

Q. Explain juvenile delinquency. What are the socio-economic, demographic and environmental factors leading to juvenile delinquency?

Juvenile delinquency:

The term "juvenile delinquency" is derived from two Latin words: "juvenis" meaning "youth" and "delinquere" meaning "to fail in one's duty or to omit." This term "juvenile delinquent" originated in late 18th and early 19th centuries when the treatment of juvenile and adult criminals was similar and punishment was over the seriousness of an offence. According to famous authors Seigel and Welsh;

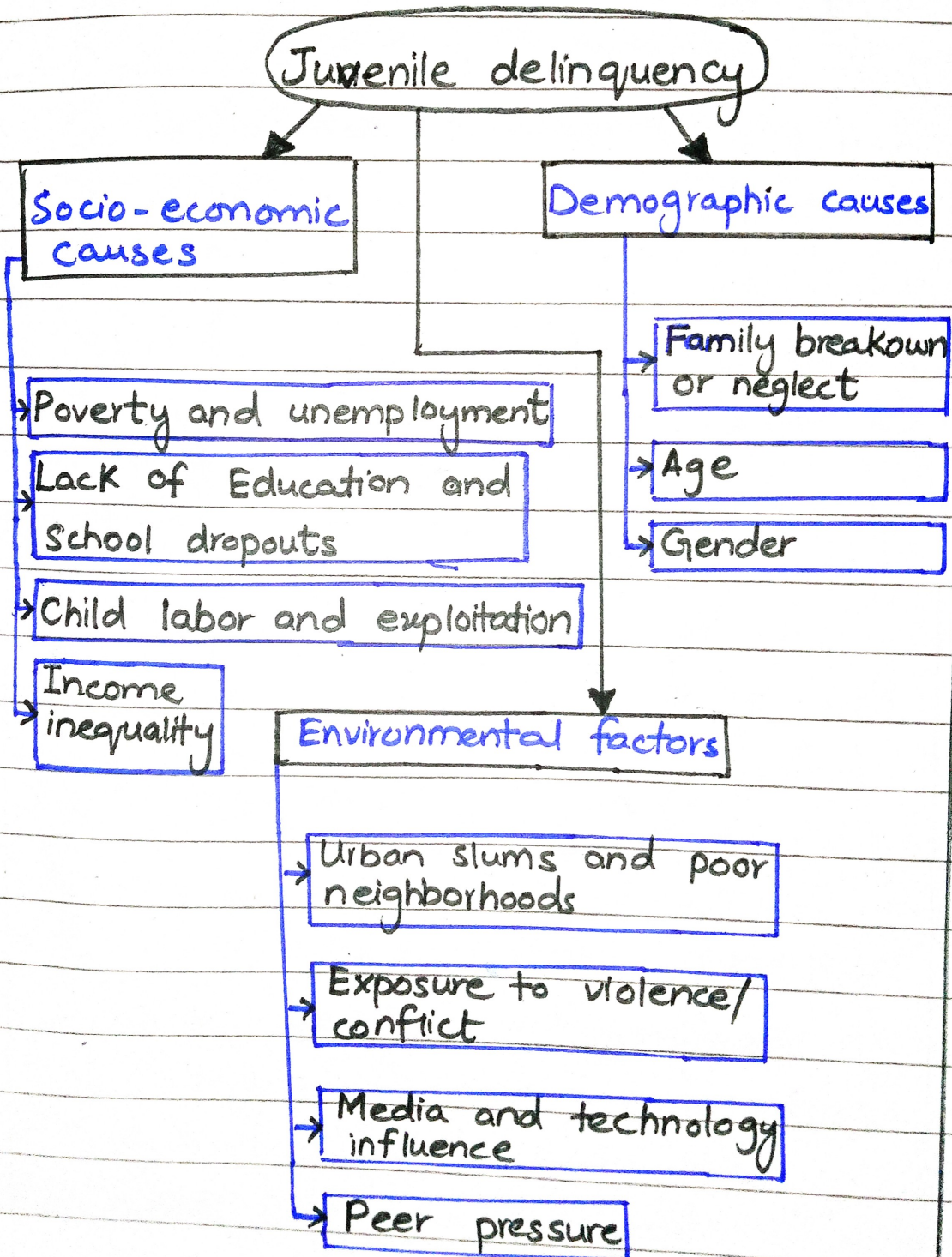
"Juvenile delinquency is an act of participating in unlawful behavior as a minor or individual younger than the statutory age of minority"

According to Pakistan's Juvenile Justice System Act 2018 and Pakistan Penal Code 1860;

"Juvenile delinquent is a person committing an unlawful act under the age of 18."

Every state has its own juvenile justice system, setting a legal criminal framework to deal with crimes committed by minors, usually children under the age of 18. Except in rare instances, juvenile offenders are not referred to as criminals. These systems set rules to minimise the chances of juvenile recidivism by maximizing their reintegration into the society. Pakistan's Juvenile Justice Act 2018 is one of such frameworks to deal with juvenile delinquency.

