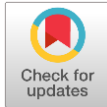


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Unpacking the Cycle of Recidivism: A Study of Age, Crime, and Contributing Factors

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Abstract

Recidivism has been a challenge in the criminal justice systems globally, as individuals continue to reoffend even after previous interventions. The current qualitative research explores the nature of the factors that underlie recidivism, with an emphasis on demographic features, including age and type of crimes. Based on a phenomenological approach, The study involved 20 inmates (15 men and 5 women) from Central Jail Sahiwal, selected through purposive sampling. Colaizzi's method was used to analyze the data, which identified three key themes, namely economic factors, psychological factors, and social factors. These key themes further gave way to subthemes, such as poverty, inflation, feelings of inferiority, lack of self-control, family and peer influence, revenge, and unwarranted accusations against offenders. The findings revealed that younger adults were more likely to engage in robbery and drug-related offences mainly due to economic instability, lack of personal control, and social inferiority. Contrarily, middle-aged and older offenders were involved in violent crimes influenced by social influence or revenge motives. The most frequent types of offence committed by the offenders were drug-related followed by robbery and murder. In conclusion, the current research highlights the complexity of reoffending behavior and the importance of a custom approach that would consider individual factors and holistic structural inequalities.

Keywords: criminal behavior, offending behavior, Pakistan, phenomenology, prison, recidivism

Introduction

Recidivism is defined as a person's reoffending after conviction and is labelled as a recurring challenge within the system of any criminal justice jurisdiction (National Institute of Justice, [2008](#); National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, [2022](#)). Societal issues in terms of

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social and economic pressures as well as organizational factors lead to a situation in which recidivism is a major concern in Pakistan. The criminal justice system in Pakistan is facing the challenges of overcrowded jails, low-budget rehabilitation facilities, and a smaller number of rehabilitation opportunities. Pakistani prison facilities are designed to serve purposes, such as authority and control, management and supervision, and rehabilitation. However, the overwhelming workload serves to thwart these objectives and makes reintegration a particularly challenging task. The lack of a good classification system for prisoners (by age, gender, and nature of crime) makes viable recovery difficult (Gul, [2018](#)).

The lack of recovery programs in Pakistan's correctional institutions is one of the biggest causes of recidivism. The absence of vocational training for both juvenile and adult inmates reduce their chances of employment upon release and increases the likelihood of recidivism (Anwar et al., [2015](#)). Institutional inequities and the lack of support systems also contribute to recidivism in Pakistan. Being in poverty, unemployment, and having difficulties accessing education greatly increase the chances of re-offending (Khan & Kanwel, [2023](#)). According to the World Bank ([2025](#)), the newly updated global poverty threshold is set at \$4.20 per person per day, and under this measure, about 44.7% of Pakistan's population now lives below the poverty line (Rana, 2025), and this type of financial decline impacts youth who are particularly vulnerable to recidivism (Khan & Kanwel, [2023](#)). Many repeat offenders are initially low-level offenders who reoffend simply to survive. Furthermore, the financial instability in the country, coupled with the consideration for work opportunities for ex-offenders, and juveniles in particular, further exacerbate the cycle of poverty and recidivism in Pakistan (Shuja, [2022](#)).

As of 2024, the prison population within Pakistan had exceeded streamlined capacity of 102,000 inmates, consisting of over 73% (74,918) individuals who are awaiting charges, which points towards a severely delayed judicial process and systemically attributed overcrowding (National Commission for Human Rights, Justice Project Pakistan & NAPA, 2024). The prison overcrowding together with the insufficiency of funding towards the prison correctional programs implies that such institutions are like holding centers rather than rehabilitation centers, which offer little education, vocational training, and psychological help (Shuja, [2022](#)).

Age can also help in understanding recidivism tendencies. In Pakistan, however, juvenile recidivism is most evident from the ages of 15 to 24 due to sociological issues, such as low or no income, educational concerns, and low chances of employment. Few scholars affirmed that delinquency reaches its peak around the age of seventeen and this for sure is the age of peak delinquent acts and it gradually squelches even as individuals begin to grow towards adulthood (Farrington, [2015](#)). Many young offenders are more easily influenced by peer pressure and, because of a tendency toward impulsivity, have fewer opportunities for structure than older offenders. Therefore, younger offenders tend to commit crimes at a higher rate than older offenders (Khan & Kanwel, [2023](#); Shuja, [2022](#)). Older offenders may experience stigma that is long-lasting and that will make reintegration more difficult and may, therefore, continue committing crimes throughout their lives.

