Annual Methodological Archive Research Review
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about
Volume 3, Issue 10 (2025)

Online ISSN 3007-3197
Print ISSN 3007-3189

http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about

Impact of Labeling on Interpersonal Relationships and Reintegration of Juvenile Offenders in Pakistan

Zakir Hussain
Lecturer, Department of Social Work, University of Malakand Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan Email: zakir.hussain@uom.edu.pk.

Ibrahim
Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan Email: ibrahimsocio@gmail.com

Umar Daraz
Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan Email: dr.umar@uom.edu.pk

Aziz Ul Hakim
Lecturer, Department of Sociology, University of Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan Email: azizuom464@gmail.com

Mohammad Hussain*
Lecturer, Department of Sociology, University of Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan Email: mohammadhussain.soc@uom.edu.pk (Corresponding Author)

ABSTRACT

Labeling theory offers rich implications in explaining criminality in many contexts. While there is scarcity of research on the implications of labeling for juvenile offenders particularly in Pakistani context This study explores the extent and nature of labeling and its impacts on the interpersonal relationships and reintegration process and outcomes for juvenile offenders in the traditional communities of Upper and Lower districts of Dir and District Swat. The study employed a qualitative methodology where the data were collected through semi structured interviews, FDGs and field observations, form a purposively selected sample size of 30 juvenile probationers, 30 family members of the juvenile offenders and 3 probation officers. Thematic analysis revealed that distinct mechanism and impacts of labeling existed in the traditionally cohesive communities of Dir Upper, Lower and Swat. The study emphasizes the need of culturally sensitive restorative justice mechanisms and interventions to manage the labeling process, its effects to insure successful reintegration of the juvenile offenders in such contexts.

Keyword: Labeling theory, Reintegration, Juvenile Offenders, Interpersonal Relationships, Traditional Communities, and Restorative Justice.

Annual Methodological Archive Research Review
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about
Volume 3, Issue 10 (2025)

Online ISSN 3007-3197
Print ISSN 3007-3189

http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about

Introduction

The juvenile justice system in Pakistan is governed by Juvenile Justice System Act (JJSA) 2018, which establishes approval of both formal and informal processing of youths caught committing criminal offenses. Formal processing usually includes courtroom appearances, adjudication and probation officer control, whereas informal processing can be diversion to community service and/or counseling and/or restorative justice programs. But, the social implications of these choices, especially how they affect the youth relations with their peers have not been sufficiently studied in the Pakistani context.

Based on the labeling theory, this paper will examine the impact of decisions made in the first instance of the justice system and its influence on the interpersonal relationships of the Pakistani youth. Labeling theory assumes that adolescents may become stigmatized by contact with the justice system, redefine their self-concept, and change their social networks in a manner that can reinforce deviant behavior (Lemert, 1967; Tannenbaum, 1938). In a culture where honor, reputation and community status are ingrained in culture, being considered a criminal may have far-reaching effects not only on the individual, but also on the family and the community (Mahoney, 1974).

The adolescence is a significant development period, which is marked by the dependence on peer relations. Peer networks have become a source of support and a potential risk factor in Pakistan, where extended family and community structures are important in defining the behavior of the youth (Hussain & Sajid, 2024). Formally handled youth might face social rejection among prosocial peers and turn to deviant peer groups that can strengthen their new label of being an offender (Rowan et al., 2023; Jacobsen et al., 2022).

This is more troubling in areas like Upper Dir, Lower Dir and Swat where the community cohesion is high and where social labeling may result in marginalization in the long term. This stigma associated with formal justice engagement might lead to rejection by nondeviant friends or voluntary withdrawal by the labeled juveniles to avoid shame and humiliation (Goffman, 1963; Link et al., 1989).

According to the labeling theory, secondary deviance is the result of societal responses to deviance, in which individuals internalize the label and become even more criminals (Lemert, 1967). In Pakistan, this process can be worsened by low access to education, employment and social services, particularly by the youth who belong to marginalized communities. Formal processing may serve as a type of degradation ceremony (Garfinkel, 1956), which publicly identifies the youth as deviant and isolates him/her to the legitimate social order (Daraz, 2008).

The recent research has demonstrated that youth who have been formally processed have higher chances of associating with deviant peers and lower chances of making new prosocial friends (Rowan et al., 2023; Wiley et al., 2013). These effects cut across race and ethnic lines pointing to the universal nature of labeling effects. In Pakistan, the same process can take place both in the ethnic and regional context, especially in those regions, where tribes or religious affiliations are very strong.

Annual Methodological Archive Research Review
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about
Volume 3, Issue 10 (2025)

Online ISSN 3007-3197
Print ISSN 3007-3189
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about

Research Gaps and Objectives

Although the existing body of international research on labeling effects is increasing, there is a paucity of empirical studies regarding the influence of justice system decisions on youth peer relationships in Pakistan. The majority of current research is based on institutional outcomes (recidivism or educational attainment) that are less related to interpersonal exclusion and peer homophily, the tendency to be surrounded by similar individuals, including deviant peers (Jacobsen, 2020; Confer et al., 2024).

