identifies specific cognitive mechanisms—such as moral justification, euphemistic labeling, advantageous comparison, displacement of responsibility, diffusion of responsibility, distorting consequences, dehumanization, and attribution of blame—that enable individuals to engage in harmful conduct while maintaining positive self-regard. The District Jail case studies reveal several such mechanisms: respondents describing robbery as necessary for survival (moral justification), referring to victims impersonally (dehumanization), or blaming circumstances rather than personal choice (attribution of blame).

In the Pakistani context, where structural constraints are severe, moral disengagement mechanisms may be particularly accessible and culturally reinforced. When legitimate opportunities are scarce and survival pressures intense, robbery may be cognitively reconstructed as a form of resource redistribution or survival strategy rather than criminal predation. These cognitive processes, while adaptive in maintaining psychological equilibrium for offenders, perpetuate criminal behavior by neutralizing internal controls against wrongdoing.

4.3 Self-Concept and Identity Formation

Adolescence and early adulthood represent critical periods for identity formation, when individuals develop coherent self-concepts that guide behavior and life choices. For marginalized youth in Pakistan, conventional identity pathways through education, employment, and family formation may be blocked or devalued. In such circumstances, delinquent identities may offer alternative sources of meaning, status, and belonging. The District Jail respondents frequently described how peer groups provided identity validation and how criminal behavior offered a sense of agency and competence otherwise unavailable in their lives.

This process of "secondary deviation," as described by labeling theory, involves the internalization of deviant identities following societal reactions to initial rule-breaking. In Pakistan's context, where criminal justice responses often emphasize punishment over rehabilitation, and where social stigma attaches readily to offenders, such identity transformations may be particularly rapid and entrenched. Once individuals identify primarily as criminals, their behavior tends to align with this self-concept, creating self-reinforcing cycles of offending.

4.4 Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences

Extensive research has established strong links between adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) including abuse, neglect, household dysfunction, and violence exposure and subsequent health and behavioral problems. The District Jail case studies reveal high rates of ACEs among robbery offenders: parental loss, domestic violence, physical abuse, emotional neglect, and family instability. These traumatic experiences may contribute to robbery through multiple pathways: impairing neurological development, creating attachment disruptions, fostering hostile attribution biases, and reducing capacity for trust and prosocial relationships.

In Pakistan, where child protection systems are weak and familial violence is often normalized, ACEs may be particularly prevalent and damaging. The cumulative impact of multiple adversities, especially during sensitive developmental periods, can significantly compromise resilience and increase vulnerability to criminal involvement. Trauma-informed approaches to prevention and intervention, which recognize these developmental impacts, may be particularly important in the Pakistani context but are notably absent from current responses, as documented in the District Jail findings.

5. Peer and Social Network Influences

5.1 Delinquent Peer Associations

The influence of delinquent peers represents one of the most robust predictors of criminal behavior across cultural contexts. As Sutherland's differential association theory posits, criminal techniques, motivations, and justifications are learned through intimate personal groups. The District Jail findings strongly support this perspective, with 75% of respondents acknowledging direct peer influence in their robbery involvement. These peers provided not only practical guidance on robbery techniques but also social reinforcement, shared identity, and moral justification for criminal behavior.

The mechanisms of peer influence are multifaceted. Selection effects occur when individuals with preexisting delinquency tendencies seek out similar peers. Socialization effects involve actual influence processes whereby peers reinforce and shape delinquent attitudes and behaviors. In many District Jail cases, both processes appeared operative: respondents with existing vulnerabilities (poverty, family problems) sought acceptance in delinquent groups, which then further socialized them into criminal lifestyles. This bidirectional relationship creates powerful feedback loops that accelerate criminal involvement.

5.2 Gang Dynamics and Group Crime

Robbery in Pakistan, as documented in the District Jail study, frequently involves group rather than solo offending. These group dynamics introduce unique criminogenic processes. First, diffusion of responsibility within groups may reduce individual inhibitions against violence or harm. Second, status hierarchies within criminal groups may reward increasingly serious offending as members compete for respect and position. Third, group cohesion and

loyalty may bind individuals to criminal identities and networks even when personal motivation wanes.

