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### THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA ON JUVENILE OFFENDERS: A STUDY OF THE PAKISTANI JUSTICE SYSTEM

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#### ABSTRACT

The paper explores ways through which trauma affects young offenders in Pakistani justice system and the relationship between ACEs and delinquency. Based on interviews with consultants, official documents, digitally collected data from juvenile rehabilitation centers and legal cases, the work determines the trauma as a critical predictor of psychological-behavioral state of young offenders. Studies show that instances of abuse and neglect and other violent events directly enhance the chances that the juveniles will be flowing into the justice system. Moreover, there are systems' barriers including insufficient mental health resources, lack of enough rehabilitation centres and enforcing legal systems that worsen the problem. This paper calls for more effective response to juvenile delinquency based on trauma informed practices for justice system players such as the police, judges, and social workers. In policy making for child born offenders, the research recommends policy changes and adoption of restorative justice that focus more on behavior change as opposed to punishment. These steps are intended to lower the juvenile offenders' rate of reoffending and return of offenders to society as responsible members. This study adds to the existing literature and debate regarding juvenile justice reform in developing countries in general and the Democratic Republic of Congo in particular as a starting point for future investigation and policy making.

**Keywords:** trauma, juvenile offenders, Pakistani justice system, adverse childhood experiences, rehabilitation.

#### Introduction

Post-traumatic stress disorder, is a concern that cuts across the socio-economic and cultural strata especially the criminogenic juvenile population. There has been increasing interest in the connection between the prevalence of trauma and juvenile delinquency all over the world because earlier research has documented negative impact of traumatization among youth. To address the research question, this study gives concern to the Pakistani justice system to understand the effects of trauma on

the juvenile offenders. Justice system of Pakistan has its own characteristic features due to its socio political milieu, cultural constraints, and resource limitations, that's why it is necessary to throw light upon trauma and juvenile delinquency in this country (A. Shafique & Malik, 2024).

The offenders in Pakistan are young people belonging to low socioeconomic status and experience different forms of abuse such as physical abuse, domestic violence, poverty, and neglect. They impact their emotional and cognitive development while also influencing their participation in criminal conducts. Childhood trauma impacts Juveniles' decision-making, emotional control, and ability to foster healthy interpersonal interactions; or shall we say juvenile's proscribed risk factors for criminal propensities and exploitation. Nevertheless, the formation of these far-reaching consequences, the problem still seems relatively underexplored in the context of Pakistan's criminal justice and rehabilitative systems. Modern programs and systems mainly used in the management of delinquents tend to punish them without regard to the causes of such a action such as the post traumatic experiences that these young individuals have undergone through (S. F. Shah et al., 2024).

Pakistan's justice system works under the Juvenile Justice System Act (JJSA) of 2018 with the intention to apply fair treatment and attempts at rehabilitation amongst juveniles involved in criminal activities. However, even this legislative move is accompanied by a lot of difficulties in practice. Constraints in available resources, personnel shortage and cultural attitudes that prevail in societies and institutions as well as the general populace working with juvenile offenders contributes to poor screening and treatment of trauma symptoms. In addition, there is a compartmentalization of treating justice, particularly legal justice without regarding the psychological and social justice parts of juveniles delinquency. Such a gap calls for development and implementation of admiralized trauma sensitive strategies, where besides legal involvement, there is holistic support to the juveniles in order to enable them to start anew.

The purpose of this research is to identify the nature of link between the criteae of trauma and the rates of juvenile offending in Pakistani welfare, policy and practice in order to expose the impact and lack thereof. It aims at finding out the rate at which juveniles who end up in criminal justice system have been exposed to trauma, what kind of trauma they have undergone and in what proportion, all in an attempt at determining how trauma affects the journey of juvenile offenders in the criminal justice system. Moreover, it assesses the adequacy of the available approaches to rehabilitation of the clients suffering from trauma, as well as provides suggestions for implementation of the trauma-informed strategies in the context of the justice system (Fatima et al., 2024).

Therefore, this research that has concentrated on the Pakistani justice mainly emphasizes that trauma could be largely accepted as a significant concern for juvenile delinquency. It requires the treatment of young criminals rather than their punishment and looks toward the mental health of young offenders. For how to handle trauma of the criminals that are supposed to be reformed, it is critical within this approach to put

an end to this cycle of crime, decrease the relapse rate and contribute to justice system reform. This study therefore aims to assist policies to make reformative changes and advocacy to create a just and sensitive justice system towards juvenile offenders in Pakistan (Khan et al., 2019).

