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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POVERTY AND CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT

Poverty and criminal behaviour have been shown to be intricately linked. Research has consistently shown that individuals who grow up in impoverished communities are more likely to engage in criminal behaviour than those who do not. This relationship is further complicated by the fact that poverty can contribute to a range of other risk factors for criminal behaviour, such as substance abuse, poor mental health, and lack of access to education and employment opportunities. While poverty alone does not cause criminal behaviour, it is a significant contributing factor that must be addressed if we are to effectively reduce crime rates and improve social outcomes for individuals and communities impacted by poverty. Policymakers and practitioners must work together to implement evidence-based strategies that address the root causes of poverty and provide individuals with the resources and support they need to succeed. Despite these debates, there is a growing consensus that reducing poverty is an important strategy for preventing crime. Addressing poverty through policies such as providing job opportunities, improving access to education, and addressing social inequalities may help to reduce crime rates in impoverished communities. Overall, the relationship between poverty and criminal behaviour is complex and multifaceted.

Keywords: Poverty, Mental Health, Abuse, Criminal Behaviour, Inequalities

INTRODUCTION:

Poverty is a widespread occurrence, affecting every country to some degree, and no country can claim to be entirely free of it. The common image that comes to mind when thinking of poverty is that of an individual lacking the resources and financial means to sustain a decent standard of living. Essentially, poverty is a state in which an individual is so deprived of basic necessities that they may not survive for long or could even die from starvation. This is a basic economic viewpoint. However, when viewed through a legal lens, poverty encompasses more than just a lack of money and food. People living in poverty may be more likely to engage in criminal activities due to a lack of economic opportunities, limited access to education and healthcare, and exposure to high levels of stress and trauma. Additionally, poverty can lead to social isolation, discrimination, and a sense of hopelessness, which can all contribute to criminal behavior. The poor often live in constant fear of becoming victims of crime, as they are more vulnerable than the wealthy. The law primarily punishes the perpetrators of crimes without necessarily considering the circumstances that led them to commit such acts, including poverty. Consequently, many times, the poor not only fall victim to crime but also become criminals themselves. To prevent this kind of involvement of the poor in criminal activity, specific measures such as education and employment opportunities can be taken. However, it is important to note that poverty alone does not necessarily lead to criminal behavior. Many



people living in poverty do not engage in criminal activities, and many criminals come from middle- or upper-class backgrounds. Moreover, other factors such as family background, mental health, and individual choices can also contribute to criminal behaviour.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The research is carried out using a doctrinal research approach, using data gathered from diverse sources such as case laws, online journal articles, books, research papers as well as online websites.

FACTORS RELATING POVERTY & CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR:

Poverty and criminal behaviour are complex phenomena that are influenced by a wide range of factors. While poverty does not directly cause criminal behaviour, there is evidence to suggest that it can be a contributing factor. Here are some of the key factors related to poverty and criminal behaviour:

1. **Lack of Opportunities:** Poverty can limit access to education, job opportunities, and other resources that can help individuals to lead a stable life. This lack of opportunities can lead some individuals to engage in criminal activities as a means of survival.
2. **Exposure to Violence:** People living in poverty are often more likely to be exposed to violence in their neighbourhoods, schools, and homes. This exposure to violence can contribute to an acceptance of violence as a means of resolving conflicts and can lead some individuals to engage in criminal behaviour.
3. **Mental Health Issues:** Poverty can increase the likelihood of mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. These issues can contribute to criminal

behaviour if they are not treated effectively.

4. **Lack of access to education and resources:** Poverty can limit access to education and resources that can help individuals make better life choices and avoid criminal activities.
5. **Lack of Social Support:** Poverty can lead to social isolation and a lack of social support, which can contribute to feelings of hopelessness and despair. These feelings can increase the likelihood of engaging in criminal behaviour.
6. **Social disorganization:** Poverty can contribute to social disorganization, which refers to a breakdown of social structures and relationships in a community. This can lead to a lack of social control and an increased risk of criminal activity.

