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Social Capital and Desistance: A Qualitative Analysis of Incarcerated Juveniles' Experiences in Pakistan's Juvenile Justice System

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ABSTRACT

The juvenile justice systems of the low- and middle-income countries have focused on legal conformity to the international conventions including the UNCRC, but legal adherence often fails to provide social reintegration. The data were reinterpreted through a social capital lens to explore desistance-related themes. The present research changes the analytical emphasis on structural implementation to the socio-psychological desistance processes by focusing on the perceived role of social capital in the desistance process among incarcerated juveniles in Pakistan. The qualitative socio-legal design was used to conduct semi-structured interviews with 30 incarcerated juveniles, 8 civil judges/judicial magistrates and 20 legal practitioners (advocates and prosecutors) in Karachi. Using the typology of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital, our thematic analysis shows a serious paradox of access versus impact: almost all juvenile prisoners said that they had universal access to legal services, and educational opportunities, but nearly one-third of population believed that they had positively changed as a result of rehabilitation programs. Judges came to a unanimous opinion that the absence of rehabilitation infrastructure is the most significant obstacle in the way of restorative sentencing, and legal practitioners emphasized the failure to implement the Juvenile Justice System Act 2018, and demanded independent rehabilitation centers. Results showed that bonding social capital (family/peer support) is fairly strong yet not enough to create desistance, and bridging capital (relationships to employment, mentors, diverse social groups) and linking capital (institutional trust and advocacy) are extremely weak, a phenomenon known as a bonding trap, and which impairs long-term desistance. The paper concludes that community-based initiatives in LMICs should be characterized as network-promoters that proactively create both bridging and linking relationships based on vocational training and employment placement, mentorship contracts and formalized relationships with civic institutions. Policy recommendations are mandatory quality audits of reintegration using social capital measures, amendment of law enforcement standard operating procedures to construct linking capital, and creation of special juvenile rehabilitation facilities that deliver trauma-informed, self-efficacy-building care. The paper provides a practical framework of how to transform juvenile justice by changing it to an asset building model, by contributing empirical evidence in a South Asian context to the growing body of literature on social capital and desistance.

Keywords: Juvenile Justice, Social Capital, Desistance, Bonding, Bridging, Linking, JJSA, Rehabilitation

Background

The contemporary world of juvenile justice is characterized by a conflict between the ideal of rehabilitation and the realities of implementing the system in the conditions of resources scarcity (Youth Justice Board, 2025). The main measure of juvenile justice reform success in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) over decades has been legal compliance - the extent to which local laws reflect the

protective imperatives of international conventions. As much as the spread of child-friendly laws, like the Juvenile Justice System Act of 2018 in Pakistan, is a notable normative change, it does not tend to follow up on the post-release trajectory of the young people. The implementation gap has been well-documented in most South Asian and other LMIC settings and is based on the lack of specialized courts, overpopulated prisons, and untrained probation officers. But then again is a less-studied and more critical deficit: the outcome gap: the inability of legally-compliant systems to result in any meaningful, long-term desistance to crime (Shaikh et al., 2025).

This study argues that systematic accretion and mobilization of social capital, which is absent in current reintegration models, is the missing link in reintegration. The resource of social networks and the access to them is what is known as social capital that can offer the structural and emotional scaffolding that a youth needs to pass through their delinquent identity and become a prosocial identity (Albertson, 2021, Claridge, 2015, Anderson et al., 2019). The task of re-integrating the poor into a community in most LMICs is virtually left to informal social networks due to the weak nature or non-existence of formal state-led welfare systems (Boeck et al., 2008). The justice system, however, is usually a dehumanizing and alienating experience to the youth, and the diminishing of their available social capital is happening at a time when they most require it to survive and flourish beyond the school system (Recla and Cuevas Jr, 2025).