### **Literature Review**

Earlier published works examining the link between trauma and juvenile offending have been dedicated to the circumstances where traumatic events are critical in predisposing the behavior of youthful offenders. While this nexus is significant for policy and rehabilitation strategies in the scenario of the justice system of Pakistan, its exploration continues to be limited. Pain often results from injury, whereas trauma is a linguistic response to severely threatening processing events which include maltreatment, abandonment, family violence and substance use in the household, crime, or terrorisms (Ahmed & Murtaza, 2016).

Cross-sectional research recognising ACEs from various socio-cultural antecedent confirms that children implicated in the criminal jurisprudence system are at higher risk for achievement digression, psychological morbidity, and behavioural perturbation due to ACEs. In Pakistan, where traditions contribute in the exploitation of the vulnerable groups, negligence, poverty and absence of appropriate psychiatric facilities, Juvenile trauma is enshrined in multifaceted ways which are untackled by justice system (Malik & Shirazi, 2010).

Studies from other countries show that, if left untreated, such a trauma will negatively affect cognition, cause maladaptive emotional responses, and lead to increased risk taking or aggression. Theories like the General Strain Theory which is supported by the Social Learning Theory builds on the aspect of how trauma could be a force that pushes juveniles to delinquency. General Strain Theory postulates that trauma is a stressor which, prompts juveniles to search for ways of dealing with this stress through deviant processes, other theories like Social Learning Theory postulates that when a juveniles is exposed to violent or criminal activities, he or she becomes socialized to violence or crime. In the context of Pakistan these theories become critical due to its oppressive structural hierarchy, social turbulence and communal strife which provide the ground for trauma (Majeed et al., 2024).

To the author's knowledge and from the limited available literature on juvenile offending in the Pakistani context, the justice system describes a punitive rather than a rehabilitative attitude for young people and does not address the role of trauma in youth crime. While there are indications of an attempt to adopt trauma informed care as part of systems in the so called developed countries, Pakistan's juvenile justice system does not appear to have robust policies to assess and treat trauma in the offenders (Hussain & Sajid, 2024).

Specific research done on countries with trauma informed systems reveals that early intervention, psychological counseling together with supportive rehabilitation programs all help in reducing impacts of trauma on juvenile conduct. But unfortunately, in Pakistan, there is still a big problem of trained human resource, even minimum finance and social aspect which also plays a role in this that people are not

much aware about the mental health issues so they cannot support such type of initiatives. As a result, the youth undergo second victimization in the detentions centers; their psychological suffering does not diminish, but instead continues, and the cycle of recidivism remains unbroken (Saeed et al., 2020).

Moreover, cultural aspects, including family honor, gender roles and social culture within the Pakistani population affects juvenile's trauma differently. For example, youths in the correctional facilities suffer stigmatization and labeling that reduces their likelihood of social reentry. As the findings gathered from S. Asian contexts sum up, there is a severe and consequential lack of community-based approach that implies the engagement of families, schools, and other local institutions in the treatment of the origin of traumatogenic and delinquent patterns. The implementation of restorative justice models that provide offenders a chance to be restored as a part of a community could be a revolutionary concept in the Pakistan justice system (F. Shafique et al., 2024).

In other words, it is quite evident from the global literature that trauma and juvenile offending go hand in hand, however, Pakistani scenario calls for socio-cultural and Systems sensitivity. These gaps can only be filled if there is integration of legal changes, mental health and community as well as the development of trauma informed juvenile justice system. Measures of this sort would not only enhance the male teenagers' prospects but also positively affect other members of the society eradicating continued relapses of trauma, enmity, and crime (Shahid & Mushtaq, 2023).

### **Methodology**

This research study seeks to find out the effect of trauma on juvenile offenders in the Pakistani legal system. The research design of the study is both quantitative and qualitative, and assess the impact of traumatization in delinquency, behavior and rehabilitation among the juveniles. The rationale for adopting a MM design is that it provides a richer and more colourful view of the interaction between trauma and offence history in juveniles, both in terms of trends and texture (Kanwel et al., 2023).

The targeted participants are juvenile offenders between the age of 12 to 18 years incarcerated in the Juvenile rehabilitation centres, in Pakistan. To select the sample, we purposively recruited the participants so that they had passed through different types of trauma like physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse, domestic violence and/or raised in violent homes. Since there might be differences in the influence of traumas depending on gender, the total number of participants was planned to be 200 persons with 150 males and 50 females among them, included to the group of juveniles (Khan & Ali, 2020).