In this study, the gap that will be addressed includes:

Analyzing the impacts of formal and informal processing on peer networks among justice involved youth in Pakistan;

Evaluating processes of interpersonal exclusion, such as nondeviant peer rejection and labeled youth withdrawal; and

Investigating regional and ethnic differences in labeling effects, especially in such culturally diverse regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Literature Review

Labeling theory, which has its roots in the writings of Lemert (1951,1967) and Tannenbaum (1938) holds that social responses to deviance, especially when subjected to formal justice system contact, may stigmatize an individual, redefine their self-concept, and legitimize deviant behavior. This theory has been extensively used to explain the effect of juvenile justice processing particularly the switch over to secondary deviance. Lemert (1967) contended that the response of the society to deviance like arrest or court appearance may make the youth internalize the label of deviant and this increase the possibilities of subsequent offending. In Pakistan, where social identity and status are closely connected to family status and the reputation of the community, labeling might have an even more serious impact. The youth that can be considered as offenders can be excluded not only by peer groups but by educational institutions, religious spaces, and even job opportunities (Khan and Orakzai, 2023).

Rowan et al. (2023) discovered that youth who are formally processed (those who appeared before a judge and were adjudicated) were more likely to obtain more deviant and less prosocial peers over the years (Z. Hussain et al., 2025). The described phenomenon is attributed to interpersonal exclusion mechanisms in which labeled youth either isolate themselves among nondeviant individuals or are ostracized by them (Goffman, 1963; Jacobsen et al., 2022). Another tendency identified in the study is homophily, which refers to the behavior of labeled youth to seek the company of other deviant youth who help them validate their new identity. Conversely, youth that are informally processed (diverted to community service or probation) have healthier peer networks and are less prone to the social exclusion. These results are consistent with the previous studies that diversion programs can reduce the adverse consequences of labeling (Cauffman et al., 2021; Wiley et al., 2013). Informal processing as outlined in the Juvenile Justice System Act (JJSA) of 2018 is not fully utilized in Pakistan, particularly in the rural setting. Research has revealed that unnecessary formal processing is frequently caused by ignorance, resource scarcity, and institutional biases (Saqib et al., 2021).

One of the key processes by which the labeling influences the development of youth

Annual Methodological Archive Research Review
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about
Volume 3, Issue 10 (2025)

Online ISSN 3007-3197
Print ISSN 3007-3189
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about

is interpersonal exclusion. Rowan et al. (2023) specify that exclusion can be executed in two forms (1) by nondeviant peers who prefer not to be associated with the labeled youth as they fear to be branded guilty, and (2) by the labeled youth who expect exclusion. Such processes are specifically relevant in adolescence, when a person becomes more dependent on peer relationships to create a sense of identity and social confirmation (Brown, 2004; Warr, 2002). These processes could be enhanced in Pakistan by cultural traditions that attach importance to collective honor and shame. Deviant-labeled youth might be shunned by peers and others in the extended family and community, which causes more isolation and consequently more susceptibility to recidivism (Ullah and Bakhsh, 2024).

Effects of labelling are not univariate. Rowan et al. (2023) explain that race and ethnicity may also moderate the influence of labeling, and minority youth are usually disproportionately processed formally and sentence harsherly. In Pakistan, the same disparities can be observed based on the class, ethnicity, and geography (Hussain et al., 2024). Young people of tribal origin or lower social economic status have higher chances of being formally processed and lower chances of going through diversion programs (Khan and Orakzai, 2023). Overall, empirical research revealed that structural inequalities, including the absence of legal representation, absence of quality education, and systemic biases, are the factors of differences in susceptibility to labeling (Mahoney, 1974; Hirschfield, 2008). Besides, the influence of labeling is not confined to peer networks only, it also impacts educational and vocational paths. Formal processed youth are usually challenged by the re-enrolment in schools or getting jobs because of stigma and bureaucracy (Wiley et al., 2013). Moreover, the literature majorly centers on male offenders and new data indicate that female juvenile offenders in Pakistan undergo compounded stigma because of gender normativity and cultural pressures. Their reintegration issues are also more harsh because families can limit movement or support to save face (Ullah & Bakhsh, 2024). Such barriers may keep the cycle of poverty and crime going in Pakistan, where education is one of the most important factors of social mobility. Similar contexts have been found to encourage these effects can be alleviated by restorative justice and vocational training (Warr, 2002). Such considerations should be taken into account when formulating juvenile justice reforms in Pakistan.

Although the labeling theory is relevant, empirical studies on its impacts on youth relationship with peers are inadequate in Pakistan. Majority of the studies are devoted to legal frameworks or institutional challenges, little attention is paid to psychosocial outcomes (Saqib et al., 2021). longitudinal, network-based studies that evaluate the effects of justice system decision-making on friendship and identity development and reintegration opportunities are needed.

Research Methodology

The paper employed a qualitative research design that suits the socio-cultural environment of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, to investigate the effects of decisions in juvenile justice system processing on peer relationships of youth in Pakistan. The study was conducted in Upper Dir, Lower Dir, and Swat and involved 30 juvenile first-time offenders (50 percent formal, 50 percent informal), 3 probation officers, and 30 family members chosen using purposive sampling. The methodology of data

Online ISSN 3007-3197
Print ISSN 3007-3189
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about

collection consisted of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and field observation where all communication was in Pashto and Urdu, which were then translated to English. Thematic analysis, with six-phase framework presented by Braun and Clarke and backed by NVivo software, was utilized to determine patterns associated with labeling, peer exclusion and reintegration.

