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# Disorder and Despair: The Structural Roots of Youth Wellbeing in Islamabad's Urban Slums

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## ABSTRACT

*The study focuses on youth well-being in the katchi abadis, or informal urban settlements in Islamabad, spaces where poverty, disorder, and exclusion coalesce in ways that influence youth's routine life. Based on qualitative field research involving more than thirty semi-structured interviews with youth aged 12-16 (20 boys and 10 girls), the paper examines how factors of physical disorder, a lack of social cohesion, and limited educational and recreational opportunities shape the subjective experience of young people. Findings highlight how the lack of infrastructure, exploitative labor opportunities, and access to deviant peer groups limit opportunities for development but create conditions conducive to delinquency, hopelessness, and stress, particularly for younger adolescents and females. These results are indicative of more general structural conditions falling under Social Disorganization Theory (Shaw & McKay, 1942) and Urban Inequality Theory (Wacquant, 2008), focusing on the role of spatial and social disintegration in the reproduction of marginality. Simultaneously, "finding meaning in education, debate, work, or shared recreation" produces accounts of resilience among some youth, pointing to the role of supportive spaces. In addressing the structural nature of the problem, that the well-being of youth in slums is something beyond an issue of individuals, the study calls for policy responses that integrate solutions to spatial injustice with the expansion of public services and the building of trust between marginalized communities and the structures of the state. Positioning youth's experiences against a backdrop of larger urban inequalities, this paper adds to the debates on issues of space, disorder, and well-being in informal settlements in Pakistan and in general South Asia.*

***Keywords:*** *Urban Slums, Youth, Well-Being, Marginalized Communities, Spatial Injustice*

## INTRODUCTION

Urban slums form an important aspect of uneven urbanization in South Asia, a phenomenon that is marked by the high rate of population growth far past the capacity of cities to provide enough housing and other infrastructural amenities. UN-Habitat (2020) found out that the population of more than 30 per cent of the urban population in South Asia lives in slum-like conditions, and these conditions are characterized by poor housing, weak tenure security, overcrowding, and the absence of basic amenities such as water, sanitation, and electricity. Such slums are not just incidental by-products of population pressure, but are closely connected to historical processes of economic restructuring, urban-rural migration, and exclusionary planning policies (Roy, 2005; Hasan, 2010). With cities like Dhaka, Mumbai, and Karachi becoming increasingly densely populated, slums develop as spatially marginal places of concentration of

disadvantage and intergenerational reproduction of poverty. These settlements thus illuminate failures of urban governance as well as the survivability of marginalized communities, which can subsist on extremely limited resources.

Slums are also paradoxical: as a symbol, they are associated with disorder, deprivation, and exclusion, yet they serve a major economic activity, initial labor, and social networks. Theorists hold that the nature of urban informality, which is widely evident in South Asian slums, cannot be seen as deviant or illegal but as an alternative urban production system that is validated by power and inequality (Roy, 2005). Even still, everyday life in the slums consists of insecurity, precarity, and susceptibility to both eviction and state violence (UN-Habitat, 2020). Lack of sustainable planning and welfare policies also helps in the reproduction of spatial inequality, enhancing both the physical and symbolic marginalization of slum dwellers (Wacquant, 2008). Therefore, the South Asian slums are a perfect representation of this duality in the city: places that maintain the lives of millions yet continue to create structurally unequal conditions.

Children living in urban slums comprise a highly vulnerable segment of the population in South Asia in terms of social and developmental well-being. It is home to one of the largest youth populations globally, with about half its population being under 24 (United Nations, 2019). In slum settings, this population group is underproportionally exposed to poverty and poor access to education, health services, and to secure employment opportunities (Evans, 2006). Through a lack of recreational facilities and youth-friendly places, youths lack opportunities to achieve personal growth, which pushes them to undertake precarious or risk-taking behaviors. In such a way, structural deprivation and marginalization are joined with developmental needs, creating an environment in which youth vulnerability is not only structural but also permanent (Chant & McIlwaine, 2016).

Social labeling and institutional indifference compound the vulnerabilities of slum youth. Studies prove that youth in underserved populations are commonly labeled as future delinquents, which amplifies their liability to police harassment and isolation by official labor markets (Herbet et al., 2018; Becker, 1963). This crisis is escalated through gendered vulnerability in the form of increased exposure to gender-based violence, reduced mobility, and limited education among young girls in slums (Chant & McIlwaine, 2016). At the same time, structural limitations undermine upward mobility trajectories, leaving young people in cycles of precocity that have direct implications for their psychological and social well-being. This is why urban slum youth is a symbolically marginalized, developmentally disadvantaged group that finds itself immersed in a world characterized by disorder, exclusion, and opportunity deprivation.

