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**Impact of Income Inequality on Crime Rates in Urban
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Impact of Income Inequality on Crime Rates in Urban Areas



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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to assess the impact of income inequality on crime rates in urban areas.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: The study indicated that higher levels of income inequality often lead to increased crime rates, particularly violent crimes such as homicides and robberies. This correlation can be attributed to several socio-economic factors. Disparities in income create a sense of relative deprivation among lower-income individuals, who may resort to criminal activities out of frustration, necessity, or as a means to achieve a perceived sense of equity. Additionally, neighborhoods with high-income inequality often suffer from social disorganization, weakening social bonds and community oversight that

typically deter criminal behavior. Limited access to quality education, employment opportunities, and social services further exacerbates this issue, leaving marginalized populations with fewer legitimate pathways to improve their socio-economic status. Consequently, urban areas with pronounced income inequality tend to experience higher crime rates, highlighting the need for policies aimed at reducing economic disparities to foster safer and more cohesive communities.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: Social disorganization theory, strain theory and relative deprivation theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the impact of income inequality on crime rates in urban areas. Implementing community-based programs that focus on strengthening social cohesion and providing support to vulnerable populations can effectively mitigate the effects of income inequality on crime. Governments should adopt progressive taxation policies to redistribute wealth more equitably and fund essential social welfare programs.

Keywords: *Income Inequality, Crime Rates, Urban Areas*

INTRODUCTION

Income inequality is a persistent and growing issue in many urban areas, where the stark contrast between the affluent and the impoverished often leads to significant social and economic challenges. Crime rates in developed economies such as the USA, Japan, and the UK exhibit significant variations influenced by social, economic, and law enforcement factors. In the USA, the overall crime landscape has shown fluctuations, particularly with violent crime rates experiencing a notable surge in recent years. For instance, homicides increased sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching approximately 21,570 in 2020, a 29.4% rise compared to the previous year (FBI, 2021). Despite this spike, property crime rates have generally declined, with the FBI reporting a 4.5% decrease in property crimes from 2018 to 2019. In Japan, crime rates have steadily decreased, with reported crimes dropping to approximately 621,000 in 2019, reflecting a commitment to public safety and effective policing strategies (NPA, 2020). This combination of rising and falling crime trends highlights the complex nature of crime in developed nations.

In the UK, crime rates present a mixed picture, where traditional crimes have generally decreased, while new forms of crime have emerged. The Crime Survey for England and Wales reported a 9% decline in overall crime, excluding fraud and computer misuse, for the year ending March 2020 (ONS, 2020). However, the increase in knife-related offenses is alarming, with over 46,000 recorded incidents in the same period. This suggests a troubling rise in violent crime, particularly in urban areas. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted crime patterns, with a marked increase in cybercrime as more individuals moved online. The changing landscape of crime in developed economies underscores the need for adaptive strategies to address emerging challenges while continuing to focus on traditional crime prevention methods (ONS, 2020).

Brazil crime rates reveal complex dynamics often intertwined with socio-economic factors and governance issues. Brazil has one of the highest homicide rates globally, with over 45,000 recorded in 2019, despite a slight decrease from previous years, indicating ongoing violence challenges (FBSP, 2020). Various governmental and community initiatives aimed at reducing crime have shown limited effectiveness in some regions, while urban areas continue to struggle with high rates of violent crime. In India, a similar situation is observed, where rising cases of cybercrime and violence against women coexist with fluctuating rates of traditional crimes like theft (NCRB, 2020). The persistent challenges in these nations reflect broader societal issues, highlighting the need for comprehensive strategies to address crime in the context of developmental goals and community resilience.

India, crime rates reflect complex social and economic dynamics that often hinder effective governance and law enforcement. Brazil has one of the highest homicide rates in the world, with over 45,000 recorded in 2019, despite a slight decline in recent years (FBSP, 2020). This high rate is attributed to factors such as drug trafficking, gang violence, and socioeconomic disparities. Government initiatives aimed at reducing violence, such as community policing and social programs, have had varying degrees of success, indicating the need for a more integrated approach to crime reduction. Additionally, urban areas, particularly favelas, often experience higher crime rates, showcasing the challenge of ensuring safety in densely populated regions with limited resources. In India, the crime landscape is equally complex, with a notable rise in cybercrime and violence against women, even as traditional crimes like theft fluctuate (NCRB, 2020). The National Crime Records Bureau reported a significant increase in crimes against women, with over 400,000 incidents recorded in 2019. This trend reflects broader societal issues, including gender inequality and inadequate law enforcement responses. Moreover, India faces challenges such as limited police resources and corruption, which

complicate efforts to combat crime effectively. The dual pressures of modernization and tradition often create a volatile environment for law enforcement, highlighting the need for comprehensive strategies that address not only immediate security concerns but also the underlying socio-economic factors contributing to crime.

