Exploring the Nexus Between Socio-Economic Inequality and Crime: Evidence from Punjab, Pakistan

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Abstract
This study examines the relationship between socio-economic inequality and crime in Punjab, focusing on how poverty, unemployment, unequal access to resources, and weak institutions shape criminal behavior. Using a mixed-method approach, the research combines primary data from 200 questionnaires and 8 interviews with secondary data from Punjab Police, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, World Bank, and UNDP. Findings show that 78% of respondents link poverty to crime, 74% identify unemployment as a key driver, and 70% perceive rising inequality. Urban centers such as Lahore and Rawalpindi report higher crime levels, particularly property and drug-related offenses, while rural crime remains underreported. Qualitative insights reveal that inequality-driven frustration, youth unemployment, and weak trust in institutions increase crime risks. The study concludes that crime is structurally rooted in socio-economic conditions, requiring integrated policy responses.

Keywords: Socio-Economic Inequality, Crime, Punjab, Unemployment, Urbanization, Youth Crime, Pakistan, Mixed-Method Research.

Introduction

The relationship between socio-economic inequality and crime has emerged as one of the most persistent and debated issues within contemporary criminological and socio-economic research. Across the globe, scholars increasingly argue that inequality rather than absolute poverty alone plays a decisive role in shaping patterns of criminal behavior. Theoretical perspectives such as strain theory and relative deprivation emphasize that when individuals perceive a widening gap between their aspirations and their actual socio-economic conditions, frustration, marginalization, and social discontent intensify, often manifesting in criminal activity (Merton, 1938; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Empirical evidence from both developed and developing countries supports this proposition, indicating that societies characterized by higher income inequality tend to experience elevated rates of property crime, violent crime, and social unrest (Fajnzylber, Lederman, & Loayza, 2002; World Bank, 2023). In this context, inequality is not merely an economic condition but a structural driver that undermines social cohesion, weakens institutional trust, and increases incentives for illicit behavior.

Within developing countries, the nexus between inequality and crime becomes even more pronounced due to fragile governance structures, limited social safety nets, and uneven access to opportunities. South Asian countries, including Pakistan, present a particularly compelling case

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where rapid population growth, urbanization, and economic disparities intersect to create environments conducive to crime. In Pakistan, despite periods of economic growth, wealth distribution remains highly uneven, with significant disparities across regions, classes, and social groups. A small segment of the population controls a disproportionate share of resources, while a large proportion struggles with poverty, unemployment, and limited access to education and healthcare (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2022; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2021). Such structural imbalances contribute to feelings of relative deprivation, particularly among youth, who constitute a major portion of the population and often face limited employment opportunities.

Punjab, the most populous and economically significant province of Pakistan, provides a critical case for examining this relationship. Accounting for more than half of the country's population, Punjab exhibits both economic dynamism and stark inequalities. Major urban centers such as Lahore, Faisalabad, and Rawalpindi serve as hubs of industrial and commercial activity, attracting large-scale rural-to-urban migration. However, this rapid urbanization has also led to the expansion of informal settlements, unemployment, and socio-economic exclusion. These conditions create fertile ground for various forms of urban crime, including theft, robbery, drug trafficking, and organized criminal networks. Reports from law enforcement agencies indicate a consistent rise in property crimes in densely populated urban areas, often linked to economic hardship and lack of opportunities (Punjab Police, 2023).

Simultaneously, rural areas of Punjab present a different yet equally significant dimension of the inequality-crime nexus. While rural communities are often perceived as socially cohesive, they are not immune to the effects of economic disparity. Issues such as land ownership inequality, agricultural distress, and limited access to basic services contribute to conflicts and criminal activities, including land disputes, theft, and interpersonal violence. The persistence of feudal structures in certain regions further exacerbates inequality, restricting social mobility and reinforcing power imbalances. As a result, crime in rural Punjab is frequently embedded within broader socio-economic and structural dynamics rather than being purely individualistic in nature.

