DEMOGRAPHY AND PARENTING DOMAINS: THE REAL CULPRITS BEHIND DELINQUENCY AMONG JUVENILES IN CAMP JAIL LAHORE, PAKISTAN

Original Research

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ABSTRACT

Background: Juvenile delinquency is a growing concern in Pakistan, with the highest rates reported in Punjab. Identifying risk factors associated with delinquent behavior is crucial for implementing preventive measures and rehabilitation programs. Family structure, parenting behaviors, socioeconomic status, and educational background have been suggested as potential determinants of juvenile criminal tendencies. However, limited research has explored these associations in Pakistan. This study aims to examine the influence of social structures and behaviors while assessing the relationship between demographic variables and juvenile delinquency.

Objective: To evaluate the impact of disrupted parenting structures, family behaviors, and demographic factors on the severity and type of juvenile delinquency among incarcerated adolescents.

Methods: A cross-sectional, prison-based census study was conducted on 61 incarcerated juveniles at Camp Jail, Lahore, from August to December 2022. Eligible participants, aged 10-18 years, were enrolled after obtaining informed consent from jail authorities. Data were collected through structured personal interviews using a 46-item questionnaire. The responses were manually scored, with higher scores indicating greater delinquency severity. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS version 22, with linear regression assessing predictors of delinquency severity and chi-square testing associations between demographic factors and crime type.

Results: Among the 61 participants, 4 (6.6%) were aged 10-12 years, 18 (29.5%) were 13-15 years, and 39 (63.9%) were 16-18 years. A total of 17 (27.9%) juveniles had poor financial resources, while 44 (72.1%) had adequate resources. Nuclear family structures were predominant in 37 (60.7%) cases, whereas 24 (39.3%) belonged to joint/extended families. Educational background revealed that 41 (67.2%) were uneducated or school dropouts, and 20 (32.8%) were currently school-going. Crime type distribution showed that 19 (31.1%) juveniles were involved in murder or rape, while 42 (68.9%) committed other crimes, including theft, pornography, and drug-related offenses. The chi-square test indicated a significant association between age and type of crime (p=0.039), with older juveniles more likely to engage in gang-related offenses. Resource availability also influenced crime patterns, with juveniles from financially stable backgrounds being more involved in organized crimes (p=0.022). Nuclear family structures were linked to increased delinquency severity (p=0.010). The linear regression model showed that parenting structure score (β=0.234, p=0.050) and family behavior score (β=0.302, p=0.020) were significant predictors of delinquency severity (R=0.535, F=4.403, p=0.002).

Conclusion: Disrupted parenting structures and disordered family behaviors significantly contribute to juvenile delinquency, while other social factors, such as media influence and peer groups, showed no significant impact. Demographic factors, including age, financial resources, and family structure, play a crucial role in determining crime type and delinquency severity. Addressing these risk factors through targeted interventions can help reduce juvenile crime rates and support rehabilitation efforts.

Keywords: Crime, delinquency, demography, juvenile offenders, parenting, prisons, risk factors.

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INTRODUCTION

Juvenile delinquency, characterized by criminal behaviors and antisocial tendencies among individuals under the age of 18, is a pressing issue worldwide. Both developing and developed nations report increasing rates of juvenile crime, making it a global concern that demands urgent attention. Various studies have identified multiple contributing factors, ranging from family dysfunction and inadequate parenting to peer influence and socioeconomic conditions. However, the majority of research focuses on condemnation, disciplinary measures, and rehabilitation, rather than an in-depth exploration of the underlying causes that drive adolescents toward delinquency. Recognizing these root causes is crucial for developing effective preventive and intervention strategies (1). Juvenile delinquency laws vary across nations, reflecting different societal and legal perspectives on the age of criminal responsibility. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) sets 12 years as the absolute minimum age for criminal responsibility. However, Pakistan's Juvenile Justice System Act (JJSA) has recently raised the minimum age from seven to ten years, replacing the earlier provisions under Section 82 of the penal code (2-4). Despite such legal adjustments, the rise in juvenile crimes suggests that legislative measures alone are insufficient in addressing the problem. Delinquent tendencies often stem from deeply rooted familial and social influences, particularly parenting styles and household environments. Studies reveal that neglectful, abusive, or overly authoritarian parenting correlates with higher rates of juvenile crime, as children deprived of emotional support and positive role models are more likely to engage in deviant behaviors (5). Physical punishment, psychological abuse, and parental rejection exacerbate these tendencies, fostering aggression, defiance, and antisocial behavior among adolescents (6). Additionally, a lack of positive peer interactions further isolates juveniles, increasing their susceptibility to criminal activities (7).