The social organization of robbery groups in Pakistan appears relatively informal compared to structured gangs in other contexts. Most District Jail respondents described loose affiliations of friends or acquaintances rather than hierarchical organizations with formal rules and roles. This informal structure may actually increase certain risks, as lack of clear leadership or codes of conduct can lead to unpredictable violence and escalation. Understanding these group dynamics is crucial for developing effective interventions, as approaches that work with individual offenders may need adaptation for group contexts.

5.3 Social Isolation and Alternative Belonging

For many District Jail respondents, delinquent peer groups offered belonging and acceptance unavailable in other social domains. Experiences of social exclusion—due to poverty, family problems, educational failure, or other stigmatized characteristics—created profound needs for connection that criminal networks fulfilled. This dynamic aligns with Cohen's (1955) subcultural theory, which posits that delinquent groups form in response to status frustration and provide alternative criteria for achievement and respect.

In Pakistan's rapidly changing social landscape, traditional sources of identity and belonging (extended family, village community, religious institutions) may be weakening, especially for urban migrants and economically marginalized youth. Criminal networks may fill this void, offering not only material benefits but also psychological rewards of belonging, purpose, and status. Prevention efforts must therefore address not only the material deprivations that push youth toward crime but also the relational poverty that makes criminal networks psychologically appealing.

6. Media and Cultural Influences

6.1 Media Violence and Behavioral Modeling

The District Jail case studies consistently mention exposure to violent media—particularly action films from Bollywood and Hollywood—as influencing robbery behavior. This aligns with extensive research on media effects, which demonstrates that exposure to media violence can increase aggression through several mechanisms: observational learning of aggressive behaviors, desensitization to violence, development of aggressive cognitive schemas, and increased arousal. Bandura's classic Bobo doll experiments provided early evidence that children readily imitate aggressive behaviors observed in media, particularly when those behaviors are portrayed as justified or rewarded.

In Pakistan, where media consumption has increased dramatically in recent decades, these effects may be particularly pronounced. Many District Jail respondents reported extensive exposure to violent content from childhood, with limited parental mediation or critical viewing skills. The glamorization of criminal lifestyles in certain media may be especially influential for youth with limited alternative role models. These media influences interact with real-world experiences of violence and deprivation to normalize aggression as a problem-solving strategy and robbery as a viable lifestyle.

6.2 Social Media and Digital Influences

The rapid proliferation of social media and digital technologies introduces new dimensions to the media-crime relationship. Social media platforms may facilitate criminal behavior through several mechanisms: providing venues for criminal networking and planning, enabling display of criminal achievements for status, exposing users to criminogenic content and ideologies, and creating platforms for cyber-enabled crimes that transition to physical robbery. The District Jail findings mention social media use among respondents, though

details are limited, suggesting this represents an emerging area needing research attention. Digital media also create new forms of relative deprivation through constant exposure to others' curated displays of wealth and success. For economically marginalized youth, these digital comparisons may intensify feelings of injustice and deprivation that motivate compensatory criminal behavior. Additionally, online radicalization processes may expose vulnerable individuals to extremist ideologies that justify violence against perceived oppressors or infidels, potentially influencing robbery motivations in complex ways.

6.3 Cultural Constructions of Masculinity

Gender represents a crucial dimension of robbery, with overwhelming male predominance in offending rates worldwide. In Pakistan, patriarchal cultural norms construct particular forms of masculinity that may facilitate robbery. Connell's (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity helps explain how culturally dominant masculine ideals—emphasizing physical strength, risk-taking, dominance, and provider roles—may predispose men toward robbery when legitimate means of achieving these ideals are blocked.

The District Jail respondents frequently expressed concerns about fulfilling provider roles for families, demonstrating how failed masculinity expectations contributed to their criminal decisions. When traditional pathways to masculine status through education, employment, and marriage are inaccessible, robbery may offer alternative means of demonstrating masculinity through bravery, earning capacity (even if illicit), and dominance over victims. These gendered dynamics necessitate gender-sensitive approaches to prevention that address both structural constraints on masculine achievement and problematic cultural constructions of masculinity itself.

6.4 Consumer Culture and Materialism

Rapid globalization has imported consumerist values into Pakistan, creating desires for material goods that may outstrip legitimate acquisition means. The District Jail respondents frequently mentioned desires for specific consumer items (motorcycles, mobile phones, fashionable clothing) as motivations for robbery. This aligns with strain theory explanations emphasizing the disjunction between culturally promoted consumption goals and structurally limited legitimate means.