Socio-economic, demographic, and environmental causes of juvenile delinquency



Socio-economic causes of juvenile delinquency

1. Poverty and unemployment

Poverty and unemployment are the major drivers of juvenile delinquency. When families can not meet their basic needs, children may resort to theft, drug peddling or joining gangs as a means of survival. This aligns with Robert Merton's strain theory which argues that when socially approved goals like good job, high status, and wealth can not be achieved through legal means youth often turn to crime.

Example

Incidents of street crimes in Karachi often involve minors, belonging to the lower class striving for survival.

2- Lack of education and high school dropouts.

Lack of education worsens the problem, as school dropouts have fewer opportunities and are more vulnerable to delinquent behavior. Schools or educational institutes act as social controlling bodies and prevent delinquency by increasing supervision and control. Chicago School of Studies in 1920s showed that delinquency concentrated in poor areas with failing schools.

Example

A study conducted in Punjab found that poor educational performance at school, illiteracy and dropping out were frequently cited by juveniles themselves as factors that led them into crime.

3- Child labor and exploitation

Early exposure to harsh labor conditions often lead minors to criminal survival strategies. Working long hours in harsh conditions deprives them of proper guidance, making them vulnerable to theft, drug trade or organized crimes. Moreover, these children are unable to get proper education that induces a sense of moral responsibility and understanding of wrong and the right.

Example

According to International labor organization, ILO, Pakistan's brick kiln industry child workers - exploited and abused - often are vulnerable to petty crimes.

4- Income inequality

Societies with high income disparities witness higher rates of juvenile crimes

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resentment and social exclusion grow. According to Relative deprivation theory, when youth compare themselves with wealthier peers, they may engage in illegal means to bridge the gap. Income differences lead them to minor, major and heinous crimes.

Example

South Africa's township gangs illustrate how ^{income} inequality and lack of mobility incite juveniles to involve themselves in crimes.

Demographic causes of juvenile delinquency

1. Age

Juvenile delinquency peaks between 12-18 years when adolescents face identity crisis, peer pressure, and weak parental supervision. Age-crime curve shows that

crime rates peak in late adolescence or early adulthood and gradually drop thereafter. It happens because that period is marked by significant biological, psychological and social changes, enforcing minors to perform delinquent, unlawful acts as a coping mechanism.

Example

James Bulger murder case in UK, 1993 where two 10-year-old boys committed a brutal murder, showing how even young adolescents can engage in extreme delinquency.

2- Gender

Males are more likely to commit violent and property crimes due to cultural freedom and weaker controls, as explained by Power-control theory of John Hagan. In patriarchal families, boys experience fewer restrictions and more autonomy as compared to girls.

offering more vulnerability to delinquent behavior even in young age

Example

Muhammad Iqbal, a 17 years old boy, committed murder and robbery in Mandi Bahauddin city of Punjab.

3. Family structure and abuse

Broken homes, neglects and abuse from parents increases the likelihood of juvenile delinquency. According to Travis Hirschi's social bond theory, people are less likely to engage in criminal behaviour when they share strong social bonds with their families and society. Children facing child abuse, psychological traumas related to caregiver's ^{lack of} support, love and care, marital fights and abusive language are more prone to resorting to crime.

Example

Mary Bell, aged just 11, was convicted of killing two small boys in UK in 1968 - She faced severe neglect from her mother and was herself a victim of child abuse by her family

Environmental causes of juvenile delinquency

1. Slums or disorganized neighborhood

Slums and poor urban areas, with weak institutions and poor policing, become breeding grounds for crime. **Social disorganization theory** by Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay posits that neighborhoods with high residential mobility rates, ethnic heterogeneity, economic decay disrupts the social control preventing minors from performing unlawful behavior.

Example

Katcha area of Karachi, characterized by poor economic activity, is a hub of crimes often by juveniles.

2- Peer pressure

According to differential association theory, juveniles learn crimes by interacting with other criminals. Children having a close family members or friends involved in crimes are more prone to commit crimes as compared to those having families and peers with no criminal background.

Example

Asim's father has been involved in drug trafficking for five years. His eldest son learned how this system works and later joined the father.

3 - Exposure to violence and conflicts

Children growing up in war-torn areas and terrorism-prone places become desensitized to brutality, normalizing violent behavior as a survival mechanism.

These children inherit and reproduce delinquent values, making them susceptible to crimes at earlier age compared to those with peaceful living conditions.

Swat valley incident where TTP recruited child soldiers by manipulating them into becoming suicide bombers between 2007 and 2009.

4 - Media and technology influence

Violent video games, films and online radicalization expose juveniles to aggression and criminal ideals that they begin to imitate. Albert Bandura's **Social Learning theory** explains that children model behaviors they observe in media, especially when such acts appear rewarding. **Columbine High School massacre** in USA, 1999 is one of such examples.

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