The pathway to delinquency is rarely abrupt; rather, it follows a progression of behavioral and social disruptions. Initial signs may include defiant attitudes, school dysfunction, and academic decline, which often lead to peer rejection. Over time, these factors contribute to more serious issues such as substance abuse, association with criminal groups, and eventual adult offenses (7). Family structures also play a pivotal role in this progression. Dysfunctional families, parental absence, and poor familial relationships significantly heighten the risk of delinquency (8-10). Adolescents growing up in unstable environments, particularly in single-parent households with limited parental supervision, exhibit higher rates of criminal behavior compared to those raised in cohesive family units (11-13). Additionally, peer influence is a strong predictor of juvenile delinquency. Adolescents embedded in social circles characterized by delinquent behavior are more likely to adopt criminal tendencies, particularly in the absence of positive parental influence (9). Studies highlight that weak familial bonds, coupled with exposure to criminal environments, contribute to an increased likelihood of engaging in unlawful activities (14-17). Environmental and demographic factors also shape patterns of juvenile crime. Research from the United States indicates that delinquent behavior intensifies during late adolescence, particularly between 16 and 18 years of age, coinciding with decreased parental supervision and increased societal exposure (18-20). The age-crime curve further illustrates that criminal tendencies escalate in environments where community crime rates are high, social support is minimal, and economic conditions are unstable (21). Socioeconomic disparities further compound the issue, as studies reveal a correlation between poverty and higher crime rates, particularly in underprivileged urban areas (22-24). However, financial deprivation is not the sole contributing factor; crime also prevails in affluent communities where conflicts over resources and social disputes foster criminal activity (23). Another significant factor is academic performance. Poor educational attainment and school dropouts have been linked to increased recidivism, whereas continued education is associated with a reduction in minor offenses, though it has little effect on the severity of crimes committed (25, 26).

Despite the wealth of international research on juvenile delinquency, studies focusing on its demographic and parenting determinants remain limited in Pakistan. While global statistics indicate alarming trends—such as an estimated 424,300 juvenile arrests in the United States in 2020, with a 5% increase in assaults, a 3% rise in robberies, and a 1% rise in homicides—the situation in Pakistan remains underexplored (27,28). Males disproportionately contribute to juvenile crime, accounting for approximately 80% of arrests in the United States, with an estimated 7% of youth being involved in criminal activities (28). Given the lack of comprehensive local data, this study aims to investigate the demographic and parenting-related determinants of juvenile delinquency in Lahore, Pakistan, a city with a population of 13.97 million. By identifying the underlying factors that contribute to youth crime, the research seeks to provide insights that can inform policy reforms and intervention programs aimed at reducing juvenile delinquency.

METHODS

This cross-sectional study was conducted at District Jail, Lahore, Pakistan, from August 2022 to December 2022. The study included incarcerated juveniles aged 10 to 18 years who provided informed consent. Individuals younger than 10 or older than 18 were excluded from participation. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board, and permission was secured from the jail administration to ensure compliance with ethical research standards. The sample was collected using the census method, incorporating all eligible incarcerated juveniles. Before data collection, the research objectives, procedures, and confidentiality measures were explained to participants, and voluntary informed consent was obtained. Data collection was performed through structured personal interviews and a detailed questionnaire consisting of 46 items, along with demographic information. The questionnaire was designed to assess multiple dimensions related to juvenile delinquency, including family structure, family behavior, family environment, peer group influence, and media exposure. Each section of the questionnaire was manually scored, with higher scores indicating a greater severity of delinquent behavior. The dependent variable in this study was the severity of juvenile delinquency, while independent variables included family structure, family behavior, family environment, peer group influence, and media exposure.

Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS, with simple linear regression applied to examine the relationship between independent variables and the severity of delinquency. The model was assessed for fitness, ensuring that key assumptions were met, including the linearity of relationships and normal distribution of variables. The regression model demonstrated a good overall fit, with scatter plots and probability-probability plots (P-P plots) confirming normality. The findings indicated a significant relationship between disrupted family structure, disordered family behaviors, and the severity of juvenile delinquency. Additionally, the chi-square test of significance was employed to analyze associations between demographic characteristics and the type of crime committed. Crimes were categorized into two groups: severe offenses (murder and rape) and other offenses (theft, pornography, sodomy, and drug-related crimes). The chi-square test was also used to assess the association between demographic variables and delinquency severity. The delinquency severity score was categorized into two groups: low (≤ 30) and high (>30). Demographic factors included age, family type, school-going status, and access to financial resources. The results highlighted significant associations between demographic factors and both the type and severity of delinquency.