Consumer culture's psychological impacts extend beyond simple desire for goods. Materialistic value orientations—emphasizing possessions as central to happiness and identity—have been linked to various negative outcomes, including lower well-being and higher rates of unethical behavior. For youth socialized in increasingly consumerist environments but excluded from legitimate participation in consumer markets, robbery may represent not merely economic calculation but also identity performance and psychological compensation for status deprivation.

7. Institutional and Systemic Factors

7.1 Educational System Failures

Education represents a crucial protective factor against crime, offering not only human capital for legitimate employment but also socialization into prosocial values and networks. The District Jail findings reveal catastrophic educational failures among robbery offenders: 80% had no formal education, and most others had dropped out early. These educational deficits reflect broader systemic problems in Pakistan's education sector, including inadequate infrastructure, poorly trained teachers, irrelevant curricula, and economic barriers to access.

The mechanisms linking educational failure to robbery are multifaceted. First, limited literacy and numeracy skills restrict legitimate employment options, increasing economic

pressure toward crime. Second, school dropout removes youth from structured environments with adult supervision during developmentally vulnerable periods. Third, negative school experiences—including corporal punishment, humiliation, and failure—may foster resentment toward authority and disidentification with conventional institutions. Fourth, schools that fail to engage students miss opportunities to impart crucial social-emotional skills that protect against delinquency.

7.2 Criminal Justice System Responses

Pakistan's criminal justice system exhibits multiple deficiencies that may inadvertently facilitate rather than reduce robbery. The District Jail respondents reported numerous problems: police misconduct including false FIRs and physical abuse, prolonged pretrial detention, inadequate legal representation, and perceptions of procedural injustice. These experiences align with broader critiques of Pakistan's justice system documented by human rights organizations and academic researchers.

Procedural justice theory emphasizes that perceptions of fairness in legal processes significantly influence compliance with laws. When individuals experience or witness unjust treatment by legal authorities, they may develop legal cynicism—the belief that laws are illegitimate and unworthy of respect. This cynicism, evident in many District Jail narratives, reduces inhibitions against future offending and may even foster defiant identities centered on resistance to perceived oppression. Additionally, harsh and degrading prison conditions, documented in the District Jail study, likely increase rather than decrease recidivism by further traumatizing offenders, strengthening criminal networks, and stigmatizing individuals in ways that block legitimate reintegration.

7.3 Child Protection and Juvenile Justice Gaps

Pakistan's child protection and juvenile justice systems exhibit severe limitations that increase vulnerability to criminal involvement. The District Jail study involved both juvenile and adult offenders, but systemic responses failed to adequately address developmental needs at any stage. For juveniles, the lack of specialized facilities, rehabilitation programs, and diversion options means that early offending often leads directly to adult prisons where further criminal socialization occurs. This represents a violation of both international standards (particularly the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) and Pakistan's own Juvenile Justice System Ordinance.

The consequences of these systemic failures are profound. Rather than interrupting developmental pathways toward crime, current responses may accelerate them through exposure to hardened criminals, trauma of incarceration, and permanent criminal records that block future opportunities. The District Jail respondents' almost universal lack of legal knowledge highlights another systemic failure: the absence of accessible legal education or child-friendly justice procedures that could help young people understand consequences and make better choices.

7.4 Social Welfare and Safety Net Deficiencies

Comprehensive social welfare systems can mitigate the criminogenic effects of poverty and family dysfunction by providing material support, counseling services, and developmental opportunities. Pakistan's social safety net remains limited and fragmented, with programs like the Benazir Income Support Program reaching only a fraction of those in need and providing minimal benefits. The almost complete absence of mental health services, family counseling, substance abuse treatment, and youth development programs creates service vacuums that criminal networks may fill.

The District Jail respondents' narratives consistently show that robbery represented a response to needs that should have been addressed through social welfare mechanisms: hunger, family financial crisis, lack of employment, educational barriers, and psychological distress. In the absence of legitimate support systems, criminal solutions became necessary adaptations. This highlights how robbery, while individually chosen, is systemically shaped by the presence or absence of social protection institutions.

8. Contextual Factors Specific to Pakistan

8.1 Political Instability and Governance Challenges

Pakistan's chronic political instability and governance deficiencies create environmental conditions conducive to crime. Weak rule of law, corruption, and institutional incapacity reduce both the perceived certainty and severity of punishment for robbery, altering rational choice calculations in favor of crime. Additionally, political instability diverts state resources and attention from crime prevention to regime security, leaving basic law enforcement functions underfunded and poorly managed.