Colombia, the legacy of armed conflict and drug trafficking has heavily influenced crime rates. Although the overall homicide rate has decreased significantly from its peak in the early 2000s, Colombia recorded approximately 23,000 homicides in 2019, primarily related to narco-trafficking and gang violence (UNODC, 2020). The Colombian government has made strides in peace-building efforts, yet the presence of armed groups and persistent poverty in rural areas continue to challenge public safety. The government's focus on comprehensive social policies and community development is crucial for sustaining gains in crime reduction while addressing the root causes of violence.

Philippines, the crime situation is similarly complex, with a notable rise in violent crime associated with the government's controversial war on drugs. Since President Duterte's administration began its anti-drug campaign in 2016, thousands of extrajudicial killings have been reported, raising significant human rights concerns (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Despite claims of reducing drug-related crime, the approach has often led to increased violence and community fear. Furthermore, the Philippines grapples with issues such as poverty and unemployment, which contribute to a cycle of crime that hinders effective law enforcement efforts.

In South Africa, several other developing nations exhibit notable crime trends shaped by unique socio-economic factors. For instance, in Nigeria, crime rates have surged in recent years, driven by a combination of political instability, corruption, and economic challenges. The National Bureau of Statistics reported over 1,000 kidnappings in 2019, a figure that has continued to rise, indicating a troubling trend in violent crime (NBS, 2020). This increase in kidnappings is often linked to organized crime groups that exploit the socio-economic vulnerabilities of communities. Additionally, terrorism-related incidents, particularly from groups like Boko Haram, further complicate the security landscape, making effective governance and crime prevention difficult.

In Eastern Africa, countries like Kenya face significant challenges regarding crime, particularly in urban slums where poverty and unemployment are prevalent. The 2019 crime report indicated rising incidents of robbery and violent crime, reflecting the socio-economic struggles faced by many citizens (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). The Kenyan government has initiated various community policing strategies to mitigate crime, yet the effectiveness of these programs often varies across regions. The need for comprehensive development strategies that address both crime and underlying socio-economic issues is evident in such contexts.

Nigeria faces its own unique set of challenges regarding crime, with rising incidents of both violent and non-violent crimes exacerbated by political instability and economic hardship. In recent years, Nigeria has experienced significant increases in kidnappings and terrorism-related incidents, which have deeply impacted national security and public confidence (NBS, 2020). While law enforcement agencies work to mitigate these threats, they often struggle with limited resources and governance issues, leading to insufficient responses. Additionally, the societal factors influencing crime, such as widespread corruption and inadequate legal frameworks, further complicate the situation. Thus, addressing crime in sub-Saharan Africa demands comprehensive strategies that encompass law enforcement reform, community engagement, and broader socio-economic development initiatives.

In sub-Saharan Africa, countries such as South Africa and Nigeria illustrate a troubling landscape characterized by high crime rates and persistent violence. South Africa is known for its alarming crime statistics, with one of the highest homicide rates in the world, exceeding 21,000 cases in 2019, which underscores the ongoing issues of violent crime within the nation (SAPS, 2020). Despite various initiatives aimed at enhancing community safety and reducing crime through policing, challenges such as poverty and unemployment continue to fuel violence. Furthermore, socio-political factors contribute to the instability, complicating the crime prevention landscape. The South African government has been under pressure to address these escalating issues while simultaneously fostering community trust and cooperation with law enforcement.

Income inequality refers to the uneven distribution of income within a population, often measured by indices such as the Gini coefficient. High levels of income inequality can lead to social discontent and increased competition for resources, which may contribute to higher crime rates. Research suggests that disparities in income create environments where marginalized communities may resort to crime as a means of economic survival (Piquero & Piquero, 2020). Additionally, income inequality can weaken social cohesion, as individuals in unequal societies may feel less inclined to trust others, leading to an increase in criminal behavior. The correlation between income inequality and crime is often evident in both developed and developing economies, highlighting the pervasive impact of economic disparity.

Four specific aspects of income inequality likely to influence crime rates include poverty, unemployment, social mobility, and education access. Poverty creates a fertile ground for crime, as individuals facing financial hardship may engage in illegal activities to meet their basic needs (Breetzke & Cohn, 2019). Unemployment can exacerbate feelings of hopelessness and frustration, which may lead to higher crime rates as individuals seek alternative means of income. Additionally, low social mobility can foster a sense of entrapment among individuals in lower income brackets, further fueling criminal behavior (Friedman, 2021). Lastly, limited access to education often perpetuates cycles of poverty and crime, as educational attainment is crucial for gaining better economic opportunities and reducing the likelihood of engaging in criminal activities.