RESULTS

A total of 61 incarcerated juveniles participated in the study, with the majority (63.9%) falling within the 16-18 years age group, while 29.5% were aged 13-15 years and 6.6% were aged 10-12 years. Regarding socioeconomic status, 72.1% of respondents reported having good financial resources and pocket money, whereas 27.9% had low financial resources. Family structure analysis showed that 60.7% of participants belonged to nuclear families, while 39.3% were from joint or extended families. Educational status revealed that 67.2% were either uneducated or school dropouts, while only 32.8% were currently attending school. The distribution of criminal offenses indicated that 31.1% of juveniles were involved in murder or rape, while 68.9% had committed other crimes such as theft, robbery, pornography, drug abuse, and sodomy. The association between crime type and demographic characteristics was assessed using the chi-square test. The age category of 10-12 years exhibited a higher proportion of severe crimes, with 75% involved in murder or rape, compared to 25% engaged in other crimes. Among juveniles aged 13-15 years, 38.9% had committed murder or rape, while 61.1% were involved in other crimes. In the 16-18 years age group, 23.1% were involved in murder or rape, whereas 76.9% had committed other offenses. Socioeconomic resources also showed a significant association with crime type (p=0.022), with 52.9% of juveniles from low-resource backgrounds committing severe crimes compared to 22.7% among those with better financial resources. Family structure was another significant factor (p=0.010), as 50% of juveniles from joint or extended families were involved in murder or rape compared to 18.9% from nuclear families. Educational status also played a significant role (p=0.026), with 50% of school-going juveniles committing severe crimes, whereas only 22% of uneducated or dropout juveniles were involved in murder or rape.

The association between demographic characteristics and the severity of juvenile delinquency scores was also analyzed. In the age group of 10-12 years, 50% had a low delinquency score, while 50% had a high score. Among those aged 13-15 years, 38.9% had low scores, while 61.1% had high scores. The 16-18 years category showed a higher severity of delinquency, with 87.2% having high scores and only 12.8% having low scores (p=0.039). Socioeconomic status, family type, and education were not found to be significantly associated with delinquency severity, with p-values of 0.456, 0.120, and 0.702, respectively. The linear regression model demonstrated that family structure score and family behavior score were significant predictors of juvenile delinquency score. The model showed an overall good fit with an R value of 0.535, F=4.403, and p=0.002. The mean standard deviation scores for independent and dependent variables were

as follows: family structure score (5.870), family behavior score (3.939), family environment score (2.648), peer group score (9.712), media exposure score (5.148), and juvenile delinquency score (7.953). Among the independent variables, family structure score (β=0.234, p=0.050) and family behavior score (β=0.302, p=0.020) significantly predicted the juvenile delinquency score, while family environment, peer influence, and media exposure did not show significant associations.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Incarcerated Juveniles

VARIABLES	FEQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
AGE		
10 -12 YEARS	4	6.6%
13-15 YEARS	18	29.5%
16-18 YEARS	39	63.9%
RESOURCES		
low	17	27.9%
good	44	72.1%
FAMILY TYPE		
NUCLEAR	37	60.7%
OTHERS	24	39.3%
EDUCATION		
Uneducated or drop out	41	67.2%
School-going	20	32.8%
TYPE OF CRIME		
Murder or Rape	19	31.1%
others	42	68.9%

Table 2: Association Between Demographic Variables and Type of Crime Among Juveniles

VARIABLES	TYPE OF CRIME		X2	p-value
	Murder or rape (19)	Others (42)		
AGE				
10-12 YEARS	3 (75.0%)	1 (25.0%)	5.274	0.072
13-15 YEARS	7 (38.9%)	11 (61.1%)		
16-18 YEARS	9 (23.1%)	30 (76.9%)		
RESOURCES				
LOW	9 (52.9%)	8 (47.1%)	5.220	0.022*
GOOD	10 (22.7%)	34 (77.3%)		
FAMILY TYPE				

| VARIABLES	TYPE OF CRIME		X2	p-value
	Murder or rape (19)	**Others (42)**		
Nuclear	7 (18.9%)	30 (81.1%)	6.557	0.010*
Others	12 (50.0%)	12 (50.0%)		
EDUCATION				
Uneducated or Drop outs	9 (22.0%)	32 (78.0%)	4.931	0.026*
School-going	10 (50.0%)	10 (50.0%)		