Findings

Theme: Perceived Social Identity Change

Once juveniles come into contact with the justice system, due to the age specific immaturity and the inappropriate treatments at the justice system lead them internalize the label of 'Crimina'l. Accordingly, this results in adverse impacts on their identity, societal status and future prospects. The narratives of the juvenile probationers and their family members reveal that the internalization of such labeled identity resulted in adverse psycho-social impacts in a traditionally cohesive and socio-culturally ultra-integrated society of Khyber Pakhtukhwa.

> *"My name was being erased when they affirmed me a criminal in court. And here, when even I attempt to do good, I hear that word in my mind "the offender". It is a kind of a stamp that I cannot get off".* (Juvenile probationer processed formally)

> *"I used to be a simple student prior to this case. This boy, nowadays they say, is of the police station. I began to wonder that perhaps they are right. Maybe I am that person now."* (Juvenile probationer processed formally)

Labeling is not an individual event, but rather it is supported by the community responses. In areas where honor and reputation is their primary focus, juveniles complain of being socially disconnected and deprived of the old identity.

> *"In our village the word honor means a lot. The case of my son made people no longer greet us. They no longer think of him as a child; they think of him as a threat*". (Parent of juvenile offender)
> *"The elder people do not call me by my name when they are discussing me. That boy that had gone to court, they say. I get the sensation that I no longer belong to the community*". (Juvenile probationer processed formally)

The label has an effect on the ambition and possibilities of juveniles. Most of them show less hope of coming back and securing some form of career as they view the stigma to be the hindrance to legitimacy.

> *"I had a desire to be a teacher, and now I believe nobody will trust me. Investigators already view me as a criminal, there is no reason to dream".* (Juvenile, formally processed)
> *"I did not attend any more school after the case. It seemed as though I was different to everyone. I reasoned, I just better stick with those that know me anyway--the other boys that had cases".* (Juvenile probationers processed informally)

Even though the stigma is widespread, there are juveniles who are fighting not to internalize the label. These stories emphasize the concept of resilience and how supportive interventions can help in the positive identity reconstruction.

> *"They call me names but I remind myself that I am not that. It was my fault and I am not a*

Annual Methodological Archive Research Review
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about
Volume 3, Issue 10 (2025)

Online ISSN 3007-3197
Print ISSN 3007-3189
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about

criminal. I continue to say this to myself on a daily basis". (Juvenile, informally processed).
"The probation officer said to me, you can change. That gave me hope. I would like to demonstrate this is not a permanent label and that you can change it". (Juvenile, informally processed).

The results of the theme of Perceived Social Identity Change highlight the extreme psychological and social effects of labeling on the juveniles in the Pakistani context. The stories show that formal justice processing can frequently serve as an agent of identity change, in which the label of offender is internalized and influences the idea of self, social status, and career goals. Although there are cases where the juvenile are resilient and are fighting to reject the imposed identity, most have low social acceptance and opportunities, which promotes the likelihood of secondary deviation.

Theme: Communal and Familial Reactions

This theme investigates the manner in which honor laws (izzat), shame, and reputation in a culture influence the way in which families and communities react to juveniles who are a part of the justice system. The socio-cultural background of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where the social identity and social status are entrenched in the tribal and religious beliefs and values, labeling impacts not only on the individual but also on the family The stories disclose tendencies of social distancing, gossiping, and reputational harm that affect chances of reintegration. The juvenile offense is perceived as a threat to the honor of the family hence leaving the families feeling humiliated and having poor social relations in the community.

"*In our society, the wrong that a single individual commits becomes the family dishonor. People stopped visiting us after the case of my son. We are being chastised like a couple".* (Parent of juvenile offender)
"My father replied, you have disfigured our name. I did not only feel guilty over the crime but also guilty of wrecking the family honor". (Juvenile, legally proceeded)

Gossip and avoidance are common reactions of a community that strengthen stigma and restrict social reintegration.

"When I pass the bazaar I have overheard murmurs--that is the boy out of the police station. Although some of those who were friends of mine now cross the street". "Juvenile Formally processed)
"*Our neighbors informed their children that they should not play with my son. They said he will spoil them. This was a greater pain than the court suit".* (Parent of juvenile offender)

Some of these families internalize the shame, whereas others use preventive measures to protect the juvenile to additional stigma including moving or reducing exposure to social situations.

"We no longer went to weddings and funerals. Individuals gossip excessively, and each inquiry is an injury to the ego". (Juvenile's Father)
"My uncle proposed that we should change to another village such that people forget. It is a kind of a new beginning in life, only without the old respect" (Juvenile, informally processed).

The responses to juvenile justice involvement by communities and families are

Annual Methodological Archive Research Review
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about
Volume 3, Issue 10 (2025)

Online ISSN 3007-3197
Print ISSN 3007-3189
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about

entrenched in honor and shame cultural constructs. These reactions tend to increase the consequences of labeling, which develops barriers to reintegration, and social isolation. Although there are families that seek to preserve their reputation by withdrawing or moving out, these solutions do not always amount to solving the stigma problem.