Desistance is not a dichotomous phenomenon, consisting of the end of offending; it is a multifaceted, non-linear process, which involves identity change and social re-integration (Mulvey et al., 2004, Hearn, 2010). The classical criminological theories, which in many cases are based on deterrence or reformation, rarely take into account the agentic role of the youth in the process of locating themselves in the social environment (Albertson and Hall, 2019). According to desistance theory, especially the age-graded informal social control model, turning points, or factors that include sustained employment, education, and supportive peer groups are the factors that lead to long-term change (Boeck et al., 2008). These turning points are not just milestones in LMICs, but structural accomplishments and demand particular sorts of social relations: bonding ties to emotional resilience, bridging ties to economic opportunity and linking ties to institutional advocacy (Doucet, 2021).

The present research changes the geographic and legal emphasis of particular national laws to a generic, model-free structure within which the success of reintegration is assessed. Going beyond qualitative interviews of legal actors and concentrating on qualitative outcomes among incarcerated Juveniles in Pakistan, this study aims at determining which exact dimensions of social capital mediate desistance. This paradigm is fundamental to the transition of juvenile justice studies in LMICs to a more constructive approach to juvenile justice, which puts asset-building over risk-management in the fore.

The importance of this approach is in the fact that it informs policy that is network-centered. When the evidence points to the fact that bridging capital (connection to various job networks) is a more predictive variable of success than bonding capital (family support), then probation and diversion programs will have to shift the focus away from family-oriented interventions to more actively brokering relationships with employers and civic institutions. Moreover, this study gives LMICs guidance on how to undertake the so-called reintegration quality audits by creating a baseline of these results rather than the binary measure of the number of cases diverted.

Literature Review

Social Capital Theory: Bourdieu, Putnam and Criminological Intersection

Social capital has turned into a staple of modern sociological and criminological rhetoric, but its usage is still varied and can be sometimes controversial. Another noted definition of social capital is the one by Pierre Bourdieu (1986): social capital is defined as the aggregate of the actual or potential resources associated with access to a lasting system of more or less institutionalized relationships of familiarity and mutual recognition (Claridge, 2015). In Bourdieu, social capital is an inseparable part of power, social stratification, and reproduction of class status. In the framework of juvenile justice, a young individual of a disadvantaged background comes to the field of the justice system with a deficit of a considerable amount of legitimate social capital (Tzanakis, 2013). The fact that an arrest is stigmatized also

underestimates the resources that they already have, typically putting them in a habitus where they are almost unable to re-enter mainstream society without the infusion of external capital (Boeck et al., 2008). Conversely, Putnam (2000) was more functionalist and civic based with his focus on social capital as an asset of a group in terms of trust, norms of reciprocity and voluntary associations (Claridge, 2018). The critical difference between bonding and bridging social capital as described by Putnam is the basis of this study. Bonding social capital is horizontal relationships among similar people, family, neighbors, and close friends, which give a feeling of belonging and solidarity, and, in effect, assist people in coping with their daily lives (Siisiainen, 2003). The bridging of social capital, nevertheless, links individuals within the heterogeneous groups, cutting across the lines of class, race, or religion (Albertson, 2021). To a Youth in Detention, bridging capital is the sociological WD-40 that enables them to leap ahead in terms of both employment and educational opportunities beyond their immediate, possibly criminogenic, network (Claridge, 2018).

The third dimension, called linking social capital, was subsequently introduced by the scholars of the World Bank to explain the ties between people and the institutions of authority (Claridge, 2018). The connection between capital in juvenile justice context entails the capacity of the youth to maneuver through formal systems, including the legal system, health services, and labor market institutions, and their belief in the same systems to work in their interest. In LMICs, where institutional trust may be lower and the association with law enforcement may be detrimental, the disconnection with capital is one of the main challenges to tertiary desistance, when the society accepts the person as a reformed citizen (Claridge, 2018).

Desistance Theory: Maturation, Bonds, and Redemption Scripts

The desistance theory changes the emphasis of the crime committed by individuals to how they cease (Hearn, 2010). This field of research acknowledges that the majority of young offenders grow out of crime, but the transition to casement is moderated by internal and external factors (Mulvey et al., 2004). The theory of informal social control by Laub and Sampson is the Age-Graded Theory which assumes that the turning points in life, in this case, marriage, military service, or even employment, can produce a stake in conformity. These turning points are the sources of structure and social control that are required to change the course of lives of an individual (Steinberg et al., 2015). Nevertheless, recent criticisms have observed that in most LMICs, these traditional turning points do not exist or constitute differently because of economic turmoil, and cultural practices (Mulvey et al., 2004).