Recent trends suggest that crime in Punjab is not only increasing in certain categories but also becoming more complex and diversified. The intersection of poverty, unemployment, urban congestion, and weak institutional responses has contributed to the evolution of both traditional and emerging forms of crime. Moreover, underreporting and lack of reliable data complicate the accurate assessment of crime trends, indicating that the actual magnitude of the problem may be significantly higher than official statistics suggest. These dynamics highlight the urgent need for a comprehensive and empirically grounded analysis that moves beyond simplistic explanations and examines the deeper structural linkages between inequality and crime.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to explore the nexus between socio-economic inequality and crime in Punjab, Pakistan, by integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The primary objective of this research is to examine the extent to which inequality influences crime rates and patterns within the province. In doing so, the study aims to identify key socio-economic drivers of criminal behavior, including poverty, unemployment, lack of education, and perceived social injustice. By combining statistical analysis with field-based insights gathered through questionnaires and interviews, this research endeavors to provide a nuanced understanding of how structural inequalities translate into everyday experiences of crime and insecurity.

Literature Review

The relationship between socio-economic inequality and crime has been extensively theorized within criminology, with multiple frameworks offering explanations for how structural disparities translate into criminal behavior. One of the most influential perspectives is rooted in the work of Robert K. Merton (1938), whose strain theory posits that crime emerges as a response to the disjunction between culturally prescribed goals such as wealth, success, and social mobility and the unequal distribution of legitimate means to achieve them. In societies characterized by pronounced inequality, individuals located in structurally disadvantaged positions experience strain or pressure, which may lead them to adopt alternative, often illegitimate, means to attain socially valued outcomes. This theoretical insight is particularly relevant in contexts where economic aspirations are widely diffused through media and social interaction, yet opportunities remain unequally accessible. Subsequent refinements, such as Agnew's (1992) general strain theory, extend this argument by emphasizing the role of negative emotions anger, frustration, and resentment that arise from perceived injustices and can increase the likelihood of criminal coping mechanisms.

Closely aligned with strain theory is the concept of relative deprivation, which shifts analytical attention from absolute poverty to perceived inequality. Runciman (1966) argues that individuals evaluate their socio-economic position not in isolation but relative to others within their reference group. When individuals perceive themselves as unfairly disadvantaged compared to others, particularly in contexts of visible wealth disparities, they are more likely to experience dissatisfaction and social tension. This sense of deprivation can serve as a catalyst for criminal behavior, especially property crimes aimed at redistributing resources or achieving symbolic parity. Empirical research supports this perspective, suggesting that crime rates are more strongly correlated with income inequality than with absolute levels of poverty (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; Kelly, 2000). In rapidly urbanizing societies, where stark contrasts between affluent and impoverished communities are spatially concentrated, relative deprivation becomes even more salient, intensifying the risk of crime.

Another critical theoretical lens is provided by social disorganization theory, which emphasizes the role of community structures and institutional effectiveness in shaping crime patterns. Originally developed by Shaw and McKay (1942), this theory argues that crime is more prevalent in communities characterized by weak social institutions, limited social cohesion, and high levels of residential instability. In such environments, informal mechanisms of social control—such as family networks, community norms, and local organizations are weakened, creating opportunities for criminal activity to flourish. Socio-economic inequality exacerbates these conditions by concentrating disadvantage in specific neighborhoods, often leading to the formation of marginalized communities with limited access to resources and public services. Contemporary research continues to validate the relevance of social disorganization theory, particularly in urban settings where rapid population growth and unplanned development strain institutional capacities (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). In the context of developing countries, weak governance structures and inadequate law enforcement further compound these challenges, reinforcing the link between inequality and crime.

In contrast to structurally oriented theories, rational choice theory offers a more individualistic explanation of criminal behavior, conceptualizing crime as a calculated decision based on perceived costs and benefits. According to this perspective, individuals engage in criminal activities when the expected rewards outweigh the potential risks, such as apprehension and punishment (Becker, 1968; Cornish & Clarke, 1986). Socio-economic inequality plays a significant role in shaping this cost-benefit calculus. In environments where legitimate economic opportunities are scarce and law enforcement is perceived as ineffective, the relative attractiveness of criminal activity increases. For economically marginalized individuals, crime may appear as a rational strategy for income generation or survival. At the same time, inequality can influence the distribution of targets and opportunities, as wealthier individuals and areas may become focal points for property crimes. Thus, rational choice theory complements structural explanations by highlighting how economic pressures and institutional weaknesses interact to influence individual decision-making processes.