Furthermore, some crimes are more closely linked to recidivism than others. In Pakistan, property crimes, such as robbery, theft, and burglary are a major contributor, often driven by financial hardship, with property crimes carrying the highest relative risk of reoffending (Munawar, [2023](#)). Similar trends are observed, internationally, in Spain where burglary and theft rank second in recidivism after felonies and sexual crimes (Villanueva et al., [2019](#)). Drug-related offenses also lead to significant rates of recidivism in Pakistan, due in part to its location as a narcotics transit hub. Offenders are frequently re-offending due to a combination of inadequate treatment options, and to a greater degree, pressure to re-offend from established networks, drug users, and dealers. Data has shown that there exist relapse curves that occur with drug offenders similar to those involving violent offenders, but this will vary by country (Yukhnenko et al., [2023](#)). Violent crimes, such as homicide, assault, and domestic violence do have high rates of recidivism as well. Interestingly, some studies suggest that people convicted of murder may be less likely to reoffend than individuals convicted of other violent crimes (Yukhnenko et al., [2023](#)).

Furthermore, the inclusion of murder recidivism cases in this study is corroborated by the current legal and procedural dynamics associated with murder in Pakistan. Dawn ([2024](#)) reported that in Rawalpindi alone, there were 1,483 murder cases between 2020 and 2024, mostly resulting from domestic matters, property disputes, and revenge, and in many cases, lack of evidence or reconciliation led to an acquittal. According to the Punjab

Police Cold Case Homicide Study (Aslam et al., [2025](#)), there have been over 3,000 backlogged homicide cases and faulty processes in all of them, resulting in very few cases solved and many being reopened. The Laws of Pakistan ([2015](#)) also indicate that under Section 302 of the Pakistan Penal Code, offenders may be given a reduced sentence, or full pardon, under the *Qisas* and *Diyat* processes (equivalent to law of retribution or law of compensation), which permits early release. This shows that the convicted murderers are able to return to society, without proper rehabilitation and reintegration, as systemic leniency and reconciliation allow for this. The combination of demographic variables, such as age, type of crime, and association of crime rate with psychosocial and economic factors would give a better insight into the concept of recidivism, both in terms of behaviors, as well as the emotional and psychological backgrounds to the continuum of criminality.

The patterns of recidivism observed in this study can be understood through several criminological perspectives. Social control theory emphasizes four propositions, namely attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. The theory argues that the lower rate of these social bonds increases the risk of reoffending (Hirschi & Stark, [1969](#)). Similarly, labelling theory emphasizes that stigma and becoming labelled as a 'criminal' can impact reintegration into society by reinforcing a deviant identity (Becker, [2018](#)). According to Differential association theory, crime is learned through social interaction, and repeated exposure to peers and/or networks that normalize offending behavior. The current and past associations reinforce such learned patterns and contribute to recidivism (Sutherland, [1998](#)). The framework of criminogenic factors discusses risk factors, such as poverty, substance misuse, and peer influence that can maintain criminal behavior (Andrews & Bonta, [2003](#)). Strain theory posits that when individuals face poverty and have blocked opportunities to achieve socially approved goals, they can face pressure to respond to their social and economic situation by engaging in criminal behavior, such as theft or other offenses they deem appropriate (Merton, [1938](#)). These theories are certainly much more synthesized in criminological literature, which provides a comprehensive foundation for applying them collectively. Together, the theoretical lenses provide a framework for this study, which examines how recidivists view and describe the factors associated with their criminal behavior to inform better programming for rehabilitation and reintegration.

Literature Review

There are many social, financial, employment, and psychological adjustments that convicted offenders will encounter when released from prison into society. A lot of these adjustments create barriers for individuals' successful reintegration back into the community (Zafar et al., [2017](#)). Conversely, Gillani's ([2017](#)) research reported 79% of prisoners in Pakistan committing offenses after release, while only 21% were first time offenders. Factors, such as psychological issues, drug use, self-harm history, aggression, and gambling addiction were determined to be substantial contributors to juvenile recidivism in Punjab (Irfan & Rafique, [2022](#)). The significance of locality, neighborhood, and poor economic status of the communities in influencing juvenile recidivism was also cited by Anwar et al. ([2015](#)) with the findings from Karachi. Shuja ([2022](#)) identified several aspects of social and environmental conditions influencing recidivism in his study based on grounded theory. The three antecedents he identified were negative social experiences, hatred for society, and toxic environment. Collectively, the evidence presented by the above-mentioned Pakistani researchers showed that economic challenges, psychological, and social pressures are significant predictors of recidivism.