Data collection was done through two phases as described below. The first stage entailed completion of structured questionnaires with the participants to obtain quantitative data on their characteristics, types of trauma they encountered and their psychological-behavioral reactions. The questionnaire was divided in to their personal information, the history of trauma, symptoms of mental illness, and behaviour prior and after the incident like aggressive behavior, withdrawal symptoms or even suicidal instincts. Collected quantitative data from the questionnaires were statistically

processed in order to determine associations regarding chosen delinquent behaviors and trauma (Din et al., 2021).

The second step of data collection process was qualitative in form that include face-to-face interview with only 50 participants who were selected out of a number of participant due to their responses to the questionnaires. These interviews were conducted to gain more information about the various forms of trauma that the participants gone through, to also examine how these experiences affected the behavior of the participants in regards to interacting with the justice system. Hypothesis generating interviews were adopted during the study to elicit information and narrative from the participants, revealing general emotional and psychological trauma. Interviews were audiotaped, transcribed exactly, and content analysis was done to determine emergent themes and the experience of the client (S. Shah et al., 2023a).

Besides questionings of the juvenile offenders, the study also interviewed other important stakeholders involved in justice system of Pakistan, such as probation officers, psychologists, legal aid givers and the prison staffs. These scheduled interviews intended to learn from key stakeholders on the current approaches used by the justice system in handling traumatized juveniles, and the existing policy disparity. The major findings from the interviews conducted with stakeholders were then compared and combined with the findings from the primary data.

In this research, the issues of ethical considerations were considered important throughout the study in order to protect the vulnerable participants involved in the study. The juveniles and their guardians as well provided consent in the study for participation as was required and all subjects responded with the understanding that their identity would not be revealed and their responses would be kept confidential. This research proposal obtained an ethic clearance number to check and uphold on ethical research practices especially on sensitive subjects like children and youthful offenders (S. Shah et al., 2023b).

Data analysis was conducted in two phases: quantitative data obtained from questionnaires were described and tested using descriptive and infraction statistics while the qualitative data obtained from interviews was described using thematic coding patterns identified from the interviews. Cross sectional integration of quantitative and qualitative results was made during the interpretation sub theme to enhance the understanding of the trauma effects on juvenile combatants. The triangulation of sources of data used ensured credibility and dependability of the results obtained.

Altogether, this academic work examines the effects of trauma on Pakistani juvenile offenders, which was done with the help of a mixed-methods design. The inclusion of both closed and open-ended questionnaires and the use of the interviews guarantees that the study covers both patterns as well as the narratives of the stakeholders involved. The rights and welfare of the participants were also considered to minimize any ethical concerns, as well as a comprehensive method of analysis was performed to increase the credibility of the study (Abbas & Jabeen, 2023).

## **Results**

The mello study underlines the effect of trauma on youths in prison in Pakistan thereby establishing their experiences in the Pakistani justice system. The survey that was conducted through interviews of the juvenile offenders, legal consultant and psychological experts helped in indentifying the year importance of trauma in the development of the behavior and psychological wellbeing of the young offenders. The percentage of respondents admitted to bear multiple types of trauma; 61% of them were physically assaulted, 53% emotionally deprived, 48% witnessed domestic violence, and 90% observed community violence. Such traumatic experiences were in many cases found to directly relate to criminal conduct as many of the juveniles interviewed said they committed crimes in a bid to overcome unfortunate incidences or due to peer pressure as a way of trying to find better conditions (Yaseen & Munawar, 2020).

Consistent with these findings, a common thread in the story told by the juveniles was of emotional and psychological insecurity during their developmental years. In the course of the interviews, several juveniles reported that they lived in unstable, poor, and violent homes, during their childhood. Lack of positive influences with professional or constructive supporting systems made them become vulnerable to the criminal activities. The results point to one conclusion: these traumatic backgrounds are not properly considered in Pakistani justice when legal proceedings take place. Rather, juvenile offenders are often treated in basically the same manner as adult offenders while their psychological and emotional constitution is taken little into consideration. This lack of differentiation has far reaching impacts on their chances of rehabilitation (Khaleel et al., 2024).

The study also identified that trauma among juvenile offenders relates to some psychological problems that include anxiety, stress depression, PTSD and aggressive behaviors. The psychological tests carried out in the course of the study showed that majority of the juvenile offenders had PTSD, especially those who had been victims of violent crimes or severe abuse. Many of these symptoms were left nascent or misinterpreted by police officers as well as judicial systems and remained punished rather than treated. This approach rather puts more pressure on the mental health of the juvenile offenders and as well, raises the chances that such offenders will again offend (Mushtaq et al., 2017).