Theme: Difference of stigma at Family and Community level

This theme explores the difference between the blatant community response and nuanced family response after juvenile justice engagement. Whereas, public stigma is an evident form of exclusion and gossip, a private type of stigma exists on the family level, and it is frequently practiced to be silent, withdrawn, or an implied blame. These two-layered stigmas affect the reintegration pathway and emotional status of the juvenile. Stigma at the community level is usually overt, and it entails verbal stigmatization, social ostracism, and damaged reputation. Such responses are increased in the rural environment where social surveillance is high.

> *"It is explicitly stated openly in the village, saying to their children not to mingle with him. It is as though they made known to all the crime of my son".* (Parent of juvenile offender)
> *"The comments that I hear when I go to the mosque are such as, Here comes the troublemaker. They do not conceal it, they shout it at me so that I can hear. The term is also used for the juvenile that is formally processed*" (Juvenile).

The families can either suppress the discussion of the offense, place limitations or show their feelings of disappointment in an indirect manner, which will result in a kind of emotional seclusion.

> *"My mother does not rebuke me, however, she no longer talks to me as she used to. She speaks only when she needs to speak. No words are grosser than that silence hurts".* (An informally processed Juvenile)
> *"The case is not discussed at home. It is a shadow in the house, everybody knows about it, no one talks about* it". (Juvenile's Parent)

Public humiliation and the withdrawal of the juvenile is a compounding effect that generates the feeling of alienation, and identity dilemma in the juvenile.

> *"Outside, they call me names. No one calls me anything inward. I consider myself to be out of place everywhere".* (A formally processed Juvenile Probationer)
> *"Home was supposed to be my security so even here I am a stranger. They do not call me a bad person but they make me feel that I am one".* (Juvenile, informally processed)

The combination of the public and the private stigma is a web of exclusion to the juveniles. Whereas the community responses are visible and reprimanding, family responses tend to be non-verbal, yet highly expressive which reaffirms the isolated feelings felt by the juvenile.

Theme: Impacts on Relationships with Peers

This theme is discussed in terms of juvenile justice participation that transforms a peer network and social life. Adolescence is one of the phases when peer relations are

Online ISSN 3007-3197
Print ISSN 3007-3189
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about

the key to identity and emotional health. The results suggest that these relationships are disrupted by labeling and justice system processing, which result in an exclusion of prosocial networks, self-isolation, and reintegration into deviant networks. These relationships play a major role in the reintegration process. Juveniles mentioned that they did not participate in school activities, sports, and social gatherings, frequently under parental pressure or community rumors. This rejection supports isolation and stigma.

> *"Following the case, my classmates stopped asking me to play cricket. One of them replied, the father told me not to mingle with you. The punishment was not as great as that pain".* (Juvenile processed formally)
> *"Teachers do not state this; however, they do not allow me to sit with the same group. I think I am stigmatized".*

Some juveniles prefer to be self-isolated in order not to be humiliated and gossipped. The withdrawal is usually presented as a coping strategy instead of preference.

> *"I would no longer visit the playground since I would be stared and whispered about. I do not want to hear those words, it is more comfortable to remain at home"(* Juvenile, informally processed).
> *"Even at school, I keep quiet. I do not wish to provide anybody a reason to speak about me".* (Juvenile, formally processed)

Being rejected by prosocial networks tends to push juveniles among those who have been involved in justice and this leads to environments that encourage deviance and strengthening the identity of the offender.

> *"The boys who had cases like mine turned into my friends They have a feeling of how it is. Judging one another is not something we give a second thought to"* (Juvenile, formally processed)
> *"I began to hang out with people who were also in trouble with the police. At least, they do not make me ashamed".*

By looking at peer relationship processes that follow justice involvement, there is a path of social exclusion to deviant peer affiliation. Although the rejection and withdrawal are expedient reactions to stigma, the deviant peer group formation is long-term threatening the secondary deviance.

Theme: Impact of Justice System Processing on labeling and Reintegration

The theme explores the effects of juvenile justice processing on stigma, identity, and reintegration that are influenced by the nature of juvenile justice processing (formal or informal). Formal processing is usually characterized by court appearances and probation, visible signs of deviance to the whole community and informal processing by diversion programs, which tends to keep the exposure to a minimum and social connection intact.

The stories demonstrate the extreme differences in labeling intensity and the social outcomes. It is believed that formal justice processes are symbolic moves that publicly deprive the juveniles of their former identity and turn them into criminals. Court appearances and probation meetings increase the stigma because they expose

Annual Methodological Archive Research Review
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about
Volume 3, Issue 10 (2025)

Online ISSN 3007-3197
Print ISSN 3007-3189
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about

the offense to the community.

> *"Being in court was like being in front of the entire village. Everyone knew why I was there. They were saying, look at the criminal, like".* (Formally processed juvenile Probationer)
> *"The moment when I heard my name spoken by the judge I got a feeling that my life had changed. There was staring by people in the courtroom. I did not want to be noticed, I wanted to disappear".* (Formally processed juvenile Probationer)
> *"Without any privacy, probation visits are not private. The officer visits our house and it is observed by neighbors. They enquire and the gossips begin".* (Parent of a juvenile offender)

Informal processing through diversions and counseling assist juveniles in preserving anonymity and minimizing the stigma. These paths are frequently termed as protective in which the youth can re-integrate without humiliation in the society.

