Akademika 96(3), October 2026
https://doi.org/10.17576/akad-2026-9603-16

The Impact of Family Socioeconomic Status on the Involvement of Youths in Gangsterism.

Kesan Status Sosioekonomi Keluarga terhadap Penglibatan Belia dalam Gengsterisme

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Received: 31-1-2026/Accepted: 13-10-2026

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the systemic relationship between family socioeconomic status (SES) and youth involvement in gangsterism. Specifically, poverty places substantial socioeconomic pressure on marginalised families and may increase youths' vulnerability to criminal activities. While conventional scholarship identifies factors such as family disintegration and educational disruption, youth aggression and gang-related behaviour remain persistent concerns across diverse contexts. A systematic thematic review was conducted using the Thematic Review FlowZ (TreZ) method. A total of 26 peer-reviewed articles published between 2021 and 2025 were synthesised through five phases: Triage, Refinement, Exclusion, Eligibility, and Zeroing-In, supported by qualitative tools such as ATLAS.ti 25. The findings categorise the research landscape into five major themes: socioeconomic determinants, urbanisation and environmental factors, psychological aspects of criminality, policy approaches, and theoretical methodologies. The review indicates that absolute and relative poverty are important structural conditions associated with family instability, weakened parental resources, and youth vulnerability to gangsterism. It further identifies 'Policy Disorganisation', whereby fragmented governance and punitive legislative responses may inadequately address the underlying structural conditions associated with systemic marginalisation. The review highlights a research gap concerning longitudinal analyses of criminal trajectories. It concludes that responses to youth gangsterism should move beyond punitive containment towards structural justice and culturally embedded governance. The Social Impact Framework (SIF) is proposed as a diagnostic tool to support more integrated and context-sensitive policy responses.

Keywords: Family Socioeconomic Status; Youths; Gangsterism; Poverty; Social Impact Framework

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini menyiasat hubungan sistemik antara status sosioekonomi (SES) keluarga dengan penglibatan belia dalam gengsterisme. Secara khusus, kemiskinan memberikan tekanan sosioekonomi yang ketara terhadap keluarga terpinggir dan boleh meningkatkan kerentanan belia terhadap aktiviti jenayah. Walaupun kajian konvensional mengenal pasti faktor seperti perpecahan keluarga dan gangguan pendidikan, keagresifan belia dan tingkah laku berkaitan geng kekal menjadi kebimbangan yang berterusan dalam pelbagai konteks. Satu tinjauan tematik sistematik telah dijalankan menggunakan kaedah Thematic Review FlowZ (TreZ). Sebanyak 26 artikel berwasit yang diterbitkan antara tahun 2021 hingga 2025 telah disintesis melalui lima fasa, iaitu Triage, Refinement, Exclusion, Eligibility dan Zeroing-In, dengan sokongan alat kualitatif seperti ATLAS.ti 25. Dapatan kajian mengkategorikan landskap penyelidikan kepada lima tema utama: penentu sosioekonomi, pembandaran dan faktor persekitaran, aspek psikologi kriminaliti, pendekatan dasar dan metodologi teori. Tinjauan ini menunjukkan bahawa kemiskinan mutlak dan relatif merupakan keadaan struktur penting yang berkaitan dengan ketidakstabilan keluarga, kelemahan sumber ibu bapa dan kerentanan belia terhadap gengsterisme. Kajian ini turut mengenal pasti 'Ketidakteraturan Dasar', iaitu keadaan apabila tadbir urus yang berpecah-pecah dan tindak balas perundangan yang bersifat punitif mungkin tidak memadai dalam menangani keadaan struktur asas yang berkaitan dengan peminggiran sistemik. Tinjauan ini mengetengahkan jurang penyelidikan berkaitan analisis longitudinal trajektori jenayah. Kajian ini menyimpulkan bahawa tindak balas terhadap gengsterisme belia perlu beralih daripada pembendungan punitif kepada keadilan struktural dan tadbir

urus yang berteraskan konteks budaya. Kerangka Impak Sosial (SIF) dicadangkan sebagai alat diagnostik bagi menyokong tindak balas dasar yang lebih bersepadu dan sensitif terhadap konteks.

Kata kunci: Status Sosioekonomi Keluarga; Belia; Gengsterisme; Kemiskinan; Kerangka Impak Sosial

INTRODUCTION

Poverty is an important structural condition associated with socioeconomic instability among disadvantaged families and with a range of social problems, including youth involvement in gangsterism. Poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage are important structural conditions associated with family instability, constrained educational and employment opportunities, and increased exposure to adverse social environments. However, socioeconomic disadvantage does not independently or inevitably result in youth involvement in gangsterism. Rather, the literature suggests that its relationship with youth delinquency and gang involvement is shaped by interacting familial, educational, environmental, psychological and institutional conditions. In this context, the present review examines how poverty and family socioeconomic conditions are represented in recent literature and how these conditions interact with broader social processes associated with youth gangsterism. This approach avoids reducing gangsterism to a single economic cause and instead considers poverty as one structural condition within a multidimensional social process. In Malaysia, socioeconomic disparities remain evident across ethnic groups. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), the incidence of absolute poverty among Indian households was 5.4% in 2022, compared with 1.9% among Chinese households, while the national incidence was 6.2% (Department of Statistics Malaysia [DOSM], 2023). Although the incidence declined subsequently, socioeconomic inequalities remain relevant to understanding disadvantage among marginalised populations. These disparities should therefore be examined in relation to broader structural, educational, employment and environmental conditions rather than interpreted as evidence of an inherent relationship between ethnicity and poverty. These disparities have been associated with long-standing historical, political and structural arrangements that contribute to the reproduction of ethnic and socioeconomic inequalities. Persistent socioeconomic disadvantage restricts access to quality education, stable employment, and social mobility, thereby intensifying financial insecurity across generations. Within such constrained environments, the relationship between poverty and youth involvement in gangsterism becomes increasingly salient and complex. Empirical studies consistently identify socioeconomic deprivation as a significant predictor of youth violence and gang participation. Where legitimate economic opportunities are limited, organised crime may emerge as an alternative pathway through which youths seek income, protection, social recognition, or a sense of belonging.

International legal instruments distinguish between an organised criminal group and the broader concept of a gang. Article 2(a) of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime defines an “organised criminal group” as a structured group of three or more persons existing for a period of time and acting in concert to commit one or more serious crimes for financial or other material benefit (United Nations, 2000). This definition is therefore used in the present study only to provide a legal reference for organised criminal activity and is not treated as a universal definition of “gangsterism”. Beyond material deprivation, poverty also amplifies psychological and social vulnerabilities. Aggression, identity insecurity, and the desire for social acceptance are frequently intensified in economically marginalised settings. The absence of

positive role models, coupled with fragile or disrupted family structures, may further push vulnerable youths towards gangs as alternative sources of identity, authority, and social status. Importantly, the effects of poverty extend beyond economic hardship to encompass social cohesion and mental well-being. Families experiencing chronic financial stress often face heightened levels of conflict, emotional strain, and relational breakdown, which can erode parental supervision and support. Such familial disintegration leaves youths particularly exposed to external influences, increasing their susceptibility to gang recruitment.

Despite extensive scholarly attention to poverty, educational disruption, family instability and other related factors, youth aggression, delinquency and gang-related behaviour remain persistent concerns across diverse contexts. However, the reviewed literature does not provide sufficient longitudinal evidence to conclude that youth aggression and gangsterism have increased uniformly at the global level. This limitation reinforces the need for systematic synthesis of recent evidence and for future longitudinal research examining changes in criminal trajectories over time. This persistence suggests that conventional interventions may insufficiently address the deeper structural and systemic mechanisms underpinning youth deviance. Although recent studies have examined socioeconomic disadvantage, family functioning, environmental conditions, psychological factors and youth delinquency, the reviewed literature remains fragmented across these dimensions. Previous reviews have tended to focus on particular risk factors, specific populations, or broader forms of youth violence and delinquency rather than systematically synthesising how poverty and family socioeconomic stability intersect with family, educational, environmental and policy conditions associated with youth gangsterism. In addition, the literature provides limited integration of these interconnected dimensions across diverse geographical and methodological contexts. The present systematic thematic review addresses this gap by synthesising recent peer-reviewed evidence published between 2021 and 2025, identifying recurring relationships across the five thematic domains and examining how socioeconomic disadvantage is embedded within broader familial, environmental, psychological and policy processes associated with youth gangsterism. The review therefore provides a structured evidence base for subsequent context-specific research on Malaysian Indian youths. Against this backdrop, the present study undertakes a systematic thematic review of peer-reviewed literature published between 2021 and 2025, with the aim of consolidating recent empirical insights on the structural drivers of youth involvement in gangsterism. The review is guided by the following research question:

To what extent does poverty undermine family socioeconomic stability and increase youths' involvement in gangsterism, as reported in the literature from 2021 to 2025?