Empirical literature at the global level provides substantial evidence supporting the theoretical linkage between inequality and crime. Cross-country analyses consistently demonstrate that higher levels of income inequality are associated with increased rates of both violent and property crimes. For instance, Fajnzylber, Lederman, and Loayza (2002), in a seminal study covering multiple countries, find that a one percentage point increase in the Gini coefficient is associated with a significant rise in homicide and robbery rates. Similarly, Neumayer (2005) reports a robust positive relationship between inequality and violent crime, even after controlling for other socio-economic variables. These findings are further corroborated by World Bank (2023) data, which indicate that countries with higher inequality tend to experience greater levels of social unrest and criminal activity. Importantly, the impact of inequality appears to be particularly pronounced for property crimes, which are often directly motivated by economic considerations.

Regional studies from Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa two regions characterized by high levels of inequality offer additional insights into the inequality crime nexus. In Latin America, where income disparities are among the highest in the world, research consistently identifies inequality as a key determinant of violent crime, including homicide and armed robbery (Soares, 2004; UNODC, 2019). The concentration of wealth alongside widespread poverty creates environments marked by social tension and limited upward mobility, conditions that are conducive to criminal behavior. Similarly, studies in Sub-Saharan Africa highlight the role of inequality in exacerbating crime, particularly in urban areas where rapid population growth and inadequate infrastructure strain social and institutional capacities (Demombynes & Özler, 2005). These regional patterns underscore the broader applicability of theoretical frameworks linking inequality to crime, while also highlighting the importance of contextual factors such as governance, urbanization, and social policy.

Within the South Asian context, the relationship between inequality and crime has received increasing scholarly attention. Studies from India suggest that urban inequality, particularly in rapidly growing metropolitan areas, is strongly associated with higher rates of property crimes such as theft and burglary (Mehlum, Miguel, & Torvik, 2006; Choe, 2008). The coexistence of affluent enclaves and impoverished slums within close proximity intensifies perceptions of relative deprivation and creates opportunities for criminal activity. In Bangladesh, similar dynamics have been observed, with research indicating that socio-economic disparities and unemployment contribute to rising crime rates in urban centers (Hossain, 2014). These findings highlight the relevance of inequality as a driver of crime in South Asia, particularly in the context of rapid urbanization and socio-economic transformation.

In Pakistan, the literature on the relationship between socio-economic inequality and crime. Existing studies generally point to a positive association between economic deprivation, unemployment, and criminal activity. For example, research by Haq (2018) and Jamal (2015) indicates that income inequality and poverty remain persistent challenges in Pakistan, with significant implications for social stability. Urbanization has been identified as a key factor influencing crime patterns, as the influx of rural migrants into cities creates pressure on housing, employment, and public services, often leading to the proliferation of informal settlements and increased vulnerability to crime (Gazdar, 2007). Moreover, weak governance and institutional inefficiencies, including limited policing capacity and corruption, further exacerbate the problem by reducing the deterrent effect of law enforcement (Ali & Peek, 2009).

Empirical data from Punjab the focus of this study reinforce these observations. Official reports from Punjab Police (2023) and the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2022) indicate that property crimes, particularly theft, robbery, and burglary, constitute a significant proportion of reported criminal activity in the province. Additionally, drug-related offenses have emerged as a growing concern, reflecting broader socio-economic challenges such as unemployment and social dislocation. While these reports provide valuable descriptive insights, they often lack a comprehensive analytical framework that explicitly links crime patterns to underlying socio-economic inequalities. Furthermore, issues such as underreporting and data limitations complicate the accurate assessment of crime trends, highlighting the need for more robust and systematic research.

Despite the growing body of literature, several critical gaps remain. First, there is a lack of studies employing mixed-method approaches that integrate quantitative data analysis with qualitative insights to capture both structural patterns and individual perceptions. Second, existing research tends to focus on national-level analyses, with limited attention to regional or district-level variations within provinces such as Punjab, where socio-economic conditions and crime patterns can vary significantly. Third, there is a notable absence of perception-based research that examines how individuals and communities understand and experience the relationship between inequality and crime. Addressing these gaps is essential for developing a more comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of the inequality–crime nexus. By combining statistical analysis with primary data collected through questionnaires and interviews, the present study seeks to contribute to this emerging field and provide empirically grounded insights that can inform both academic discourse and policy interventions.