This paper analyzes how the subjective well-being of the youth in the slums of Islamabad is affected due to the surrounding contexts of poverty and lack of order. Space is perceived as a social factor instead of a neutral setting. Poor housing, infrastructural degradation, crime, and social segregation define disorganized neighborhoods that create bad living conditions of hostility, which impedes the development of youth (Shaw & McKay, 1942; Wacquant, 2008). In these settings, young adults who are navigating adolescent years are shaped by their own decisions and the pressures of potentially hazardous, chaotic, and under-resourced social situations. This study therefore focuses on the interconnection between psychosocial well-being on the one hand, and spatial inequality on the other hand, pointing out that the experiences of the youth in the context they live cannot be fully comprehensible without questioning the spaces which they live.

The study also emphasizes the cumulative impacts of spatial neglect on life outcomes by adjudicating youth well-being in the broader context of urban disorganization and marginality. Spaces of disorder breed uncertainty, fear, decrease collective efficacy, and the opportunity to socialize safely, creating a kind of structural despair (Wacquant, 2008; Harvey, 2012). On the other hand, a lack of supportive environments and intervention by state agencies encourages the youth to engage in informal means of survival, which can encourage delinquency and conflict with authorities like the police. Therefore, this

paper uses a place-based lens to critically analyze how spatial disorganization is not only an environmental condition but a structural effect on the subjective well-being of marginalized urban youths in Pakistan.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Urban informality is central to South Asian urbanization, not just shaping where the poor live but also how they are governed and categorized. As Roy (2005) argues, informality operates as a state strategy: authorities selectively tolerate or penalize informal practices to exert control over the poor. In major cities like Mumbai, Dhaka, and Karachi, slum settlements reveal this paradox. Residents create homes and livelihoods outside formal planning, yet are closely watched by the state. In Pakistan, particularly Karachi, Hasan (2010) notes that "katchi abadis" have proliferated due to rural-urban migration outpacing housing supply, leaving nearly half the city in informal settlements. These areas face social exclusion, not only through poor services but also through the criminalizing and stigmatizing discourses that define them.

In Islamabad alone, the country's sole planned city, exclusion is evident in the placement of the slums in politics and space. Slums in I-11 and H-9 are usually under threat of eviction, which implies the government's attempt to maintain the look of the capital as "planned" while disregarding the working class that keeps the city working (Hasan, 2010; Bari, 2016). Such exclusion makes the life of slum dwellers complicated because it renders them necessary and disposable simultaneously: necessary as workers in the informal economy but unwanted when they disturb the city's look. Thus, informal living in South Asian cities reveals not only deficits of material resources but also entrenched forms of exclusion rooted in planning, government, and discourse.

Youth's well-being is highly entwined with their environment, with nature and social worlds influencing the way they develop. Evans (2006) states that housing quality, overcrowding, noise, and neighborhood disorder are significant in influencing mental health and learning among youth. Ungar (2012), in his resilience studies, finds that young people's well-being is founded on relationships and context, which is established by the availability of support systems such as education, health care, and access to safe community space. For the youth of urban slums, these support conditions do not exist, and they are more vulnerable to stress, violence, and reduced life chances. In Pakistan, various studies have established that poor urban environments make life harder for young people: low-quality schools, unsafe parks, and fewer employment opportunities make their mental and social development suffer and frustrate slum youth (Sathar et al., 2016; Khan, 2020).

Besides, environmental limitations don't impact all youth equally; they cut across class, gender, and cultural expectations. Youth in Islamabad's katchi abadis tend to move about the public space with comparative ease, although they risk harassment at the hands of the police and peer pressure to adopt delinquent values (Herbet et al., 2018). Young women, on the other hand, have constrained mobility and increased susceptibility to gender violence, which results in their isolation and limited participation in public life (Chant & McIlwaine, 2016). These constraints produce environments of limited agency, where youth aspirations are curtailed by structural barriers embedded in the very spaces they inhabit. Thus, environmental disorganization is not only a backdrop but a key determinant of subjective well-being and social trajectories for marginalized youth.

