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Youth Crime: Causes and Remedies

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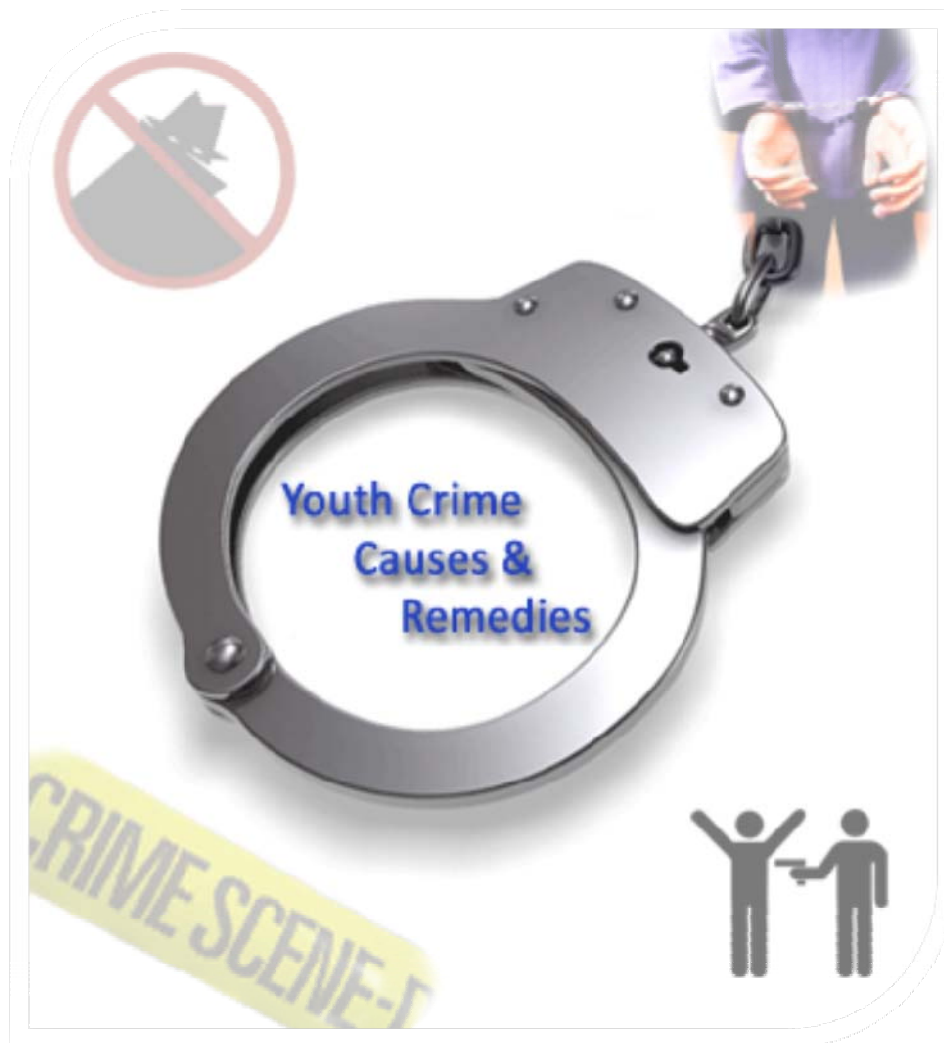
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Essay on:

Youth Crime: Causes and Remedies

For Youth Essay Competition 2008 of Ministry of Youth Affairs Government of Pakistan



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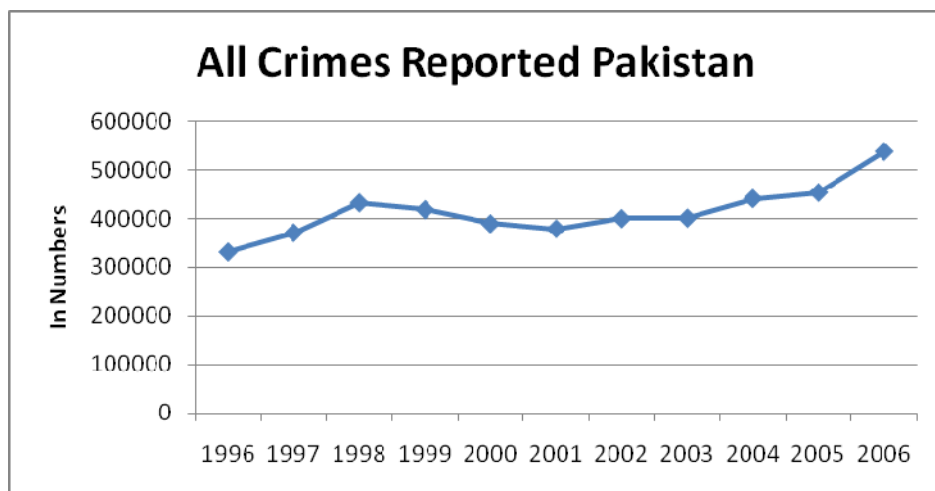
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Introduction

With the passage of time crime rates are increasing all over the world. Several factors are responsible for this increase which relates Economic, Social and Family situations and problems. Pakistan is also facing the increasing trend in crimes over the years. Figure 1 shows that since 1996, number of crimes reported increased till 1998 after which they started declining.

