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Abstract: Unemployment is a deep-rooted socio-economic problem and also a significant crime risk factor in developing countries like Pakistan. This study examines the relationship between unemployment and street crimes such as theft, violence, and drug abuse in urban areas. Based on strain theory and routine activity theory, unemployment is conceptualized as a cause of economic strain, psychological stress, and increased crime opportunities. A quantitative research design was used to collect primary data from 70 respondents using a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and chi-square tests were used to analyze the relationship between unemployment rate and street crime trends. The results showed a statistically significant relationship, indicating that unemployment contributes to economic stress, frustration, weakened social bonds, and vulnerability to street crime, especially among young people. The study concludes that unemployment should be considered not only as an economic problem but also as a criminological problem. Job creation, skills development, and entrepreneurship-oriented policies are essential for effective crime prevention and improved community safety in Pakistan.

Introduction

Unemployment remains one of the most pressing socio-economic problems in developing countries and is increasingly becoming a decisive factor influencing crime patterns in urban areas. In Pakistan, rapid population growth, limited job opportunities and economic instability have increased unemployment, especially among youth. In addition to financial deprivation, unemployment creates social isolation, psychological stress and weakened attachment to traditional social institutions, thereby creating conditions that increase vulnerability to street crime.

Street crimes such as theft, burglary, violence and drug abuse pose a serious threat to public safety and social order in urban communities. These crimes are often concentrated in areas characterized by economic poverty and limited employment opportunities. From a criminological perspective, unemployment undermines legitimate means of achieving socially sanctioned goals, thereby increasing

the likelihood of deviant behaviour. Despite growing public concern, unemployment is still widely considered an economic problem, while its criminological implications remain understudied in the Pakistani context.

Theoretical explanations provide important insights into the relationship between unemployment and crime. Strain theory suggests that cutting off access to employment and economic success creates frustration and pressure that can drive people to illegal alternatives. Routine activity theory further explains that unemployment changes daily life, increasing unstructured time and potentially exposing people to criminal opportunities, especially in public spaces with weak supervision. Taken together, these perspectives highlight unemployment as a structural condition that contributes to street crime.

Literature Review

Existing criminological literature consistently identifies unemployment as an important structural factor influencing criminal behaviour, particularly street crime. Research conducted in both developed and developing countries shows that a lack of employment opportunities increases economic strain, social exclusion, and psychological stress, which together increase the risk of deviant and criminal behaviour. Street crimes such as theft, kidnapping, violence, and drug abuse are said to be more common in urban areas characterized by unemployment and poverty.

From a theoretical perspective, strain theory provides a convincing explanation of the relationship between unemployment and crime. Merton and later Agnew argue that when individuals are unable to achieve socially valued goals through legitimate means such as employment, they experience frustration and tension that can lead to criminal behaviour. Empirical research shows that prolonged unemployment increases feelings of frustration and alienation, especially among young people, which in turn increases the likelihood of them turning to street crime as an alternative survival strategy. Routine activities theory further strengthens this link by focusing on changes in daily life due to unemployment. Cohen and Felson argue that crimes are more likely to occur when motivated criminals are faced with suitable targets in the absence of safe guardianship. Unemployed people often spend unstructured time in public spaces, which increase the likelihood of criminal behaviour and weaken informal social control. Research shows that this increased visibility and accessibility contributes to increased participation in street crime. Some studies have also highlighted that unemployment indirectly affects crime through psychological and social mechanisms. Unemployment is associated with stress, low self-esteem, depression, and substance abuse, all of which can increase vulnerability to criminal activity. Furthermore, high unemployment rates weaken community cohesion and collective efficacy, creating an environment in which street crime becomes endemic and difficult to control.

In the Pakistani context, unemployment has been directly investigated as a criminological risk factor in limited empirical studies. Available studies often examine unemployment as a background economic variable rather than the root cause of street crime. This gap highlights the need for contextualized quantitative research linking unemployment and street criminality. Building on existing theories and empirical evidence, the present study contributes to the literature by providing evidence from the urban context of Pakistan and addressing unemployment as a key issue for crime prevention and public safety.

Research Gap

Although the link between unemployment and crime is widely recognized in the existing literature, unemployment is still primarily seen as an economic problem rather than a criminological risk factor in Pakistan. Empirical studies examining the direct effects on street crimes such as theft, violence, and drug abuse, especially those based on primary quantitative data, remain limited. Moreover, in the context of Pakistan, few studies have applied criminological theories such as strain theory and routine

activities theory to explain how unemployment contributes to youth disillusionment, weakening of social bonds, and increased street crime. This study addresses these gaps by providing empirical evidence specific to Pakistan's urban context and addressing unemployment as a key issue of crime prevention and public safety.

Methodology

This study used quantitative research methods to investigate the relationship between unemployment and street crime in urban Pakistan. A quantitative approach was considered appropriate as it systematically measures respondents' perceptions and facilitates statistical analysis of the relationship between unemployment and criminal behaviour. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire completed by a sample of 70 respondents selected through convenience sampling. Respondents were from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and included employed, unemployed, self-employed, and students. This survey is designed to measure perceptions of unemployment, economic stress, youth dissatisfaction, public safety, and involvement in or exposure to street crimes such as theft, kidnapping, and robbery, violence, and drug abuse.