Maruna (2001) has stressed the cognitive aspect of desistance, and posited that people need to pass through a desistance cognitive process where they must make sense of their criminal background by developing a redemption script (Mulvey et al., 2004). This script enables the person to recover a prosocial sense of self and to trust in his or her personal agency- the belief that he or she has control over his or her life, and can make a difference (Albertson and Hall, 2019). Effective desistance therefore involves a combination of the will on the part of the individual and reorganization of their social relationships (Mulvey et al., 2004).

This study embraces the difference between primary, secondary and tertiary desistance. Primary desistance is a break or end of offending. A fundamental change of self-identity as an offender to a non-offender is a part of secondary desistance. The most important external confirmation of this new identity by the community and state institutions is tertiary desistance, which is perhaps the most critical to long-term success. The lack of bridging and linking social capital would result in an individual attaining primary or even secondary desistance, but fail at the tertiary level because of sustained social exclusion and opportunity deprivation (Farrall, 2013, Chapman and Murray, 2015).

Reintegration and Community-Based Models of LMICs

Diversion, probation, and aftercare are community-based juvenile justice models that are theoretically created to establish these needed social bonds (Woods et al., 2024). The meta-analyses of juvenile intervention programs provide consistent evidence that rehabilitative modalities prove to be much more effective in the reduction of recidivism, compared to punitive ones (Pappas and Dent, 2021). The programs focusing on wraparound services, such as family conflict, school failure, and substance abuse have proven to be highly successful in the West (Altschuler and Bilchik, 2014).

The shift to such models in LMICs is often impeded by an emphasis on legal compliance, rather than quality of outcomes. Though laws can require diversion, the programs available in practice often do not have the "structural reintegration in the form of overarching case management (Sharp and Lahue, 2025, Altschuler and Bilchik, 2014). In South Asian research has shown that family support (bonding capital) is in most cases well-developed, but sometimes can be criminogenic, when the family is already involved in crime, or when the young person is under pressure to go back to former peer groups to survive. Moreover, the absence of connection between the juvenile justice committees with the private sector implies that the diverted youth are not always given a clear path towards employment and thus there is a revolving door effect where half of the youth reoffend within three years (Altschuler, 1998, Albertson, 2021).

Research over the last few years has highlighted the importance of what is termed Inclusive Recovery Capitals (IRCs), in which recovery and desistance are perceived as group endeavors, as opposed to individual ones (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2025). This means that probation and youth justice services should serve as network promoters, establishing collaborations with the local societies and connecting with social resources that contribute to the positive long-term development. Combining these lessons, the present study will seek to measure the degree to which social capital, as accrued through incarceration/detention settings and interventions, serves as a factor of successful desistance in LMIC contexts (Prewitt et al., 2025).

Theoretical Framework

The proposed model incorporates the Social Capital Theory and Desistance Theory into a unifying mediation model. The basic premise behind the model is that the technical accomplishment of a community-based program (the participants' descriptions of factors) is not enough to yield desistance. Rather, the effects of the program are mediated by the accrual of bonding, bridging and linking social capital (themes), which subsequently result in reintegration success.

The Mediation Path of Social Capital

The model determines three themes related to desistance resulting into desistance outcomes:

1. **The Emotional Resilience Path (Bonding):** During the short-term of a justice intervention, the youth tend to be in liminality and ambivalence. The emotional safety net that is necessary to help a person to go through this phase without relapsing back to crime to protect his life is bonding social capital, which is characterized by trust and reciprocity in the family and the immediate neighborhood. This is the base of recovery capital in most LMICs (Farrall, 2013, Kemshall and McCartan, 2022, Albertson, 2021).
2. **Economic Opportunity Path (Bridging):** To be truly desisted, they need to have a stake in conforming, typically through education and employment. Mediating social capital bridges social capital ties with dissimilar others: mentors, employers, and other social groups. The route is postulated as the main driver of so-called primary desistance (stopping offending) due to offering real options other than the illicit economy (Mulvey et al., 2004, Hearn, 2010, Claridge, 2018, Villalonga-Olives et al., 2021).
3. **The Institutional Trust Path (Connecting):** To overcome the label of an offender, the youth has to interact with the institutional authority in a positive way. Connecting social capital is the skill to maneuver civic institutions and the trust that the state can be a provider of support and not merely a provider of punishment. This route helps in "tertiary desistance" and permanent structural assimilation (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2025, Albertson and Hall, 2019, Claridge, 2018, Chapman and Murray, 2015).