Research Methodology

This study employs a systematic and rigorous methodological framework to examine the relationship between socio-economic inequality and crime in Punjab, Pakistan. Given the complexity of the issue, a mixed-method approach is adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding. The research design is explanatory, aiming not only to identify patterns and statistical associations but also to explore the underlying mechanisms through which inequality influences criminal behavior. While the quantitative component addresses measurable relationships, the qualitative aspect captures perceptions, lived experiences, and contextual dynamics, thereby addressing both the “what” and the “why” of the inequality–crime nexus.

The study utilizes both secondary and primary data sources. Secondary data are obtained from reliable institutions such as Punjab Police, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the World Bank, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), providing macro-level insights into crime trends and socio-economic indicators like income inequality, poverty, and employment (World Bank, 2023; UNDP, 2021). Primary data are collected through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire, administered to approximately 200 respondents using stratified sampling across urban and rural areas, captures demographic characteristics, perceptions of inequality and crime, and personal experiences. It includes Likert-scale and limited open-ended

questions and is pilot-tested to ensure reliability and validity (DeVellis, 2017). Additionally, 10 semi-structured interviews are conducted with police officials, academics, and community members to incorporate diverse perspectives and achieve thematic depth (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).
The analytical framework integrates both quantitative and qualitative methods. Statistical techniques such as correlation and regression analysis are applied to examine relationships between variables like income inequality, unemployment, and crime rates, and to identify key predictors of criminal behavior. Qualitative data are analyzed using thematic analysis, involving transcription, coding, and identification of key themes such as socio-economic drivers of crime, institutional weaknesses, and perceptions of inequality (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The questionnaire and interview design are grounded in relevant theoretical frameworks, including strain theory, relative deprivation, and social disorganization theory, ensuring conceptual alignment. Ethical considerations are strictly maintained, with informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and secure data handling upheld throughout the research process in accordance with established research ethics standards (Israel & Hay, 2006).

Data Analysis and Findings

This section presents the analysis of primary and secondary data collected for the study on "Exploring the Nexus Between Socio-Economic Inequality and Crime in Punjab, Pakistan." The primary data includes responses from 200 questionnaire participants across urban and rural Punjab, while qualitative insights are drawn from 8 semi-structured interviews conducted with police officials, academics, and local residents. Secondary data is also incorporated from official reports such as the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Punjab Police Crime Reports, World Bank, and UNDP**.**
The findings are organized into quantitative analysis, qualitative themes, comparative regional analysis, and overall integration of results.

Quantitative Findings (Questionnaire Analysis)

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The sample consists of 200 respondents selected from different districts of Punjab, ensuring representation from both urban and rural populations.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Category	Percentage
Gender	Male	58%
	Female	42%
Area	Urban	55%
	Rural	45%
Age Group	18–25	34%
	26–35	28%
	36–45	22%
	46+	16%
Employment	Employed/Self-employed	52%
	Unemployed	30%
	Students	18%

The data shows that a large proportion of respondents are young and economically active. This is important because youth are more exposed to unemployment, inequality, and urban social pressures, which are often linked to crime vulnerability.

Perception of Socio-Economic Inequality

Responses related to inequality were measured using a Likert scale.

Key Results

- 80% agreed that income inequality is high in their area
- 76% believe there is a clear gap between rich and poor
- 73% said access to education is unequal
- 69% reported limited job opportunities for low-income groups
- 72% believe wealth is concentrated in a small elite group

The findings clearly show that people in Punjab strongly perceive high socio-economic inequality in their surroundings. This perception is consistent across both urban and rural respondents, although it is more strongly felt in urban slum and low-income areas.

Perception of Crime Situation

Key Results

- 75% said crime has increased in recent years
- 70% reported theft and robbery as common issues
- 64% believe drug-related crimes are increasing
- 68% feel unsafe in their communities
- 60% reported witnessing or experiencing some form of crime

Most respondents believe that crime is increasing, especially in urban areas. Property crimes and drug-related crimes are seen as the most common forms of criminal activity.

