Deviant Behavior

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/udbh20

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**To cite this article:** Rahat Shah, Asif Hayat, Muhammad Zaman & Imran Sabir (2021): Youth Experiences of Violence at Home, School, and Street in Disadvantaged Urban Neighborhoods of Islamabad, Pakistan: Troika of Violence, Deviant Behavior, DOI: 10.1080/01639625.2021.1909315

**To link to this article:** https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2021.1909315

Published online: 31 Mar 2021.

DEVIANT BEHAVIOR
https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2021.1909315

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group



# Youth Experiences of Violence at Home, School, and Street in Disadvantaged Urban Neighborhoods of Islamabad, Pakistan: Troika of Violence

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**ABSTRACT**

Youth and Violence have mostly been correlated with either neighborhood, school, or street environment. The current study aims at exploring how the violent experiences of youth at home, school and the street are interconnected, an area of study that has been overlooked in previous studies. Thirty in-depth interviews were conducted with violent youth aged between 14 and 21 years in two disadvantaged urban neighborhoods of Islamabad. The findings show that youth had cyclical experience of violence on three fronts including their homes, schools, and streets in Islamabad. The analysis led us to term these consequential violent experiences among Pakistani youth as the "Troika" of violence. The troika of violence, thus, engages an individual in its vicious cycle, where shared standards of street code become desirable attributes for the youth of disadvantaged neighborhood at home, school, and the street.

**ARTICLE HISTORY**
Received 13 August 2020
Accepted 26 February 2021

## Introduction

Although, a considerable body of literature is available on youth violence and disadvantaged urban neighborhoods in the global North, but only a few studies have been conducted on youth violence in the context of disadvantaged urban neighborhoods in the South. Empirical frameworks for understanding neighborhood violence are mostly based on research carried out in North America and Western Europe (See, e.g., Adamson 2017; Klein, Weerman, and Thornberry 2006; Reppucci, Fried, and Schmidt 2002). The perspective of developing countries in the field of youth violence is largely missing within the research landscape. Further, existing research on youth urban neighborhood violence has been conducted through the quantitative survey approach including large scale samples, and through analysis of secondary data (Bellair 1997; Markowitz et al. 2001). Therefore, these studies offer limited insights for work focused on the experiences of the youth within disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Neighborhood environment is an important indicator of youth involvement in violent behavior. Neighborhood disadvantages play a consequential role in the relationship between violence and street code values amongst the youth in risky neighborhoods (Harding 2009). The youth living in risky neighborhoods considers the use of violence as a normal response to preserve their group identity in accordance with their street culture. The major characteristics of the street culture include the learning of violent behaviors, perception of violence as normal behavior and idealizing the role models who are violent and aggressive (Prothrow-Stith and Weissman 1991).

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Pakistan has one of the highest youth populations in the world and its youth makes the second youngest population after Afghanistan in the South Asian region (United Nations Development Program 2018). More than 60% of the country's population is aged below 30 years (United Nations Fund for Population Activities 2017). The total urban population of Pakistan is 39.23% with a 3.19% annual growth rate of urban population. The change rate for the urban population was 1.20 from 2005 to 2010, and the ratio of slum population was found to be 47.0% of the total urban population in 2007 (UN HABITAT 2009). The youth in Pakistan is exposed to violence which is reported from time to time in print and electronic media. Pak Institute for Peace Studies (2013) stated that fights between different gangs and security agencies led to 122 causalities in 2013 in different urban neighborhoods of the country. According to the National Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Report (2017), a total of 7017 crimes was reported in Islamabad in 2016, most of them took place in urban neighborhoods of Islamabad (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2017). These are striking statistics, given that in a majority of cases, crimes tend not to be reported due to a lack of trust in the police and the law enforcement agencies (Anjum 2013).

The current research takes into account three potential platforms of socialization by considering the issue of youth violence in urban neighborhoods of the capital city of Pakistan to understand how they are interrelated. It is commonly believed that the family and kinship system in Pakistan is strong and contributive to informal social control. It is interesting to explore how neighborhood environment plays its role in breeding the antisocial behavior among youth. Similarly, the schooling system in the country is also believed to produce conformists to existing social order. However, these institutions of informal social control are gradually losing their traditional grounds for socializing an individual as per desirable social standards of expected behavior. The present study contributes to understand how these changing patterns of socialization in family and schooling in Pakistan are consequential to the violent experiences of youth in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods. In other words, we intend to be focusing on how violence across the spheres of family, street, and the school is interconnected.