Moving to international perspectives, Apel and Sweeten ([2010](#)) considered unemployment to be one of the main contributors to recidivism. They claimed that ex-prisoners may engage in crime because there is little or no access to employment, so they may develop a pattern of crime-based engagement. Substance abuse can create a situation in which post-prison treatment is ineffective, can contribute to perceptions of substance use as a normal engagement, and the addiction can inhibit engagement in society even further (Scott et al., [2014](#)). Other issues, including not having a social network or housing, can magnify these issues and see crime become a normal way to engage in society (Ahmed et al., [2018](#)).

Other studies have attempted to dive deeper into the complexities of recidivism in order to examine characteristics that may naturally lead an individual to engage in criminal behavior. Ruiz and Pereda ([2022](#)) identified that recidivism was associated with family violence and peer delinquency. The absence of social support predicted recidivism in individuals who experienced family violence. Zgoba et al. ([2020](#)) followed inmates after their release in New Jersey and found that inmates with substance abuse disorder had the highest rearrest rates compared to individuals with only

mental illness and those with both substance abuse and mental illness.

Gamage and Fernando ([2019](#)) discovered that recidivism occurs in 31.9% of the cases in Sri Lanka, with drug-related offences (46.3%) and property offenses (41.5%) accounting for the greatest percentage of recidivism. Their study identified several risk factors for recidivism, including younger age, male gender, low level of education, drug misuse, a prior criminal record, and non-compliance with the conditions of probation.

Additionally, crime in Punjab, which is Pakistan's most populous province, is multifaceted and varied. Rural areas are closely associated with land disputes and honor killings, while urban areas experience street crimes and gang violence. These include actual violence, such as murder and armed robbery, property crimes, such as theft and burglary due to economic and social reasons. The reason is that most of the crimes recorded today result from economic differences, poverty, and unemployment in most part of the province (ANI News, [2024](#)).

Rationale of the Study

Recidivism continues to undermine rehabilitation approaches in Pakistan resulting in overcrowded prisons and insecurity in society. Gillani ([2017](#)) indicated that 79% of prisoners in Pakistan were recidivists, where only 21% were first-time offenders. The extent of recidivism has been established. Most of the prior researches have examined recidivism as a whole by using either primarily quantitative based applications (Irfan & Rafique, [2022](#)) or grounded theory (Shuja, [2022](#)). Both approaches have added value to the literature in the field, however, there is a lack of research on the experiences of the offenders and the factors that led them back to crime. Additionally, the current research has also provided insight into how variables, such as age and type of crime influence recidivism. A better understanding of these two influencing variables will allow for the development of improved evidence-based rehabilitation and prevention program strategies for offenders in Pakistan.

Research Questions

- Which factors contribute to criminal recidivism among offenders in Pakistan?
- How does the type of crime influence offenders' experiences of reoffending?

- How does offenders' age shape their experiences and explanations of recidivism?

Method

Research Design

The research employed a descriptive phenomenological design that focused on recidivists' lived experiences. Descriptive phenomenology is derived from the philosophy of Husserl (1970). It aims to describe the essence of experiences as they take place, giving meaning from the point of view of the participant, and disregarding assumptions that the researcher has made (Giorgi, 2009). In the descriptive phenomenological design, the researcher acts as a blank slate and practices bracketing by leaving their biases and preconceptions so they can focus on the descriptions of participants (Neubauer et al., 2019). Bracketing was utilized in the current study through constant reflection, face-to-face encounters, reflective journaling, and peer review. Demographic coding and subgroup analysis were applied during data analysis by grouping participants by age and type of crime to examine patterns and variations in their lived experiences.