Figure 1



Data Source: Federal Bureau of Statistics

Total Number of crimes kept on declining till 2001 after which the increasing trend was followed till 2006. The highest jump was seen in 2005-06 period in which crimes reported increased by 84606 (18.66%). Although these figures are giving us a picture of crimes in Pakistan but they are not the true reflection of the actual crimes because there are various cases which are not reported to the police because of different reasons. When some of the victims of the crimes like mobile snatching and pick pocketing were interviewed, it was revealed that majority of the offenders were young (16-30) which reflects that youth crime rates are very high in Pakistan and for prevention strategies youth are to be targeted. In order to develop the crime prevention strategy, we first need to find out the causes of youth crime.

Causes of Youth Crime

There is no single root cause of crime. Crime is primarily the outcome of multiple adverse social, economic, cultural and family conditions. To prevent crime it is important to have an understanding of its roots¹. Causes of crime differ from country to country because of different cultural, economic and social characteristics.

The causes of crime are primarily related to:

- Economic Situation
- Social Environment
- Family Structures

Economic Situation

The major economic factors that contribute to the crime initiations are Poverty, Unemployment and Political Situation.

Poverty and Inequality

Financial crisis due to poverty causes the person to involve in criminal activities. A poor father may not be able to educate his children in school and lack of education may lead to criminal thinking of a child. Homelessness causes the children to spend most of the time on streets

Unemployment

Lack of employment opportunities leads to criminal activities amongst the unemployed. An unemployed person needs to run his household by any means and when he doesn't find any legal opportunity to earn; he may get involved in criminal activities to finance his living.

Political Conditions

Due to political uncertainty, sense of insecurity develops in the members of the society. The sense in which they become hopeless of their future due to which they get involved in unfair means of earning.

¹ **The Root Causes of Crime** Web Link: http://www.preventingcrime.net/library/Causes_of_Crime.pdf

Social Factors

Our social structure mirrors to citizens and communities what we value and how we set priorities. Social environment is needed to be studied with respect to different environmental scenarios.

The core Social root causes of crime are:

1. Inequality,
2. Not sharing power,
3. Lack of support to families and neighborhoods,
4. Real or perceived inaccessibility to services,
5. Lack of leadership in communities,
6. Low value placed on children and
7. Individual well-being, the overexposure to television as a means of recreation.

Social environment is needed to be studied with respect to different social scenarios². For this purpose causes to crime from some of the core parts of the society with whom the youth directly belong are separately explained below.

School Environment

Causes related to the school environment are:

- *Disruptive Behavior of a child:*
- *Lack of commitment in school:*

Community Environment

Major causes of crime related to community environment are:

- *Lack of cohesion in the society*
- *Disorganization and neglect specially for Youth*

² ANDRESON, BIENHART, PRO FARRINGTON, LONGMAN, STURGIS & UTTING “**Risk and Protective factors associated with youth crime and effective interventions to prevent it**”, Youth Justice Board (YJB) Research Note No 5 2002.

- *Easy availability of drugs*
- *High population turnover (Number of Children).*
- Corruption in the law enforcing agencies
- *Weak Law Enforcing Agencies*

Family Structures

Youth whose family have one or more characteristics listed below, are more likely to be involved in crime.

- Parents are involved in crime
- Poor parental supervision
- Their parents neglect them, there is erratic discipline or they are treated harshly
- Family income is low or they are isolated
- Family conflict.
- Lack of communication between children and parents.
- Lack of respect and responsibility amongst family members
- Abuse and neglect of children
- Family violence
- Family Breakup

Crime prevention must focus on improvements in all possible areas. In order to see how can we develop and implement the crime prevention strategies we need to identify the factors that are actually responsible for the crime so that we can target them in our policy framework.

Consequences of Crime

Crime affects people on many levels, often needlessly generating fear and anxiety and leading to victimization and over-reaction. Crime will become increasingly significant as the population ages and older people begin to worry about their personal safety and security. Due to this sense

of insecurity, people avoid going for healthy activities like jogging or sports which hurts the elderly and the kids most.