## Literature review

A vast literature has examined how the neighborhood environment facilitates involvement in criminal activities. For instance, one of the early topics and the primary focus of the early years of Chicago schools were the study of crime and deviant behavior (Hardyns and Pauwels 2018). The focus of early research in neighborhood analysis was to provide a road map on the research of neighborhood dynamics. It has been argued that neighborhood context and characteristics play a major role in shaping values, norms and behaviors amongst the youth. Characteristics of disadvantaged neighborhood included high rates of unemployment, poor economic conditions, and mistrust of law enforcement agencies, unequal treatment by the state institutions, instability and ethnic heterogeneity (Anderson 1999a). Disadvantaged neighborhood environment is the main medium for the involvement of youth in criminal activities as illustrated by Sampson et al. (2002). The main focus of their research was on how many social problems such as youth violence and crimes tend to prevail at the level of underprivileged neighborhoods. They remarked that neighborhood structural disadvantages, along with racial segregation, comprise "geographic hotspots for crime and problem-related behavior that are characterized by multiple forms of disadvantage" (Sampson et al. 2002, p.446). Similarly, Goffman's (2014) ethnographic project showed the African American neighborhoods in which the male juveniles suffer harsh and rough policing strategies and elimination from the job market might lead to their adoption of criminal careers. One such activity displayed by the youth in a disadvantaged neighborhood is violence.

'Violence' is form of aggression in which the other person is physically harmed, considered a threat to the life and safety of the individual perpetrating violence. It was also observed that the high ratio of violence in disadvantaged neighborhoods mostly results from structural disadvantages and deviant (not in line with mainstream) cultural values (Stewart and Simons 2010). In addition to this, there are studies on gang involvement and violence amongst youth that are mostly concentrated on the

socioeconomic risk factors responsible for youth involvement in illicit drug usage. Among the key socioeconomic factors responsible for youth violence include residence in poor disadvantaged neighborhoods, socialization in single-parent or broken family households, lack of employment opportunities and failure to graduate from high school (Hill, Lui, and Hawkins 2001). Shedd (2015) also stated that violent acts amongst adolescents are promoted through the disadvantaged socio-economic condition of the neighborhoods. Her study also revealed that neighborhood-based norm-setting or regulatory structure, or its inadequacy, results in violence-oriented ways of social interactions of adolescents in these hazardous neighborhoods.

Matsuda et al. (2013) suggested a close connection between the acceptance of violent norms among the peers. Their study revealed that gang membership is vital to the acceptance of violent beliefs and gives rise to violent conduct amongst adolescents. The role of peers and gangs can be further illustrated by the study of Richardson and Vil (2016), conducted in a socially disadvantaged neighborhood and examined the strategies in which low-wage earners handle relationships with gangs, school fellows, and peer groups to avoid and stop victimization. This study found that adolescents in these neighborhoods form friendships with violent peers to stay in the neighborhood streets. However, some adolescents have segregated themselves from street culture as a strategy to avoid victimization. The crucial components in the legal socialization of youth are the firsthand experiences with the police and different types of racial discrimination among individuals (Berg et al. 2016). An essential feature of those experiences is communication with legal authorities since, for the majority of youth, police stand together with school administrations in an act of violence within the school or the neighborhood street (Shedd 2015). Over time, crime is influenced by these communications and socialization experiences, particularly for adolescents who experience violence at home and in the neighborhood streets are more vulnerable to victimization (Burt, Lei, and Simons 2017).

The major reason for violent victimization amongst African-American youth is that they learned to embrace the violent values and consider the use of violence as normal behavior (Stewart, Schreck, and Simons 2006). The rejection of the mainstream cultural values and the adoption of the new culture came to be known as the "street code." The code provides justification for violent acts, and under the code, violent behaviors are legitimized and accepted within similar groups. The code also outlines how one needs to behave in the street to deter victimization and to gain respect (Anderson 1999b). In general, the 'code of the street' as explained by Anderson justifies the use of violence as a strategy to gain respect and status among peers.

There is an ongoing debate in the literature regarding street code and violent victimization. McNeeley and Hoeben (2017), examined whether code of the street affects victimization and delinquency and whether there are variations for adolescents having different lifestyles. They found that situational factors like unstructured socialization, affect the relationship between street code and violent delinquency. High involvement in unstructured public socialization and conflict positioning is interlinked with increasing risk of delinquency. However, there is no relationship between victimization and these values. However, Yuan and McNeeley (2018), demonstrates that increasing fear of violence in the contexts of schools and neighborhood, decreases the probability of unstructured socialization for adolescents. Teenagers who are engaged in unstructured socializing are more inclined toward delinquency and their chances of victimization are also higher. In contrast, adolescents more fearful of violence, avoid peer groups and spaces where chances of unstructured socialization are higher.

When processing the motives and initiations of code-inspired behavior, especially in terms of victimization, literature suggests that provoking potential offenders might be an avid cause (see, e.g., McNeeley and Wilcox 2015b; Stewart, Schreck, and Simons 2006). Backed by the urge to engage in aggressive encounters with possible offenders, the risk of violent victimization considerably increases for code followers; where provocative code behavior is likely to generate response from those being threatened or insulted, particularly when exhibited in public, in presence of witnesses (see Jacobs and Wright 2006; McNeeley and Wilcox 2015a). Considering the previous accounts on violent victimization, an aggravated rate of involvement in such victimization can be observed among those code

followers that are more immersed in a public lifestyle; as reported in the study on adults in Seattle, Washington, USA, by McNeeley and Wilcox (2015a). Therefore, violent victimization may rise and persist as a result of the public display or threat of the display of aggression and violence directed toward potential offenders, who are more likely to reciprocate with similar ferocity, owing to the perceived social pressure.