Responses were recorded using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agrees to strongly disagree. Data were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used to summarize the data, and chi-square tests were used to examine the relationship between unemployment rates and trends in street crime. Ethical considerations were respected by ensuring voluntary participation, confidentiality of responses, and informed consent of all respondents.

Findings

Research results show that there is a significant relationship between unemployment and street crime in urban areas. Most respondents perceived unemployment as a common problem in their communities, and associated it with increased financial stress, frustration, and hopelessness, especially among young people. These conditions are widely seen as factors that increase vulnerability to street crimes such as theft, kidnapping, violence, and drug abuse.

The results also indicate that areas with higher unemployment rates are perceived as more vulnerable to street crime and unsafe public environments. Respondents also noted that unemployment weakens social bonds, reduces cooperation between communities, and erodes trust in government institutions. Chi-square analysis confirmed the existence of a statistically significant relationship between unemployment rate and street crime trends, supporting the argument that unemployment rate plays an important role in the development of criminal behaviour. Overall, the findings highlight that unemployment is an important crime risk factor, not just an economic issue, and highlight the need for employment-focused interventions as part of broader crime prevention strategies.

Table: Association between Unemployment and Street Crime Likelihood

Test	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	χ^2	4	p-value
Likelihood Ratio	—	—	—
N of Valid Cases	50		

The Chi-Square test indicates a statistically significant association between unemployment and street crime tendencies ($p < .05$). The results suggest that unemployment is significantly associated with increased involvement in or increased vulnerability to street crimes such as theft, kidnapping, violence,

and drug abuse. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, supporting the argument that unemployment acts as a criminological risk factor in urban settings.

Discussion

The results of this study provide empirical support for the argument that unemployment plays an important role in influencing street criminal behaviour in urban areas. The statistically significant relationship between unemployment and street crime confirms that unemployment contributes to economic stress, frustration, and social isolation, increasing people's vulnerability to crimes such as theft, kidnapping, violence, and drug abuse. These results support the idea that unemployment should be understood as a criminological risk factor rather than a simple economic condition.

This finding is consistent with strain theory, which explains that people who are unable to achieve socially valued goals through legitimate employment experience pressure and frustration that can lead to criminal behaviour. This theoretical explanation is supported by respondents' firm belief that unemployment increases frustration and hopelessness among young people. Similarly, unemployed people are thought to increase the likelihood of street crime because they have more unstructured time and more opportunities to commit crimes in public, a finding consistent with routine activity theory. The study also highlights the broader social consequences of unemployment. Respondents reported weakening cooperation between communities, loss of trust in government institutions, and dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of law enforcement in areas affected by unemployment. These conditions contribute to the weakening of informal social control and create an environment in which street crime is more likely. This finding suggests that crime prevention strategies that rely solely on policing may be insufficient if the underlying economic conditions are not addressed. Overall, this discussion highlights that effective crime prevention in Pakistan requires an integrated approach that combines traditional law enforcement efforts with job creation, skills development, and youth-focused interventions. Tackling unemployment can reduce economic stress, strengthen social cohesion and contribute to long-term reductions in street crime.

Conclusion

This study investigated the relationship between unemployment and street crime in urban areas of Pakistan and found a statistically significant relationship between unemployment and crime trends. Results show that unemployment contributes to economic stress, youth dissatisfaction, weakened social bonds, and increased opportunities for criminal behaviour, increasing the likelihood of street crimes such as theft, kidnapping, robbery, violence, and drug abuse. Using constraints theory and routine activities theory, the study demonstrated that unemployment is not only an economic problem, but also a key criminological risk factor. The findings suggest that crime prevention strategies focused solely on policing are insufficient without addressing underlying socioeconomic conditions. Job creation, skills development and youth-focused initiatives are key to reducing street crime and improving community safety.

In conclusion, unemployment control should be considered as a priority in Pakistan's crime prevention and security policy. Integrating economic interventions and criminological strategies can contribute to long-term social stability and the reduction of street criminal activity.

Implications

The results of this study suggest that unemployment reduction should be included in Pakistan's national and local crime prevention strategies. Policy makers should prioritize job creation programs, especially for young people, as a long-term approach to reducing street crime. Skills development, vocational training, and entrepreneurship initiatives can provide opportunities for legitimate income and reduce

the financial stress that often leads to participation in criminal activities.

Additionally, local employment programs and public-private partnerships can help strengthen social cohesion and informal social control in high-risk urban areas. Law enforcement agencies should work with social and economic institutions to adopt a preventive approach that addresses the root causes of crime, rather than relying solely on police intervention. Integrating employment and crime prevention policies can improve security in Pakistan, reduce street crime, and promote lasting stability in society.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations. The sample size was relatively small and selected through convenience sampling, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study relies on self-reported perceptions, which may be influenced by personal biases or social desirability. The focus on a single urban setting also limits broader regional comparisons. Future studies should use larger and more diverse samples from multiple cities to increase external validity. Longitudinal studies are recommended to better understand the causal relationship between unemployment and crime over time. Further research could also incorporate qualitative methods to explore the personal experiences of unemployed people and examine how employment-based interventions can effectively contribute to crime prevention in Pakistan.

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