Table 3: Association Between Demographic Variables and Severity of Juvenile Delinquency

VARIABLES	JUVENILE DELINQUENCY		X2	p-value
	LOW (14)	**HIGH (47)**		
AGE				
10-12 YEARS	2(50.0%)	2(50.0%)	6.504	0.039*
13-15 YEARS	7(38.9%)	11(61.1%)		
16-18 YEARS	5(12.8%)	34(87.2%)		
RESOURCES				
LOW	5(29.4%)	12(70.6%)	0.556	0.456
GOOD	9(20.5%)	35(79.5%)		
FAMILY TYPE				
Nuclear	6(16.2%)	31(83.8%)	2.412	0.120
Others	8(33.3%)	16(66.7%)		
EDUCATION				
Uneducated or Drop outs	10(24.4%)	31(75.6%)	0.147	0.702
School-going	4(20.0%)	16(80.0%)		

Table 4: Regression Analysis of Predictors of Juvenile Delinquency Severity

VARIABLES	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Family Structure Score	.317	.159	.234	2.002	.050
Family behavior Score	.610	.255	.302	2.392	.020
Family Environment Score	.016	.351	.005	.045	.964

VARIABLES	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Peer Influence Score	.063	.100	.077	.635	.528
Media score	.321	.190	.208	1.691	.096
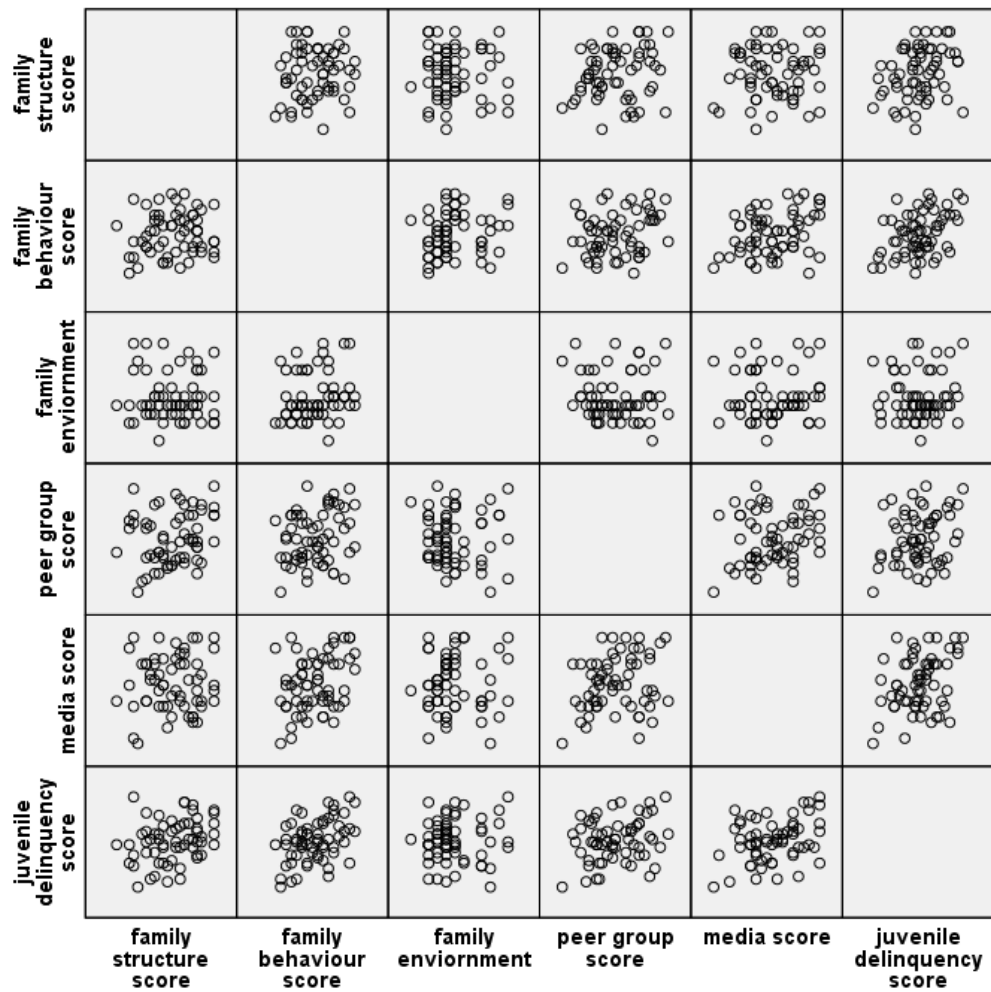
Distribution of Crime Types Among Juvenile Delinquents