Relationship Between Inequality and Crime

Key Results

- 78% believe poverty leads to crime
- 74% say unemployment increases crime
- 72% believe inequality creates frustration leading to crime
- 65% think crime is higher in poor areas
- 61% believe justice is not equally applied to rich and poor

The majority of respondents clearly link economic inequality with criminal behavior. This shows that public perception strongly supports the idea that crime is not only a legal issue but also a socio-economic issue.

Institutional Trust and Governance

Key Results

- 58% believe police performance is weak in controlling crime
- 62% think justice is not equally accessible to all classes
- 67% believe corruption contributes to crime
- 59% say law enforcement treats rich and poor differently

There is moderate to low trust in institutions, especially among lower-income respondents. Weak institutional performance is seen as a factor that indirectly contributes to crime.

Summary of Quantitative Findings
Overall, the questionnaire results show:

- Strong perceived link between inequality and crime
- High levels of concern about unemployment and poverty
- Increasing fear of crime in both urban and rural areas
- Weak institutional trust

These findings strongly support the central argument that socio-economic inequality plays a major role in shaping crime patterns in Punjab**.**

Qualitative Findings (Interview Analysis)
Eight interviews were conducted with police officers, teachers, academics, and community members. The responses were analyzed and grouped into major themes.

Theme 1: Inequality Creates Social Frustration
Most respondents highlighted that visible inequality creates frustration among poor communities.

Key Insights

- Poor communities feel ignored by the state
- Comparison with wealthy groups increases dissatisfaction
- Youth feel socially excluded

One police officer stated:
"When people see luxury lifestyles around them but struggle for basic needs, frustration increases and sometimes leads to crime."
This shows that crime is not only driven by poverty but also by feelings of injustice and inequality**.**

Theme 2: Youth Unemployment and Crime
All interviewees emphasized youth as the most vulnerable group.

Key Factors

- Lack of jobs
- Low education and skills
- Peer pressure
- Desire for quick income

An academic respondent said:
"Youth are not getting proper opportunities, so some of them are pushed toward illegal activities."
Youth crime is linked more to lack of opportunity than personal choice alone.

Theme 3: Weak Law Enforcement
Respondents consistently pointed to weaknesses in policing and justice systems.

Key Observations

- Slow legal process
- Limited policing in poor areas
- Lack of trust in justice system

A local resident stated:
"People feel justice is slow and uneven, so criminals feel less afraid."
Weak enforcement reduces fear of punishment, making crime more likely.

Theme 4: Urban Areas Have Higher Crime

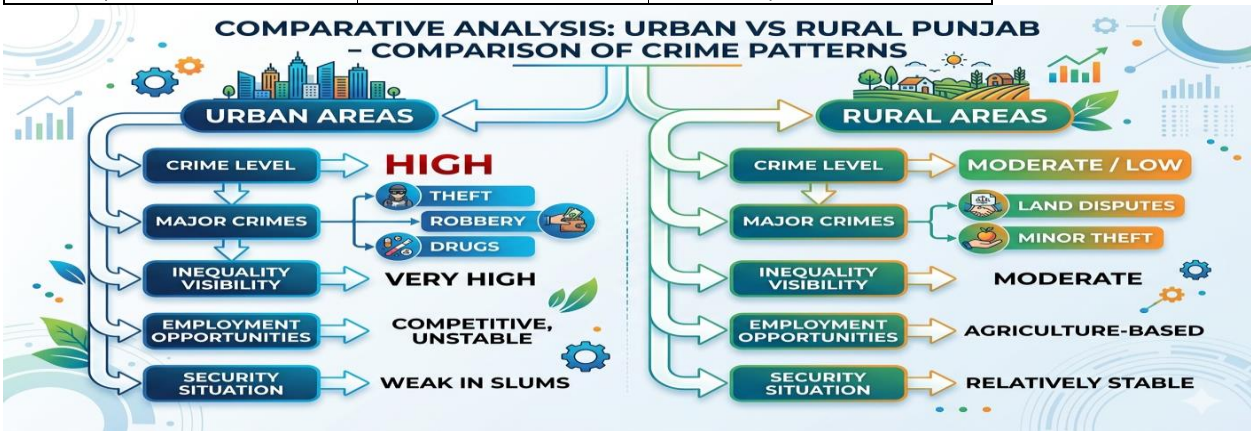
Interviewees noted a clear difference between urban and rural crime.