Participant Recruitment

The study population included individuals with a criminal recidivist history serving or awaiting sentence in Central Jail Sahiwal. The sample size comprised of 20 participants, 15 males and 5 females, selected through purposive sampling technique. This distribution reflects fewer incidences of females being classified as "recidivists" in Pakistan. The inclusion of the female participants helps to include some aspects related to the varying experiences of female recidivism and give insight into those aspects. In the 25–33-year-old category, there were eight participants, which represented the largest proportion of the sample ($N=8$; $M=28.75$; $SD=2.49$). In the 34–41-year-old category, there were seven participants ($N=7$; $M=37.43$; $SD=2.30$). Whereas, in the 42–50 age group, there were five participants ($N=5$; $M=45.80$; $SD=3.19$). This categorization allows the researcher to engage with the age group that is most commonly classified as "recidivists" in Pakistan. The inclusion criteria required participants to have a minimum of two incarcerations, be aged 18 years or older, be able to communicate in Urdu or English, and voluntarily provide consent. Contrarily, exclusion criteria included first-time offenders, individuals with severe cognitive impairments or memory issues, or those unwilling to participate.

Recruitment was coordinated with the prison psychologist, who helped identify participants and obtain access. The researcher briefed each potential participant and completed informed consent. Data saturation was reached with the 19th participant, and the 20th was added to ensure saturation.

Measures

The instruments used to collect data included informed consent, demographic information form, and semi-structured interviews. The demographic forms gathered details, such as age of the offender, age of first criminal act, type of crime committed, and jail history. Semi-structured interviews collected extensive qualitative data regarding criminal activities, reasons for committing crimes, and criminal histories. Additionally, demographic data collected gave researchers the opportunity to conduct subgroup analyses based on the participants' ages and types of crimes.

Procedure

The data collection process was carried out between February and August 2023, with the approval from Ethics Review Committee of the Department of Applied Psychology, University of Sahiwal, and DIG Police, Central Jail, Sahiwal. There was sufficient time to gather information, establish rapport with the participants, and conduct interim analysis that contribute in improving the methodology (Creswell, [2013](#)). Initially, informed consent was signed by participants to ensure their willingness to participate in the study. They were informed of their rights regarding confidentiality of data and their ability to withdraw from the research at any time. All interviewees had a 15-minute orientation session before they took part in interviews. Interviews were conducted in detail through written notes, which simply gave an account of the experiences of the interviewee because of the security measures in prisons. The interviews were conducted in private over a long period of 30 to 40 minutes. This was ensured in terms of confidentiality during the research; all the subjects were not only in a position to withdraw their consent at any stage of the research but they were also not pressured to join the research through any means of undue influence.

Ethical Considerations

The forensic facility was accessed with proper authorization and in line with the procedures that were to be adhered to the forensic facility in regard

to the security of both the participants and the researcher. This research was conducted in a forensic setting and certain ethical factors, such as participant anonymity through providing controlled environment, absence of coercive power on the side of the prison administration, and anonymity of all interviewees, were adhered to. In this study, all the national and institutional research ethics guidelines relating to the rights of the participants were followed.

Data Analysis

The phenomenological approach presented by Colaizzi (1978) was used to analyze the data. The Colaizzi approach consists of seven stages: First, get to know the data; Second, identify important statements; Third, construct meanings; Fourth, cluster themes and develop a description in general; Fifth, establish the underlying structure; and sixth, verify the structures. In the process of thematic analysis of the data, demographic coding, and subgroup analysis (age, and type of crime) were applied, to give information about the differences between participants. According to the Colaizzi procedure, the transcripts were considered several times, and the main phrases and statements were recognized and presented as coded phrases in order to facilitate the creation of meanings. The different coded phrases were classified into themes and generalized to form thematic grouping. The thematic groupings were properly reported, forming a comprehensive account of the phenomenon under investigation. The final step of the phenomenological analysis lies in the ability to verify findings by the use of member checks, peer interaction, and expert reviews.

Rigor and Trustworthiness

In order to promote rigor of the study, the research team adhered to the recommendations of Lincoln and Guba (1986) in developing credibility, transferability, reliability, and confirmability. Credibility of the themes was verified by seeking the participants' views of the findings of the data analysis. Moreover, participants were provided with an opportunity to view their transcripts and notes of the researcher as a source of credibility of the themes formulated by the team. The researchers gave a detailed description of the experiences of the participants in order to have transferability. To establish confirmability, the researchers were reflexive and controlled their own biases in the data collection and data analysis process. Nonetheless, reliability of the data analysis was ensured by the fact that the researchers

had an audit trail.

Results

The results of each theme are supported by data examples to show strong connection with participants' experiences. Based on the analysis, this thematic organization is intended to provide comprehensive understanding of possible factors contributing to recidivism.