Using the Thematic Review FlowZ (TreZ) protocol, this study synthesises findings across diverse geographical and methodological contexts to identify recurring patterns, mechanisms, and theoretical insights. Although global in scope, the analysis prioritises the development of transferable structural explanations to inform a subsequent, context-specific examination of Malaysian Indian youths within the broader doctoral research. This article contributes to the literature by reconceptualising poverty as a structural determinant of youth gangsterism, elucidating the interdependent roles of family institutions, education, and living conditions, and demonstrating how fragmented policy interventions fail to address the cumulative and mutually reinforcing nature of structural risk.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts an interpretive methodological orientation within a systematic literature review design. The systematic review component provides the structured procedure for identifying, screening, selecting and documenting relevant peer-reviewed studies, while thematic synthesis provides the analytical procedure for identifying recurring patterns, relationships and conceptual categories across the included literature. These components serve different but complementary purposes: the systematic review establishes transparency and traceability in study selection, whereas thematic synthesis supports interpretive examination of the meanings and relationships emerging across the evidence base. Accordingly, thematic analysis is not treated as synonymous with systematic review; rather, it constitutes the analytical strategy applied to the selected literature. The study therefore combines systematic evidence identification with interpretive thematic synthesis to examine how poverty, family socioeconomic conditions and youth gangsterism are represented across the recent literature by employing the Thematic Review FlowZ (TreZ) protocol developed by Zairul (2023). The TreZ protocol was used as the review procedure, while PRISMA 2020 principles were consulted to strengthen transparent reporting of the identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion processes. The technique is protected under copyright registration number CRLY2023W02032. This methodological framework was selected for its capacity to integrate rigorous thematic analysis procedures within a systematic literature review design, thereby enhancing methodological transparency, analytic consistency, and academic credibility. In this study, thematic analysis is guided by the interpretive principles outlined by Braun and Clarke (2013), who conceptualise it as a systematic process of identifying recurring patterns of meaning across data in order to construct analytically meaningful themes.

Following this approach, the review proceeded by identifying dominant thematic patterns and developing conceptual classifications to examine how poverty constrains family socioeconomic status and, in turn, shapes youths' vulnerability to involvement in gangsterism. The analytical orientation of the study is interpretive rather than merely descriptive, with emphasis placed on understanding structural mechanisms and social processes underlying youth aggression and organised criminal involvement. The primary objective of the review is to synthesise existing empirical evidence in order to inform future research directions within the field of human and social sciences, particularly in relation to poverty, family systems, and youth delinquency. Literature selection was conducted based on clearly defined evaluation criteria: (a) publication between 2021 and 2025; (b) inclusion of keywords related to socioeconomic status or poverty, and aggression, gangsterism, or organised crime; and (c) empirical focus on youth behavioural outcomes associated with socioeconomic disadvantage. The review did not impose geographical restrictions on the selected literature. This decision was made to facilitate a broader conceptual understanding of youth aggression and gangsterism across diverse socioeconomic contexts, allowing for comparative reflection against the Malaysian setting in which the primary empirical research is situated. Such an approach strengthens the theoretical generalisability of the findings while maintaining contextual sensitivity. In line with Zairul's (2023) methodological guidance, the research questions guiding the thematic review were formulated to be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART). The review process was executed through five systematic analytical phases, supported by advancements in artificial intelligence–assisted screening and the use of ATLAS.ti version 25 for qualitative data management, coding, and thematic organisation. This combined approach ensured analytical rigour, traceability of decisions, and consistency throughout the review process.

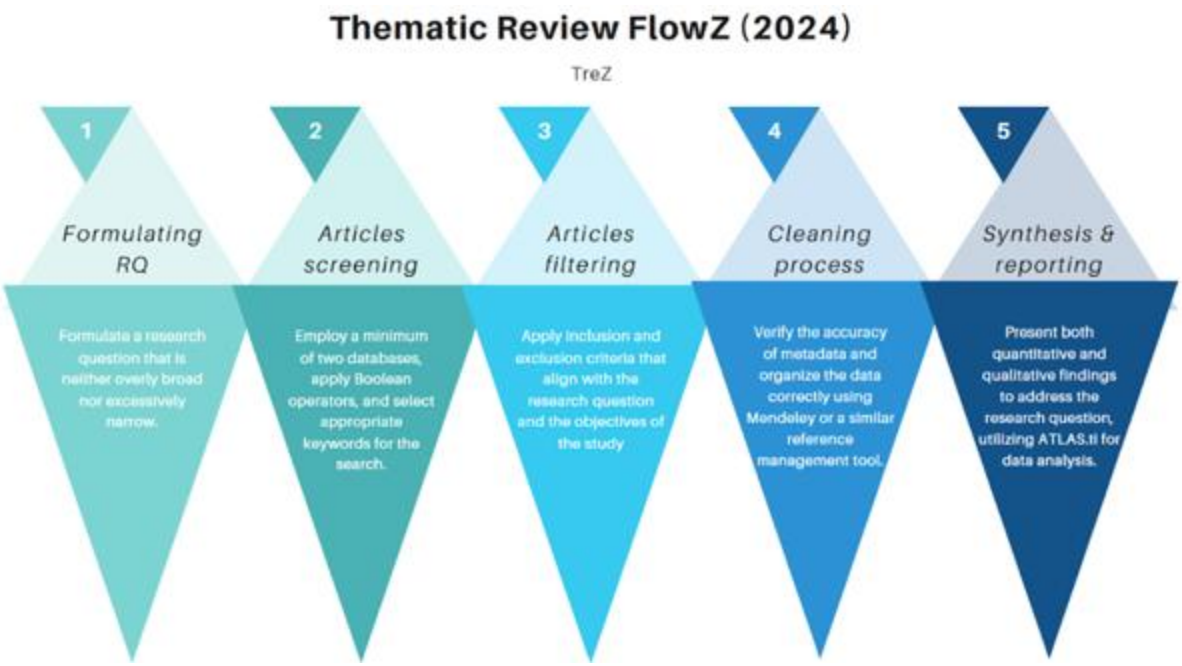


FIGURE 1. Thematic Review FlowZ (2024); Copyright No: CRLY2023W02032

FORMULATION AND ARTICLE SCREENING

The search strategy was derived directly from the three core constructs specified in the research question: poverty, family socioeconomic stability, and youth involvement in gangsterism. The first construct was operationalised through terms including "poverty", "socioeconomic", "socioeconomic status", "deprivation", "economic hardship" and "inequality". The second construct was operationalised through terms including "family", "household", "parental", "family functioning", "family instability" and related family-level concepts. The third construct was operationalised through terms including "youth", "adolescent", "young people", "gangsterism", "gang involvement", "gang membership" and "delinquency". Boolean operators were then used to combine these concept groups according to the search syntax permitted by each database. This approach ensured that the search strategy was conceptually aligned with the research question while allowing for database-specific search functions. systematic literature search was conducted across five major databases namely Scopus AI, Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), Springer, and Sage using targeted keywords such as "socio-economic", "gangsterism", "poverty", "family", "youth", and "crime" combined with precise Boolean operators. This strategy yielded 91 initial records, with the database specific search strings summarised in Table 1 and Table 2.

TABLE 1. Conceptual Search Structure

Core Construct	**Search Concepts**
Poverty	poverty, socioeconomic disadvantage, socioeconomic status, deprivation, economic hardship, inequality
Family SES Stability	family, household, parental, family functioning, family instability, family socioeconomic
Youth Gangsterism	youth, adolescent, young people, gang, gang involvement, gang membership, gangsterism, delinquency

TABLE 2. Search strings and keywords used in this study

Database	Boolean Search String	Results
Scopus AI	("socio-economic" OR "poverty" OR "deprivation") AND ("family" OR "household" OR "parental") AND ("youth" OR "adolescent" OR "young people" AND ("gangsterism" OR "gang involvement" OR "gang membership")	25
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("socio-economic" AND "gangsterism") AND ("crime" OR "delinquency")	17
WoS	("socio-economic" AND "gangsterism") (All Fields)	5
Springer	("socio-economic" AND "gangsterism" AND "poverty")	10
Sage	("socio-economic" AND "gangsterism") AND (year: [2021 TO 2025])	34

The literature search was executed using a multi-tiered strategy across five databases to ensure both the breadth and precision of the retrieved records. A broad and complex search query was initially deployed via Scopus AI, utilising a combination of AND and OR operators to capture a comprehensive range of socio-economic and familial variables on gang-related activities, including parental and youth. The inclusion of terms such as "family", "household" and "parental" ensured that the results encompassed research analysing the underlying causes and contributors to gangsterism. This approach yielded 25 results and established an exhaustive foundation for the review.

To complement the initial search, a more refined and targeted approach was applied to Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) using specific AND operators to isolate high-relevance literature. For Scopus, the keywords "socio-economic", "gangsterism", and "crime" were utilised within the TITLE-ABS-KEY parameter to ensure these concepts were primary focus areas, resulting in 17 studies. Conversely, the WoS database was queried using a more concentrated string of "socio-economic" and "gangsterism", yielding 5 studies. This discrepancy in result volume indicates that while these databases index high-impact literature, fewer studies explicitly address the intersection of gangsterism and socio-economic factors in such a specific manner, further highlighting a potential research gap in current criminological discourse.

Finally, a specific economic-focused string was utilised for Springer, incorporating "poverty" as a limiting factor to retrieve 10 highly relevant studies, while Sage was queried with a similar refined string restricted by a contemporary timeframe (2021–2025) to provide the highest volume of 34 recent records. Strategic variation between complex search strings and refined Boolean queries was employed to balance comprehensive recall with analytical precision across databases. This multi-tiered strategy identified 91 records from five major databases, ensuring broad coverage of the socioeconomic drivers of gangsterism.

Following rigorous screening and data cleaning, 26 high-relevance articles were retained, achieving thematic saturation and providing a robust empirical foundation for analysis.

FILTERING AND INCLUSION/EXCLUSION CRITERIA

The filtration process adhered to strict evaluative guidelines to narrow the scope to 26 pertinent studies. This stage may involve using established quality assessment tools, such as PRISMA 2020 guidelines, to evaluate each article's robustness and relevance while further narrowing down filtered articles based on their direct contribution to the research question.