Remedies for Youth Crime

In order to formulate the strategy package to fight crime rate, we need to focus on the factors that are leading to these increasing number of crimes. The solution to the dominant factors which are responsible for increasing rate of crime in Pakistan are separately discussed below.

Eliminate the corruption

Corruption in the crime control officials (Police) is the main factor in increasing rate of crime in Pakistan. People, specially youth, has no fear what so ever in breaking the laws because they know that if they get caught, they'll be released on spot in return of Rs. 50. Some actions are taken to minimize the factor of corruption from traffic police for which cameras were placed in high profile areas of Karachi but due to the loop holes, the problem is still there. If this problem of corruption is eliminated from the Police system, crime rate will fall by 70-75%.

Strengthen the Law Enforcing Agencies

In Pakistan, Police seems to have limited authority. There is a need to increase the authorities of police and solve their problems in order to improve their attitude towards work. As a result, the control over the offenders will be increased. Most of the offenders do it freely just because they know that there is no one to catch them. If police arrests 20 or 30 criminals and give them proper punishment, the other criminals will think twice before doing illegal acts.

While it is understandable that police should call for a tougher stance, especially when they are continually dealing with the same offenders, other stakeholders are equally convinced that this will do more harm than good.³

Targeting markets of stolen goods

Goods are stolen generally to sell. There are specific markets where these stolen goods are sold specially for electronic items like mobile and laptops. If the markets are eliminated, the

³ James Cook University Youth Crime in Focus: <http://media.jcu.edu.au/story.cfm?id=81>

incentive to steal or rob will decline significantly. As far as the sell of legal used goods is concerned, they can be made sellable by showing their purchase receipts.

Youth awareness program for education

In this modern world today there are still many people who cannot recognize the importance of education, especially higher education. In addition to the steps to make higher education attainable for poor, there is a need of some youth awareness program that can highlight the importance of education in youth. Higher education will increase the probability of the person to get employed which can reduce the chances of him to involve in crime.

Introduction of technologically advanced security tools

Criminals often know about the loopholes in the anti-theft security mechanism such as car trackers. Technologies used for such tools in developing countries like Pakistan are old and criminals are well aware of their weaknesses. In order to make sure that the tools actually works, new technologies are needed to be introduced such as GSM based tracking or Radio Frequency tracking which is used in South Africa and it is much more effective than the GPS system⁴.

Maintaining the record

Government should maintain record of every individual with his criminal activities and asset possession etc, as it is done in developed nations like United Kingdom. All vehicles should be registered with active National Identity Cards so that tracking the criminals could be made easy. With a fear that crime will be registered against his name for a life time, criminal will think twice before committing a crime.

Reducing the drug availability

Availability of dangerous drugs is needed to be curtailed so that fewer people get access to it. A drug addicted person cannot work and hence cannot finance his/her drug expenses as a result he steals other's assets and sells them in the market to buy the drugs. Drug mafia is needed to

⁴ The Daily Jang, Sunday Magazine page 16 June 22nd 2008
Weblink (Login Required): <http://www.jang.net/jm/6-22-2008/mag16.asp>

be targeted so that the existing drug addicts can be cured other can be saved from getting involved in drugs usage.

Provision of Employment Opportunities

Increased opportunities of employment can help in making the crime rate fall. Employment opportunities can be increased by promoting small scale industries which are suffering due to the high electricity rates and high cost of production. Provisions of incentives to the small scale industries will not only increase the gross domestic product of the country but also it will make the youth busy in productive work, hence the crime rate will fall.

Reducing Poverty and Inequality

By using proper taxation tools with guaranteed fair implementation, the inequality can be decreased. Poor can be made better off by targeting food inflation and increasing the minimum wage in the country. The more the youth is involved in the productive work, lesser are the chances of their involvement in criminal activities.

Conclusion

There is no single factor that can be specified as the main cause of criminal behavior. This can more accurately be found in the way that multiple risk factors clustered together can interact in the lives of some children, while important protective factors are absent. Moreover, causes of crime differ from country to country, In western world, causes are directly related to the environment of the surroundings. These surroundings can be of school, home, neighborhood or playground. In contrast, causes of youth crime in Pakistan are significantly different from that of the western world. Here in Pakistan, the first main cause of youth crime is corruption in the law enforcing agencies, if corruption is eliminated; the major part of the problem will be solved.

After identification of the root causes of crime in Pakistan, the remedial measures to control the criminal activities must revolve around those identified causes. These remedial measures include mainly the solution to the following problems, Corruption in law enforcing agencies, lack of authorities given to the agencies, unsolved issues of the agencies (like salary increment and provision of modern tools), technological backwardness in context of security tools, poverty and unemployment. Priority wise solution of the problems is the key to success. If the above mentioned remedial measures are taken into account, significant decrease in crime can be achieved.

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