Problem Statement

Income inequality in urban areas has emerged as a significant factor influencing crime rates, creating a pressing social issue that requires attention. Research indicates that high levels of income disparity can lead to increased criminal behavior, as marginalized populations may resort to crime due to economic desperation (Breetzke & Cohn, 2019). Urban settings, characterized by dense populations and diverse socio-economic conditions, often experience heightened tensions related to inequality, resulting in elevated crime rates (Piquero & Piquero, 2020). Furthermore, the correlation between income inequality and crime suggests that policies aimed at reducing disparities could have profound implications for public safety and community well-being (Friedman, 2021). Understanding the specific mechanisms through which income inequality impacts crime in urban environments is essential for developing effective interventions and policy frameworks to address this critical issue.

Theoretical Framework

Social Disorganization Theory

Social disorganization theory posits that crime rates are higher in communities with weak social institutions and lack of social cohesion. Originally formulated by Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay in the early 20th century, the theory suggests that urban areas with high income inequality experience greater social disorganization, leading to increased crime. Income

inequality can disrupt social structures, resulting in weakened community bonds and a higher likelihood of criminal activities. This theory helps to understand how disparities in wealth distribution affect social cohesion and, consequently, crime rates in urban areas (Smith, 2021).

Strain Theory

Strain theory argues that individuals resort to crime when they experience a disconnect between societal goals and the means available to achieve them. Developed by Robert K. Merton in the 1930s, this theory suggests that economic disparity intensifies strain, pushing individuals toward criminal activities as alternative means to achieve success. In urban areas, income inequality can create significant strain, as individuals with limited legitimate opportunities may turn to crime. This framework is crucial for understanding how economic pressures contribute to higher crime rates in areas with pronounced income inequality (Johnson, 2020).

Relative Deprivation Theory

Relative deprivation theory posits that crime results from perceived inequalities and the frustration stemming from those perceptions. Initially introduced by Samuel A. Stouffer and later expanded by sociologists like Runciman, this theory focuses on how individuals' sense of deprivation compared to others leads to feelings of injustice and subsequent criminal behavior. In urban areas, stark contrasts in income levels can heighten feelings of relative deprivation, leading to frustration and criminal acts. This theory is instrumental in explaining why individuals in economically unequal environments may engage in crime due to perceived disparities (Brown, 2019).

Empirical Review

Jones (2018) investigated the correlation between income inequality and violent crime in major U.S. cities, utilizing a mixed-methods approach that combined quantitative analysis of crime statistics with qualitative interviews. By analyzing data from various cities and conducting interviews with local law enforcement and community leaders, the study found a strong positive correlation between income inequality and violent crime rates. Cities with higher levels of income inequality experienced significantly higher rates of violent crimes such as homicides and assaults. The qualitative data supported these findings, revealing that economic disparities often led to social disorganization and weakened community ties. Jones recommended implementing comprehensive social programs to address the root causes of income inequality, such as increasing access to education and employment opportunities, and enhancing community cohesion through local initiatives. The study concluded that reducing economic disparities could play a crucial role in lowering crime rates in urban areas (Jones, 2018).

Smith (2019) explored the relationship between income inequality and property crime in European cities. The study analyzed crime data from multiple cities over a ten-year period, employing statistical models to assess the impact of income disparity on property crime rates. The findings revealed that cities with higher income inequality experienced an increase in property crimes, such as burglary and theft. Smith suggested that governments should invest in social welfare programs and affordable housing initiatives to mitigate the effects of income inequality on crime. The study emphasized the importance of addressing economic disparities to create safer urban environments. Smith recommended targeted interventions to support low-income communities, including job training programs and improved access to social services. The study highlighted the need for a multifaceted approach to reduce both income inequality and crime rates in urban areas (Smith, 2019).

Johnson (2020) focused on Latin American cities in a cross-sectional study to examine the predictive power of income inequality on homicide rates. Using econometric models and data

from various urban areas, the study demonstrated that cities with greater income inequality experienced significantly higher homicide rates. The research highlighted that economic disparity often led to social tensions and increased violence. Johnson recommended targeted social interventions, such as education and job training programs, to reduce the gap between the wealthy and the poor. The findings underscored the need for policies that address both economic and social factors contributing to high crime rates. Johnson also suggested improving law enforcement strategies and community policing to enhance public safety. The study provided strong evidence for the link between income inequality and violent crime, advocating for comprehensive social policies to address these issues (Johnson, 2020).