- Temporal Scope: Peer-reviewed studies (2021–2025)
- Thematic Focus: Socioeconomic poverty, family disadvantage, and youth aggression
- Data Criteria: Full-text English empirical or theoretical articles

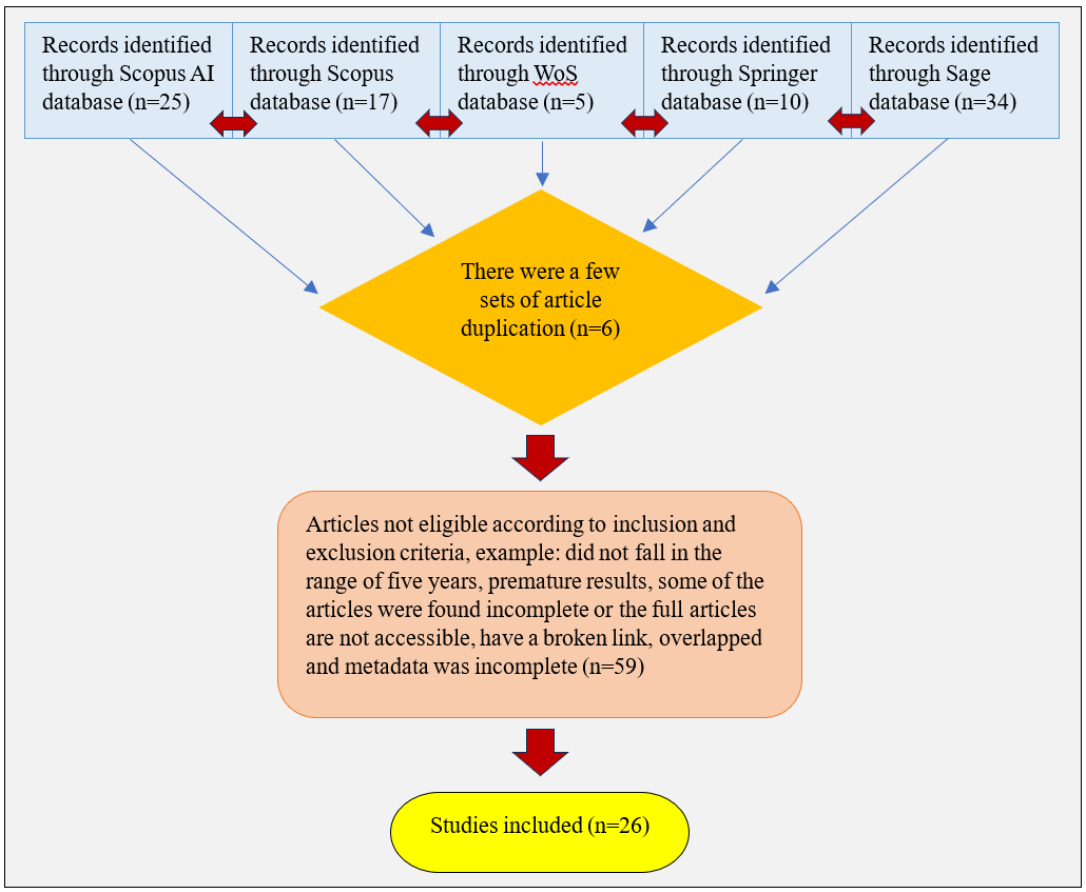


FIGURE 2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Following the 'Triage' and 'Refinement' steps, which vet relevance via titles and abstracts, out of 91 papers 59 articles were excluded under the 'Exclusion Criteria' due to lack of empirical rigor or non-alignment with the research objectives. Six sets of duplications were also removed, leaving only 26 papers. The 'Eligibility' phase involved a thorough full-text review, leading to the final 'Zeroing-In' process where the chosen studies were grouped into subject clusters focusing on marginalised families.

CLEANING, SYNTHESIS, AND REPORTING

The Cleaning phase ensured metadata accuracy and systematic organisation using Mendeley to extract key study characteristics, while the final Synthesis and Reporting phase employed ATLAS.ti 25 to interpret the refined corpus and identify dominant thematic patterns. The review adheres to systematic review standards and advances policy- and research-relevant insights, particularly on the structural effects of socioeconomic disparities on marginalised families. Through the rigorous application of the TreZ protocol, 26 high-quality studies were selected, providing a robust analytical foundation to demonstrate how sustained socioeconomic pressure

undermines family stability and increases youths' vulnerability to gangsterism, while also identifying emerging trends and gaps for future research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

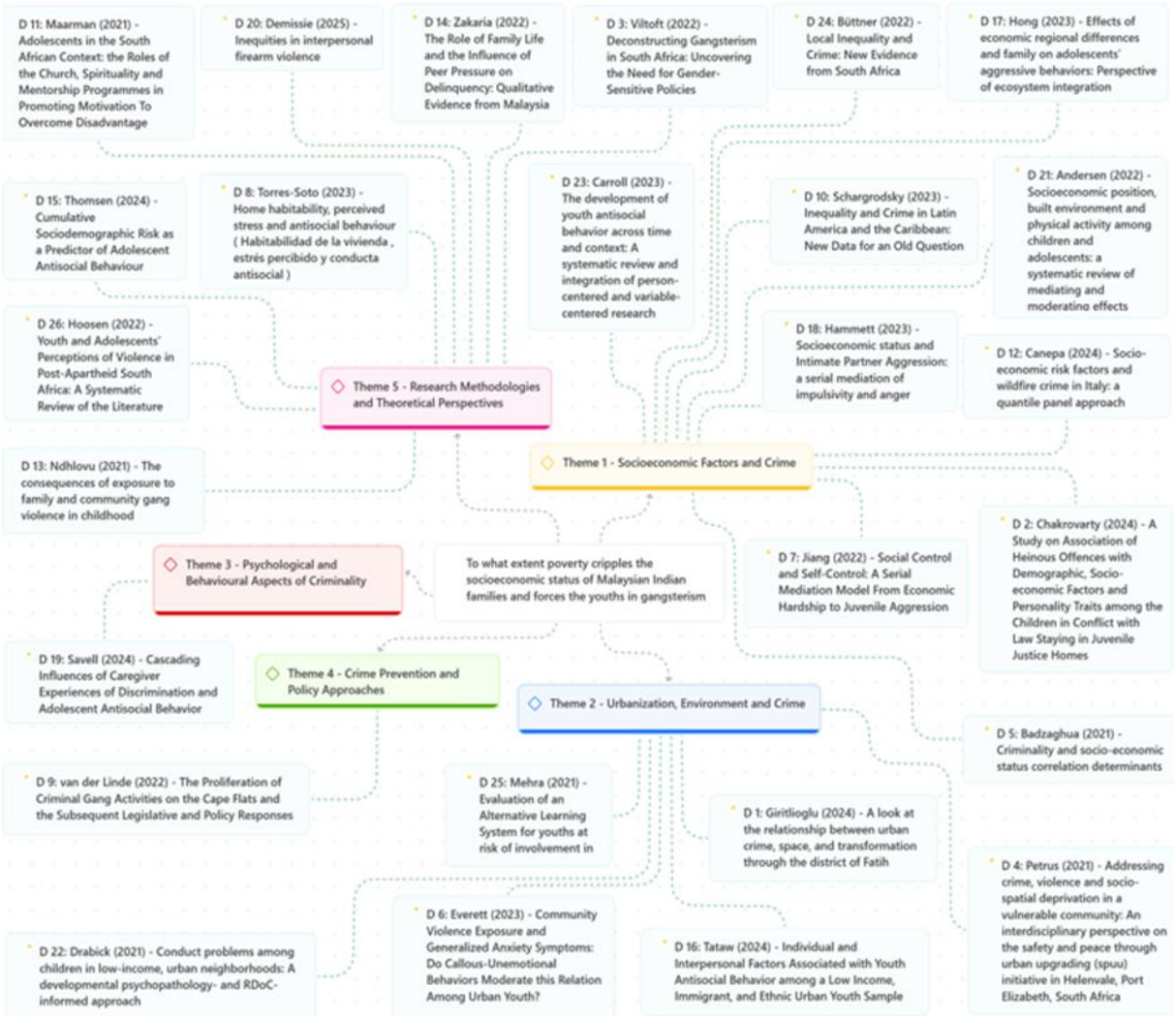


FIGURE 3. Overall themes to answer research question

Recently, there has been growing scholarly interest in understanding why youth moral decay is increasing. As antisocial behaviour, youth aggression, and organised crime continue to expand over time, it is essential to address this trend by identifying its underlying causes. Drawing on literature published between 2021 and 2025; this study examines recent developments and patterns in youth aggression associated with socioeconomic disparities and family poverty. The review synthesises findings from multiple sources and organises them into five major themes: Theme 1, Socioeconomic Factors and Crime; Theme 2, Urbanisation, Environment and Crime; Theme 3, Psychological and Behavioural Aspects of Criminality; Theme 4, Crime Prevention and Policy Approaches; and Theme 5, Research Methodologies and Theoretical Perspectives. Each theme reflects a critical area contributing to contemporary understanding of how socioeconomic disadvantage affects poor families, family structures, parenting practices, and youth behaviour. By

examining these themes, the study provides a comprehensive assessment of how socioeconomic disparities shape family institutions and youth behavioural problems. Consequently, the findings offer valuable insights for scholars and stakeholders seeking to better understand the structural roots of family poverty, familial instability, and youth aggression. In addition, this paper on gangsterism identifies the global geographical distribution of youth aggression based on the 26 analysed studies.

The map shows how research and publications about socioeconomic influence and family poverty are distributed geographically based on the 26 articles being analysed.

