

**The Involvement of Juveniles in Drug Trafficking: A Case Study of Regional Directorate
Peshawar**

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ABSTRACT

The rising involvement of juveniles in drug trafficking presents a critical challenge to Pakistan's criminal justice and social welfare systems. This research explores the socio-economic, legal, and institutional factors that contribute to the exploitation of minors in narcotics networks. It examines how poverty, lack of education, peer pressure, and weak law enforcement create an environment where children are both victims and perpetrators. The study also analyzes gaps in the implementation of the Juvenile Justice System Act, 2018, and assesses whether current rehabilitation and legal measures are adequate to prevent recidivism. By highlighting real-life cases and existing legal frameworks, this article aims to offer policy recommendations for more effective prevention, prosecution, and reintegration strategies tailored to juvenile offenders involved in drug-related crimes

Keywords: Juvenile delinquency, Drug trafficking, Juvenile justice system, Child exploitation Narcotics crime, Juvenile offenders, Criminal justice in Pakistan Juvenile rehabilitation, Drug abuse and youth, Juvenile Justice System Act 2018 Vulnerable youth, Organized crime and minors, Legal protection of children and Juvenile crime prevention

INTRODUCTION

The involvement of juveniles in drug trafficking is a growing concern in Pakistan, reflecting deeper socio-economic and systemic challenges within the country's criminal justice and child protection systems. Increasingly, minors are being recruited or coerced by organized crime networks to act as drug couriers, sellers, or lookouts due to their legal vulnerability and low likelihood of receiving harsh punishments (UNODC, 2021). Poverty, lack of access to education, dysfunctional family environments, and weak institutional safeguards significantly contribute to this trend (Siddiqui, 2019). Pakistan, being both a consumer and a transit country in the global narcotics trade due to its proximity to Afghanistan, has become increasingly vulnerable to internal drug trafficking networks that exploit children and adolescents (UNODC, 2021).

Despite the enactment of the Juvenile Justice System Act, 2018, which seeks to protect minors from the harsh realities of adult legal proceedings and encourage rehabilitation, the practical implementation of these protections remains weak. Law enforcement agencies often lack the training or resources to distinguish between child victims and offenders, leading to unjust prosecutions and long-term consequences for the affected juveniles (HRCP, 2020). Furthermore, the absence of specialized juvenile rehabilitation programs and effective monitoring mechanisms contributes to high recidivism rates and deeper involvement in criminal networks. This study aims to examine the causes, legal responses, and

consequences of juvenile involvement in drug trafficking in Pakistan, while recommending policy reforms for prevention, protection, and rehabilitation.

Another key factor contributing to juvenile involvement in drug trafficking in Pakistan is the failure of the education and child protection systems to provide vulnerable youth with safe alternatives and early intervention. In many urban slums and rural areas, children are out of school and exposed to environments where drugs are easily accessible, and traffickers actively recruit minors due to their impressionable age and perceived immunity from harsh legal consequences (Ali & Zia, 2020).

Moreover, child protection laws and welfare institutions often lack coordination with law enforcement, leading to a gap in identifying and assisting at-risk children before they are drawn into criminal activities. The stigma attached to juvenile offenders further complicates reintegration efforts, as society tends to view these individuals as criminals rather than victims of systemic neglect and exploitation (Bano, 2018). Without targeted intervention policies that address both prevention and rehabilitation, the cycle of drug-related juvenile crime is likely to persist.

Objective of The Study

1. To investigate the patterns, causes, and institutional responses to juvenile involvement in drug trafficking within the jurisdiction of the Regional Directorate, Peshawar.

Research Questions

1. "What are the key patterns, underlying causes, and institutional responses to juvenile involvement in drug trafficking in the Regional Directorate, Peshawar?"

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Research on juvenile delinquency and drug-related offences in Pakistan has established several important themes: socio-economic vulnerability of youth, deficiencies in the juvenile justice framework, and the broader supply/control dimensions of narcotics. However, far fewer studies focus explicitly on the active involvement of juveniles in trafficking operations rather than merely as users or victims. This review summarizes three key strands of literature relevant to your study: (1) structural drivers of juvenile delinquency; (2) youth engagement with drugs and criminal justice responses; and (3) drug-trafficking networks and enforcement in Pakistan. It will then identify how the specific area of juvenile trafficking remains under-researched.

Structural Drivers of Juvenile Delinquency, analyses of youth crime in Pakistan highlight how low socio-economic status, family disruption, peer influences, and limited supervision contribute to juvenile delinquency. Ullah & Bakhsh (2024) examine socioeconomic and cultural factors under structural theories, showing that deprivation, gender norms and educational exclusion create fertile ground for young people's antisocial behaviour (Ullah & Bakhsh, 2024). Earlier data indicate that among juvenile offenders in Pakistan, significant proportions emerged from under-privileged backgrounds (Kachwaha, 1982). The link between structural inequality and juvenile involvement in crime is thus well established.

Youth, Drugs And Justice System Responses

A body of research addresses young people's involvement with drug use and the way the juvenile justice system deals with them. For example, a study of male juvenile detainees in a Karachi prison found high levels of substance-use and sexual-risk behaviours, indicating how drugs become entwined with broader delinquent trajectories (Irfan & Rafique, 2022). The justice system in Pakistan has also been critiqued:

Abbas, Chughtai & Hussain (2022) provide a critical appraisal of the juvenile justice framework, noting gaps in how juvenile offenders are protected and rehabilitated. However, much of this work focuses on users or delinquents rather than those engaged in trafficking.