Findings from the cross-cultural analysis of youth violence in Pakistan, Bulgaria and South Africa show that Anderson's Street code conception is influenced by the contextual dynamic of different cultures and is not generalizable in its fullest in all socio-cultural contexts. Some general patterns persist across all the cultures as noted by Anderson that include neighborhood perception, respect and interpretation of violence from actors. However, other elements, important among which are striving for success, masculinity/toughness, role of family/friends, responding to the enemies and symbolizing the violence significantly vary across different contexts (Kurtenbach et al. 2019).

The literature we discussed have covered violence at different spheres like neighborhood violence, school violence and home violence; however, there is dearth of literature which interlinks violence on these three spheres. The current study is going to address this gap through showing how violence across the sphere of home, school, and the neighborhood is connected. The study is also significant with regard to showing the application of theories on code of the street, specifically Anderson (1999), Code of the street theory to the Pakistani context.

## Methods

The philosophical foundations of any research are based on epistemological and ontological considerations (Creswell 2012). The ontological position of this research is nominalism which is premised on the idea that there is no objective universal reality, and that reality is socially constructed. If insights into how reality is constructed are sought, then the researcher has to understand what meaning people attach to their actions (Bryman 2008a). The epistemological base of this study is anti-positivist interpretive approach, as researchers sought to know the contextual experiences of the youth regarding violence, rather than being interested in the statistical significance of violence in these neighborhoods.

The universe of research comprised two neighborhoods of Islamabad that include the locales of Bari Imam and Bara Kahu. These neighborhoods were selected for being densely populated urban slums, having high rates of violent acts, unemployed youth, and social disorganization. According to Crime Statistics Report of 2017, the ratio of crimes is higher among the disadvantaged urban neighborhoods like Liyari, Bari Imam, and slum areas of Rawalpindi. Another reason for selecting these neighborhoods was its lower level of social control, narrower streets, high ratio of unemployed youth and prevalence of drug abuse in the area. We adopted multi-facet strategy to reach out to our study participants. We used personal contacts to identify key respondents and informants. We then used those key informants to access to our relevant respondents. We also contacted gatekeepers who provided us access to the neighborhood streets and respondents involved in violent activities. Our field work took nearly 20 months where three researchers spent considerable amount of time in those neighborhoods, for building the rapport and winning the trust of the study participants before getting access to the inside information. Our researchers were familiar with local languages of the respondents that favored us a great deal in providing access to the relevant respondents.

Most of our respondents were students of the schools of study area. Data from the students were collected outside the schools. We adopted the strategy of interviewing the students outside the school to avoid any influence of school administration or peers in the school on the interviewees. We accessed the students in places like playgrounds located nearby the schools, nearby park and other areas where they used to gather. We asked them questions regarding their violent experiences within the school and other spheres like home and neighborhood street. We also explored their experiences with regard to violent groups, and role of school environment in their adoption of street code. 30 in-depth interviews were conducted with the voluntary participants to get their insights to understand the