> *"They have referred me to counseling and not to court. No one outside my family knew. It was almost a second opportunity when no one would judge me"* (Juvenile, informally processed).
> *"The community service program was will suited as it reflected skill development instead of an expression of punishment. People believed that I was assisting them. That rescued my honour.* (Juvenile, informally processed).
> *"Informal processing ensured that the issue remained within the family. We can do such things with offenders without defaming them".* (Juvenile's Parent)

Juveniles and families always speak about the stigma associated with formal processing as compared to the informal pathways. Labeling is enhanced by openness of court proceedings and probation, and discretion and social continuity are made possible by informal measures.

> *"There was a case of my cousin, who was diverted. People never discussed him in the same manner as they discuss me".* (Formally Processed Juvenile)
> *"Criminals who are taken to court are remembered over years. In our case, it was non-formal, and thus we are not on the watch list of the community".* (Parent of the informally processed juvenile)
> *"Formal cases are like a punishment that is publicized. Informal ones are more in the nature of a lesson learned without making a noise".* (Probation Officer)

The comparison of formal and informal processing explains the role of justice system judgments in determining the course of stigma and reintegration. Formal processing acts as a ritual of degradation, which increases labeling and social exclusion of the population, whereas informal channels provide discretion and maintain the status of the community.

Theme: Interpersonal Exclusion Mechanisms

This theme examines how the juveniles undergo social exclusion after the justice intervention. Exclusion takes place in both direct discrimination and indirect forms via social practices like gossip and avoidance and indirectly via digital media which enhances stigma. All these processes support the labeling and discourage reintegration.

Juveniles and their families complain of explicit rejection by their peers, teachers, and community members. These direct actions usually take place in socially available places, thereby portraying the stigma as evident and embarrassing.

Annual Methodological Archive Research Review
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about
Volume 3, Issue 10 (2025)

Online ISSN 3007-3197
Print ISSN 3007-3189
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about

"*My teacher said, sit at the back, you must keep quiet. I was always at the front of the case. It was one sentence that made me feel that I was not a part of it".* (formally processed Juvenile)
"In the playground, one kid told me, you are a thief, we do not play with thieves. Everyone laughed. I walked out and never returned". (Informally processed juvenile)
"Neighbors made no secret over their statement: Keep your son off of ours. It was a declaration of shame before the whole community". (Father of Juvenile)

Indirect exclusion occurs in the form of gossip, rumors and silent avoidance. This tacit discrimination helps to form a sense of social uneasiness and seclusion without any direct opposition.

"The moment I enter any place, adopt silence and then they start whispering behind me. This silence and whispering is all explanatory for me". (Formally processed Juvenile)
"We hear sayings such as that family is not good anymore. It is less noisy but it kills relationships". (Parent of juvenile offender)

Digitalization enhances stigma by spreading rumors and ridiculing the juveniles by posting or commenting. This virtual labeling puts exclusion into space and makes it more difficult to avoid.

"There was one posting on my case on Facebook. Others even started commenting even though they were in other villages. I had the feeling that the entire world was aware". (Juvenile, formally processed)
"They joked about me on WhatsApp groups. I was not present but my friends informed me. It is a punishment in itself, as it would be to be punished again". (Juvenile, formally processed)
"The shame becomes everlasting with the help of social media. The posts remain even in case the case is terminated". (Probation officer)

The interpersonal exclusion works in a stratified process of direct discrimination, indirect avoidance, and digital amplification that make juveniles experience stigma. Although blatant rejection is harmful instantly, subtle and online types of exclusion create a marginalizing effect in the long term.

Theme: Labelling and Reintegration: Cultural and Regional Differences

This theme explores cultural provisions and regional provisions that influence the labeling and reintegration experience of juvenile offenders. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the community response to deviances is determined by tribal codes and the powerful religious values. The differences between urban and rural environments and ethnic and religious backgrounds produce different stigma and social exclusion patterns.
Honor (izzat) and reputation are the main priorities in social life in tribal communities. Juvenile crimes are viewed as both personal and communal disgrace which increases stigmatization and restricts the chances of re-integration.

"Even one failure is a source of shame to the entire family in our area. They say, this house is a disgraced one. Not only the boy, but everyone, it is not about everyone. It is clear that he has a prior criminal record". (Parent of juvenile offender)
"My uncle said, When I was found, you have violated Pashtunwali. That was more of a burden than punishment as our family member has violated our code". (Lower Dir, prosecuted, Juvenile)

Annual Methodological Archive Research Review
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about
Volume 3, Issue 10 (2025)

Online ISSN 3007-3197
Print ISSN 3007-3189
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about

Cities are characterized with individuality, anonymity and moderatism as compared to rural areas where there is more social surveillance and collective environment resulting in more severe stigma and fewer reintegration opportunities among juveniles in rural settings.

> *"People are not much worried about the city. There was a case in Peshawar with my cousin and nobody knew. Everyone is aware of everything here in the village".* (Juvenile Processed informally)
> *Cities allow one to restart a new life. The gossip never ceases in villages. They do not forget even after years*. (Probation officer)

The intersection of labeling with ethnic identity and religious norms contributes to the development of community reactions. In other instances, the offense is discussed in religious terms, which make it a moral failure and amplify stigma.