Participants' Characteristics

A total of 20 recidivists, including 15 men and 5 women were recruited from the Central Jail, Sahiwal. The participants' current age ranged from 25 to 50 years, with an average of 36 years. Participants' demographic data is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 20)

Participants	Age at First Crime	Age	Gender	Crime Type
1	21	50	Male	Murder
2	21	35	Male	Attempt to commit murder
3	18	40	Male	Robbery
4	21	30	Male	Robbery
5	21	25	Male	Robbery
6	17	36	Male	Assault/Illegal Gun Possession
7	22	28	Male	Robbery
8	23	30	Male	Robbery
9	18	31	Male	Murder
10	20	30	Male	Drug
11	22	41	Male	Murder
12	18	45	Male	Murder
13	16	38	Male	Murder
14	24	31	Male	Drug
15	21	25	Male	Drug
16	20	36	Female	Drug
17	17	48	Female	Drug
18	22	36	Female	Drug
19	23	42	Female	Robbery
20	26	44	Female	Drug

Factors Associated with Recidivism

Table 2

Factors Associated with Recidivism (N=20)

Emergent Themes	Theme Clusters
Economic Factors	Lack of Financial Resources Inflation
Psychological Factors	Feelings of Inferiority Lack of Self-Control Revenge and Vendetta
Social Factors	Peer Influence and Bad Company Wrongful Accusation and Injustice

In this section, three themes are outlined (a) economic factors, (b) psychological factors, and (c) social factors with different subthemes that lead to recidivism.

Economic Factors

The economic problems played a major role in the decision-making of the participants to recidivate in criminal activity. Financial pressure emerged as a long-term situation that defines their everyday lives. Two subthemes were identified which included lack of financial resources and inflation. These economic factors were also observed to be more prevalent in young (25-33) and middle-aged offenders (ages 34-41) and in those committed drug and robbery crimes, demonstrating how age and type of crime interacted with this theme.

Lack of Financial Resources

Numerous subjects indicated that they lacked funds to sustain themselves and had to resort to crime as a way of meeting their basic needs. For example, Participant 19 (42 years old, Female, Robbery) mentioned that “my kids couldn’t afford clothes or shoes or school supplies and as a mother it broke me, so I had to steal to get what the kids needed.” Participant 5 (25 years old, Male, Robbery), on the other hand, stated that “I grew up in a family where we had not enough food and I turned to stealing so I could get food, especially after I had been incarcerated.” This shows that many people in poverty view crime as a viable option for survival when legal means to get the same basics are unavailable.

Inflation

Inflation has only made it worse. The economic pressure caused by rising prices limits the options available to people looking for ways to support themselves and their families. Participant No. 3 (40 years old, Male, Robbery) indicated that "prices continued rising, I could not afford to purchase food for my family, so I had no choice but to steal in order to provide food" Similarly, Participant No. 7 (28 years old, Male, Robbery) had simply stated, "I stole due to inflation". Again, this indicates that the increased prices exacerbated an already dire economic situation thereby creating even more barriers for individuals in financially stressed situations trying to meet their basic needs. This eventually results in an increased likelihood of re-offending.

Psychological Factors

The study identified two sub-themes that emerged from participants' responses: feelings of inferiority due to a lack of self-control and self-efficacy. These psychological factors were most prevalent among offenders aged 25 to 36, and persons who committed robbery and drug-related offenses, thus linking internal experience with demographic trends.

Feelings of Inferiority

The participants' low self-esteem and feelings of social inadequacy illustrated the feelings of being inferior. Participant 2 (35 years old, Male, Attempt to Commit Murder) said, "I often became so angry that I couldn't help but fight. I felt so hollow inside that no one respect me. I had to prove that I was not weak, which is why I did many bad things" Participant 5 (25 years old, Male, Robbery) explained,

I always believed that I was inferior than everyone else. I could feel how other people treated me and looked at me like I was worthless. That made me steal and do whatever to seem like I was not being left out or to make me feel that I belonged to a group. I never stopped thinking that way.

These statements explain the influence of social and financial inferiority in causing crime.

Lack of Self-Control

Lack of self-control referred to the struggles that the participants

experienced with controlling their behavior, impulsivity, and addiction. Participants 10 (30 years old, Male, Drug) and 15 (25 years old, Female, Drug) noted drug use as a primary factor contributing to their recidivism. As Participant 15 stated, “I started using drugs with friends, and then I could not stop myself there was no longer any self-discipline or control.” Participant 8 (30 years old, Male, Robbery) committed robberies “for fun and entertainment” even though he came from a financially stable family, which illustrates that impulsivity and thrill-seeking are factors in repeat offending. Participant 18 (36 years old, Female, Drug Offender) became involved in criminal activity slowly through social influences, noting “*Eventually, I ended up developing that habit too.*” Lack of self-control can form through repeated exposure to criminal environments.