**Table 1.** Respondents' demographic information.

| Respondent Code | Gender | Education | Age | Neighborhood | Duration living in neighborhood | Group membership | Family type |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BI14-M | Male | 10th grade | 14 | Bari Imam | 4 years | Malangi | Joint |
| BI17-B | Male | Illiterate | 17 | Bari Imam | 3 years | Boxer | Nuclear |
| BI17-3 | Male | 9th grade | 17 | Bari Imam | 9 years | 333 | Joint |
| BI18-B | Male | 11th grade | 18 | Bara Kahu | 10 years | Boxer | Joint |
| BK15-3 | Male | 10th grade | 15 | Bara Kahu | 12 years | 333 | Nuclear |
| BI15-M | Male | Illiterate | 15 | Bari Imam | 7 years | Malangi | Joint |
| BK18-B | Male | 12th grade | 18 | Bara Kahu | 6 years | Boxer | Nuclear |
| BK14-N | Male | 8th grade | 14 | Bara Kahu | 5 years | N/A | Joint |
| BI16-M | Male | 10th grade | 16 | Bari Imam | 3 years | Malangi | Joint |
| BK15-B | Male | Illiterate | 15 | Bara Kahu | 8 years | Boxer | Nuclear |
| BK14-M | Male | 8th grade | 14 | Bara Kahu | 9 years | Malangi | Nuclear |
| BI17-3 | Male | Illiterate | 17 | Bari Imam | 6 years | 333 | Joint |
| BK16-B | Male | 9th grade | 16 | Bara Kahu | 10 years | Boxer | Nuclear |
| BI16-3 | Male | Illiterate | 16 | Bari Imam | 12 years | 333 | Nuclear |
| BK18-7 | Male | Illiterate | 18 | Bara Kahu | 7 years | 777 | Joint |
| BK14-7 | Male | 10th grade | 14 | Bara Kahu | 3 years | 777 | Joint |
| BI17-M | Male | Illiterate | 17 | Bari Imam | 2 years | Malangi | Nuclear |
| BI16-B | Male | 9th grade | 16 | Bari Imam | 3 years | Boxer | Nuclear |
| BK18-7 | Male | 11th grade | 18 | Bara Kahu | 8 years | 777 | Nuclear |
| BI15-B | Male | 10th grade | 15 | Bari Imam | 8 years | Boxer | Joint |
| BI21-N | Male | Illiterate | 21 | Bari Imam | 4 years | N/A | Joint |
| BK18-M | Male | 12th grade | 18 | Bara Kahu | 4 years | Malangi | Nuclear |
| BI14-N | Male | 8th grade | 14 | Bari Imam | 9 years | N/A | Joint |
| BK16-M | Male | 10th grade | 16 | Bara Kahu | 3 years | Malangi | Nuclear |
| BI15-B | Male | Illiterate | 15 | Bari Imam | 7 years | Boxer | Joint |
| BK14-B | Male | 8th grade | 14 | Bara Kahu | 6 years | Boxer | Joint |
| BK17-N | Male | Illiterate | 17 | Bara Kahu | 3 years | N/A | Nuclear |
| BI16-M | Male | 9th grade | 16 | Bari Imam | 8 years | Malangi | Nuclear |
| BK20-3 | Male | Illiterate | 20 | Bara Kahu | 11 years | 333 | Joint |
| BI18-M | Male | Illiterate | 18 | Bari Imam | 6 years | Malangi | Joint |

meanings they attached to their street violence activities. The duration of interviews vary between 40 and 60 minutes each.

### Study participants

All the respondents of the study were male, and were aged between 14 and 21 years. Pakistan, being a patriarchal society, provides little space to female to hang around in the neighborhood streets. Twelve of them were illiterate, as they never went to the school. Eleven of the study participants were school dropouts, and rest of them was getting education in different grades, between 8 and 12. They were dwelling for 2 to 12 years in the study area. All the participants belonged to four violent street groups, except for the four respondents who refused to reveal the identity of their group. Table 1 reflects the detailed information of respondents' demographic variables.

We have coded every respondent's identity based on three variables: by taking the first two initials of their neighborhood name; their age in number; and, after adding slash, the first letter/number of their group name. (e.g., respondent from Bari Imam neighborhood who is 17 years old, having membership of Malangi group is coded as BI17-M, and respondent from Bara Kahu neighborhood who is 15 years old, belonging to the group 333 is coded as BK15-3) to avoid disclosing their identity. We contacted respondents in these neighborhoods through gatekeepers and key informants. We also hired researchers who were able to understand and speak in local languages. We spent two years in these neighborhoods for collecting the data.

The sampling strategy for the study was non-probability snowball sampling. We initially spent a couple of months in the field to build rapport with the three participants through concurrent visits to the field, and then with the help of these gatekeepers, consent of other respondents was sought to willingly participate in the study. We conducted interviews in the neighborhood streets, playgrounds, at a Shrine located in the neighborhood and side corner areas where most of the youth gathers to consume drugs and discuss their routine activities and devise their plans of action. A shrine is considered a sacred place, associated with a holy person, and people often visit to pay tribute, offer prayers and immolation, light a votive. Mostly, free food is available for everyone which is one of the motives for impoverished people to visit. For the neighboring community, it opens many possibilities of economic activities, both legitimate as well as illegitimate, including pickpocketing, theft, prostitution, drug dealing, etc. We interviewed those respondents who had some history of being involved in violations of law, like involvement in theft, illicit drug abuse, clashes and gang fights in which someone got injured, etc. As we spent almost two years in the field, we learned about their daily activities and also identified respondents who could willingly provide us information to meet the objectives of the study. We gathered information while observing their routine activities and also conducted interviews with them in their natural settings. We used a structured interview guide for interviewing our study participants. The guide included elements concerning the daily activities of the youth, their experiences within the family, at school and in the street, their definitions of honor, violence, respect, vanity, identity and friendship.

The data was then analyzed through NVivo software which helped to code the data into different themes. Inductive coding was used because of the adoption of Anderson's street code theory in the study. Open coding was carried out with NVivo which led to the identification of several themes and subthemes from the data. We also did axial and selective coding while keeping in view the deductive approach. We compared the codes and categories with Anderson's codes of the street theory and found similarities and differences. Conclusions were drawn from the data based on similarities and differences with the data, the theory and the existing body of knowledge.