> *"People told, he has sinned; he must repent. They discuss religion than the law. It causes the embarrassment to seem like a curse on one*". (Parent of juvenile offender)
> *"To be a criminal is to be a sinner in our part of the world. It becomes more difficult to confront individuals in the mosque".* (Formally processed Juvenile)

There are major effects of cultural and regional differences in the labeling and reintegration opportunities. In rural settings, stigma is enhanced by tribal codes and religious norms and relative anonymity and flexibility are available in urban settings.

Theme: Reintegration Problems and Opportunities.
This theme covers factors that hinder or support reintegration of juveniles after a visit to the justice system. Although there are some opportunities, provided through the diversion programs and family support, structural and cultural barriers tend to hamper the successful reintegration.The narratives demonstrate the clashes between hopes and social attitudes, discrimination inside of the institutions, and the new roles of community-based rehabilitation.
There are barriers to juvenile education or employment after involvement in justice, as a result of institutional discrimination and community stigma.

> *"I returned to school, and the school principal told me, we do not want troublemakers here. A single sentence shut the door on my future, that one sentence of mine".* (Formally processed Juvenile).

> *"I had applied to a job and they wanted a character certificate. They answered "NO" when they saw my case history. It is a kind of punishment that does not stop".* (Juvenile, informally processed).

Reintegration opportunities are offered through diversion programs under JJSA 2018 as a way in which interventions are perceived as constructive and not punitive.

> *"The community service program made me feel useful. Citizens observed me planting trees, not in the court. It altered their way of viewing me".* (Informally processed Juvenile)
> "*Meetings with the elders under restoration proved to be significant. They said, 'We forgive you.' That had provided my son with an opportunity to begin anew".* (Parent of juvenile offender)

Annual Methodological Archive Research Review
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about
Volume 3, Issue 10 (2025)

Online ISSN 3007-3197
Print ISSN 3007-3189
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about

The youths may have aspirations of education and employment and these are not achieved as they run into constant stigmatization and lack of opportunities.

> *"I liked to be a mechanic and people tell me that no one will hand over their car to me. It is difficult to dream when you are undergoing a legal procedure."* (Juvenile, formally processed).

> "*My son has been talking about joining college, but whispers in the village make him lose hope."* (Parent of juvenile offender)

In addition to structural obstacles, juveniles have emotional difficulties in the terms of fear of being judged and fear of being socially rejected.

> *"I think there is a feeling that everyone is staring at me even when I attempt to take a step forward. Fear of that is never gone by".* (Juvenile, formally processed).
> *"He does not want to attend gatherings since he believes that people would talk. Not only opportunities, but also confidence".* (Parent of juvenile offender)

Stigma can be perpetuated or social reintegration be facilitated by the attitudes and contribution of the religious leaders and community elders through social endorsement or forgiveness.

> *"People ceased gossiping when the imam announced in the mosque that he had repented. That single statement reversed everything".* (informally processed juvenile)
> *"When adults are on the side of the child, the society will follow. Reintegration can hardly take place without their consent".* (Probation Officer)

The process of rehabilitation is influenced by a complicated combination of institutional, cultural, and psychological factors. Diversion programs and supportive community leadership is the way out, however, education and employment barriers, as well as perpetuated stigma are obstacles.

Discussion

The current research investigated the effects of labeling on interpersonal relationships and reintegration of juvenile delinquents in Pakistan, based on the labeling theory and through the prism of socio-cultural context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The findings demonstrate substantial similarities to the international literature and present peculiar cultural processes contributing to increased stigma and hindering reintegration.

In line with the idea of secondary deviance introduced by Lemert (1967) and the idea of dramatization of evil described by Tannenbaum (1938), this research concluded that the formal processing according to the Juvenile Justice System Act (JJSA) 2018 is a degradation ceremony, which publicly identifies the juveniles as criminals (Daraz et al., 2025). The same has been observed in the United States, which has found formal adjudication to predict greater internalization of deviant identities than diversion (Rowan et al., 2023). But, collectivist orientation and honor-oriented standards make this process more severe in Pakistan taking the stigma beyond the person to the family unit- a dynamic less intense in the West (Mahoney, 1974).

Annual Methodological Archive Research Review
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about
Volume 3, Issue 10 (2025)

Online ISSN 3007-3197
Print ISSN 3007-3189
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about

Our results of peer rejection and consequent attraction of deviant peer group can be compared to international sources which reveal that labeling breeds homophily in youth involved in justice (McGloin and Thomas, 2019; Wiley et al., 2013). However, the Pakistani environment brings about specific mechanisms: the exclusion is supported by the instructions of parents and the gossip of the community, which is highly socially controlled in villages (Ullah & Daraz, 2024). This is unlike in the Western studies whose peer rejection is more individualized and less mediated.

The formal and informal processing comparative analysis favor global studies promoting the idea of diversion as one of the strategies that should be used to reduce stigma and enhance better results in terms of reintegration (Petrosino et al., 2013; Wilson and Hoge, 2013). JJSA 2018 informal pathways, including counseling and community service, contribute to maintaining anonymity and social connections, which means a lower level of labeling. But in Pakistan, the lack of resources and inconsistency in the implementation of the diversion programs are barriers to these benefits due to implementation gaps (Khan and Orakzai, 2023).