For exploring the condition of youth in slums, the concept of precarity offers a convenient lens through which one can explain the structural insecurities of marginalized city dwellers. According to Harvey (2012), neoliberal capitalist urbanization produces uneven geographies that place wealth in select enclaves and leave the poor in precarious areas defined by dispossession and instability. In slum areas, the precarity is expressed in the form of insecure tenure, permanent threat of eviction, informal work, and

disconnection from urban services. In Pakistan, slum dwellers in urban areas such as Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad lead conditions of chronic precarity, surviving only through tenuous negotiations with state institutions, local landowners, and informal social networks (Hasan, 2020; Bari, 2016). These insecurities inherently compromise youth well-being, as housing, security, and work uncertainties lead to conditions of hopelessness and despair.

Spatial justice, as a conceptual framework, insists on the entitlement of marginalized groups to fair access to urban space and resources (Soja, 2010). The planned model of Islamabad's city has created stark spatial inequities: whereas affluent sectors have green spaces, safe housing, and well-paved infrastructure, slum dwellers are relegated to outer or hidden spaces where access to clean water, healthcare, and education is severely limited. This exclusion reenacts generational disadvantage, since young people inherit not just the material deprivations of their families but also the stigmatization of living in "illegal" neighborhoods. In this view, the well-being of slum youth cannot be tackled without addressing the larger questions of urban justice, equity, and the redistributive role of the state.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Disorganization Theory, which was formulated by Shaw and McKay (1942) in the Chicago School of Sociology, offers a basic framework to comprehend how local conditions affect crime, delinquency, and general social malfunction. The theory contends that poor, residentially unstable, and ethnically diverse communities are less capable of exerting social control and harmony, leading to greater deviance. In such contexts, collective efficacy—the common strength of residents to control behavior and promote constructive social outcomes—is eroded, placing youths most at risk for delinquent peer influences (Sampson & Groves, 1989). For youths in the slums of cities, disorganization is reflected in frayed social bonds, ineffective institutions, and exposure to settings in which informal norms and deviant subcultures replace malfunctioning formal structures.

Applied to Islamabad's slums, Social Disorganization Theory emphasizes the way structural disadvantages like insecure shelter, poor infrastructure, and inadequate community institutions lead to delinquency as well as to lower well-being. Slum communities tend to be deprived of proper schooling, healthcare, and recreational centers, which not only restricts youth opportunities but also reduces trust in formal institutions. Research on katchi abadis in Pakistan uncovers trends of weak neighborhood social networks, crime, and variable access to state services—conditions that track the traditional markers of disorganization (Bari, 2016; Khan, 2020). As such, youth raised in these environments are exposed to cumulative risks: on the one hand, restricted access to resources for well-being and, on the other, increased exposure to environments that desensitize delinquency and diminish chances of upward mobility. Social Disorganization Theory thus offers a conceptual framework for connecting spatial disorder with the social and subjective well-being of marginalized youth in Islamabad.

Whereas Social Disorganization Theory concentrates on the breakdown at the community level, Urban Inequality Theory highlights the structural forces that generate and maintain marginality at urban peripheries. Wacquant (2008) explains how neoliberal urbanization processes generate "territorial stigmatization" whereby whole neighborhoods are labeled as risky, criminal, and socially undesirable. Such stigmatization not only influences opportunities for residents but also molds institutional responses—e.g., policing and welfare provision—which further consolidate exclusion. Urban Inequality Theory therefore, reverses focus away from internal community processes to wider structural and political-economic forces that create advanced marginality. It locates slums not just as disordered places but as outcomes of systemic neglect and inequality rooted in urban governance.

In the context of Pakistan, this framework particularly applies due to the structural location of slums in urban planning and state policy. Islamabad, commonly praised as a "planned city," exists alongside

enclaves of informality in which slum dwellers are at once integral to the city's economy and excluded from urban citizenship (Hasan, 2010; Bari, 2016). These neighborhoods are spaces of dispossession where dwellers experience threats to eviction, exclusion of basic services, and social stigmatization, perpetuating the cycle of marginality. For the youth, this translates to inheriting material poverty and symbolic exclusion, which determine their identity, opportunities, and well-being. Urban Inequality Theory assists in unraveling how the structural production of marginality—by planning regimes, labor precariousness, and state abandonment—produces not only disordered neighborhoods but also systemic states of despair. This framework allows the study to transcend community pathology to probe the structural inequalities that position slum youth in a disadvantageous cycle.

## METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative fieldwork methodology to understand the lived experiences of youth within Islamabad's katchi abadis (informal settlements) that are inhabited by marginalized groups left out of the city's official planning and service delivery. Qualitative research is best suited to investigating subjective perceptions and capturing the intricacies of daily life within socially disorganized environments (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Fieldwork in such slums permitted immersion within the everyday lives of young people, and an exploration was thereby enabled of the interplay between spatial deprivation, social marginality, and well-being. Islamabad represents a very specific context, in that it is the sole planned city in Pakistan but has, on its outskirts, its own stigmatized, eviction-threatened, and service-deprived informal settlements (Hasan, 2010; Bari, 2016). By situating the research in these excluded spaces, the research places in the foreground the voices of youth whose everyday life is silenced in hegemonic urban policy discourses.

Data were gathered through face-to-face interviews with 30 youth participants (12–16 years), including 10 girls and 20 boys, who were sampled using convenience sampling. This method allowed accessibility of participants in difficult-to-reach slum settings, where establishing trust is key to genuine participation (Bernard, 2017). Face-to-face interviews allowed participants to recount their subjective interpretation of well-being, routines, and encounters with neighborhood disorder and institutions like the police. In addition to interviewing, participatory observation was used in order to deepen the understanding of daily routines, neighborhood life, and social interactions in a natural setting. This triangulation increased validity by placing youth accounts within observable contexts (Denzin, 2012). Ethical concerns were taken into account, including verbal consent, confidentiality, and sensitivity to the vulnerabilities of child and adolescent participants. All together, these approaches offered a rich, multifaceted description of how youth in the slums of Islamabad navigate and experience the structural limitations of disorganized city spaces.

## FINDINGS

The narratives of young respondents in Islamabad's *katchi abadis* highlight the everyday consequences of infrastructural breakdown and the absence of recreational facilities on their well-being. For many children, daily routines are structured around work and survival rather than leisure or personal development. One boy said, *"I get up in the morning, take a bath, and go to work… I work in the day at the mechanic shop, and some of my friends still go to school".* The need to work to supplement the family income also takes away from time available for education and play, while also creating physical and emotional fatigue. As one child put it, on Fridays, they are able to *"play cricket and hang out with friends",* highlighting the space for recreation as a contrast to the daily life of restrictions. Such statements are in line with Evans (2006), who argues that environmental limitations have a direct impact on children's psychological well-being via limiting opportunities for "rest, play, and socializing". Youth, in general, are more likely to engage in deviant behaviors and be at risk for health-related issues, given

the combination of these limitations, and in Pakistan, these are compounded by poverty, lack of parental guidance, and slum populations being generally neglected by the system (Hasan, 2010).

Meanwhile, the lack of organized recreational areas and safe places creates avenues towards delinquency for some of the slum youth. Several respondents noted that peers who neither attend school nor engage in work *"do bad things as they fight, and do gambling, and watch dirty materials in net cafes."* Others added that *"some children steal money for gambling and other illegal activities,"* linking the lack of constructive engagement opportunities to risky behaviors. The accounts also underscore the structural roots of deprivation: *"Low income of our parents are the sole reason for us to work in the labour market,"* and *"Poverty is the greatest evil in the slums of Islamabad… children face lack of proper sanitation, access to clean water and proper food which hinder their physical and mental growth."* These voices capture the dynamics addressed by Social Disorganization Theory (Shaw & McKay, 1942), which attributes community disintegration and infrastructure abandonment to deviance and social dysfunction. In the same vein, Wacquant's (2008) concept of "territorial stigmatization" describes how institutional exclusion of slum populations creates cumulative disadvantage such that environmental deterioration fuels both material deprivation and social alienation. The findings thereby point to how dilapidated infrastructure and poor recreational facilities not only erode the well-being of youths but also inform the paths of disorder and despair in Islamabad's marginalized urban fringes.