## Results

### *Family troubles: inculcation of violent values*

According to the "code of the street," families adopting the street code are termed as street families. These families have different values as compared to the mainstream values and they act per the street code which might lead them to violence and criminal activities. Anderson's (1999) conception of the street and decent families is somewhat different from that applicable in the neighborhood context of Islamabad. In the neighborhoods of Islamabad, decent families are called "*Shareef gharany*" (non-violent families) in the local language. A family is categorized as decent based on the family members' affinity with religion and conformity to the dominant values of Pakistani culture, while street families are called "*ghair khanadani loog*" (uncivilized families). The criteria of indecency are the same as those who do not confirm to the dominant norms are called *ghair khanadani loog*. It was found that the family troubles and the way parents socialize their children contribute significantly to the adoption of violent values. According to Anderson, the street parents do not have social control over their children and they leave them unattended in the street to socialize themselves. Our research findings do confirm to this assumption but with a complex variation in parenting style. Parents do intend to socialize their children as per dominant norms of the society. Yet they fail to control the influence of their neighborhood subculture on the socialization of their children. For instance, the research participant BK18-7 while narrating his experiences with the parents stated:

> We are six siblings and I am the eldest one. I have spent all my time in the street playing with the boys who were older than me. I have learnt a lot of things from them. They introduced me to the smoking and also to consume drugs. My father used to admonish me for my company, and had even beaten me up many times but I never listened to him. Now, he has stopped giving me any advice (Authors' fieldwork, 2018).

This familial social control is not only limited to parents but other family members as well, like elder siblings and kin can also exercise control over youth as evident from the following verbatim of a 17-year-old interviewee, BI17-M:

> I used to spend most of the time with my friends on the street. At the beginning, my elder brother used to advise me to avoid indulging in the activities such as drug consumption and spending time with the indecent friends in the street. He used to physically punish me for that. But now, I am used to it and am not affected by his harsh treatment. He has also realized that his sanctions are not going to work on me (Authors' fieldwork, 2018).

Most of the adolescents are dealt with physical punishment as a normative socialization style at their homes. They learn to value violence from their parents and elders, as a mean to achieve desirable standards of behavior, and then tend to practice it as a norm on the street. This could have been interpreted as antisocial behavior, had there been a permanent disapproval of such acts from their parents. Interestingly, it was found that the parents also get involved in the quarrels and clashes of their children on the street, as narrated by BK17-M:

> If I am having a fight or conflict with someone in the street, I get support of my family members as well (Authors' fieldwork, 2018).

According to Jencks and Mayer (1990), the family environment, whether decent, or street, has a significant impact on the behavior of the youth. Parents who are involved in violent activities do not focus on the positive socialization of their children, despite their positive intentions, which results in their indulgence in delinquent behavior. Youth, by normalizing that behavior, also adopts the street culture due to the hostile environment in their families, as BI16-B narrates his experiences:

> My father is a drug dependent. I have grown up seeing my father frequently beating my mother and my siblings on very petty issues. I have also learnt to express my reactions violently and aggressively. It has become part of my personality now. I often fight with other boys in the streets, but my father does not care. Rather, he encourages me to be tough and violent. Otherwise, the other guys in the street will consider me an easy target (Authors' fieldwork, 2018).

It is important to bear in mind that in families belonging to disadvantaged neighborhoods in Pakistan, the adult male members are heading the families which is why they, more often than not, exercise their power on their children and female members through coercive means, leading to the use of violence. Such scenes of employing violent means not only to tame their families but also to resolve domestic issues, consequentially transforms violence as desirable value, instead of being considered as antisocial act. As they grow older and enter the school, they find a different socializing environment, which in the disadvantaged urban neighborhood of Islamabad perpetuates their conception of violence as legitimate means to achieve their desired goals.

### *Formation of tanzeem (Groups) in schools*

Children acquire the conception of violence in their domestic context. However, they seldom find an opportunity to exercise it. Schools located in these disadvantaged neighborhoods provide the opportunity of exercising violence by joining violent groups. Anderson (1999) and Swahn and Bossarte (2009) assert that youth in disadvantaged neighborhoods mostly join gangs to achieve their objectives. As children have already observed their fathers and elder brothers to meet their desired goals by exercising violence at home, their impressions are ready to be materialized in practicing violence in the school, by following the group norms. The existence of different violent groups in the schools of the study area have been observed. These groups are often involved in antisocial and criminal activities, such as drug dealing, stealing, eve teasing, pickpocketing, and conflicts and fights with the rival groups. It is worth mentioning that the respondents of the study did not like to label their groups as *gangs*. Rather, they preferred to employ a value neutral term like *tanzeem* (organization), even when they themselves admitted to be involved in violent activities. Gang, according to them, is negatively connoted term, which would necessarily reflect their activities as antisocial, even when they do not intend to be deviant. The principle objective of *tanzeem* formation for them is to preserve their distinctive identity with honor and dignity, while living in a disadvantaged neighborhood, where other ethnic groups are a potential threat to their survival. In doing so, they often have to act violently in order to respond to the violence committed against them. One of the reasons they do not use the term gang for their groups is that they do not want to get the attention of law enforcement agencies. A respondent BI18-M explained:

> Tanzeems (Groups) are formed in every such neighborhood on the basis of cast or ethnicity to deal with the potential threats from one another. Choudharies (a relatively higher cast of the Punjab ethnicity) are having their group, and we have our own tanzeem which is Malangi. We are not a gang with mala fide intentions, but we help each other in challenging situations, like physical attacks or threats from other groups. If anyone inflicts violence or tries to harm any of our group members, we act in vengeance as a team (Authors' fieldwork, 2018).