Age Distribution of Juvenile Delinquents
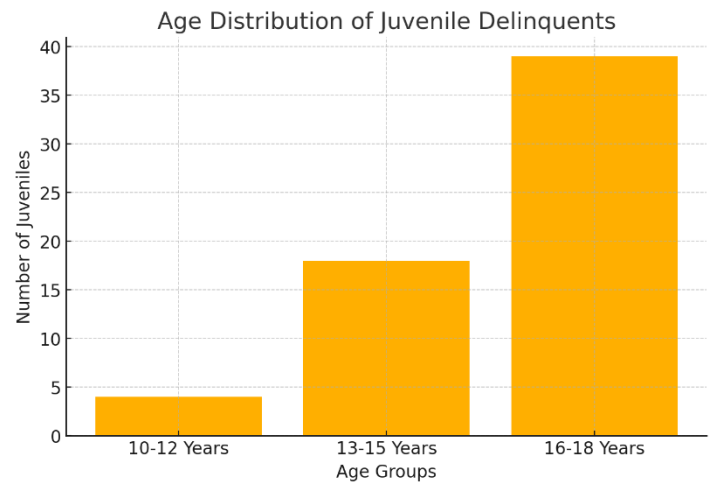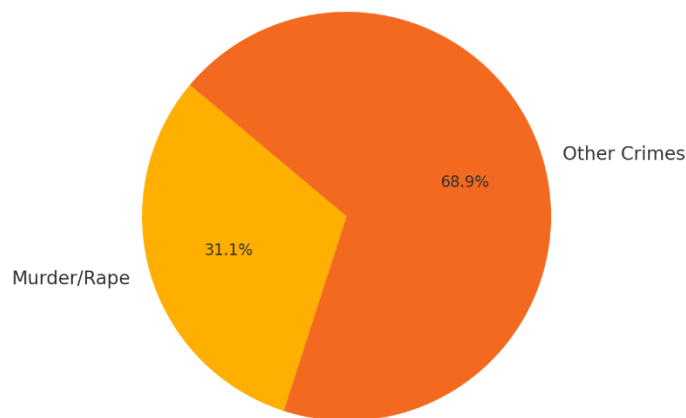
DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the significant association between disrupted parenting structures, disordered family behaviors, and the severity of juvenile delinquency. In contrast, other social factors such as negative peer influence, a hostile family environment, and media exposure did not demonstrate a statistically significant relationship with delinquency. Demographic variables exhibited distinct patterns in influencing both the type and severity of juvenile crimes. These results align with existing literature that underscores the critical role of family structure and parenting behaviors in shaping delinquent tendencies among juveniles, reinforcing the argument that early childhood experiences and family dynamics are crucial determinants of future criminal behavior (8,11). Age emerged as a significant factor influencing both the nature and intensity of juvenile delinquency. The analysis revealed that younger juveniles, particularly those aged 10-12 years, were more likely to commit severe offenses such as murder, often resulting from abrupt, innate criminal tendencies rather than social influences. With increasing age, the likelihood of engaging in gang-related crimes rose, highlighting the role of community involvement, family neglect, and exposure to criminal networks. This pattern is supported by the age-crime curve, which suggests that criminal tendencies peak in late adolescence due to a combination of social influences and increased access to delinquent opportunities (21). While some studies contradict this trend, indicating that youth crime involvement does not necessarily increase with age, the current findings are well-supported by existing criminological research. However, the limited sample size may have restricted the ability to capture variations in criminal behavior across different age groups (29).