Youth's lives who live in Islamabad city katchi abadis illustrate how social fragmentation, characterized by weak social bonds and fragile family structure, shapes delinquent behavior and negatively impacts well-being. As one respondent observed, *"Slums lack social cohesion, resulting in inefficient supervision of the youth, resulting in youth delinquency or deviancy."* In many cases, youth pointed to broken families and domestic violence as primary drivers of vulnerability: *"Broken families are the leading cause of youth delinquency, violent parents compel the youth to join a negative peer group."* These results are in line with Shaw and McKay's (1942) arguments, who argued that youths' delinquency is generated by social disorganization rather than individual pathology since it erodes communal bonds and informal controls. Simultaneous studies among youths have confirmed in Pakistan that neighborhood disorder and family instability increase youths' vulnerability to drug use, gambling, and petty crime (Beall, 1997). In contrast, some of the participants defied these negative trends by anchoring themselves in family responsibility: *"I have a family that relies on me, I do not have the time for joining any group, I work and then spend the rest of the day with my family."* These narratives imply that while fragmentation is pervasive, its impact is unequal as individual resilience and family responsibilities counteract risks for some.

Peer deviance and poor adult supervision have long been understood to be crucial in shaping youth behavior. Participants stressed that *"the negative peer group is responsible for promoting any negative behavior in children. A youth can easily start using drugs when he gets associated with a group of drug users."* One respondent added to this as *"some of the children have very low parental supervision over them, they steal money for gambling and other illegal activities".* These findings reinforce Sampson and Groves' (1989) extension of Social Disorganization Theory, which holds that poor social networks and weak parental control facilitate the development of criminal subcultures. These insights correspond with Sampson and Groves' (1989) extension of Social Disorganization Theory, which stresses that weak networks and low parental control foster criminal subcultures. Moreover, poverty compounds these risks: *"We do not afford healthy food and there are days when we eat only once,"* indicating that deprivation undermines both physical survival and capacity for self-regulation. The lack of structured routine also emerged as significant, as youth with busy schedules in work or school were *"engaged in good activities,"* while those with unstructured free time *"commit bad things".* The normalization of bunking school to frequent *"net-cafes and gaming zones"* highlights how informal urban spaces act as breeding grounds for deviant practices in the absence of regulated social environments. Wacquant's (2008)

theorization of urban inequality supplies a contextual understanding of these processes, highlighting how marginality is structurally reproduced simultaneously through economic poverty and fragmented social connections. In Islamabad's slums, fragmentation thus becomes a signifier and facilitator of youth vulnerability, amplifying the cycle of disorder and despair.

The psychological cost of life in Islamabad's slums is immense, with young people, especially girls and younger adolescents, reporting ongoing states of hopelessness, anxiety, and fear. As one respondent noted, *"Low income of our parents is the sole reason for us to work in the labour market,"* underscoring how economic deprivation forces children into adult responsibilities at the expense of their childhood and well-being. Others highlighted the stigma of marginality, stating that *"youth in slums are also the future of this country, they are innocent souls dominated by the evils of society,"* a reflection of both resilience and despair. Emotional strain is also exacerbated by exploitative work conditions and being exposed to drugs and crime: *"Youth in slums are deprived in numerous ways; furthermore they are exploited in the labour market and sometimes are engaged in drug supply, which directly impacts their well-being."* These narratives are echoed with Ungar's (2012) conclusion that cumulative stressors destabilize adolescents' resilience capacity, especially where there are lacking protective social networks. For young children and girls who experience other kinds of vulnerabilities in traversing dangerous spaces, the conditions of poverty and social isolation become translated into persistent anxiety and fear, echoing Evans' (2006) observations that environmental stress powerfully conditions young people's mental health. Thus, the confluence of poverty, disorganization, and abandonment creates a cycle in which emotional pain not just reduces short-term well-being but also constrains future potential.

**DISCUSSION**

The findings from the slums in Islamabad highlight the ways in which geography, in and of itself, characterized by poverty and neglect and environmental disorder, serves as a structural determinant of youth well-being. The absence of safe recreational spaces, poor sanitation, and deteriorating housing repeat cycles of deprivation, to quote one respondent, *"Children in slums face lack of proper sanitation, access to clean water, and proper food, which hinder their physical and mental growth*". These types of structural conditions are consistent with Shaw and McKay's Social disorganization Theory of 1942 which, stated that neighborhood disorganization promotes delinquency and weak social networks of protection. Poor geographies in urban Pakistan expose children to exploitative positions in labor markets. *"Low income of our parents is the sole reason for us to work in the labour market",* suggesting a reality that compromises children's rights but can also limit access to education and development. This connects to Wacquant's (2008) theory of urban marginality, which understands urban space as a site of exclusion that not only results in a lack of access to material resources but also attaches social stigma. So, geography itself is not simply a setting – it is a force that helps to determine the vulnerabilities, desires, and affects the youth in cities.