It is interesting to understand why retribution is preferred over becoming a law-abiding citizen. Youth of these neighborhoods is mostly fascinated by local cinema and film industry, which has concurrently been producing films portraying 'protagonists' taking revenge from 'antagonists' to restore their valor with dignity, instead of seeking institutionalized justice. '*Malangi*' is one such character in a Punjabi blockbuster film. Similarly, some other group names include the *Ajay Group* and *Boxer Group*. The name *Ajay* is the screen name of a famous Bollywood actor *Ajay Devgan*, who is famous for being action hero. Similarly, Boxer is attributable to the sport of boxing.

These groups have a large number of members, and they are connected with each other through different means of communication, like social media and cellphones. They communicate through their WhatsApp or Facebook groups whenever a situation arises, to congregate at the troubled spot.

Interestingly, one of the explicit objectives behind these groups' formation in the schools is that they work for the students' welfare and to assist them for curricular and cocurricular activities. Employing welfare tactics not only help them increase their membership but also allow them to exercise their implicit deviant activities under legitimate credentials. These groups are mostly led by the students who possess more combat abilities and can fist fully lead in violent situations. There is no

time limit for the nominated leaders of these groups. It is totally up to the leader for how long he is able to control the group activities. Some of these groups have contacts with notorious criminals and drug dealers in the neighborhood. They also provide manpower to them for drug dealing and other violent activities. In exchange, those criminal groups protect its members from other violent groups. The same was also confirmed by a respondent BK19-B:

> There are organizations like Malang Students Force (MSF), Khan Students Force (KSF) and Boxer. These groups are mostly formed in the schools. However, there is support for these groups from outside as well. Politically and economically powerful people are supporting these groups because they have their interests in them. There are prominent drug dealers who are supporting these groups (Authors' fieldwork, 2018).

Anderson (1999) notes that schools in disadvantaged neighborhoods work like a "staging arena" wherein campaigns for respect and recognition are carried out. Since most of the respondents reveal that they were unable to perform well in their studies in school, they were often humiliated and stigmatized for being *nalaik* (dull), and *kaam chor* (lazy bum). As Harding (2009) and Simons, Simons, and Wallace (2004) indicate that youth in underprivileged vicinities also perform poorly at schools. The presence of violent groups in nearly every school in the disadvantaged neighborhoods was noted in this study.

It was also found that teachers have little control over the activities of the students. They often use the means of corporal punishment when they fail to perform well in the given academic tasks. When they find little or no improvement in their academic performance despite the perpetual use of violence, such students are labeled with negative stereotypes. Students, after facing offensive, derogatory, and violent behavior in the classroom environment consider themselves as academically futile. Being rejected from the mainstream and exacerbated by their violent family background, they look for the alternatives, and find refuge in the counter culture of street violence and drug consumption, often valued by their peer group. Their aggressions against their academic victimhood are sometimes then converted into the desire to revenge from the perpetrators, in this case, their teachers.

Surroundings of these schools in the disadvantageous neighborhoods of Islamabad are often converted into "fighting Arenas," rather than "staging Arenas," as termed by (Anderson 1999g). According to the "code of the street," being disrespected by the other people is a very serious offense which is often dealt with revenge. This violent behavior is displayed to regain their lost respect among the members of the disadvantaged neighborhood. Identical behavior was observed among the participants of current research. Street and school disputes are transformed into group fights. For instance, if a person fought at school or anywhere else, he would inform his group members and they would join him in the fight. If they are unable to reach on time and their group member was beaten by the enemy, then they would take his revenge by attacking the enemy on another time and venue. Although schools serve as important platforms to recruit group members and plan for the activities, these groups avoid exercising violence and other antisocial activities within the boundaries of schools. For that, they prefer neighborhood streets.

## *Violence on the streets*

Violence becomes a major aspect of the street life in the urban slums, when these *tanzeems* exercise their activities to achieve their desired goals. When the study participants were asked about the reasons for their violence, different explanations were given. They believed that using violence was a way to avoid the loss of dignity in peer groups and to gain and maintain respect which was necessary for surviving in the neighborhood. If someone does not respond to the abuse or bullying, he is considered coward and worthless. He then becomes vulnerable to more attacks from his opponents. The researchers personally observed few fights and clashes during data collection in the field. One of such incidents occurred while interviewing a participant near his school. We saw few boys coming out of the school, and they started beating one another. We inquired our respondent about the reason of

the quarrel. He told us that they had a disagreement during a lesson in the class where one of the guys felt offended, and now they were leveling the scores.