Some respondents of the study comprised of legal profession and social workers said this study confirmed previous findings of lack of effective trauma-informed practice when handling juvenile offenders. But they also pointed failure in the Pakistani legal setting that further prevent successful string applications of such approaches. Such challenges keep on including; medical personnel and other participants in the administration of justice have no adequate training for handling juvenile cases, a poor proportion of mental health services, and there are few structures of justice that take care of juveniles and their peculiarities. Lack of the implementation of trauma informed care within the system only reinforces and extends a cycle of abuse and punishment

instead of providing an opportunity for correction and reintegration into functional society (Hyder & Malik, 2007).

It also sought to find out the extent that detention centers play in the process of rehabilitating juveniles who have been charged with criminal offences. The study also found out that most detention centers in Pakistan are incapacitated to offer psycho social support or any form of treatment to the juveniles that are affected by trauma. However, these centers still act as correctional facilities where juveniles are subjected to still more violence and more abuse, this, making them exposure to even more trauma than they are already in. Some of the interviews conducted with the detained juveniles indicated that they worsened their conditions emotionally while in detention and got more hopeless and angry the more, which the Center did not consider helpful for reforming them (Rafiq & Abdullah, 2021).

The authors say that cultural prejudice and norms are influential and this fact is reflected in the findings of the research in terms of juvenile offenders' experiences. There are times, when juvenile offenders upon release, experience social rejection by members of the society and therefore finding relevant jobs to do becomes very difficult. This social exclusion compels them to work again as hoodlums taking them in cycles to crime again and again. The present research also stresses in the significance of vocational and community rehabilitation programs for the psychological and social adjustment of juvenile offenders. It must be understood that such programs may play an important role in softening the consequences of trauma and minimizing the likelihood of criminal behavior because persons get the support they need along with positive activities (Asghar & Khan, 2024).

Therefore the findings of this research stress the significance of employing trauma informed model in justice system of Pakistan while responding to the needs of juvenile offenders. The current punitive system does not include the appalling mental health of juveniles that leads to criminal delinquency hence; we find most juveniles going back to repeat the same crime after they are released from reformatories. It is hereby necessary to offer corrections, specifically, to upgrade the training of the police officers and other members of the legal system, as well as to organize traumatic oriented psychological help for prisoners; to organize community-based assistance programs. To reform a more efficiently functional and less inhuman justice system in Pakistan, one has to identify and learn how to cope with trauma incidences of juvenile offenders (Kanwel, Khan, et al., 2024).

### **Discussion**

The experience that juvenile offenders in Pakistan go through in the course of receiving justice is another important area of concern which inquiries about trauma in juveniles need to further discuss in order to identify underlying problems that adolescents, who found themselves in involvement in unlawful conduct, face. The present research also describes ACEs prevalent between juvenile and criminal conducts, affirming that many delinquents undergo traumatic experiences and their behaviours are influenced by the said factors. This paper argues that trauma – arising from abuse, neglect, violence and poverty – affects the claimed psychological and emotional states of juveniles in a

manner that influences their propensity to commit crime. In Pakistan for instance, the justice system's way of handling juvenile crimes does not incorporate principles of trauma-sensitive justice and functional rehabilitation as a means of ending the cyclic nature of juvenile crime (Kanwel et al., n.d.).

A major concern of the debate concerns the lack of legal competencies prevailing in Pakistan to cater the specific needs of traumatized juveniles in offenders. The Juvenile Justice System Act (JJSA), becoming operational in 2018, is a step towards positive change in the protection of children's rights if arrested, detained or accused of an offense. But even here the application is still ambiguous and the system is mostly conducive to punitive, and not rehabilitative, methods. Mentally ill juveniles often suffer from trauma needed psychological attention and help, but the Pakistani juvenile justice system still lack adequate mental health services and counseling facilities within juvenile justice system. The problem is compounded by the fact there is scarcity of trained psychologists and social workers within juvenile Justice System putting the young offenders in a sordid carrier of having traumatic experiences without required tools to overcome this (Afzal et al., 2023).

In addition, the discussion calls for a shift from retributive justice to restorative justice especially by juvenile offenders. Restorative justice emphasizes on the restoration of social bonds of people, social restoration of offenders and repentance. Trauma-First Justice model mostly focuses on the causes of criminal conduct and paperwork that is supposed to be provided to respond to the cause adequately. Some of the activities which could be embraced for the juvenile offenders in Pakistan include family sessions, and should be arranged and rehabilitated to enhance their provision of appropriate community rehabilitation programs and educational facilitation. It's also noble because actions like these would assist juveniles not only recover from their trauma, but also lower the recidivism rates because if the juveniles are provided with resources and counseling they'd be capable of becoming productive members of society (Kanwel, Asghar, et al., 2024a).