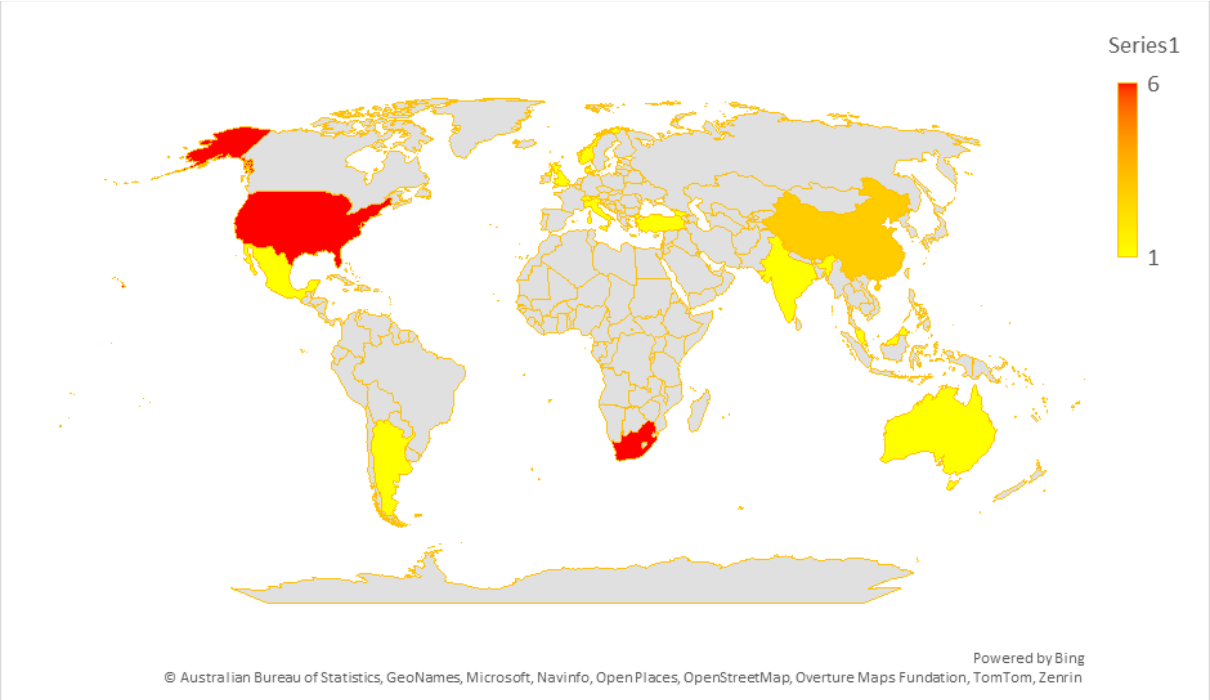


FIGURE 4. Geographical dispersion of the paper published on gangsterism issues

The nations that are highlighted are representative of areas that have made substantial contributions to this field's research and development. Three categories are displayed on the map using colour coding, where each colour denotes the frequency or density of research output. For instance, the red coloured nations termed as denser nations are with higher cases of youth problems. Subsequently, the light mustard yellow-coloured nations were referred as second highest cases in youth aggression. Finally, the yellow-coloured nations have the least number of cases of youth's moral decay. Based on the 26 articles, the impact of socioeconomic disparities on youth aggression can be explained via a country-based analysis. The prevalence of youth aggression varies significantly across countries due to socioeconomic disparities, family structure, and community environments. Scholars argue that these disparities exacerbate youth delinquency, influencing criminal behaviour and gang involvement. This report examines the impact of these factors on youth aggression in different nations, as reflected in the attached world map, where red indicates higher levels of aggression. The countries in discussion are the United States of America (USA), South Africa, India, China, Brazil and Australia.

The USA exhibits the highest levels of youth aggression, which scholars attribute to economic inequality and systemic racial disparities (Buttner, 2022). Drabick et al. (2021) argue that urban poverty and gang culture are critical contributors to youth's violent behaviour, emphasising how socioeconomic deprivation fosters criminal tendencies. Conversely, Everett & Drabick (2023) highlight the role of gun accessibility and exposure to community violence, exacerbating aggressive behaviour. Likewise, South Africa also demonstrates high youth aggression, largely due to post-apartheid socioeconomic disparities. Hoosen et al. (2022) emphasise that historical inequalities, coupled with high unemployment rates, contribute to youth's aggressive behaviours. Van der Linde (2022) argues that the persistence of community violence and inadequate law enforcement perpetuates youth involvement in gang activities. Acknowledging systemic poverty as the primary factor driving aggression, together with political instability and ineffective governance in failing to curb violence.

Thereafter, Brazil experiences significant youth aggression due to extreme income inequality and high crime rates (Schargrodsky & Freira, 2023). Petrus (2021) suggests that youth in favelas often resort to violence as a survival mechanism due to systemic marginalisation. Tataw (2024) highlights the influence of gang culture in shaping aggressive behaviours by seeking identity and protection via gang membership. Scholars believe that economic deprivation is the root cause of violence within the marginalised communities. Next, China shows moderate levels of youth aggression, with socioeconomic inequality playing a central role (Hong et al., 2023). Rapid urbanisation has led to significant disparities in wealth distribution, particularly affecting rural-to-urban migrant families. Thomsen & Homel (2024) argue that rigid authoritarian parenting styles contribute to aggression among youth. In contrast, Zhang & Wei (2023) assert that strict governmental policies play a crucial role in preventing youth delinquency despite the existence of economic inequalities. Whereas, in India the world's highest populated nation with 1.44 billion people indicated that youth aggression is linked to rural-urban migration, economic disparity, and family instability (Hong et al., 2023). Zakaria et al. (2022) suggest that disrupted family structures significantly contribute to increased delinquency among youth. Mehra et al. (2021) argue that the lack of access to education and employment opportunities in urban slums creates an environment conducive to gang involvement. However, some scholars contend that cultural norms and social stigmas surrounding poverty further alienate marginalised youth, exacerbating aggression beyond economic limitations alone.

Notwithstanding, Australia presents lower levels of youth aggression compared to other nations, but socioeconomic disparities persist among Indigenous and marginalised communities. Badzaghua & Gondauri (2021) emphasise the impact of historical oppression on Indigenous youth, contributing to behavioural issues. However, Maarman & Lamont-Mbawuli (2021) argue that government-funded social programs have mitigated many of these risks, leading to lower overall aggression levels. Scholars debate whether social interventions are sufficient to reduce youth violence or whether deeper structural reforms are necessary. In a nutshell, the distribution of youth aggression across different countries highlights the interplay between socioeconomic disparities, family structure, and environmental factors. While economic hardship is a common underlying factor, variations in governance, law enforcement, and social programs influence the severity of aggression. Some scholars argue that structural inequalities are the primary cause of youth aggression, while others emphasise the role of cultural and political frameworks in mitigating or aggravating violent behaviour.

Future research should explore tailored interventions for each region to effectively reduce youth violence worldwide. Simultaneously, the next sub-topic deals with the frequencies of

specific words mentioned and repeated throughout the 26 analysed articles, which indicates the importance of the subject matter related to the research question. This arrangement is termed as word cloud.



FIGURE 5. Word Cloud displays the frequency of words within the research topic

The word cloud visually represents the frequency of words in a dataset related to youth violence, socioeconomic factors, and crime. In a word cloud, the larger and bolder the word, the more frequently it appears in the dataset. Key observations from the word cloud indicated that the most frequent words are written in larger sizes such as 'Violence', 'Crime' and 'Risk'. These are the most prominent words, indicating that the primary focus of the dataset is on youth violence and criminal behaviour. Whilst the words 'Youth', 'Children', 'Child' and 'Adolescents' suggest that much of the research focuses on young individuals and their involvement in crime and violence. Meanwhile, the words 'Social', 'Economic', 'Inequality', and 'Sociodemographic' emphasise the role of socioeconomic conditions in shaping youth behaviour. Followed by the frequency of words 'Health', 'Education' and 'Community' which explores the impact of violence and crime on public health and education.

Moderately frequent words are written in medium sized words such as 'Exposure', 'Environment', 'Income', and 'School'. These words indicate a discussion on risk factors such as financial hardship and environmental influences, which contribute to youth aggression. Besides, the words 'Intervention', 'Policy', 'Research', and 'Study' suggest that academic studies focus on

potential solutions and government interventions to mitigate youth violence. Thereafter, the words 'Physical', 'Mental', and 'Psychology' highlight discussions about psychological effects of violence and crime on youths.

Less frequent words are written in smaller captions such as 'CSR' (Corporate Social Responsibility), 'Wildfire', 'Home', 'Years', and 'Access'. These words suggest occasional mentions of corporate interventions, environmental issues, and long-term research trends. The frequent appearance of terms related to 'Education', 'Health', and 'Social Factors' suggests an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating psychology, public policy, and criminology. Additionally, the presence of words such as 'Intervention' and 'Research' indicates that scholars are actively exploring solutions to mitigate youth aggression through policy reforms and community initiatives. In conclusion, the word cloud reflects a research focus on youth violence and crime as influenced by socioeconomic disparities.

Next, the author–theme analysis was employed to map scholarly contributions and trace thematic patterns across the 26 reviewed studies. The analysis reveals a strong convergence among scholars including Chakravorty (2024), Badzaghua (2021), Jiang (2022), Schargrodsky (2023), Canepa (2024), Hong (2023), Hammett (2023), Carroll (2023), Buttner (2022), and Andersen (2022), all of whom identify socioeconomic disparities as a central determinant of youth crime and aggression. Schargrodsky (2023) and Buttner (2022) demonstrate how pronounced income inequality exacerbates criminal behaviour, particularly in contexts such as Brazil and South Africa, where extreme economic stratification facilitates youth gang involvement. Similarly, Hong (2023) and Jiang (2022) emphasise that economic hardship, compounded by rural–urban migration and unstable family structures, intensifies aggressive tendencies among youths in China and India. In contrast, Carroll (2023) advances a complementary psychological perspective, arguing that while poverty is a significant contributor, individual behavioural traits and environmental influences must also be considered in explaining youth delinquency.