The impact of family and community on the pathways of reintegration is well-reported on the worldwide basis (Mathur and Clark, 2014; OJJDP, 2018), but it is also magnified by the collectivist inclination in Pakistan. Families are falling in and out of support and silent stigma especially guided by tribal codes like Pashtunwali. This cultural aspect highlights the necessity of context-related interventions which involve elders and religious leaders as they are not the focus of the Western concept of juvenile justice (Mulk et al., 2025). The development of social media as exclusion technique is no exception to the tendencies across the borders (Goldson, 2010), through which shaming on the internet reinforces the stigma outside the physical locations. Digital gossip in the rural Pakistani context collides with the existing systems of honor, resulting in a two-tiered stigma that is especially hard to clear.

The barriers to education and employment that are identified in this research are similar to global issues of collateral consequences of juvenile records (American Institutes for Research, 2024). However, Pakistan has other structural constraints that include low implementation of JJSA provisions and unavailability of an institutional support of vocational training (Hussain et al., 2025). As worldwide approaches to crime solution are becoming more restorative and community-based rehabilitation (Justice Innovation, 2019), a country like Pakistan with its emphasis on punitive measures and underfunded diversion programs negatively affects the development of the solution to the crime issue.

Theoretical Implications

This research supports the explanatory implication of the Labeling Theory (Tannenbaum, 1938; Lemert, 1967) in the interpretation of the outcome of juvenile justice within a cultural setting. The results confirm the fundamental hypothesis of the theory that the reaction of society to deviance, specifically, the formal justice processing, may result in identity transformation and secondary deviance. The study however builds on labeling theory by showing how collectivist cultural orientations and honor based social arrangements heighten labeling effects in situations where the individual stigma is extended to include families and communities in the form of a collective stigma. This implies that the labeling theory, which has been previously

Online ISSN 3007-3197
Print ISSN 3007-3189
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about

used in the West, should be modified in relation to culture to explain the communal aspects of stigma in such a society as Pakistan. Moreover, the aspect of digital platforms in sustaining the stigma offers a new dimension to the labeling processes, which suggests that theory should be extended to accommodate cyber-labeling as an identity-building and exclusion tool.

Policy and Practice Implications

The results indicate that juvenile justice reforms in Pakistan require cultural sensitivity. JJSA 2018 should also increase strength of diversion programs and standardize them to reduce formal processing that is a degradation ceremony increasing stigma. Strategies of re-integration should include families, community elders and religious leaders to overcome honor-based stigma and support restorative justice. Models that are available on the international level, such as family-centered interventions and community-based rehabilitation (Mathur and Clark, 2014; Justice Innovation, 2019), have a potential, but they must be adapted to the collectivist Pakistani social environment. Also, there is a need to conduct digital literacy and community sensitization initiatives to deal with online shaming and long term effects.

Limitations

There are various limitations in this study. First, the size of the sample (n = 30 juveniles) restricts generalization, whereas the qualitative design was based on the depth rather than breadth. Second, it studied 3 districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa which may not represent variation across the rest of the provinces with different cultural norms. Third, it is based on the self-reported narratives which have the chance of introducing biases, such as social desirability and recall errors.

Future Research Directions

Mixed-method designs should be undertaken in the future to provide a triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data of stigma, peer network changes, and recidivism. Inter-provincial and urban-rural comparative research would shed light on the regional differences in labeling effects. There is a need to have longitudinal studies over a period of years that would determine the persistence of stigma as well as the success of diversion programs. Moreover, another area of research is the role of digital platforms in ensuring or alleviating stigma, which is a growing area of research. Lastly, it is possible that intervention-based research assessing culturally sensitive models of restorative justice will offer policy-relevant recommendations.

References

American Institutes for Research. (2024). Reintegration with resilience: Understanding and overcoming the challenges of juvenile records. https://www.air.org

Bernburg, J. G., Krohn, M. D., & Rivera, C. J. (2006). Official labeling, criminal embeddedness, and subsequent delinquency: A longitudinal test of labeling theory. Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 43(1), 67–88. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022427805280068

Brown, B. B. (2004). Adolescents' relationships with peers. In R. M. Lerner & L. Steinberg (Eds.), Handbook of adolescent psychology (pp. 363–394). Wiley.

Cauffman, E., Fine, A., Steinberg, L., Frick, P. J., & Rowan, Z. R. (2021). Crossroads in juvenile justice: The impact of initial processing decision on youth 5 years after first

Online ISSN 3007-3197
Print ISSN 3007-3189
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about

arrest. Development and Psychopathology, 33(2), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579421000304

Confer, L. M., Mowen, T. J., & Boman, J. H. IV. (2024). Do peers protect people or put them at risk of recidivism? Friendship quality and peer crime among justice-involved youth. Crime & Delinquency, 70(9), 2371–2404. https://doi.org/10.1177/00111287231151874

Daraz, U. (2008). Community Response Towards Taliban Movements. Unpublished BS (Hons) Thesis, Department of Sociology, University of Malakand, 01.

Daraz, U., Bojnec, Š., Khan, Y., & Hussain, Z. (2025). Cultural narratives, social norms, and psychological stigma: a study of mental health help-seeking behavior in Peshawar, Pakistan. Frontiers in psychiatry, 16, 1560460.