The study further demonstrated a significant relationship between socioeconomic resources and the type of crime committed. Juveniles with limited financial resources were equally likely to engage in severe crimes such as murder or rape and in other offenses. In contrast, those with ample financial resources showed a higher likelihood of involvement in crimes requiring social capital, such as drug abuse, pornography, and other gang-related activities. Previous research has shown that poverty-stricken environments are linked to a broad spectrum of criminal activities, while access to financial resources does not necessarily mitigate delinquency but may instead shift its nature towards property or organized crimes (22). Although some studies suggest that social capital, when structured positively, can reduce crime, the current findings indicate that financial resources, when coupled with negative social influences, may facilitate access to criminal networks and illicit activities (23,29). Family structure played a crucial role in shaping delinquent behaviors. The results indicated that juveniles from nuclear families were significantly more involved in gang-related crimes, such as drug abuse and pornography, likely due to parental neglect and reduced supervision. Nuclear family settings, being more isolated, often result in weaker parent-child bonding, pushing juveniles toward external influences such as peer groups and media (13). In contrast, joint or extended family systems did not show a strong influence on crime selection, with an equal distribution of different crime types. However, due to the small sample size, definitive conclusions regarding the impact of joint family systems on crime propensities could not be drawn. Furthermore, nuclear family settings were associated with higher delinquency scores, reinforcing existing evidence that weak parental interactions contribute to the severity of delinquent behaviors (24).

Educational background also demonstrated a notable influence on juvenile delinquency. Uneducated or school dropouts exhibited a higher tendency to engage in gang-related crimes and delinquent peer circles. However, school attendance did not appear to significantly alter crime selection patterns, as school-going juveniles were equally involved in both severe and other crimes. The relationship between education and delinquency severity was less conclusive, as both school-going and dropout juveniles exhibited high delinquency scores, suggesting that educational status alone may not be a strong protective factor against severe delinquent behaviors (25,26). The limited sample size may have influenced these findings, necessitating further research to explore the role of education in crime prevention. Despite the established role of peer influence and media exposure in shaping adolescent behaviors, these factors did not show significant associations with juvenile delinquency in the regression model. While numerous studies suggest that negative peer associations and violent media consumption contribute to delinquent behaviors, the findings of this study do not support these claims (8,11). The possibility of underreporting or lack of direct measurement of these influences may have contributed to the observed non-significance. Additionally, social interactions and media effects may act as indirect rather than direct predictors of delinquency, which the current statistical model may not have fully captured.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature by providing empirical evidence on the influence of family structure, parenting behaviors, and socioeconomic factors on juvenile delinquency. The research model offers a statistical foundation for identifying key socio-demographic barriers associated with severe crimes and high delinquency scores. However, the study has certain limitations, including a small sample size, single-location data collection, and the exclusion of gender-based analysis, which may have influenced the generalizability of the findings. Future research should incorporate larger sample sizes, multiple study locations, and a gender-based perspective to provide a more comprehensive understanding of juvenile delinquency patterns. Additionally, advanced statistical models incorporating multiple independent variables could enhance the predictive accuracy of the study and provide deeper insights into the complex interplay between family, social, and environmental influences. The findings of this research have significant implications for juvenile justice policies, legal frameworks, and youth rehabilitation programs in Pakistan. By identifying the role of family disruptions and parenting deficiencies in fostering delinquency, policymakers can design targeted interventions focusing on family strengthening programs, parental education, and social reintegration strategies. Furthermore, allocating national resources to address youth crime prevention through education, community engagement, and structured social support systems could play a pivotal role in mitigating juvenile delinquency and promoting positive youth development.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that disrupted parenting structures and disordered family behaviors play a crucial role in fostering juvenile delinquency. Factors such as increasing age, socioeconomic limitations, lack of education, and nuclear family settings further contribute to delinquent behaviors and influence the nature of crimes committed. The findings underscore the importance of strong familial bonds, structured parenting, and socio-educational support in mitigating juvenile delinquency. Addressing these root causes through targeted interventions, youth rehabilitation programs, and community-based preventive strategies can help reduce juvenile crime rates and promote positive adolescent development. The study highlights the need for policy reforms that emphasize family engagement, social integration, and educational opportunities to create a supportive environment that deters delinquent behaviors and fosters a law-abiding youth population.

Author Contribution

Author	Contribution
Kashaf Fatima	Substantial Contribution to study design, analysis, acquisition of Data Manuscript Writing Has given Final Approval of the version to be published
Saima Naz Mohsin	Substantial Contribution to study design, acquisition and interpretation of Data Critical Review and Manuscript Writing Has given Final Approval of the version to be published
Haleema Sadia	Substantial Contribution to acquisition and interpretation of Data Has given Final Approval of the version to be published
Fatima Asim	Contributed to Data Collection and Analysis Has given Final Approval of the version to be published
Ali Husnain	Contributed to Data Collection and Analysis Has given Final Approval of the version to be published
M Sohaib	Substantial Contribution to study design and Data Analysis Has given Final Approval of the version to be published
Ayesha Hamayun	Contributed to study concept and Data collection Has given Final Approval of the version to be published

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