TABLE 2. Author Table 2: Author vs Theme

Author	**Theme 1**: Socioeconomic Factors and Crime	**Theme 2**: Urbanisation, Environment and Crime	**Theme 3**: Psychological and Behavioural Aspects of Criminality	**Theme 4**: Crime Prevention and Policy Approaches	**Theme 5**: Research Methodologies, and Theoretical Perspectives
Giritlioglu (2024)	-	/	-	-	-
Chakrovarty (2024)	/	-	-	-	-
Viltoft (2022)	-	-	-	-	/
Petrus (2021)	-	/	-	-	-
Badzaghua (2021)	/	-	-	-	-
Everett (2023)	-	/	-	-	-
Jiang (2022)	/	-	-	-	-
Torres-Soto (2023)	-	-	-	-	/
van der Linde (2022)	-	-	-	/	-
Schargrodsky (2023)	/	-	-	-	-
Maarman (2021)	-	-	-	-	/
Canepa (2024)	/	-	-	-	-
Ndhlovu (2021)	-	-	-	-	/
Zakaria (2022)	-	-	-	-	/
Thomsen (2024)	-	-	-	-	/

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Tataw (2024)	-	/	-	-	-
Hong (2023)	/	-	-	-	-
Hammett (2023)	/	-	-	-	-
Savell (2024)	-	-	/	-	-
Demissie (2025)	-	-	-	-	/
Andersen (2022)	/	-	-	-	-
Drabick (2021)	-	/	-	-	-
Carroll (2023)	/	-	-	-	-
Buttner (2022)	/	-	-	-	-
Mehra (2021)	-	/	-	-	-
Hoosen (2022)	-	-	-	-	/
TOTAL	10	6	1	1	8

Whilst, scholars such as Giritlioglu (2024), Petrus (2021), Everett (2023), Mehra (2021), and Tataw (2024) concretely stated that urbanisation plays a critical role in shaping crime rates, particularly among youth. Petrus (2021) examines how socio-spatial deprivation contributes to violence in South Africa, arguing that the lack of social infrastructure in urban settlements may increase youths' vulnerability to criminal activities. Similarly, Mehra (2021) highlights how urban poverty in the Philippines has created high-risk environments where delinquent behaviour flourishes. However, Everett (2023) and Tataw (2024) counter that urbanisation alone does not explain youth aggression, as psychological resilience and access to community support systems significantly impact crime rates.

On the other hand, only one scholar, namely Savell (2024) directly focuses on psychological aspects, arguing that experiences of discrimination among caregivers influence adolescent antisocial behaviour. This perspective challenges purely economic explanations of youth aggression, emphasising how psychological trauma and social alienation contribute to criminal tendencies. Similarly, scholar Van der Linde (2022) examines how legislative and policy responses influence youth crime rates, particularly in South Africa. The study argues that while socioeconomic deprivation is a key factor, ineffective governance and policing allow gang activities to thrive. This statement goes along with arguments by Buttner (2022) and Schargrodsky (2023), who suggest that economic inequality is the primary driver of youth aggression, highlighting the need for a more integrated policy approach. If the policies are ineffective, it's almost certain to create socioeconomic disparities and inequalities.

Finally, scholars such as Viltoft (2022), Torres-Soto (2023), Ndhlovu (2021), Zakaria (2022), Thomsen (2024), Demissie (2025), Maarman (2021), and Hoosen (2022) focused on broader theoretical perspectives and research methodologies. Viltoft (2022) and Zakaria (2022) emphasise the need for gender-sensitive and culturally specific approaches to studying youth aggression, particularly in Malaysia and South Africa. Demissie (2025) and Thomsen (2024) provide data-driven analyses of how cumulative socio-demographic risks predict youth delinquency. Hoosen (2022) argues that historical and systemic inequalities must be factored into criminological research, particularly in post-apartheid South Africa. These studies provide crucial insights into how methodological approaches influence the understanding of youth aggression.

In conclusion, by linking authors to themes it is evident that youth aggression is a multifaceted issue shaped by socioeconomic, environmental, psychological, and policy-related factors. While some scholars focus on economic deprivation as the primary driver, others emphasise governance, urbanisation, or behavioural influences. This analysis underscores the need for interdisciplinary research and context-specific interventions to effectively address youth

violence and delinquency. Following the author–theme analysis, a year–theme analysis was undertaken to trace the temporal evolution of research priorities, identify emerging trends, and detect shifts in scholarly focus.

This approach enables the mapping of thematic emergence, consolidation, and decline across time, thereby illuminating theoretical developments and the influence of broader socioeconomic and political contexts on research trajectories. It also facilitates the identification of underexplored areas and ensures that subsequent analyses are anchored in current empirical debates. The findings are visualised using a Sankey flow diagram, where link thickness represents the relative prominence of each theme across publication years. Overall, the analysis demonstrates that scholarship on poverty and youth gangsterism has progressed from predominantly structural socioeconomic explanations towards more nuanced psychological, behavioural, and policy-oriented perspectives, reflecting an increasingly integrative understanding of youth crime dynamics.

TABLE 3. Year vs Theme

Year	**Theme 1:** Socioeconomic Factors and Crime	**Theme:** Urbanisation, Environment and Crime	**Theme 3:** Psychological and Behavioural Aspects of Criminality	**Theme 4:** Crime Prevention and Policy Approaches	**Theme 5:** Research Methodologies and Theoretical Perspectives	**Total**
2021	1	3	-	-	2	6
2022	3	-	-	1	3	7
2023	4	1	-	-	1	6
2024	2	2	1	-	1	6
2025	-	-	-	-	1	1
Total	10	6	1	1	8	26

Early scholarship on crime and poverty largely framed youth delinquency through structural socioeconomic determinants, including income inequality, unemployment, and limited educational access. Jiang and Dong (2022) demonstrated that economic hardship heightens juvenile aggression by restricting educational and employment opportunities, thereby increasing youths' exposure to criminal influences. Similarly, Schargrodsky and Freira (2023) showed that extreme economic inequality in Latin America sustains high levels of gang activity, positioning poverty as a principal driver of crime and advocating macro-level economic and educational interventions.

Post-2020 literature reflects a conceptual shift toward behavioural, psychological, and social mediators of youth crime. Instead of viewing poverty as a direct cause, researchers explored how financial instability affects mental health, self-control, and socialisation processes, contributing to delinquency. Tataw (2024) argued that prolonged exposure to low-income environments shapes antisocial attitudes toward violence and authority, while Carroll et al. (2023) contended that youth aggression emerges from the interaction of peer dynamics, neighbourhood contexts, and early adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) rather than economic deprivation alone. In parallel, Zakaria et al. (2022) emphasised the mediating role of family functioning and peer pressure among Malaysian youths, underscoring socialisation processes as critical pathways linking poverty to delinquency.

However, from 2023 onwards research increasingly foregrounds policy effectiveness and holistic crime prevention strategies. Van der Linde (2022) highlighted that socioeconomic reforms

must be complemented by law enforcement and community-based interventions to curb gang activity in South Africa. Expanding this view, Thomsen and Homel (2024) proposed a cumulative sociocultural risk framework, advocating intersectional policies that integrate mental health, education, and employment initiatives. Concurrently, spatial and environmental dimensions have gained prominence: Petrus (2021) linked urbanisation and spatial deprivation to youth aggression, while Everett and Drabick (2023) demonstrated that sustained exposure to community violence elevates aggressive behaviour regardless of socioeconomic status.

Overall, the literature evidences a progressive shift from mono-causal economic explanations to a multidimensional framework encompassing psychological, familial, social, and environmental factors. While early studies prioritised poverty as the root cause of youth crime, recent scholarship advocates integrated, multi-sectoral interventions. This thematic evolution underscores the need for interdisciplinary approaches to address youth gangsterism effectively and informs the temporal mapping of themes presented in the Sankey diagram.