Social Factors

Social factors were critical influences in recidivism, with most of the participants identifying subthemes of revenge and vendetta, peer influence and bad company, and wrongful accusation and injustice. Unlike economic and psychological factors, these social factors were significantly more prevalent among middle and older aged participants, demonstrating that social conflicts, clan dynamics, and long-standing disputes intensify with age.

Revenge and Vendetta

Revenge and vendetta clarify the result of long-term, ongoing conflict and problem-solving among family members and interpersonal relationships experienced by participants. Participant 13 (38 years old, Male, Murder) said, “My father and uncle were arrested for killing some of the other party. Our side was also responsible for their grandfather's death. We killed 14 of their men in this fight.” Participant 9 (31 years old, Male, Murder), on the other hand, stated, “We had to take revenge. They murdered my uncle, and We killed seven of their men in retaliation.” Other participants, 6 (36 years old, Male, Assault), 11 (41 years old, Male, Murder), and 12 (45 years old, Male, Murder), also viewed reoffending as similar to revenge. Hence, it can be concluded that such vengeful violence is based on an unrelenting revenge.

Peer Influence and Bad Company

Peer influence also promotes criminal activity and increases the likelihood of recidivism. Participant 10 (30 years old, Male, Drug Offender)

said, “My friends were getting high on drugs and stealing stuff. At first, I only got involved to try the drug. Eventually, to keep doing the drugs I needed to steal with them.” Participant 20 (48 years old, Female, Drug Offender) talked about how experience as, “My husband was a drug addict. I begged him to stop, and he couldn’t. In my frustration, I started using drugs to be just like him, almost as if to spite him.” Whereas, Participant 15 (25 years old, Male, Drug Offender) also wrote about his peer influence leading to recidivism. As per the responses of participants, it is evident that bad company has the potential to take away an individual's self-worth and contribute to a "normalization" of criminal activity within the context of criminal peers while at the same time providing less resistance to reoffending.

Wrongful Accusation and Injustice

Wrongful accusation and injustice refer to the way participants view themselves as being unfairly treated by the criminal justice system. This further ignites the feelings of resentment in them and, therefore, increases the chances of reoffending. Participant 1 (50, Male, Murder) expressed his views in these words,

I was accused of murder by my boss. He was guilty of the murder, but paid off my lawyer, and blamed me to save himself because I was too poor and powerless to protect myself from the accusation. I was vulnerable, and he knew that I could not find anyone to believe me or defend me. This injustice sent me down a very dark road.

Similarly, Participant 4 (30, Male, Robbery) said, "I was charged and convicted for robbery but was grouped up with the other accused. My position was only as the driver, but I was treated as if I was the planner." Also, Participants 14 (31, Male, Drug Offender) and 16 (36, Female, Drug Offender) described how injustice within the criminal justice system contributed to their recidivism by fueling the feelings of anger, frustration and isolation. Overall, many participants shared similar experiences of being subjected to inequitable treatment.

Subgroup Analysis

The analysis of emerging themes regarding recidivism is carried out separately for the participants, based on their age groups and type of the crime. The analysis also explores the intersection of the demographic factors with economic, psychological, and social influences.

The younger (ages 25 to 33) and middle-aged adults (34-41) tended to report more often the impact of economic factors, such as insufficient financial resources and inflation. Almost all of the young participants reported committing robbery-related crimes. Participant 5 (25 years old, Male, Robbery) explained how, as a result of not being able to find a job after being released from the prison, his only option was to steal for his family. "When people don't believe you, you can't get hired. You end up going back to doing what you were doing before, because that's what pays best." Similarly, Participant 3 (40 years old, Male, Robbery) said, "Whenever I got a new job, it never paid enough. I always ended up going back to what I knew." The same is true for a woman. Participant 19 (42 years old, Female, Robbery) shared, "What could I do when my children would ask for pretty things, what could I buy them with 10000 rupees I used to make." This indicates a significant influence of financial stress on younger and middle-aged adult offenders who commit theft/robbery crimes.