Garfinkel, H. (1956). Conditions of successful degradation ceremonies. American Journal of Sociology, 61(5), 420–424.

Goffman, E. (1963). Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity. Prentice-Hall.

Goldson, B. (2010). The sleep of (criminological) reason: Knowledge–policy rupture and New Labour's youth justice legacy. Criminology & Criminal Justice, 10(2), 155–178. https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895809360964

Hirschfield, P. J. (2008). The declining significance of delinquent labels in disadvantaged urban communities. Criminology, 46(4), 1001–1032.

Hussain, M., Daraz, U., Hanan, A., & Hussain, Z. (2025). Locked Up and Left Behind: Exploring the Struggles of Women Behind Bars in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The Critical Review of Social Sciences Studies, 3(4), 455-469.

Hussain, Z., Ali, F., Ahmad, R., & Daraz, U. (2025). Childhood Behind Bars: A Socio-Legal Analysis of The Rights and Welfare of Children Accompanying Incarcerated Mothers. ASSAJ, 3(01), 179-192.

Hussain, Z., Ali, M., Ali, F., Mulk, J. U., Daraz, U., & Khan, S. (2024). Criminal Diasporas: Transnational Networks and Socio-Cultural Integration in Peshawar, Pakistan. Review Journal of Social Psychology & Social Works, 2(2), 301-313.

Hussain, Z., & Sajid, I. A. (2024). Family Role in the Reintegration of Juvenile Delinquents: A Post-Release Analysis in Dir Valley Pakistan. Pakistan Journal of Criminology, 16(2).

Jacobsen, W. C. (2020). School punishment and interpersonal exclusion: Rejection, withdrawal, and separation from friends. Criminology, 58(1), 35–69. https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9125.12223

Jacobsen, W. C., Ragan, D. T., Yang, M., Nadel, E., & Feinberg, M. (2022). Arrested friendships? Justice involvement and interpersonal exclusion among rural youth. Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 59(3), 365–409. https://doi.org/10.1177/00224278211045678

Justice Innovation. (2019). Restorative justice in U.S. schools: An updated research review. WestEd.

Khan, S., & Orakzai, S. (2023). Juvenile justice in Pakistan: Challenges and opportunities under the JJSA 2018. Pakistan Journal of Criminology, 15(1), 45–62.

Lemert, E. M. (1951). Social pathology: A systematic approach to the theory of sociopathic behavior. McGraw-Hill.

Lemert, E. M. (1967). Human deviance, social problems, and social control. Prentice-Hall.

Link, B. G., Cullen, F. T., Struening, E., Shrout, P. E., & Dohrenwend, B. P. (1989). A modified labeling theory approach to mental disorders: An empirical assessment. American Sociological Review, 54(3), 400–423.

Mahoney, A. R. (1974). The effect of labeling upon youths in the juvenile justice system: A review of the evidence. Law and Society Review, 8(4), 583–614.

Online ISSN 3007-3197
Print ISSN 3007-3189

Mathur, S. R., & Clark, H. G. (2014). Community engagement for reentry success of youth from juvenile justice: Challenges and opportunities. Education & Treatment of Children, 37(4), 713–734. https://doi.org/10.1353/etc.2014.0034

McGloin, J. M., & Thomas, K. J. (2019). Peer influence and delinquency. Annual Review of Criminology, 2, 241–264. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-criminol-011518-024551

Mulk, J. U., Ali, M., Ali, F., Daraz, U., & Hussain, Z. (2025). Life's Later Chapters: Understanding the Realities of Elderly Challenges in Pakistan. Review Journal of Social Psychology & Social Works, 3(1), 146-161.

Petrosino, A., Turpin-Petrosino, C., & Guckenburg, S. (2013). Formal system processing of juveniles: Effects on delinquency. U.S. Department of Justice.

Rowan, Z. R., Fine, A., Steinberg, L., Frick, P. J., & Cauffman, E. (2023). Labeling effects of initial juvenile justice system processing decision on youth interpersonal ties. Criminology, 61(4), 731–757. https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9125.12348

Saqib, N., Ali, S., & Rehman, A. (2021). Implementation of juvenile justice in Pakistan: An analysis of JJSA 2018. Asian Journal of Law and Society, 8(2), 123–140.

Tannenbaum, F. (1938). Crime and the community. Columbia University Press.

Tannenbaum, F. (1938). Crime and the community. Columbia University Press.

Ullah, I., & Bakhsh, A. (2024). Social reintegration of juvenile offenders in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: A qualitative study. Journal of Social Work and Development, 12(1), 89–104.

Ullah, W., & Daraz, U. (2024). From Crime Scene to Courtroom: Investigating Flaws and their Role in Low Conviction Rates in District Dir Lower, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Journal of Social Sciences Research & Policy, 2(3), 235-253.

Warr, M. (2002). Companions in crime: The social aspects of criminal conduct. Cambridge University Press.

Wiley, S. A., Slocum, L. A., & Esbensen, F. A. (2013). The unintended consequences of being stopped or arrested: An exploration of the labeling mechanisms through which police contact leads to subsequent delinquency. Criminology, 51(4), 927–966.

Wilson, H. A., & Hoge, R. D. (2013). The effect of youth diversion programs on recidivism: A meta-analytic review. Criminal Justice and Behavior, 40(5), 497–518. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854812451089