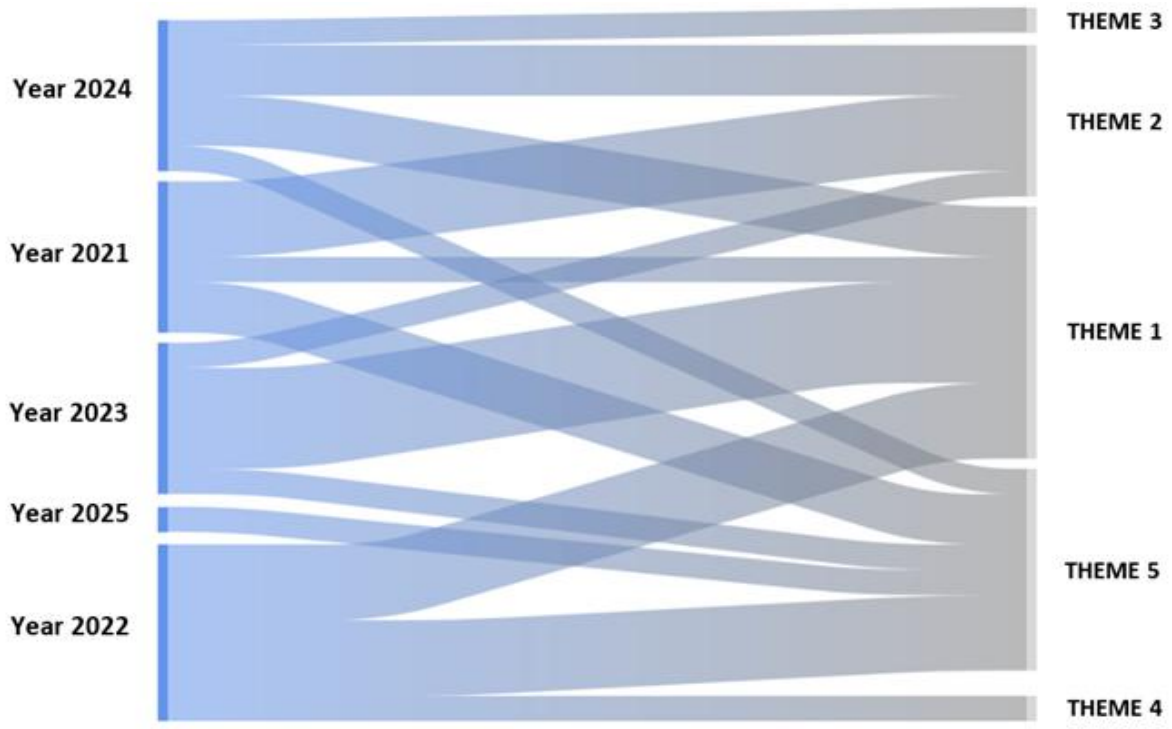


FIGURE 6. Sankey diagram showing Year vs Theme

THEME 1: SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS AND CRIME

This theme directly addresses the first construct of the research question by showing how poverty, income inequality and economic insecurity are associated with family socioeconomic instability and increased vulnerability to youth delinquency and gang involvement.

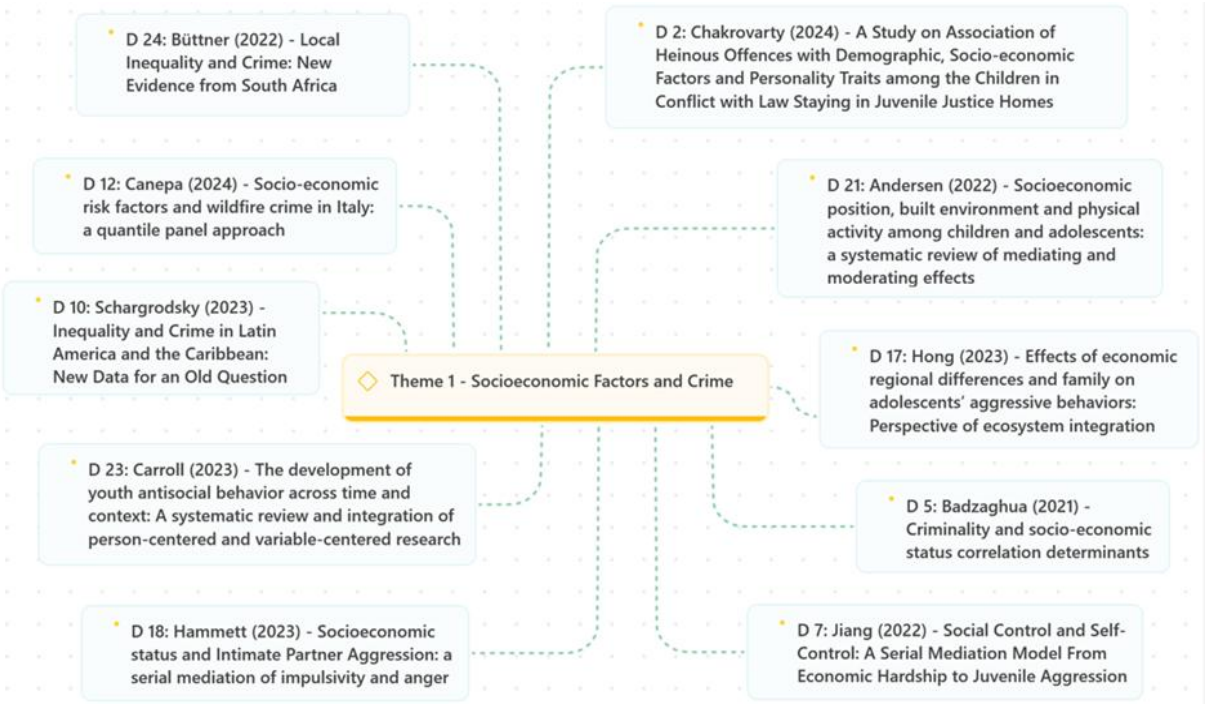


FIGURE 7. Theme 1 (socioeconomic factors and crime)

The relationship between socioeconomic conditions and crime has been widely examined, with scholars highlighting poverty, income inequality, and economic stress as critical drivers of criminal behaviour, particularly among youths. Buttner (2022), drawing on evidence from South Africa, demonstrates that local income inequality is a strong predictor of crime rates. Similarly, Schargrodsky (2023) argues that relative deprivation where individuals compare their economic standing with wealthier groups, exerts a stronger influence on criminal motivation than absolute poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean. However, the socioeconomic–crime nexus is not uniform across contexts. Badzaghua (2021) cautions that crime rates are also shaped by governance quality, social policies, and law enforcement effectiveness. Supporting this contextual perspective, Hong (2023) shows that regional economic disparities and family-level financial stress significantly heighten adolescent aggression and delinquency. Jiang (2022) further links economic hardship to weakened social control and self-regulation, increasing youths' susceptibility to criminal behaviour.

Beyond income deprivation, broader economic environments and employment instability also play a decisive role. Carroll (2023) finds that prolonged financial insecurity contributes to persistent antisocial behaviour, while Hammett (2023) demonstrates that socioeconomic stress intensifies impulsivity and aggression, thereby elevating the risk of violent crime. Extending this debate, Canepa (2024) reveals that crime is experienced differently across income groups in Italy, challenging the assumption that poverty alone explains criminal involvement. Overall, the literature affirms that while adverse socioeconomic conditions are strongly associated with crime, their effects are mediated by structural, policy, and institutional factors. These findings underscore the need for targeted economic interventions, employment opportunities, and social protection mechanisms to address crime at its structural roots.

THEME 2: URBANISATION, ENVIRONMENT AND CRIME

This theme extends the analysis by showing how the socioeconomic effects of poverty are experienced within neighbourhood and built environments, particularly where inadequate infrastructure and social disorganisation intensify family and youth vulnerability.

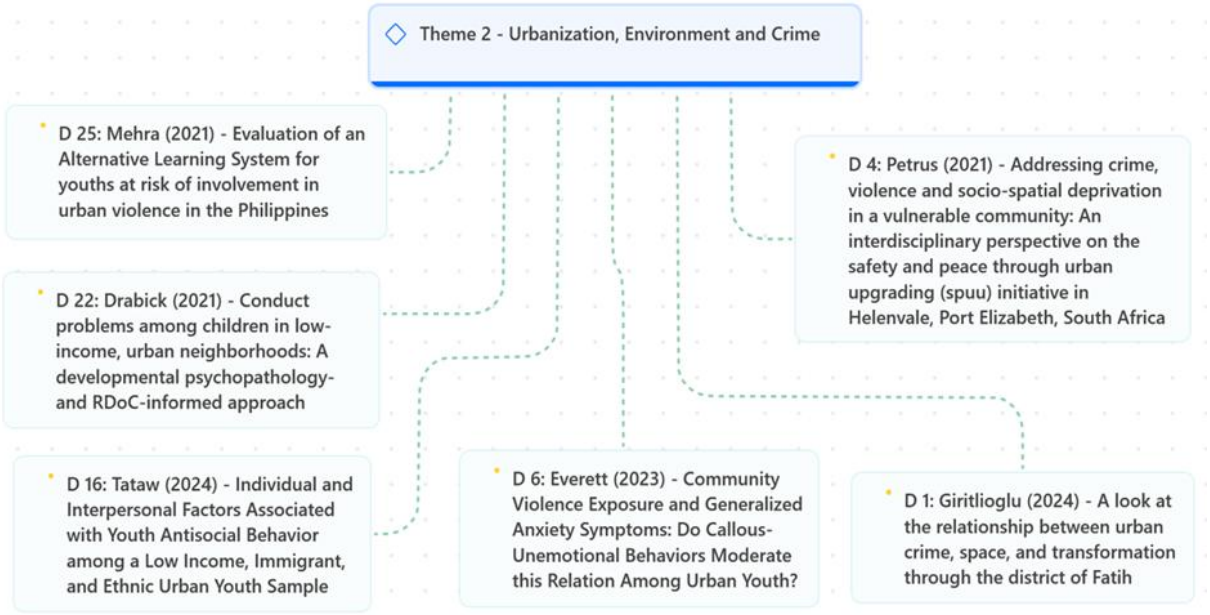


FIGURE 8. Theme 2 (urbanisation, environment and crime)

Urbanisation and environmental conditions are central to shaping crime patterns, particularly within low-income and high-density urban areas. Giritlioglu (2024) demonstrates that crime clusters in zones undergoing rapid spatial transformation, where social disorganisation and weakened institutional control create criminogenic conditions. Similarly, Petrus (2021) shows that socio-spatial deprivation in Helenvale, South Africa, characterised by poor urban planning and inadequate infrastructure exacerbates violence, while highlighting that urban upgrading initiatives can enhance community safety. Beyond structural factors, exposure to urban crime has significant psychological and behavioural consequences for youths. Everett (2023) links sustained exposure to community violence with heightened anxiety symptoms, increasing the risk of aggressive and antisocial behaviour. This is reinforced by Drabick (2021), whose developmental psychopathology analysis reveals that crime-ridden urban environments function as chronic stressors contributing to conduct problems and delinquency.