The absence of spatial planning or proper public services within the katchi abadis also contributes to continuing the cycle of chaos and hopelessness amongst the youth. In the absence of poor infrastructure, waste management, and facilities for youth, adolescents have no choice but to an exploitative form of labor or leisure activities that can create risk. As one youth put it, *"We play cricket on holidays, it refreshes our moods from the workload of the whole week",* reflecting the lack of even informal recreational space in these settlements. Alternatively, *"net cafes and gaming zones"* are frequented by many, places which can lead to delinquent peer bonding and drug exposure. As Hasan (2010) has long pointed out, Pakistan's urban poor have been marginalized from formal planning processes, leading to slums being unacknowledged and therefore unserviced. The lack of access to education, health resources, or safe public space further affirms Harvey's (2012) claims that spatial injustice is part and parcel of systemic inequality, as marginalized populations are unable to access the very basic 'right to the city'.

Given this, urban planning is not simply an engineering task but needs to be thought of as fundamentally an issue of social justice, one that, when ignored, exposes youth to exploitation, bad health, and fragmented social identities.

The results highlight how this "underprivileged geography" in the context of katchi abadis within Islamabad becomes a structural factor impacting youth well-being, with the absence of infrastructure, sanitation, and recreation space continuing cycles of poverty and hopelessness. As one informant put it, *"Children in slums face a lack of proper sanitation, access to clean drinking water, and proper food, which hinder physical and mental growth,"* highlighting how deprivation in the environment directly impedes health and development. The geography in question is not merely a neutral backdrop but rather a generative force of vulnerability consistent with Shaw and McKay's (1942) Social Disorganization Theory, which correlates "community disorganization and social disruption with delinquency," Wacquant's (2008) "urban ghetto as an 'inside' space reproducing social inequality" theory of urban marginality. Youth testimonies also show these gaps leading children into exploitative work, *"Low income of our parents is the sole reason for us to work in the labor market",* or insecure play in *"net cafes and gaming zones"* that foster delinquent peer bonding. These results are representative of larger failures of spatial planning and public service provision as laid out by Hasan (2010), "the systematic exclusion of informal settlements from the urban policy framework," and Harvey's (2012) concept of spatial injustice is revealed in unequal service provision and opportunities. These two conditions together highlight how absent planning and systemic inequality, as evidenced in the production of slum geographies, create "places of disorder and despair" that further limit the well-being of youth and entrench cycles of marginalization.

## CONCLUSION

By tracing the structural underpinnings of youth well-being in the katchi abadis of Islamabad, this study has revealed the intersection of spatial deprivation, social fragmentation, and a lack of public services in explaining cycles of vulnerability and despair. The results of this study indicate that physical disorder in the form of broken down infrastructure, lack of sanitation or safe recreation spaces, limits the everyday lives of youth, pushing many into exploitative work or delinquent peer groups. As highlighted by the interviewees, poverty and lack of parental oversight drive kids into negative activities like gambling and drug use, and the absence of educational alternatives contributes to a sense of hopelessness and marginalization. These lived experiences are not experiences in isolation but embedded in a structure, in line with Shaw and McKay's (1942) Social Disorganization Theory, which relates community disintegration to youth's delinquency, and Wacquant's (2008) Urban Inequality thesis about the reproduction of marginality in the spatial periphery of the city.

This study also reinforces the idea that disadvantaged places are dynamic actors in the lives of youth and the pathways they will follow to achieve well-being. The lack of any planning interventions or provision of services in slums resonates with other patterns of spatial injustice (Harvey, 2012) and urban exclusion (Hasan, 2010), predisposing youth to cycles of deprivation and exploitation. Yet, these stories also indicate resilience and hope – children who find purpose in schooling or in debate and or play activities indicate the transformative power of positive surroundings. Therefore, addressing the well-being of youth living in slum and shanty neighborhoods in urban areas needs to go beyond the local level and move from acknowledging informal settlements, integrating them into city plans, providing basic services, and engaging police practices of trust not stigmatization. Through addressing the structural inequalities that create the geographies of the slum, policy makers can act to move towards changing the "nexus of order and despair" that has become so entrenched, and provide the opportunity for marginalized youth to succeed and become active citizens and contributors to the future of Pakistan.

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