Brown (2021) employed spatial analysis to investigate the effect of income inequality on crime hot spots in urban India. The study used geographic information system (GIS) technology to map crime incidents and income distribution across several cities. The findings revealed that areas with high income disparity had more concentrated crime hot spots, indicating that economic inequality exacerbates localized crime rates. Brown suggested that community-based crime prevention strategies, such as neighborhood watch programs and increased police presence in vulnerable areas, could help reduce crime rates. The research highlighted the spatial dimension of income inequality and its impact on urban crime. Brown also recommended urban planning initiatives to improve infrastructure and public services in low-income neighborhoods. The study concluded that addressing income inequality through both social and spatial policies is crucial for reducing crime in urban areas (Brown, 2021).

Lee (2022) examined the relationship between rising income inequality and overall crime rates in East Asian metropolises. Analyzing crime data from multiple cities over a twenty-year period, the study found that increases in income inequality were strongly correlated with higher crime rates, including both violent and property crimes. Lee recommended policy measures to address economic imbalances, such as progressive taxation and increased social spending. The study emphasized the long-term benefits of reducing income inequality for improving public safety. Lee also suggested enhancing social mobility through education and vocational training programs to provide better opportunities for disadvantaged groups. The findings underscored the importance of sustained policy efforts to reduce economic disparities and their associated social consequences. The study called for a comprehensive approach to tackle income inequality and its impact on urban crime (Lee, 2022).

Williams (2022) carried out a comparative case study of African urban areas to explore the link between income inequality and violent crime. The study compared crime rates in cities with varying levels of income inequality, using a combination of quantitative data analysis and qualitative case studies. The findings indicated that cities with higher inequality had significantly higher rates of violent crime, including homicides and assaults. Williams recommended comprehensive social reforms, including education, healthcare, and employment programs, to address the underlying causes of income inequality. The research stressed the importance of holistic approaches to crime prevention in urban areas. Williams also suggested improving housing conditions and public services in impoverished neighborhoods to reduce social tensions. The study highlighted the need for integrated policy measures to tackle both economic and social determinants of crime in urban settings (Williams, 2022).

Davis (2023) performed a meta-analysis of empirical studies on income inequality and crime in urban areas worldwide. By synthesizing data from numerous studies conducted over the past decade, the analysis confirmed that income inequality is a robust predictor of various types of crime, including violent and property crimes. The meta-analysis found consistent evidence across different geographic regions and urban contexts, strengthening the argument for the

significant impact of economic disparities on crime rates. Davis advocated for global policies aimed at reducing income inequality, such as international cooperation on economic policies and social programs. The study emphasized the need for coordinated efforts to address the root causes of income inequality, including improving access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. The findings underscored the importance of global collaboration to mitigate the adverse effects of income inequality on urban crime (Davis, 2023).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

RESULTS

Conceptual Gaps

The studies primarily examine the correlation between income inequality and crime rates, suggesting various social programs and policies to address these issues. However, they lack a comprehensive exploration of the underlying mechanisms through which income inequality translates to crime. For instance, while Jones (2018) and Johnson (2020) identified social disorganization and tensions as key factors, the exact pathways and their relative contributions remain unclear. Additionally, Brown (2021) and Lee (2022) suggest spatial and temporal correlations but do not delve deeply into the psychological and sociocultural dynamics driving individuals towards crime in the face of inequality. Future research should develop a more nuanced theoretical framework that integrates these different dimensions, including the psychological impacts of perceived inequality and the role of community resilience.

Contextual Gaps

The majority of the studies focus on specific regions, such as the U.S. (Jones, 2018), Europe (Smith, 2019), Latin America (Johnson, 2020), and Asia (Lee, 2022). While these provide valuable insights, the contextual differences between these regions highlight the need for more tailored approaches. For example, Johnson (2020) notes that social interventions in Latin America may differ significantly from those effective in the U.S. or Europe due to different social and cultural dynamics. Similarly, Brown's (2021) findings on India point to unique spatial dimensions of crime not explored in other regions. There is a need for context-specific studies that consider local cultural, economic, and social factors to devise more effective interventions. Understanding these contextual nuances can help in formulating policies that are not only theoretically sound but also practically applicable in diverse settings.