Drug-Trafficking Networks and Enforcement in Pakistan studies on drug trafficking in Pakistan outline the country's role as a transit zone and the operational challenges faced by law-enforcement agencies. Khan, Shahzadi & Batool (2025) review Pakistan's transnational trafficking vulnerabilities and the counter-measures required, indicating how sophisticated drug-networks exploit geographic and governance weaknesses (Khan et al., 2025). Media and government sources note that agencies such as the ANF warn of youth and students being used by traffickers: for instance, the ANF reported that "anti-national elements are using not just college and university students but even school children in this game". (SamaaTV, 2024)

Juvenile Involvement in Trafficking: The Under-Researched Dimension

Despite the above literature, the specific phenomenon of juveniles as active agents in drug-trafficking (rather than mere users or victims) receives scant systematic academic attention in Pakistan. One Supreme Court case noted a juvenile incarcerated for more than 11 years for a drug-trafficking charge, pointing to investigative and procedural flaws in youth-trafficking contexts (Tribune, 2018). A Sindh analysis found that 14.2 % of juveniles in youth offender industrial schools were under trial or convicted for drug-related crimes — yet this covers drug use/possession rather than organized trafficking roles (LAO Report, 2022). The gap becomes especially acute when focusing on the region of Peshawar (KP) and the operational role of the ANF Regional Directorate in identifying and prosecuting juvenile traffickers. In particular, three inter-linked gaps stand out recruitment and roles of juveniles: How are juveniles recruited into trafficking networks (coercion, peer pressure, economic incentives)? What roles do they actually play (couriers, stash-keepers, local distributors) within the Peshawar region? The literature does not chart this clearly.

Quantitative and network data: There is little quantitative empirical data mapping how many juveniles are involved in trafficking operations (as distinct from drug use) in Pakistan, what their profiles are (age, socio-economic background, gender, region), or how their involvement connects to adult traffickers. The youth gang/drug-trafficking literature from other contexts (Howell & Gleason, 1999) suggests this data is important but has not been applied locally.

Justice and rehabilitation outcomes for juvenile traffickers: While juvenile justice research covers young offenders, there is limited focus on those specifically involved in drug-trafficking – how they are treated by the justice system, what rehabilitation mechanisms exist, what recidivism rates are, and how region-specific interventions (e.g., in KP) function or fail.

Research Gap

While considerable attention has been given to the broader issue of drug trafficking in Pakistan—particularly in regions like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Peshawar due to their proximity to major trafficking routes—there remains a significant gap in research specifically addressing the involvement of juveniles in these illicit networks. Existing studies largely focus on youth drug abuse or general criminality, with limited investigation into how and why juveniles become actively involved in trafficking operations. Furthermore, little is known about the specific roles they play, the socio-economic and structural factors contributing to their recruitment, and the operational methods of traffickers who exploit young individuals. Within the context of the Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) Regional Directorate Peshawar, there is a noticeable lack of empirical data and case-based analysis that explores how law enforcement identifies, prosecutes, or rehabilitates juvenile offenders involved in drug trafficking. This gap hinders the

development of targeted prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation strategies tailored to this vulnerable group. As such, a focused case study in this region is necessary to uncover the dynamics of juvenile involvement in drug trafficking and to inform policy and practice.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study was qualitative in nature, based on perception. The research study was confined to the juveniles in Regional Directorate Peshawar. There are 4 central jails in which 95 reported juveniles are under trial in regional Directorate Peshawar. The sample size of the study was 20- 30 juveniles. Convenience sampling - a non-probability sampling technique was being used to select the sampled respondents. Interview schedule was used as a tool of data collection with open and close ended questions. The interview schedule was prepared in English, but the interviews were taken in the native language i.e., Urdu and Pashto. After collection of data, it was analyzed and interpreted through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The tool for data collection is a very important and essential step in the research. The tool for data collection was adapted interview schedule, validity and reliability will be evaluated as prescribed procedure.

FINDINGS

The involvement of juveniles in drug trafficking has become a growing concern worldwide, reflecting deep social, economic, and familial issues. Research shows that many young people are drawn into drug networks due to poverty, lack of education, peer pressure, and the lure of quick financial gain. Drug traffickers often exploit juveniles because they are less likely to attract police attention and face lighter legal penalties if caught. This involvement exposes youths to violence, addiction, and long-term criminal behavior, hindering their development and future opportunities. Overall, the increasing participation of juveniles in drug trafficking highlights the urgent need for stronger preventive measures, community education, and rehabilitation programs focused on youth empowerment and social support.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the involvement of juveniles in drug trafficking is a serious social issue that demands immediate and collective action. It reflects deeper problems such as poverty, unemployment, weak family structures, and limited access to education and social opportunities. Addressing this challenge requires not only strict law enforcement but also preventive and rehabilitative strategies that focus on guiding youth toward positive alternatives. By investing in education, mentorship, and community development, societies can reduce the vulnerability of young people to criminal influences and help them build productive, drug-free futures.

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