It is crucial to highlight, however, that poverty does not induce criminal activity. Other elements, like as personal characteristics and experiences, also play an important part in determining criminal conduct. Likewise, not all persons who live in poverty engage in criminal activity, and many criminals do not originate from destitute families¹³⁷. In the case of *State of Madhya Pradesh v. Ramesh*¹³⁸, the Supreme Court of India found that poverty, illiteracy, and a lack of economic prospects are all factors that contribute to criminal behaviour. The court noted that poverty is a key contributor to the rise in crime and that the government must address this issue.

WHY ARE THE POOR MORE PRONE TO COMMIT CRIMES?

Before digging into this topic, we must first comprehend the relationship between poverty and education. Poor children seldom have access to a proper education, and as a result,

¹³⁷ <https://www.restlessstories.com/poverties/poverty-and-crime>

¹³⁸ *State of Madhya Pradesh v. Ramesh*, (2011) 3 SCC 178.



adults from the same socioeconomic group are denied stable and suitable employment. Even if children attend school at a young age, circumstances force them to drop out and work for their family's survival, causing them to remain in the same socioeconomic strata as their parents.¹³⁹

Furthermore, the poor may be more likely to engage in criminal behavior due to a variety of interconnected factors. One significant factor is the lack of opportunities, including employment and education, which can lead to desperation and a sense of hopelessness. Additionally, living in poverty can expose individuals to negative social influences and environments that may encourage criminal behavior. Moreover, poverty often comes with limited access to healthcare, housing, and other basic necessities, which can increase stress levels and contribute to mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, that could, in turn, increase the likelihood of criminal activity. Furthermore, research suggests that individuals living in poverty are more likely to experience discrimination and other forms of social exclusion, which can contribute to feelings of resentment and frustration and lead to criminal activity as a means of seeking revenge or justice. Overall, poverty is a complex and multifaceted issue that can contribute to criminal behavior in various ways.

In the case of *Sheela Barse v. Union of India*¹⁴⁰, The Supreme Court ruled that inmates have the right to fundamental human necessities such as food, clothes, and shelter, and that the government is responsible for meeting these requirements. The court remarked that poverty and social marginalization frequently result in a lack of these fundamental demands, which can lead to criminal behaviour.

THE RELATION BETWEEN POVERTY AND VARIOUS CRIMES:

¹³⁹ Poor and the law: A critical Analysis, <https://www.legalserviceindia.com/legal/article-4894-poor-and-the-law-a-critical-analysis.html>

¹⁴⁰ *Sheela Barse v. Union of India*, AIR 1983 SC 378.

Poverty is one of the key social issues in India, and unfortunately, it is often linked with criminal behaviour. While poverty itself does not cause crime, it can lead to circumstances that increase the likelihood of criminal activity. People living in poverty may turn to crime as a means of survival, such as theft or drug trafficking, or may engage in criminal behaviour due to limited economic opportunities and social exclusion. Additionally, poverty can lead to stress, frustration, and a sense of hopelessness, which can increase the likelihood of criminal behaviour. Here are a few situations that relates poverty with criminal behaviour:

- **Theft and Robbery:** People who live in poverty may resort to theft and robbery as a means to survive. In many cases, these crimes are committed out of desperation, as individuals may have no other way to obtain food, shelter, or money.
- **Prostitution:** Women who live in poverty may turn to prostitution as a means of survival. This is particularly common in areas where there are limited job opportunities for women and where the social stigma attached to prostitution is not as severe.
- **Drug Abuse:** Poverty can also lead to drug abuse as a means of escape from the harsh realities of life. In many cases, individuals may start using drugs as a way to cope with the stress and anxiety of living in poverty, and this can eventually lead to criminal behaviour.
- **Child Labour:** Poverty often leads to child labour, as families may have no other way to support themselves. Children may be forced to work in hazardous conditions for very little pay, and this can lead to physical and emotional abuse.
- **Begging:** Individuals living in great poverty may rely on begging for a living. When begging fails, individuals may become angry or violent, which can escalate to criminal behaviour in some situations. It is important to note that



poverty is not the sole cause of criminal behaviour.