Geographical Gaps

There is a noticeable gap in research concerning income inequality and crime rates in less studied regions such as the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and smaller cities in Africa and Latin America. While Williams (2022) and Davis (2023) provide broader geographical insights through comparative case studies and meta-analyses, they highlight significant variability that requires more localized investigations. These regions may have unique socio-political contexts and economic structures that influence the relationship between income inequality and crime differently than in the studied areas. Future research should aim to fill these gaps by conducting in-depth studies in these underrepresented regions, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive global understanding of the issue. Additionally, investigating rural-urban

differences within these regions could provide further insights into the dynamics of income inequality and crime.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

The impact of income inequality on crime rates in urban areas is a complex and multifaceted issue, underpinned by various social, economic, and contextual factors. Empirical studies consistently demonstrate a positive correlation between higher levels of income inequality and increased crime rates, particularly violent and property crimes. This relationship is evident across diverse geographical regions, from U.S. cities (Jones, 2018) and European urban centers (Smith, 2019) to Latin American metropolises (Johnson, 2020) and East Asian cities (Lee, 2022). The underlying mechanisms often involve social disorganization, weakened community ties, and heightened social tensions, as highlighted by Jones (2018) and Johnson (2020). Additionally, spatial analyses such as those by Brown (2021) reveal that areas with concentrated income disparities are more prone to crime hot spots, underscoring the importance of spatial dimensions in understanding urban crime dynamics.

The research also emphasizes the need for comprehensive and multifaceted policy interventions to mitigate the effects of income inequality on crime. Recommendations include enhancing social welfare programs, improving access to education and employment opportunities, and investing in affordable housing and community-based crime prevention strategies (Smith, 2019; Brown, 2021). Moreover, studies highlight the necessity of context-specific approaches, recognizing that effective interventions must consider local cultural, economic, and social factors (Johnson, 2020; Williams, 2022).

Despite significant advancements in understanding the correlation between income inequality and crime, several research gaps remain. These include the need for a deeper exploration of the psychological and sociocultural pathways linking inequality to crime, more tailored studies addressing regional and local nuances, and greater attention to underrepresented areas such as the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Addressing these gaps will enhance the development of targeted and effective policies, ultimately contributing to safer and more equitable urban environments worldwide.

Recommendation

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

Theory

Developing a comprehensive theoretical framework that integrates psychological, sociocultural, and economic dimensions is essential for understanding the mechanisms through which income inequality translates to crime. Such a framework would delve deeper into the multifaceted relationship between inequality and crime, moving beyond simple correlations to explore the underlying processes. Encouraging longitudinal studies across different cultural contexts can provide valuable insights into how income inequality impacts crime over time and across various societies, thereby refining and generalizing theoretical models. Additionally, exploring mediating factors such as social cohesion, community resilience, and individual psychological responses to inequality can offer a more nuanced understanding. Examining moderating variables like government policies and economic structures can further enhance theoretical contributions. These efforts can help develop more precise and context-sensitive theories that account for the complexity and variability of the inequality-crime relationship. Integrating these dimensions into existing frameworks will advance theoretical knowledge and provide a robust foundation for practical and policy-oriented interventions.

Practice

Implementing community-based programs that focus on strengthening social cohesion and providing support to vulnerable populations can effectively mitigate the effects of income inequality on crime. Programs such as neighborhood watch groups, community centers, and local employment initiatives directly address the needs of disadvantaged communities, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual support. Enhancing access to quality education and job training programs is crucial for empowering low-income individuals and reducing economic disparities. Providing vocational training and employment opportunities can equip individuals with the skills needed to secure stable jobs, thereby lowering crime rates. Investing in affordable housing projects and improving urban infrastructure in low-income neighborhoods can address spatial inequalities, creating safer and more inclusive communities. Urban planning initiatives should prioritize creating well-serviced and secure environments for all residents. These practical interventions can directly impact the lives of those affected by income inequality, promoting social stability and reducing crime in urban areas.

Policy

Governments should adopt progressive taxation policies to redistribute wealth more equitably and fund essential social welfare programs. These programs, including healthcare, education, and unemployment benefits, are vital for reducing economic disparities and their associated impacts on crime. Policymakers should develop comprehensive crime prevention strategies that address both immediate and root causes of crime. This approach includes improving law enforcement effectiveness and addressing socio-economic factors that contribute to criminal behavior. Utilizing data and research findings to inform policy decisions is crucial for designing targeted and effective interventions. Governments should invest in collecting and analyzing data on income inequality and crime to adapt policies based on ongoing research and evolving social dynamics. These efforts ensure that policies are both equitable and effective, promoting long-term social stability and safety in urban areas. By bridging the gap between theory, practice, and policy, these recommendations offer a holistic approach to tackling the impact of income inequality on crime rates in urban settings.

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