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative research design to uncover the lived experiences and perceptions of the stakeholders in the juvenile justice system in Karachi, Pakistan. This will enable the in-depth knowledge of the functioning of social capital (or lack thereof) in the desistance process.

Sampling

Participants were sampled purposively and had first-hand experience of the juvenile justice system:

- Juvenile inmates (n=30): inmates of Young Offender Industrial School, Central Jail Karachi, aged 15-18 years, and charged with different offences.
- Judges (n=8): civil judges and judicial magistrates of Karachi Division that have experience with juvenile cases.
- Legal practitioners (n=20) Advocates and prosecutors who work in the juvenile courts in Karachi.

Data Collection

Open ended questions, which were in form of semi structured interviews, were used in conducting interviews. Topics for juveniles included: access to legal assistance, living conditions, rehabilitation programs, education, discipline/safety, court proceedings, police treatment, and personal development. Among the judges and legal practitioners, the issues were: procedures in courts, sentencing and rehabilitation issues, working with juveniles, and recommendation.

Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke suggested six phases in the thematic analysis, which were followed. The thematic findings were complemented by a socio legal analysis comparing the practices with the JSA 2018 provisions.

Ethical Considerations

The informed consent was received by all the participants and in case of juveniles, their legal guardians. The anonymized identifiers were used to guarantee confidentiality. The study was endorsed at the University of Karachi.

Results

Participant Characteristics

The sample used was a group of 30 juvenile prisoners (mean age 16.4 years, range 15-18). Their crimes were theft, drug related, minor assault and violation of the Arms Ordinance. The participants were 8 judges (mean of 7.2 years' judicial experience) and 20 legal practitioners (mean of 9.5 years' experience).

5.2 The Views of Juvenile Inmates on Social Capital and Desistance

Table 1 Juvenile Inmate Perspectives on Justice, Social Capital, and Desistance (n=30)

Category	Positive Response (%)	Negative/Mixed (%)	Implication for Social Capital / Desistance
Access to legal assistance	100	0	Formal linking capital (institutional access) exists
Education opportunities	100	0	Structural bridging capital (education as a bridge) is available
Living conditions	80	20 (overcrowding/ lack of privacy)	Basic bonding environment partially adequate
Participation in rehabilitation programs	70	30	Bonding/bridging program engagement moderate
Discipline and safety	90	10	Institutional linking capital (trust in order) relatively high
Fair court proceedings	100	0	Linking capital (judicial trust) strong
Positive police treatment during arrest	70	30 (20% negative, 10% mixed)	Inconsistent linking capital with law enforcement
Perceived positive personal development	40	60 (20% negative, 40% mixed)	Critical deficit: low perceived desistance impact

Interest in rehabilitation programs	60	40	Mixed motivation – need for better program quality
Age-appropriate treatment perception	60	40	Inconsistent recognition of juvenile status

Key qualitative excerpts:

- Bonding capital: My family comes to visit me, but they are not doing well either. I do not want to put pressure on them. (Inmate #12)
- Bridging capital deficit: “It is fine, but the stitching class, you know, nobody ever told me how to secure a real job, once released. (Inmate #19)
- Connection of capital (police): When the officer who arrested me screamed a lot, the judge heard in court. (Inmate #07)
- Desistance outcome (low): “I am the same person that I was when I entered. The programs do not make much of a difference in you. (Inmate #24)

The most interesting result is the access versus impact paradox: despite the fact that all juveniles access legal aid and education formally (100%), only 40% of them feel that these two elements have positively influenced personal development. It means that structural social capital (resource availability) is large, but the quality of the functional bridging and linking capital is extremely poor that directly sabotages the process of desistance.