Psychological factors also contributed greatly to reoffending behaviors. Feelings of inferiority and lack of self-control became more salient in respondents between the ages of 25-36 and those who engaged in robbery and drug related crimes. Participant 2 (35 years old, Male, Attempted Murder) described, "I attempted to part ways with old feuds, yet people still seek to snatch me back into them. It felt like all the issues of the past awaited me just outside the gate." Similarly, Participant 15 (25 years, Male, Drug Offender) also stated, "When you are in the company of friends, you have to cross your limits." Even those with more stable backgrounds. Similarly, Participant 8 (30 years old, Male, Robbery) highlighted the impact of thrill-seeking behavior and said, "Although I was locked up, I continued getting calls by my friends and my friends were continuing their criminal activities. I was pulled right back in." This shows that younger adult offenders are at a higher risk of recidivism resulting from the complex interaction of economic deprivation and their own psychological vulnerabilities.

Social factors, such as revenge, peer influence, and false accusation were more pronounced in the middle-aged (34-41) and older adults (ages 42-50). Revenge and vendetta greatly impacted the older, middle-aged offenders of violent crimes. Participant 13 (38 years old, Male, Murder) told, "Retaliation was expected of me or I would have been disowned." Similarly, Participant 11 (41 years old, Male, Murder) reported, "It was not just for me; but for the honor of our family." Such reported incidents clearly

indicate that societal and inter-generational tensions are very powerful factors that influence the violent recidivism of middle and older aged offenders. Peer pressure and influence of bad company were also significant. For example, Participant 10 (Male, 30 years old, Drug Offender) answered, "I was using drugs and robbing with my friends simply to fit in." Participant 20 (48 years old Female, Drug Offender) had the same perspective "I was addicted, I had no alternative but to continue walking that direction." These examples demonstrate that peer networks are likely to provide a setting in which criminal acts turn into a habit and facilitate criminal behavior in later life, irrespective of age. Injustice and wrongful accusation issues were also reported in both younger and older-aged subjects. Participant 1 (50 Male, age, years, Murder) said, "I was wrongfully charged with committing a crime... It was just a matter of time before I went back to crime since I thought that no one cared." Participant 14 (31 years old, Female, Drug Offender) also said, "When your own family turns on you, who could come to your help, you?" Along with the above-mentioned incidents, systemic injustice appears to be an additional element within the continuum of criminality.

Discussion

The current study examined the factors that contribute to recidivism and the influence of age and crime types in cases of reoffending. A number of themes emerged, in which economic factor proved to be a key element. Lack of financial resources and inflation were experienced as subthemes. Similar results were given by Anwar et al. ([2015](#)), who stated that poverty and lack of financial resources were important factors which re-escalated juveniles into recidivism. On the same note, Ahmad ([2022](#)) also reported that economic hardships were closely related to youth recidivism. This trend is consistent with Strain Theory, which argues that as long as people face economic pressure or blocked opportunities, they can turn to crime as an escape, another way of adjusting to deprivation.

Psychological reasons also contributed greatly to reoffending behaviors. Feelings of inferiority and lack of self-control result in recidivism, as they feel a need to be validated by others or become addicted to commit the crime. Pratt ([2000](#)) studied a similar outcome with his analysis indicating that lack of self-control is strongly related to crime. Social Control Theory supports this finding by suggesting that weak bonds to society reduce self-regulation, increasing the likelihood of impulsive or repeated offending.

Social factors emerged as another prominent theme, which played a significant role in motivating offenders to reoffend. Three subthemes were identified under social factors. To begin, revenge and vendetta focused on how traditional familial feuds and rivalries served to perpetuate cycles of reoffending and violence. This pattern is also consistent with criminogenic factors frameworks, which describe how unresolved interpersonal conflict and lack of institutional mediation sustain violent recidivism. Similarly, peer influence or bad company was also a dominant factor. According to the theory of differential association, if somebody associates with peers who supported or encouraged retaliation, that association will be a continuing influence for that person to retaliate, and peer association is what influence the crime and justify it. McGloin et al. (2019) also reviewed the strong association between delinquency and peer influence, therefore aligning with differential association theory, that crime is learned through social interaction and exposure to a criminal subculture. Another sub-theme is wrongful accusation and injustice, where participants were wrongly accused of committing crimes based on family affiliation or bias from an institutional authority. For several participants, this fostered resentment and generated a perceived need to publicly reassert their innocence even if, in doing so, they felt compelled to commit further crimes. Labelling Theory explains that labelling someone as a criminal (regardless of whether they really committed a crime), reinforces their deviant identity. Resultantly, the chances of repeating the offence increases due to social isolation and the lack of reintegration opportunities.