Our respondents, while narrating their stories of exercising violence in the street, showed great pride in telling the tales of their victories. One of the residents BI16-B described how he once had a *great fight* in the street with his opponents. This fight, according to him is still remembered for his and his group's reverence and courage:

> A few Punjabi (ethnic group) boys had beaten up my cousin in front of the school. The next day, I was with my cousin and we were coming back from the school. The same boys started bullying my cousin. I warned them not to do that again, but they didn't stop, and even one of the guys slapped me on my face. I did not respond at that time. When they came to our area, I captured one of them and beat him badly. The next day when I was going to school, I was stopped by nearly 100 boys from the street who were carrying sticks, motorcycle locks, and iron chains. We were five friends, and they were nearly 100. We were unable to handle them at that time, and were beaten badly. They threw me to the bushes down there. My younger brother got 5 stitches in the head and my leg was also fractured. I remained in hospital for a few days. Then our elders intervened in that matter. I was not in favor of making a peaceful settlement with them, as you know we are very hotheads, but my elders insisted for peace (Authors' fieldwork, 2018).

The verbatim by BI16 shows how a minor issue in the school got escalated to a brutal and violent clash on the street involving even their families from two neighborhoods in which many youngsters even got injured. This finding reflects how these three platforms are interconnected for perceiving, learning and exercising violence.

When a new group is formed in the neighborhood, it faces resistance from preexisting groups. Each group tries to assert its dominance over the other, and this struggle often leads to violent inter-group conflicts. A member of the Boxer group, BI17-3, explained:

> When we come to know that a new group is getting popularity, we prepare our team and attack them and beat them. This spreads our fear among other groups, and we gain more respect and repute. We have even beaten policemen many times. I myself have beaten policemen three to four times. Fortunately, I never spent more than a week in the cell. I got political and economic influence on my back. They always keep me safe (Authors' fieldwork, 2018).

The members of these violent groups who are involved in violent activities are patronized by powerful people. They are mostly politicians and drug dealers, and they use these young boys to pursuit their criminal and political activities in the area. When the group members get in trouble, the political patrons help to extricate them out of that situation. These political linkages are important to understand their continuous involvement in the violent activities despite the intervention of law enforcement agencies.

Youngsters who experience violence at their adolescence and then participate in violent activities at school and the street, often practice violence at their homes, after reaching the age of maturity. One of our study participants, BI21-N who was married and having a 4-year-old kid narrated his views regarding the socialization of his child.

> I have experienced violence of every kind in these neighborhood streets, I have been regularly victimized and targeted by the members of opponent groups. Now I don't want my child to be targeted and victimized. I am socializing him in a way so that he doesn't show any weakness on the street and is not easily victimized. I sometimes physically punish him for not obeying me (Authors' fieldwork, 2018).

Violence is also practiced by being the elder sibling on the younger family members who are socialized in the disadvantaged neighborhood environment. Our research participant BK20-3 was one such example, who narrated his experience:

> I have spent nearly 10 years in the streets of our neighborhood. Now my younger brother, who is 11 years old is spending most of his time on these streets. I want to keep him away from his violent peers and bad company, but he often ignores my advice, and then I have to beat and torture him to make him understand my advice (Authors' fieldwork, 2018).

Street norms for these groups act in two ways. They not only allow them to exercise violence in order to protect their dignity and identity, they are equally being produced and reproduced through on street

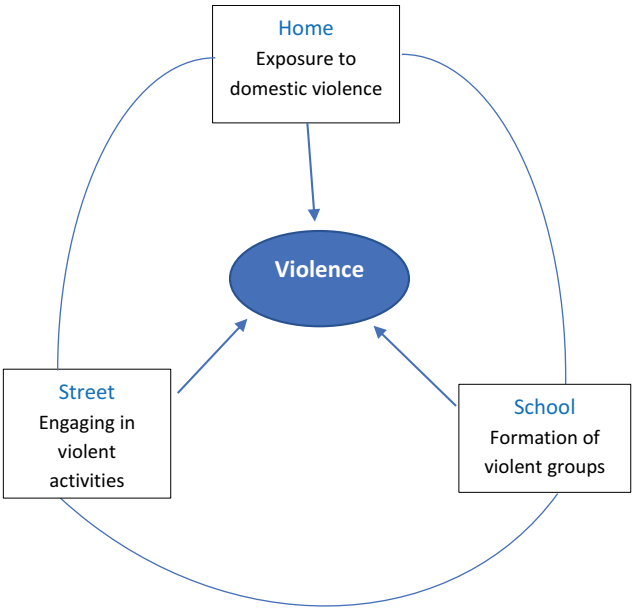


**Figure 1.** Troika of violence.

violence as shared standards of desirable behavior for the newly recruited group members from the school. Street being the *fighting arena* exacerbate the violence which is circulating in these important spheres of the life of disadvantageous urban youth.