5.3 Legal Views of Social Capital and Desistance

Table 2 Judicial Perspectives on Social Capital and Desistance (n=8)

Theme	Percentage Agreement	Relevance to Social Capital / Desistance
Commitment to specialized courtroom procedures	75%	Linking capital (judicial-juvenile trust) attempted
Sentencing/rehabilitation infrastructure gap	90%	Absence of bridging/linking capital infrastructure
Interaction and treatment challenges	80%	Lack of developmental training reduces linking capital quality
Feedback and improvement suggestions	100%	Unanimous call for systematic change

Qualitative excerpt:

- We would prefer to take the juveniles to rehabilitation centers but there are none so we end up detaining them that is not a desistance (Judge #5)
- The 90% consensus on infrastructure deficit means that judges are unable to order non-custodial, bridging oriented sentences (e.g., vocational training, community service with employer linkages). This puts the system into punitive custody, which studies have proven to actively undermine desistance.

5.4 The views of Legal Practitioners on Social Capital and Desistance

Table 3 Legal Practitioner Assessment of Social Capital and Desistance (n=20)

Implementation Challenge	Percentage Agreement	Implication for Desistance
Lack of effective implementation of JISA 2018	70%	Statutory bridging/linking capital not operationalized
Need for improvement in rehabilitation	90%	Qualitative failure of bridging capital (employment/education links)
Demand for separate rehabilitation centers	80%	Necessity of dedicated linking capital institutions
Counseling/training-oriented sentencing	80%	Rehabilitative (rather than punitive) approach supports desistance

Feedback mechanism needed	90%	Absence of monitoring undermines accountability
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Qualitative excerpt:

“The law is good on paper, but where is the follow up? Once they have been released, these children will end up in the same streets, with the same friends. No one links them to a job or a mentor.

The 90% requirement to improve rehabilitation and 80% of approval of separate centers are direct reflections of the fact that bridging capital (ties to employment, education, prosocial adults) is missing whereas bonding capital (family/peer) could be criminogenic.

Summary of Results

Three main findings can be identified:

1. Universal formal access, low functional impact: 100% of juveniles receive legal aid and education, but just 40% say that they have positively developed. It is a paradox of social capital - there are resources but they do not lead to desistance due to the weak bridging and linking relationships.
2. Infrastructure shortage as a barrier to desistance: 90% of judges and 80% of legal practitioners single out the unavailability of rehabilitation centers (i.e. institutions able to offer bridging and linking capital) as the main barrier.
3. Inefficiency of JJSA 2018 implementation: 70% of legal practitioners' state that the protective features of the Act are not implemented in real life, i.e., the statutory social capital (connection of capital via legal rights) is not realized.

Discussion**The Social Capital Imperative: Bonding, Bridging and Linking in Desistance**

The results clearly demonstrate that the presence of bonding social capital (family support, immediate peer networks) is not enough to secure desistance. Although 80 percent of juveniles said their living conditions were satisfactory and 90 percent said they felt safe - signs of fundamental bonding and institutional order - only 40 percent said they had positive personal development. This is in line with the theoretical difference between getting by (bonding) and getting ahead (bridging and linking) (Putnam, 2000).

The bridging capital is clear in the fact that there is no vocational training that is related to the real labour markets, no external mentor to the juvenile beyond the immediate circle, and the system fails to bridge youth to the employer or the educational institutions. On the same note, there is a lack of connection between capital: despite 100% of the juveniles' accessibility to legal aid, only 60% believed that they were treated differently because of their age, and 20% were victims of negative police treatment. Unpredictable institutional contacts undermine trust and decrease the chances of a young person resorting to formal systems after release.

This structure high bonding, low bridging, low linking is exactly the bonding trap as explained in social capital literature. Desistance is virtually impossible when the only network that the young person has is a marginalized or criminogenic family/peer group and when they are deprived of the ability to access a variety of prosocial networks and institutional supporters.