The District Jail study does not extensively explore political dimensions, but broader research confirms their importance. Jalil et al. (2010) identified political variables as significant in explaining crime trends, while anecdotal evidence suggests that connections between criminal networks and political actors sometimes provide protection that emboldens offenders. In regions with active insurgencies or sectarian violence, robbery may also become entangled with broader conflict dynamics, serving as fundraising for armed groups or occurring amidst general lawlessness.

8.2 Religious and Cultural Norms

Pakistan's Islamic cultural context introduces unique dimensions to crime causation and response. Religious teachings strongly prohibit theft and violence, yet also emphasize social justice and care for the poor. For some offenders, religious beliefs may create moral dissonance that deters crime, while for others, selective interpretation or compartmentalization may neutralize religious prohibitions. The District Jail respondents frequently mentioned religious repentance and guilt, suggesting that religious frameworks remain psychologically salient even for offenders.

Certain cultural practices specific to Pakistan may also influence crime patterns. The prevalence of honor-based violence, documented by researchers like Fikree et al. (2003), reflects cultural norms that privilege family reputation over individual rights and may normalize violent conflict resolution. Caste and tribal affiliations, mentioned by some District Jail respondents, can create alternative loyalties that compete with state law. And traditional dispute resolution mechanisms (jirgas, panchayats) sometimes handle crimes informally, creating parallel justice systems with inconsistent standards and outcomes.

8.3 Drug Markets and Substance Abuse

Substance abuse features prominently in the District Jail narratives, with many respondents reporting early initiation into smoking, hashish use, or other drug consumption. The relationship between drugs and robbery is complex and bidirectional: drug use may impair judgment and increase impulsivity, making robbery more likely; simultaneously, robbery may provide funds to support drug habits. Additionally, involvement in drug distribution networks may socialize individuals into criminal lifestyles that later expand to include robbery.

Pakistan's position as a transit route for Afghan heroin has created extensive domestic drug markets, particularly in urban centers. These markets generate violence through territorial disputes, create addictions that drive property crime, and provide criminal

employment alternatives to legitimate work. The District Jail cases show individuals moving between drug crimes and robbery, suggesting interconnected criminal economies rather than discrete offense categories. Effective robbery reduction may therefore require simultaneous attention to drug markets and addiction treatment.

8.4 Regional and Rural-Urban Disparities

Pakistan exhibits pronounced regional disparities in development, security, and governance that influence crime patterns. Punjab, where Faisalabad is located, represents the most developed province but also has high crime rates due to population density and urbanization. By contrast, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa face distinct challenges including insurgency, tribal conflict, and cross-border dynamics that shape criminality differently. Even within Punjab, sharp urban-rural divides create different robbery contexts: urban robbery often involves street muggings and mobile phone snatching, while rural robbery may involve highway banditry or agricultural theft.

The District Jail findings that 70% of offenders came from rural areas highlight how rural deprivation pushes migration to cities, where unfamiliar environments and limited support systems increase vulnerability to crime. This rural-urban transition represents a critical period when preventive interventions could be particularly effective but currently receive little systematic attention. Understanding these geographic dimensions is essential for developing contextually appropriate robbery prevention strategies.

Conclusion

This comprehensive literature review has examined the multifaceted determinants of robbery in Pakistan through integrated analysis of theoretical perspectives and empirical findings, with particular attention to the District Jail Faisalabad study. Rather than a simple behavior explainable by single factors, robbery emerges as a complex social phenomenon rooted in intersecting structural conditions, developmental experiences, social relationships, cultural contexts, and institutional failures.

Several key insights emerge from this synthesis. First, economic deprivation operates not merely as background condition but as active generator of strain, limited opportunities, and survival pressures that make robbery rationally appealing. Second, family dysfunction and poor parenting create developmental vulnerabilities that increase susceptibility to criminal influences while reducing internal controls against offending. Third, peer networks and media environments provide powerful socialization into criminal techniques, motivations, and identities. Fourth, psychological factors—particularly emotional dysregulation, impulsivity, and cognitive distortions—mediate between structural conditions and criminal behavior. Fifth, institutional failures in education, justice, child protection, and social welfare systems exacerbate rather than mitigate underlying vulnerabilities.