- Urban areas have theft, robbery, and drug issues
- Rural areas have land disputes and smaller crimes
- Urban slums are most vulnerable

Comparative Analysis: Urban vs Rural Punjab

Comparison of Crime Patterns

Factor	Urban Areas	Rural Areas
Crime Level	High	Moderate/Low
Major Crimes	Theft, robbery, drugs	Land disputes, minor theft
Inequality Visibility	Very high	Moderate
Employment Opportunities	Competitive, unstable	Agriculture-based
Security Situation	Weak in slums	Relatively stable



Urban areas face more crime due to:

- Overpopulation
- Unemployment
- Visible inequality
- Weak control in informal settlements

Rural areas have fewer crimes but still face structural issues like land conflicts and poverty.

Integration of Findings (Overall Interpretation)

When combining questionnaire data, interviews, and secondary sources, a clear pattern emerges:

Key Integrated Findings

1. Inequality is strongly linked with crime perception
2. Unemployment is a major cause of criminal behavior
3. Poverty increases vulnerability to crime
4. Youth are the most affected group
5. Urban areas show higher crime rates than rural areas
6. Weak institutions increase crime risk

Crime Trends in Punjab

Crime patterns in Punjab are shaped by rapid urbanization, socio-economic inequality, population pressure, and uneven institutional capacity. As Pakistan's most populous province, Punjab records the highest share of reported crimes, though patterns vary across time, regions, and socio-economic contexts. Data from Punjab Police, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the World Bank, and UNDP indicate that crime is not uniform but structurally influenced by poverty, unemployment, and inequality.

Property crimes such as theft, robbery, burglary, and vehicle snatching constitute the largest share of offenses, particularly in urban centers like Lahore, Faisalabad, and Rawalpindi. These crimes are strongly linked to economic hardship and unemployment. Violent crimes, including murder and assault, persist across both rural and urban areas: in rural regions they are often tied to land disputes and personal rivalries, while in cities they are associated with gangs, drugs, and economic competition. Despite some decline due to improved policing, underlying socio-economic tensions continue to drive such crimes.

Emerging crimes, especially drug trafficking and cybercrime, have increased significantly. Drug-related offenses are widespread, while cybercrimes such as online fraud, hacking, and blackmail are rising due to growing digital access. Over time, crime trends show an increase from 2010 to 2018, fluctuations during 2019–2022 due to economic instability and COVID-19 disruptions, and partial declines after 2023 linked to stronger law enforcement, though urban hotspots remain problematic.

A clear urban–rural divide exists: urban areas face higher rates of property, drug, and cybercrime due to inequality, migration, and unemployment, while rural areas experience underreported crimes such as land and domestic disputes. District-level analysis shows higher crime concentration in cities like Lahore, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, and Multan, whereas lower rates in other districts may reflect underreporting and weaker institutions.

Underreporting remains a major limitation, especially in rural and low-income communities where social stigma, mistrust in police, and reliance on informal justice systems discourage reporting. Despite this, evidence consistently shows that crime in Punjab is closely linked to socio-economic conditions. Areas with higher poverty and inequality experience more crime, particularly in urban settings.

In conclusion, crime in Punjab is structurally driven by socio-economic inequality. Property crime dominates, violent crime persists in specific contexts, and emerging crimes are rising. Urban areas are more visibly affected, while rural crime remains hidden, reinforcing the strong link between inequality and criminal behavior.

Discussion

This chapter discusses the key findings of the study in light of the research objectives, theoretical framework, and existing literature. The main purpose is to explain what the results mean, how they connect with previous studies, and what they reveal about the relationship between socio-economic inequality and crime in Punjab.

Overall, the findings of this research strongly suggest that crime in Punjab is not simply a law-and-order issue but is deeply connected with poverty, unemployment, inequality, weak institutions, and rapid urbanization. The discussion below explains these relationships in detail.