## Discussion

The study findings reflect that youth in disadvantaged neighborhoods of Islamabad are vulnerable to violence on different fronts. The exposure to domestic violence at home and presence of violent groups in schools creates an overall disadvantageous neighborhood environment, which can be termed as "troika of violence" for the youth. They are entangled in a vicious cycle of violence that is the outcome of three major institutions of socialization, including schools, family, and the neighborhood streets. Although an individual who becomes the member of violent groups in the street does not necessarily experience violence on all three fronts. Yet they are interconnected for violent experiences, exposures, and practice.

Our study also highlights that the violence inducing groups can covertly exist in the schools, which had not been discussed in the previous studies. Nearly every public school in the neighborhoods has these *tanzeems*, which are involved in violent and criminal activities like harassment, bullying, and beating of the students and violent clashes along with the supply of drugs to the campus and outside areas of the neighborhoods. Harding (2009) and Simons, Simons, and Wallace (2004) have reported that youth from underprivileged neighborhoods perform poorly in schools and have a higher ratio of school dropouts. The poor academic performers become an easy prey to be recruited by these groups.

Being labeled as valueless social beings, these poor performers, often dropouts, look for the alternatives to attain respect, dignity and worthwhile social identity. Anderson (1999) notes that schools in disadvantaged neighborhoods are "staging Arenas" where most of the campaigns for respect and building reputation are carried out. However, Anderson's study fails to contextualize how these groups operate within schools, and what recruiting strategies they employ for the disadvantageous urban youth. Our findings demonstrate how violence at home and existence of *tanzeems* at schools play a catalytic role in producing on street violence, rage and gang wars, as shown in Figure 1. Due to

the presence of a large number of violent groups in the schools of the study area, virtually every student has experienced violence, often multiple times. Therefore, this study, in consensus with Anderson's (1999) conceptualization, terms the schools as "staging arenas" and the surrounding neighborhood as "fighting arenas"

Violent experiences on one front are interlinked with the other two at the same time, like adolescents experiencing and observing violence at their families are likely to have violent tendencies and might respond violently to any offensive response on the street and in the school. When these adolescents get exposure to the neighborhood street that is already characterized by a higher ratio of violence, the presence of violent groups and violent individuals, and force them to adopt the violent street culture.

## Conclusion

The present research was aimed at exploring the interconnection of family, school and street in imparting, socializing, producing and exercising violence in the disadvantageous urban neighborhoods. For the purpose, the personal experiences of the youth in the study area of Islamabad, Pakistan were taken into account. Youth belonging to disadvantaged neighborhood adopt the 'street code' where they engage themselves in the activities leading them to practice violence and other antisocial behaviors by becoming the members of organized street gangs. Interestingly, these gangs are often formed in the schools under the guise of student welfare groups. The prevalence of violence within these neighborhoods is attributable to the adoption of street values among the youth where they strive to gain 'respect' by showing macho attitude and physical aggression to gain respect and to save themselves from victimization and bullying. The home was found to be an important front where most of the youth in disadvantaged neighborhoods were exposed to violence. Being part of the community of underprivileged people, parents are least able to focus on the affirmative socialization of their children. Their deprivations, sense of insecurity, and disrespect offer little to legitimately achieve an adequate living. Believing to be fatalistically entangled in the whirlpool of destitution, most of the fathers find refuge in drug consumption. When their drug dependency increases and they are unable to meet both ends, they take desperate measures. They end up being aggressive and violent to their own families. Their outrageous behavior to deal with their own insecurities becomes the characteristic of their method to socialize their children as well. Being exposed to aggression at home and corporal punishment, such as caning or flogging, at schools, these children begin to internalize violence as the only mean to strive for life goals. These experiences then have far-reaching consequences, like adolescents who experience violence at home are more likely to adopt violent responses to any offensive act at school or on the street. An individual experiencing violence on all the three fronts has a higher tendency to act violently in comparison to his counterparts. The troika of violence, thus, engages an individual in its vicious cycle, where shared standards of street code become desirable attributes for the youth of disadvantaged neighborhood.

This study, however, has a number of limitations. Firstly, it did not inquire into the violent experiences of females in disadvantaged neighborhoods due to sociocultural barriers. Females, mostly being the victim of myriad of violence in these neighborhoods, would be worth exploring to understand gendered experiences of violence. Secondly, these findings are based on in-depth interviews and information given by the respondents involved in violent activities in neighborhoods. A future study could also include the views of the neighborhood residents, school administration, the local leaders, and police to get a holistic picture of the neighborhood environment. Thirdly, the current study was limited in its scope to only include the neighborhoods of the capital city of Pakistan. A comparative research can be more helpful to comprehensively understand the trends and patterns of youth violence in different neighborhoods of metropolitan cities in other cultural contexts.

## Acknowledgments

We are greatly indebted to our respondents and participants of the study who helped us in carrying out this research. Their time and availability for interviews and sharing their valuable information regarding violent experiences made us able to complete this study successfully.

## Notes on contributor

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## Declaration of interest statement

We would like to confirm that there is no known conflict of interest associated with this article.

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