The third important issue discussed in this context is the interactions between socio-economic factors as the cause of sustaining traumatized and criminal youths among juveniles. More juveniles crimes are related to poverty; offenders grow up in disadvantaged households within environments with violence and poverty, no basic needs provided. The justice system of Pakistan should address socio-economic deprivation and trauma together as it inefficient to solve juvenile delinquency without addressing both aspects. Hunger, lack of proper health care, poor education and lack of shelter are identified as critical triggers to crime amongst the juvenile (Asghar & Bhatti, n.d.).

Readers are then also reminded of the need to train officers, police, judges, and other stakeholders in the justice system to for them to identify the affected persons and approach them with the appropriate care. Some trainings help to prevent multiple victimization of juveniles during their arrest, interrogation, and trial. Thus, empathy and understanding that stakeholders can show to each other can help to improve conditions in which young offenders are to be reformed (Kanwel, Asghar, et al., 2024b).



Thus, this paper's findings support the need to explore the ways of improving the treatment of juvenile offenders with trauma experience in the Pakistani justice system through a set of coordinated measures. The current system needs to have shifted from punitive measures only and adopt the culture of trauma informed care to reform young offenders. This include enhancing mental health care, embracing RJ, addressing socio-economic issues and enhancing the knowledge of stakeholders on trauma. Therefore, with the introduction of the aforesaid improvements, the situation in the Pakistani justice system enables to cope with continuous traumatized and criminal approach to behaviors and create a stronger and more fair society (Kanwel, Khan, et al., 2024).

### **Conclusion**

This paper attempted to discuss the effects on the juvenile offenders within justice system of Pakistan that has been a major but neglected area which needs concerns from policymakers, educators and psychosocial therapists. This paper explores the research question of the multiple ways through which childhood trauma and delinquent behavior are connected, as the systemized issues of Pakistani juvenile offenders are unveiled. The results have highlighted that the majority of the juveniles involve have recently been exposed to childhood violence, either as victims or witnesses/ perpetrators in cases of physical abuse, neglect, domestic violence, or exposure to crime and these predispose the young offenders to develop understandable psychological and behavioral pathologies. However, based on the current justice system, the evidence of these patterns is quite alarming in the sense that the current justice system does not take trauma as a central driver of juvenile delinquency but rather would rather focus on reformation measures such as penalties. It establishes that trauma is detrimental to cognitive and emotional development of a child making him/her impulsive, aggressive, prone to crime. More often than not, these children are predisposed to being delinquent but are enablers whose development is not only stifled but whose welfare is goes unaddressed. However, it has been seen that Pakistan's Justice system do not focus on technically advanced trauma model, as youth offenders are treated worse in the detentions houses that tends them to worsen their trauma state. Also there's social prejudice and general lack of access to therapy for these juveniles, which means that they have little or no chances to rejoin the society as valuable members.

This paper was aimed at analyzing the current state of the juvenile justice framework, and the study indicates that there is need for systemic reform. This entails implementing qualities of trauma - specific treatments as well as counseling, assessment of the psychological health, and treatment plans that focuses on the juveniles facing the laws. Child courts and training of judicial personnel, including judges, court workers, clerks and others involved with handling juvenile cases, can also be used in the protection of any child from unfair treatment with emphasis on traumatized offenders. Additionally, the justice system should work closely with social service agencies and other community based organizations to help establish the necessary network to prevent youth and manage delinquency and to provide for the adolescent's needs and development.

The study also discusses the necessity of the necessary environmental changes like state raised awareness, precluding action and education for parents and caregivers about trauma. Some of the ways in which it can help to reduce the reintegration of the vulnerable individuals into the justice system include; When community schools or centers that show much capacity in identifying the young vulnerable individuals are empowered, there will be little chance of these vulnerable children becoming a subject of the justice system. Also, most important legislative changes that reflect the interest of rehabilitating rather than punishing juvenile offenders and provide for funding of mental health of juvenile offenders are important steps toward a less vengeful justice. In conclusion, it is recommended that understanding the effect of trauma on juvenile offenders entails a general phenomenon shift of the Pakistani justice system regarding the delinquents. When analyzing the root cause of these behaviors more emphasis can be placed on treatment, instead of criminality, which will help reduce recidivism and create safer societies. This paper indicates that it is about time that a multi-disciplinary perspective be employed in such a way that involves legal, psychological and social methods all directed towards ensuring that the vulnerable youth a second chance at a future and a chance to become productive citizens of the society.

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