The intersection of urbanisation and crime is particularly pronounced among marginalised youth populations. Tataw (2024) argues that systemic disadvantages combined with environmental risk factors intensify antisocial behaviour among low-income immigrant and ethnic youths in urban settings. Complementing this, Mehra (2021) demonstrates that alternative learning systems in the Philippines can mitigate urban youth violence by providing structured educational and social support. Overall, the literature underscores the multidimensional relationship between urbanisation, environmental stressors, and crime. While rapid urban expansion and infrastructural deficits heighten criminal risk, targeted interventions such as urban renewal and community-based educational support play a critical role in crime prevention. These findings collectively affirm the

necessity of multidisciplinary approaches that integrate spatial, psychological, and socioeconomic perspectives.

THEME 3: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND BEHAVIOURAL ASPECTS OF CRIMINALITY

This theme identifies the psychosocial processes through which socioeconomic and family disadvantage may be associated with youth behavioural outcomes, demonstrating that poverty should not be interpreted as a direct or sufficient explanation for gangsterism.

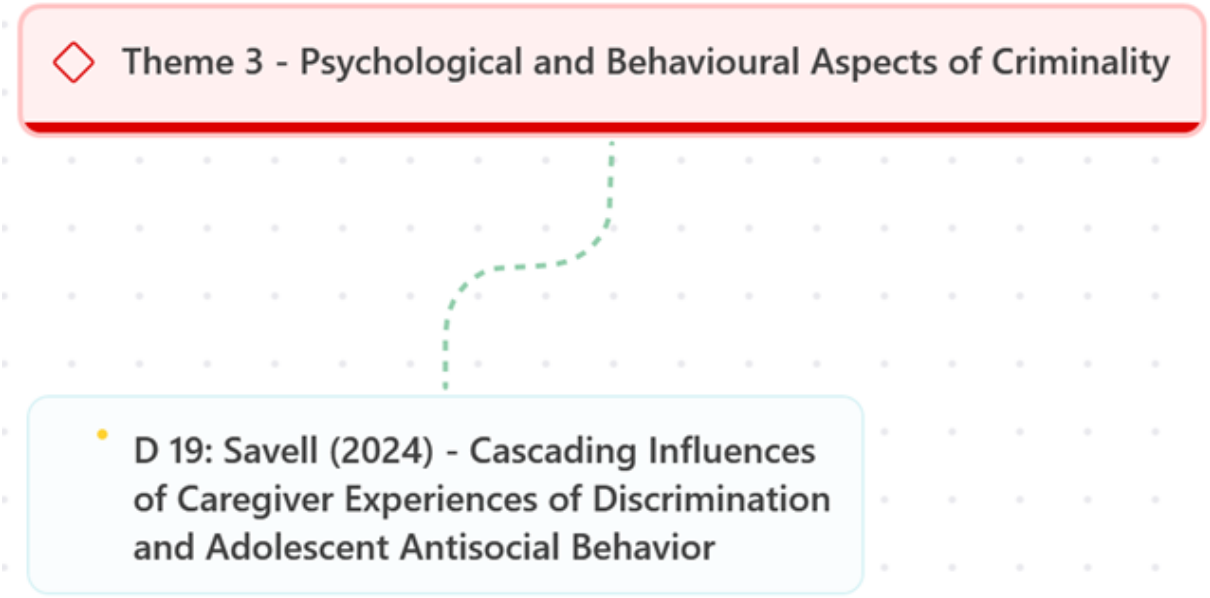


FIGURE 9. Theme 3 (Psychological and behavioural aspects of criminality)

The psychological and behavioural dimensions of criminality play a pivotal role in shaping antisocial behaviours, particularly among adolescents. Psychological stressors, early-life experiences, and familial influences contribute significantly to the development of delinquent tendencies. Savell (2024) explores the cascading effects of caregiver experiences of discrimination on adolescent antisocial behaviour, emphasising how intergenerational transmission of stress and social adversity affects youth behavioural outcomes. The study suggests that caregivers who experience discrimination may develop psychological distress, which, in turn, affects their parenting style, emotional availability, and overall household environment. These factors contribute to increased behavioural issues among adolescents, including aggression, defiance, and engagement in criminal activities.

The findings highlight the importance of psychological resilience and coping mechanisms within families exposed to systemic stressors. Adolescents who grow up in environments marked by discrimination and parental distress may exhibit heightened emotional dysregulation, impulsivity, and reduced capacity for prosocial behaviour. This aligns with broader psychological theories that link childhood adversity and negative socialisation experiences to criminal behaviour. Moreover, the study suggests that interventions focused on caregiver support, mental health resources, and community-based initiatives can mitigate the impact of discrimination-induced stress on adolescent behavioural development. In conclusion, the psychological and behavioural aspects of criminality are deeply intertwined with familial and social experiences. Understanding

the mechanisms through which stress and discrimination shape youth behaviour is essential for developing effective preventive strategies and targeted interventions which may reduce the likelihood of youth engaging in criminal activities.

THEME 4: CRIME PREVENTION AND POLICY APPROACHES

This theme addresses how institutional and policy responses may mitigate or reproduce the socioeconomic and family conditions associated with youth gangsterism.

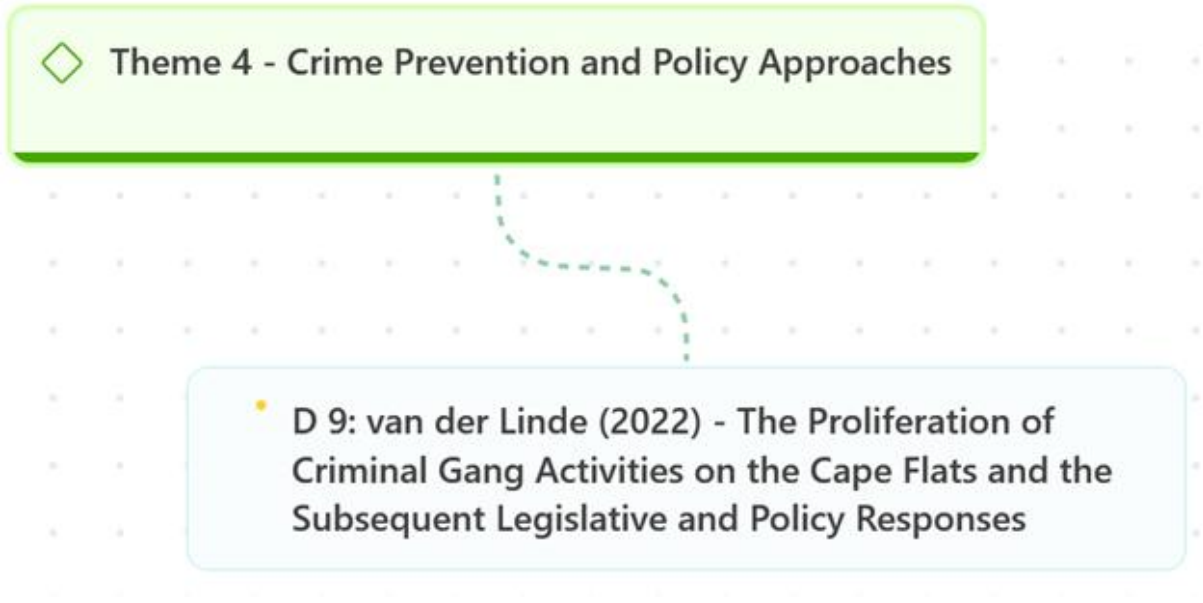


FIGURE 10. Theme 4 (Crime prevention and policy approaches)

Effective crime prevention and policy measures are essential in addressing the proliferation of gang activities and organised crime. Van der Linde (2022) examines the rise of criminal gang activities in the Cape Flats, a region notorious for high levels of organised crime, and evaluates the subsequent legislative and policy responses. The study highlights how socio-political and economic factors contribute to gang proliferation, necessitating comprehensive crime prevention strategies. The research underscores the role of law enforcement, community engagement, and legislative frameworks in mitigating gang-related crimes. Various policy approaches, including stricter legal penalties, targeted police interventions, and social reintegration programs, have been implemented to curb gang violence.

However, the study also critiques the effectiveness of punitive measures, arguing that without addressing the root causes such as poverty, unemployment, and social disintegration, gang activity remains a persistent issue. Instead, it advocates for a holistic approach that combines law enforcement with proactive social policies, including education initiatives, job creation programs, and community-based interventions. Furthermore, the study emphasises the need for adaptive policy frameworks that evolve in response to changing gang dynamics. It suggests that legislative measures should not only focus on criminalisation but also prioritise rehabilitation and reintegration efforts. Additionally, collaboration between governmental agencies, civil society organisations, and local communities is crucial in fostering sustainable crime prevention strategies. In conclusion, while law enforcement plays a vital role in gang suppression, a multidimensional

policy approach that incorporates social, economic, and legislative strategies is necessary for long-term crime prevention. Addressing the systemic issues that fuel gang involvement is essential in developing effective policies that reduce criminal activities and enhance community resilience.

THEME 5: RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

This theme identifies how different methodological and theoretical approaches have conceptualised the relationship between socioeconomic disadvantage, family conditions and youth delinquency, thereby informing the methodological gap addressed by the present review.