Age-based differences were particularly evident in the responses of participants. Younger participants (25-33 years) were more likely to repeat their crimes due to economic problems, peer pressure, and psychological stress. Middle-aged (34-41 years) and older participants (42-50 years) reported social conflict, family commitment, and revenge as the primary motives for their criminal behavior. Based on these patterns, it appears that interventions to assist offenders should be based on the age of an offender and the reasons that caused them to commit the crime.

In terms of types of crime, drug crimes had the highest level of recidivism, followed closely by robbery and murder. These results align with earlier findings by Durose (2021), who reported high re-arrests rates for robbery, burglary, larceny, possession of drugs, and weapons. Similarly, a study in the Guangxi found that theft was the most common reconvicted offence (39.7 %), followed by robbery (23.9 %) among repeat offenders.

Conclusion

The research indicates that recidivism in Pakistan is determined by the interrelation among economic, psychological, and social factors. Economic instability, peer pressure, and the lack of opportunities have made young adults (25-33 years) repeat robbery and drug crimes. The middle-aged participants (34-41) were also prone to repeat interpersonal violence, and organized crimes, which are caused by financial pressures, family, and social stressors. The older adults (42 and over) reoffend infrequently, but when they do, it is always due to retaliatory or conflict-based violence, which is determined by the poor social support and previous inconsistencies. In all ages, structural factors, including poverty, unemployment, stigma, and poor rehabilitation, were primary causes of recidivism. Psychological needs, including re-establishing honor or responding to harm within a group also contribute to criminal actions. On the whole, the research highlights the importance of the age-sensitive and context-specific intervention that considers not only socioeconomic factors but also the emotional experience that determine the ways of how people move back to crime. Rehabilitation, provision of economic opportunities, and breaking the vicious circles of retaliatory violence should be strengthened in order to reduce recidivism and facilitate meaningful reintegration.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this qualitative study. The sample was selected through purposive sampling from a single jail which limits the generalizability of findings. Self-reported data is also subject to bias when participants under-report or over-report their responses, increasing the risk of memory failure or addressing social desirability. Also, audio recordings were not possible and the research notes were likely limiting the richness and accuracy of certain observations. Finally, the study did not have a thorough investigation of systemic factors, such as more generalized societal and institutional influences. Additionally, the sample included disproportionately fewer female participants, limiting gender representation and reducing the ability to explore gender-specific patterns of recidivism. The age range of 25-50 years was also limited, excluding both younger offenders (below 25 years old) and older adults (over 50 years old), which could exclude significant developmental and life-course variations in repeat offending.

Recommendations

As a way of curtailing recidivism, the interventions must be age-based depending on the developmental requirements of the various age groups. Besides this, intensive economic reintegration programs should be included that offer job training, provide employment opportunities, and maintain financial stability. Psychosocial support also involves counseling and trauma-informed care that are necessary in dealing with inferiority and lack of control, which tend to promote reoffending. The community-based network and restorative-justice strategies can be used to break the retaliatory violence cycles, extensive substance-abuse treatment, and post-release coordination services would guarantee ongoing support. In conclusion, lessening social stigma and enhancing partnership between justice, social, and health sectors is important in fostering an environment of successful reintegration and sustained non-recidivism.

Practical Implications

The results obtained in the course of the research revealed that the problem of recidivism in Pakistan is multifaceted which is influenced by economic, psychological, and social factors. These findings are a clear indication that punitive treatment cannot help to curb reoffending, as structural obstacles, including the lack of sustainable sources of income, stigma, and inadequate mental health service are forcing people into the circle of recidivism. This study demonstrated the need to integrate rehabilitative strategies into the correctional system and how lessons learned through the personal experience of criminals can be used to create a more successful policy and curriculum. This, in practice, involves making rehabilitative support and socio-economic vulnerability less of an optional consideration, and more of an issue that needs to be worked on. Addressing these socio-economic issues is a necessary reform to improve recidivism and the safety of the community.

Author Contribution

Areej Akram: conceptualization, methodology, data curation, formal analysis, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing. **Saira Irfan:** supervision, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing. **Ayesha Aziz:** writing – original draft, writing – review & editing.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The data associated with this study will be provided by the corresponding author upon request.

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