There are many other factors that can contribute to criminal activity, such as social, cultural, and economic factors. However, addressing poverty is an important step in reducing the likelihood of criminal behaviour.

IMPACT OF POVERTY ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS:

Poverty can have a significant impact on the development of criminal behaviour in children and adolescents. Living in poverty often means limited access to education, employment opportunities, and basic resources. This can lead to feelings of hopelessness and desperation, which may cause some individuals to resort to criminal activity as a means of survival. Moreover, growing up in impoverished neighbourhoods may expose children to violence, substance abuse, and other criminal behaviours, which can normalize and reinforce such conduct. All of these factors can contribute to the development of criminal behaviour in children and adolescents, making it a critical issue to address in efforts to reduce crime and promote social justice.

Research has shown that poverty is strongly linked to higher rates of criminal behaviour among young people. Children and adolescents living in poverty are more likely to engage in delinquent behaviour, including theft, vandalism, drug use, and violent crimes. The lack of access to resources and opportunities, coupled with exposure to adverse living conditions, can lead to social and emotional problems that increase the likelihood of criminal activity. Additionally, poverty can cause stress and trauma in children's lives, which can increase the risk of mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, that may contribute to criminal behaviour. Therefore, addressing poverty and improving access to education, healthcare, and social support services may

help reduce the incidence of criminal behaviour in children and adolescents.¹⁴¹

HOW CAN IT BE AVOIDED:

Poverty and criminal behaviour are complicated issues with various contributing elements. Nonetheless, there are certain measures that can assist in mitigating these issues:

- **Education:** Education can be a powerful tool to reduce poverty and prevent criminal behaviour. Access to quality education can help individuals to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to improve their socioeconomic status and provide them with more opportunities to succeed in life.
- **Job creation:** Creating job opportunities can help to reduce poverty by providing individuals with a means to support themselves and their families. Employment can also reduce the likelihood of criminal behaviour by giving individuals a sense of purpose and direction.
- **Support for at-risk populations:** Providing support and resources to at-risk populations such as children from low-income families, individuals with mental health issues, and those struggling with addiction can help to prevent criminal behaviour.
- **Access to healthcare:** Access to healthcare can improve the health and well-being of individuals, which can in turn improve their ability to work and support themselves. This can help to reduce poverty and prevent criminal behaviour.
- **Strong social safety net:** A strong social safety net can provide a safety net for those who are struggling financially, which can help to reduce poverty and prevent criminal behaviour.

¹⁴¹ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7721/chilyoutenvi.14.1.0173>



Ultimately, poverty and criminal conduct are complicated concerns that must be addressed in a diverse manner. We can contribute to minimise poverty and criminal behaviour by concentrating on education, job growth, support for at-risk populations, access to healthcare, and a robust social security net.

CONCLUSION:

Poverty and criminal behaviour are linked in a complicated and diverse way. While there is some evidence that poverty may be a role in criminal behaviour, it is crucial to remember that poverty does not lead people to commit crimes. Numerous additional elements, such as societal and environmental influences, personal values and beliefs, and individual attributes, may impact criminal conduct. Nevertheless, poverty is not a standard experience, and various people may react to it differently based on their own circumstances. Having said that, studies have found that poverty increases the chance of some forms of criminal activity, such as property crime and drug crimes. This might be due to a variety of causes, including a lack of access to education and career prospects, seeing violence and other types of trauma, and experiencing feelings of hopelessness and desperation.

Finally, addressing the link between poverty and criminal conduct necessitates a multidimensional strategy that addresses not just the material realities of poverty, but also the underlying social and psychological aspects that may lead to criminal behaviour. This might include a variety of interventions such as education and job training programmes, mental health services, and community-based efforts to combat poverty and its effects on individuals and communities.