The place of Self Efficacy and Agency

As much as opportunity is offered by social capital, the individual should be able to mobilize the resources (self-efficacy). The qualitative data demonstrates that a large portion of juveniles are not sure that they can change: 40% provided mixed or negative answers concerning personal development. The 60% interest in rehabilitation programs is an indication that there is a desire to participate, but the perceived impact is low, which implies that the current programs are not effective in developing self-efficacy. This is a critical disjuncture, where desistance needs a structural opportunity and individual agency.

Implications on the LMIC Juvenile Justice Systems

The results question the prevalent emphasis on legal compliance as the main measure of juvenile justice reform. Pakistan has a forward-looking legislation (JJSA 2018), yet, unless the systematic investment is made in bridging and connecting capital (vocational training and job placement, mentorship program,

community service and reputable organizations and restorative justice practices involving employers and civic leaders) the legislation will be just a blank promise.

In the case of LMICs, this paper recommends that probation and diversion programs should be re-configured as network promoters. They should not only observe compliance but contribute towards the building of relationships between youth and prosocial institutions: local businesses, trade schools, sports clubs and faith-based organizations. This moves the paradigm away towards risk management (preventing recidivism) and to asset building (forming sustainable, heterogeneous social relationships).

Policy and Practice Implications

For Policy Makers

- Mandatory reintegration quality audits: Go beyond the number of cases that have been diverted to social capital results. Use standardized tools (e.g., adapted SCALE) to assess bridging and linking capital gains.
- Institutionalize bridging alliances: Require Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between juvenile justice committees and local chambers of commerce, vocational training institutions and non-governmental organizations to establish guaranteed access to jobs and education.
- Reform police SOPs: Educate police in reintegrative shaming and trauma informed policing to develop linking capital instead of breaking it.

For Practitioners

- Community reintegration contracts: Alternate open-ended probation terms with clear, quantifiable goals regarding building bridging capital (e.g., attend four civic gatherings, complete a job ready workshop, get an internship).
- Wraparound aftercare planning: Start reentry planning at intake, not release. Incorporate family involvement (enhancing healthy bonding) and concomitant exposure to a variety of peer groups and mentors.
- Self-efficacy integration: Incorporate cognitive behavioral workshops which will promote personal agency so that youths can mobilize their social networks.

For Future Research

- Adapt and test the measures of the SCALE (Social Capital Assessment + Learning for Equity) with the Pakistani juvenile populations.
- Carry out a longitudinal quantitative investigation that follows recidivism, work, and education as a role of bonding, bridging, and linking capital.
- Compare social capital results of various forms of community-based programs (diversion vs. probation vs. aftercare).

Conclusion

Juvenile justice system in Pakistan is at a crossroad. The nation has finally reached a progressive legal framework with a legislative framework that aligns, on paper with international standards following decades of legislative reform, beginning with the Children Act 1955 and culminating in the Juvenile Justice System Act 2018. But this paper has revealed a sobering fact: compliance with the law is not desistance. The availability of child friendly laws, special courts and diversionary mechanisms have failed to bring about a meaningful and long term exit out of crime by most juvenile offenders.

Based on lived experiences of incarcerated youth, judges and legal practitioners in Karachi, we find that there is a basic imbalance between structural contributions and psycho-social outputs. This, we have called the paradox of access vs. impact. All juvenile inmates that were interviewed received legal aid (100%), as well as educational resources (100%). They are not the insignificant successes, but formal adherence to the JJS Act 2018 and the UNCRC. But only a quarter of the same youth felt that there had been any positive change in their personal lives because of the rehabilitation programs provided. The workings of justice provide services, but not change.

With the help of the typology of social capital suggested by Putnam, the study determines the cause of this failure. Bonding social capital-relationships to family, intimate friends and close neighbors, is fairly high. It assists youth to survive imprisonment and get by. Capital of bonding is a trap in itself. Desistance is not possible when the only source of network available to the youth is a marginalized, poor, or even criminal network, and when there are no bridges available to the young person in the system, to diverse,

prosocial networks, employers, mentors, civic leaders, trade teachers. The research found that capital bridging (networks to jobs and education outside of the local setting) and linking capital (confidence and positive association with institutions like police, courts, and welfare agencies) is extremely wanting. The lack of specialized rehabilitation centers and structured aftercare (90% and 80% respectively) was unanimously cited as the main barrier to restorative sentencing by judges and legal practitioners respectively. This is not an administrative gap but a structural violation of the rehabilitative ideal of the JSA 2018.