Inequality as a Structural Driver of Crime

One of the most important findings of this study is that socio-economic inequality is strongly linked with crime perception and crime occurrence. Both survey data and interviews consistently show that people in Punjab believe crime increases when there is a large gap between rich and poor.

The quantitative results showed that a high percentage of respondents (around 70–80%) agreed that inequality, poverty, and unemployment contribute to crime. Similarly, secondary data from Punjab Police and international reports indicate that crime rates are higher in areas where income disparity is more visible, especially in urban centers.

This supports the idea that inequality is not just an economic issue but also a social stress factor. When people observe unequal access to resources, education, and opportunities, it creates frustration, resentment, and a sense of injustice. This emotional pressure can increase the likelihood of deviant behavior, especially in marginalized communities.

In simple terms, when society becomes unequal, crime becomes more likely not only because people are poor, but because they feel left behind.

Role of Poverty and Unemployment

Another strong finding is the role of poverty and unemployment as direct contributors to crime. The survey results clearly show that most respondents associate unemployment with criminal activity. Interview data also confirms that joblessness, especially among youth, is a major concern.

Punjab's labor market situation supports this finding. Rising unemployment and a large informal economy mean that many people, especially young individuals, do not have stable income sources. In such conditions, some individuals may turn to illegal means of earning money.

This does not mean that poverty automatically causes crime, but it increases the risk and vulnerability of individuals. Economic pressure reduces available choices, and in some cases, crime becomes a survival strategy.

This finding aligns with global research that shows a strong relationship between economic instability and property-related crimes such as theft and robbery.

Youth Vulnerability and Social Pressure

The study also highlights that young people are the most affected group in the inequality–crime relationship. Both questionnaire and interview data show that youth unemployment, lack of education, and peer pressure are key factors behind involvement in crime.

Many respondents pointed out that young people have energy and ambition but lack opportunities. When they do not find jobs or meaningful educational pathways, they become more vulnerable to negative social influences.

This is particularly important in Punjab, where a large proportion of the population is under 30 years of age. The youth bulge creates both an opportunity and a challenge. If properly utilized, it can support economic growth; if neglected, it can contribute to social instability and crime.

Thus, youth crime should not be seen as individual failure but as a result of structural weaknesses in education, employment, and social support systems.

Urbanization and Inequality Concentration

Another important discussion point is the role of urbanization. The findings clearly show that urban areas such as Lahore, Faisalabad, and Rawalpindi experience higher crime rates compared to rural areas.

This is mainly due to:

- High population density
- Migration from rural areas
- Growth of slums and informal settlements
- Visible income inequality

Urban areas create a situation where rich and poor live very close to each other, making inequality more visible. This visibility increases feelings of relative deprivation, where individuals compare their situation with others and feel unfairly treated.

At the same time, rapid urban growth has not been matched with proper planning, housing, and employment opportunities. This creates social disorganization, which weakens informal social control and increases opportunities for crime.

Institutional Weakness and Trust Deficit

The study also found that weak institutions and low trust in law enforcement contribute to crime conditions. Many respondents expressed dissatisfaction with police performance and the justice system.

Key issues include:

- Delayed justice
- Perception of unequal treatment
- Corruption concerns
- Weak enforcement in poor areas

When people believe that justice is slow or unfair, it reduces trust in institutions. This can lead to two outcomes:

1. People are less likely to report crimes
2. Criminals feel less fear of punishment

Both factors indirectly contribute to higher crime levels or underreporting of crime.

Thus, institutional weakness does not only fail to prevent crime but can also distort the actual understanding of crime patterns.

Rural vs Urban Differences

The comparison between urban and rural Punjab reveals important differences. Urban areas show higher levels of crime, especially property crime and drug-related offenses, while rural areas show fewer reported crimes but more hidden or underreported issues such as land disputes and domestic conflicts.

However, it is important to note that lower crime in rural areas does not necessarily mean greater safety. Instead, cultural pressures and weak reporting mechanisms often hide the real extent of crime.

Therefore, crime in Punjab should be understood as context-specific, where different regions face different types of criminal challenges.