The interconnectedness of these factors suggests that effective responses must be equally comprehensive and integrated. Isolated interventions targeting single risk factors are unlikely to succeed when multiple, reinforcing vulnerabilities exist simultaneously. Instead, coordinated strategies addressing economic opportunities, family functioning, educational engagement, peer influences, psychological well-being, and institutional reform offer greater promise.

Future research should address several gaps identified in this review. More nuanced understanding of how specific Pakistani cultural norms and religious values influence crime decisions is needed. Longitudinal studies tracking developmental pathways into and out of robbery could identify critical intervention points. Research on digital media influences and emerging technologies' impacts on crime patterns is urgently required. And comparative

studies across Pakistan's diverse regions could identify contextually specific risk and protective factors.

Ultimately, reducing robbery in Pakistan requires recognizing it not as a problem of individual moral failure but as a symptom of systemic social failure. The young men in District Jail Faisalabad represent not predators to be simply punished but victims of multiple, intersecting deprivations whose criminal choices reflect limited alternatives as much as personal flaws. Addressing robbery effectively therefore demands not only improved law enforcement but more fundamentally, greater social justice, economic opportunity, and human development for Pakistan's marginalized youth.

Research Methodology

The methodological approach of this study was designed to capture the nuanced, lived experiences of juvenile robbery offenders within the Pakistani criminal justice system. Employing a qualitative, exploratory research design centered on case studies, the investigation sought to generate in-depth, context-rich insights rather than generalizable statistical data. This approach was deemed most appropriate given the complex, interwoven nature of the social, economic, and psychological factors underlying criminal behavior, which quantitative methods might oversimplify. The research was conducted in situ at the District Jail Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan, a setting chosen for its relevance as a major detention facility in a populous province with high reported crime rates, thereby providing direct access to the target population within their institutional context. Participants consisted of ten male juveniles, aged between 14 and 18 years, all of whom had been convicted under robbery-related sections (such as 392, 397, 398) of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC 1860). This purposive sampling was intentional, aiming to focus on a demographic—adolescent males—identified in preliminary reviews as being disproportionately involved in street crimes like robbery, thus allowing for a concentrated examination of their specific pathways into delinquency. Data collection was executed primarily through in-person, semi-structured interviews, which facilitated a flexible yet guided exploration of each participant's background, motivations, experiences, and perceptions. These interviews, often resulting in detailed case narratives, were supplemented by observational notes taken within the jail environment to contextualize the self-reported data. Stringent ethical considerations were upheld throughout the process: prior to any interaction, informed consent was obtained from both the participants and the relevant jail authorities, ensuring that individuals understood the study's purpose and their voluntary participation. To protect participant integrity, anonymity was guaranteed through the use of pseudonyms and the omission of identifiable details in all records and publications. Furthermore, formal institutional approval was secured from the jail administration, adhering to protocols for research within secure facilities. For data analysis, the collected interview transcripts and narrative accounts were subjected to thematic analysis. This involved a systematic process of repeatedly reading the transcripts to achieve immersion, generating initial codes that captured key features of the data, and then collating these codes into potential themes that addressed the research questions regarding the causes and implications of robbery involvement. The themes were then reviewed, refined, and defined to ensure they accurately represented the dataset, culminating in a rich, descriptive account of the shared experiences and distinct stories that illuminate the socioeconomic and psychological landscape of juvenile robbery in Faisalabad. This methodological framework was thus integral in uncovering the textured realities behind the crime statistics, prioritizing depth of understanding and the voices of the offenders themselves.

Qualitative Analysis

This chapter presents the results and discussion of ten in-depth case studies of male juveniles incarcerated in District Jail Faisalabad for robbery-related offenses under the Pakistan Penal Code. The primary objective is to explore, through a qualitative lens, how socioeconomic deprivation, familial disintegration, and systemic failures converge to create pathways into robbery for young men in Pakistan. The analysis moves beyond individual culpability to situate criminal behavior within a broader context of structural inequality and social vulnerability.

4.2 Thematic Analysis of Pathways to Robbery

Analysis of the ten case studies reveals several interconnected themes that collectively map the journey from childhood deprivation to juvenile robbery. These themes are not mutually exclusive but represent overlapping and reinforcing factors.