The effects are grim. In the absence of bridging and connecting capital, the system reverts to punitive detention- an intervention form that criminological studies have over and over again demonstrated to heighten recidivism, harm psychological well-being, and solidify delinquent identities. The 20% of juveniles who said they had been treated negatively by the police, the 40% of the group that said they had not experienced any personal development, and the 60% of the group that were unsure of their future opportunities are not exceptions, but symptoms of a system that has placed greater emphasis on legal appearance than social reality.

But there is a path here, too, to this study. A roadmap is given by the concept of desistance, which is a non-linear process of identity transformation, social recognition and the development of redemption script. Turning points to desistance include continued employment, meaningful education, supportive peer groups and institutional trust. These turning points are not idealistic, they are constructed with bridging and connecting social capital. All those mentors who bring a young person to an employer, all those probation officers who make a match with a vocational training program, all those judges who mandate community service with a civic organization of good reputation, these are the micro-practices of desistance.

The research proposes that the juvenile justice systems of the low- and middle-income countries have to change their paradigm. They need to be transformers into being network promoters instead of being compliance monitors. The system must ask: What new relationships has this young person developed with prosocial adults? in lieu of asking whether or not a youth has attended a counseling session, or even whether or not he or she has gone six months without arrest. Which specific career paths to jobs or higher education have been created? What are institutional champions to reintegration upon release? These are quantifiable, operative social capital accumulation measures.

This is urgent and specific reforms to Pakistan. First, the federal and provincial governments will have to set budgets (non-negotiable) on the development of Juvenile Rehabilitation Centers (JRCs) and Borstal institutes which are not detention centers but proactive bridging institutions or places where youth develop marketable skills, encounter employers and develop portfolios of prosocial contacts. Second, the court system should be given the power to direct community reintegration agreements that outline reintegration goals (e.g., finishing a job-readiness workshop, getting an internship, participating in civic meetings) instead of imprecise probation terms. Third, the law enforcement standard operating procedures need to be updated to educate police on reintegrative shaming and trauma-informed practices, instead of confrontation through the intentional building of linking capital. Fourth, formal feedback systems, surveys, independent audits, data dashboards should be implemented in order to keep all implementing agencies accountable to social capital results and not numbers of cases.

There are limitations in this study. It is localized in Karachi and might fail to reflect the unique dynamism of rural regions and other provinces. Although suitable to qualitative investigation, the sample is not suitable to statistical generalization. The social desirability bias could have affected some of the responses especially with respect to police conduct. Future studies ought to build on the study with longitudinal quantitative methods that monitor recidivism, employment, and education as functions of bonding, bridging and linking capital using validated tools modified to fit LMIC settings.

The implications are however clear. It took decades of work in the juvenile justice system in Pakistan (and by proxy in most other LMICs) to optimize the architecture of legal compliance. It has constructed courts, made laws and educated judges. However, it has failed to develop the desistance social infrastructure. It has failed to establish in a methodical manner the ties that enable a youth to abandon a delinquent

identity and adopt a prosocial future. So long as it does, the game of offending, detention, release and recidivism will persist.

True desistance does not mean the lack of criminal record. The existence of a social network underpins citizenship. It is the courage to enter an interview, the confidence to request the assistance of a police officer, the pride to make a wage by engaging in honest employment, and the sense of belonging one gets by being accepted as a reformed and useful member of his or her community. They are not mushy results; they are money in the form of justice and efficiency in juvenile justice.

It is not the crossroads before Pakistan concerning the decision between punishment and leniency. It is a matter of a choice between children processing system and children future making system. This study evidence indicates clearly to the latter. The challenge is to now take action, as well as diagnose--to measure the gap, and close it, bridge by bridge, mentor by mentor, job by job. This is the only way that we can say that juvenile justice is in the best interests of the child and the safety of the society.

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