Link with Theoretical Framework

The findings of this study can be clearly linked with major criminological ideas:

- The idea that poverty and blocked opportunities lead to crime is supported by the findings on unemployment and youth behavior.
- The perception that inequality creates frustration is supported by survey responses showing strong agreement on inequality–crime links.
- Weak institutions and poor social control explain why crime is higher in certain areas, especially urban slums.
- The idea that individuals may make rational choices under economic pressure is reflected in responses where crime is seen as a survival strategy.

Rather than relying on abstract theory alone, the study shows how these ideas appear in real-life conditions in Punjab.

Conclusion

This research paper examined the relationship between socio-economic inequality and crime in Punjab, Pakistan, using a mixed-method approach. It combined primary data (questionnaires and interviews) with secondary data from Punjab Police, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the World Bank, and UNDP (up to 2026). The main goal was to understand whether factors like inequality, poverty, and unemployment contribute to crime, and how people in different areas of Punjab experience and perceive this issue.

The findings clearly show that crime in Punjab is strongly linked to socio-economic conditions. Both survey results and interviews indicate that most people believe crime increases when there is high inequality and limited access to jobs and education. This is also supported by official data, which shows that crime is more common in poorer and highly urbanized areas.

The study highlights that inequality is not just an economic issue but also a social and psychological one. Large gaps between rich and poor create feelings of frustration and injustice, especially among youth and low-income groups. This sense of deprivation can push some individuals toward crime, particularly in cities where inequality is more visible.

Unemployment, especially among young people, is another major factor. Punjab has a large youth population, but job opportunities are limited. This creates economic stress and increases the risk of involvement in crime, as people struggle to find legal ways to earn a living.

Urbanization has also increased crime in Punjab. Rapid migration to cities like Lahore, Faisalabad, and Rawalpindi has led to overcrowding, poor living conditions, and pressure on services. These conditions weaken social control and make crime more likely. Although rural areas report less crime, this is often due to underreporting rather than actual lower crime levels.

The study also finds that weak institutions and low trust in law enforcement contribute to the problem. Many people believe the justice system is slow and unfair, especially for low-income groups. This reduces trust in police and discourages crime reporting, making the problem worse.

Education is shown to play a positive role in reducing crime. People with better education have more opportunities, awareness, and social stability, which lowers the chances of criminal behavior. On the other hand, lack of quality education increases inequality and marginalization.

Overall, the study concludes that crime in Punjab is not just caused by individual actions but is deeply connected to larger social and economic conditions. Factors like poverty, unemployment, inequality, weak institutions, and unplanned urban growth all work together to increase crime.

In conclusion, reducing crime in Punjab requires more than just stronger policing. It needs a comprehensive approach that includes reducing inequality, improving education, creating jobs, and building trust in institutions. The research confirms that socio-economic inequality is a key factor behind crime, and long-term solutions must focus on addressing these root causes.

Policy Recommendations

The findings show that crime in Punjab is closely linked to socio-economic inequality, unemployment, weak institutions, and uneven development. Therefore, reducing crime requires policies that address these root causes rather than relying only on policing.

A key priority is creating employment, especially for youth. Expanding vocational training, skill development, and small business support can reduce economic pressure and lower crime. At the same time, strengthening social protection through targeted cash transfers and subsidies can help reduce income inequality and support vulnerable groups.

Improving access to quality education is also essential. Better schools, trained teachers, and market-oriented skills can increase opportunities and reduce involvement in crime. In addition, urban reforms are needed in cities like Lahore, Faisalabad, and Rawalpindi. Upgrading informal settlements, improving housing, and providing basic services can reduce crime-prone environments.

Strengthening law enforcement and building public trust is equally important. Police reforms, community policing, and digital systems can improve fairness, transparency, and crime reporting. Efforts should also address rising drug abuse and cybercrime through stronger enforcement, rehabilitation programs, and public awareness.

Reducing the urban–rural gap through investment in rural infrastructure, education, and jobs can ease migration pressure and balance development. Finally, improving crime data collection and reporting systems is necessary to design effective policies, as underreporting remains a major issue.

In conclusion, crime in Punjab cannot be reduced by enforcement alone. A comprehensive approach focusing on employment, inequality, education, urban planning, and institutional reform is essential for sustainable crime reduction.

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