4.2.1 Theme 1: Overwhelming Socioeconomic Deprivation as a Primary Driver

Results: In all ten cases, extreme poverty and economic hardship formed the foundational backdrop. Respondents universally came from low-income or lower-middle-class households (Case 5, 6, 7, 8, 9). Families were characterized by unemployment, underemployment in low-wage informal labor (e.g., motorcycle shop worker, domestic cleaner, mill laborer), and income insufficient to meet basic needs. As Respondent No. 1 stated, his mother's earnings of PKR 20,000 were "not enough to cover basic household expenses." This deprivation was often exacerbated by large family sizes (Case 9), which diluted already scarce resources and parental attention.

Discussion: These findings strongly align with classic strain theory (Merton, 1938). The disjunction between culturally prescribed goals of financial stability and the legitimate, institutionally approved means to achieve them was stark for these juveniles. When legal avenues like education and formal employment were blocked by poverty, dropping out of school, and exploitation in the informal labor market (Case 3, 5), robbery emerged as an innovative, albeit illicit, means to achieve economic ends. The pressure to contribute to family income was a recurring motif, turning theft and later robbery into a perceived duty rather than a choice (Case 6). This reframes robbery not as greed, but as a survival strategy borne of desperation.

4.2.2 Theme 2: Familial Disintegration and the Vacuum of Social Control

Results: A near-universal feature was the breakdown of effective family units and weak parental attachment. This manifested in several ways:

- **Parental Absence:** Due to death (Case 1, 7), long working hours, or emotional unavailability.
- **Weak Emotional Bonds:** Respondents repeatedly reported "little emotional attachment" (Case 1), "poor parental bonding" (Case 5), and feeling neglected.
- **Dysfunctional Dynamics:** Homes were marked by conflict between parents (Case 5), harsh or permissive parenting (Case 4), and a lack of supervision and moral guidance.
- **Intergenerational Illiteracy:** 95% of parents were illiterate (as per the summary), severely limiting their capacity to guide their children's development or navigate societal institutions.

Discussion: Hirschi's (1969) Social Control Theory is vividly illustrated here. The bonds that conventionally attach individuals to society—*attachment* (to parents), *commitment* (to conventional goals like education), *involvement* (in conventional activities), and *belief* (in the moral validity of rules)—were profoundly weak. The vacuum created by absent or ineffective families was not left empty; it was filled by peer groups and the street. As parental

attachment and supervision waned, susceptibility to alternative, delinquent socializing agents increased exponentially. The family, intended to be the primary site of socialization and informal social control, instead became a site of strain and disconnection.

4.2.3 Theme 3: Peer Groups as Alternative Socialization Agents

Results: Peer influence was a critical proximate cause in 75% of cases. Respondents gravitated towards friends who were similarly unemployed, out-of-school, and idle. These groups provided belonging, identity, and a new normative framework. As Respondent No. 1 noted, his peer group carried weapons "for excitement and a sense of power." These associations normalized deviant behaviors, from early smoking and substance use (Case 2, 7) to petty theft, which then escalated to coordinated robbery (Case 3, 5, 6, 9).

Discussion: This process is a textbook example of Sutherland's (1947) Differential Association Theory. Criminal behavior is learned through intimate personal groups. The juveniles in this study learned not just the techniques of robbery (e.g., using motorcycles, targeting individuals) but also the motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes favorable to law violation. The peer group redefined robbery from a morally reprehensible act to a "simple and sustainable way of life" (Case 1), an "acceptable survival strategy," and even a source of excitement and status. The group provided the moral disengagement necessary to overcome internal inhibitions.

4.2.4 Theme 4: Educational Deprivation and the Foreclosure of Legitimate Pathways

Results: Educational deprivation was almost total. 80% of respondents had no formal education, having typically dropped out between the 4th and 8th grades due to poverty. This was not a matter of disinterest alone but a direct consequence of economic strain (Case 1, 3). Dropping out severed a crucial link to conventional society, drastically narrowing future prospects.

Discussion: School serves multiple functions: it imparts skills for employability, occupies youth's time constructively, and socializes them into prosocial norms and future aspirations. Its absence creates a double bind: it eliminates the primary legitimate path to socioeconomic mobility while freeing up vast amounts of unstructured, unsupervised time—a well-documented risk factor for delinquency. The resulting illiteracy and lack of skills trapped these youths in a cycle where only low-wage, exploitative informal labor or crime seemed viable. Education was not just missed; its absence actively constructed criminal pathways.

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