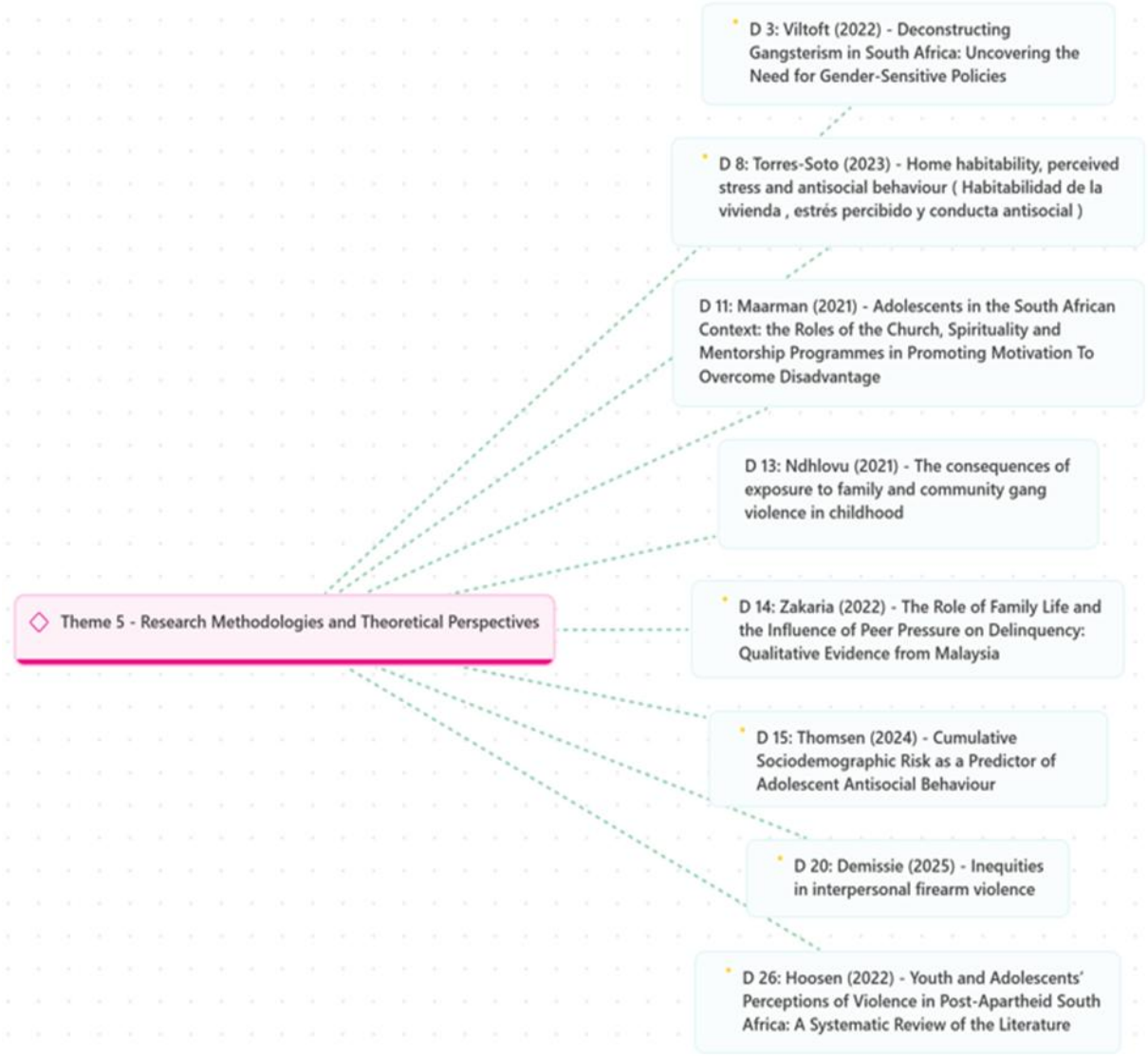


FIGURE 11. Theme 5 (Research methodologies and theoretical perspectives)

The study of criminal behaviour and violence requires diverse research methodologies and theoretical frameworks to understand its complex nature. Zakaria (2022) employs a qualitative approach to examine the role of family life and peer pressure in delinquency, drawing from evidence in Malaysia. This study highlights how qualitative research methods provide in-depth

insights into the lived experiences of individuals involved in criminal activities, allowing researchers to explore the social dynamics that contribute to delinquency. Similarly, Viltoft (2022) utilises a gender-sensitive lens to deconstruct gangsterism in South Africa, emphasising the need for policy reforms based on empirical findings. This research underscores the importance of incorporating gender perspectives in criminological studies, as traditional approaches often overlook the unique experiences of women in gang-related activities. Additionally, Hoosen (2022) conducts a systematic review of literature on youth perceptions of violence in post-apartheid South Africa, demonstrating the value of secondary research methodologies in identifying patterns and gaps in existing studies.

Quantitative methodologies are also essential in criminological research. Thomsen (2024) applies a cumulative sociodemographic risk model to predict adolescent antisocial behaviour, showcasing the effectiveness of statistical analyses in identifying risk factors for criminal behaviour. Similarly, Torres-Soto (2023) explores the relationship between home habitability, perceived stress, and antisocial behaviour, using quantitative measures to assess the environmental and psychological influences on criminal tendencies. In contrast, Ndlhovu (2021) takes a developmental psychology approach to examine the consequences of childhood exposure to gang violence. This research aligns with longitudinal study designs, which track individuals over time to understand the long-term impacts of early-life experiences on later behaviour. Additionally, Demissie (2025) investigates inequities in firearm violence through an interpersonal violence framework, contributing to the growing field of research on structural violence and its role in crime.

The integration of multiple methodologies is crucial in criminology. Maarman (2021) adopts a mixed-methods approach to analyse how mentorship programs influence adolescent motivation to overcome disadvantage, demonstrating the benefits of combining qualitative and quantitative research techniques. This methodological pluralism enhances the depth and applicability of criminological research, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of crime and its underlying factors. Overall, the diversity of research methodologies and theoretical perspectives in the study of criminal behaviour underscores the need for interdisciplinary approaches. The combination of qualitative, quantitative, systematic reviews, and developmental frameworks provides a holistic understanding of the factors driving crime and informs more effective intervention strategies.

Taken together, the five themes indicate that poverty should not be understood as a sufficient or isolated explanation for youth gangsterism. Rather, socioeconomic disadvantage interacts with family functioning, educational opportunities, neighbourhood conditions, psychological processes and institutional responses. Theme 1 establishes the structural socioeconomic dimension; Theme 2 demonstrates how disadvantage is embedded within environmental contexts; Theme 3 identifies psychosocial processes associated with behavioural outcomes; Theme 4 examines the role of policy and institutional responses; and Theme 5 highlights the methodological and theoretical approaches used to understand these relationships. Collectively, the findings therefore support a multidimensional interpretation in which family socioeconomic stability forms an important structural context, while social, environmental, psychological and institutional factors shape how disadvantage is experienced and associated with youth involvement in gangsterism.

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE STUDIES

The intersection between poverty, socioeconomic status, and youth involvement in gangsterism has been extensively studied in criminological literature from 2021 to 2025. Research across multiple thematic areas, including socioeconomic factors, urbanisation, psychological and behavioural aspects, crime prevention policies, and research methodologies, provides a comprehensive understanding of how financial hardship contributes to delinquent behaviours. The synthesis of these studies highlights systemic inequalities and the need for evidence-based interventions to disrupt the cycle of poverty-driven criminality.

The first theme indicates that socioeconomic disadvantage is an important structural condition associated with youth vulnerability to gangsterism, particularly where poverty intersects with limited educational opportunities, employment insecurity, family instability and exposure to disadvantaged social environments. Studies such as Canepa (2024) and Schargrodsky (2023) illustrate how economic inequality and socio-spatial deprivation worsen the crime rates, particularly among marginalized communities. Similarly, Andersen (2022) emphasises the role of built environments in shaping physical activity and social behaviours, linking poor urban infrastructure to higher crime rates. The presence of structural disadvantages, including inadequate education and limited employment opportunities, further entrenches youth in cycles of delinquency (Chakravorty, 2024). In Malaysia, Zakaria (2022) provides qualitative evidence on how family life and peer influence shape delinquency, suggesting that economic hardships disrupt household structures, thereby increasing vulnerability to gang recruitment. Additionally, Jiang (2022) explores how financial hardship diminishes self-control, leading to heightened juvenile aggression. This aligns with Hammett (2023), which identifies socioeconomic status as a predictor of intimate partner aggression, reinforcing the broader effects of financial instability on violent behaviours.

The second theme of urbanisation and environmental factors indicated the relationship between urban poverty and gangsterism. Gittirloglu (2024) examines the spatial transformation of urban crime, particularly in low-income districts, emphasising the need for urban renewal initiatives. Everett (2023) and Tataw (2024) further investigate how exposure to community violence heightens psychological distress among youths, leading to increased participation in gang-related activities. The presence of socio-spatial deprivation in vulnerable communities, as discussed by Petrus (2022), supports the argument that youth gangsterism is a direct consequence of inadequate urban development and economic exclusion.

Meanwhile, the third theme of psychological and behavioural aspects of criminality emphasised the relationship between poverty and youth delinquency. Savell (2024) highlights the cascading effects of caregiver discrimination experiences on adolescent antisocial behaviour, suggesting that marginalised families face additional stressors that reinforce negative behavioural outcomes. Drabick (2021) examines conduct problems among children in low-income urban settings, linking developmental psychopathology to long-term delinquency. Furthermore, Hong (2023) and Buttner (2022) address the influence of ecological integration and local inequality on adolescent aggression, demonstrating that environmental stressors interact with psychological predispositions to drive criminal behaviour.

The fourth theme of crime prevention and policy approaches expressed the importance of legislative and policy responses. Van der Linde (2022) investigates the proliferation of gang activities and the corresponding legal interventions, highlighting the limitations of punitive measures in addressing systemic poverty. In contrast, Mehra (2021) evaluates alternative learning systems for at-risk youth, demonstrating that educational interventions are more effective in

breaking the cycle of delinquency. The role of mentorship programs in fostering resilience, as explored by Maarman (2021), further underscores the necessity of community-based initiatives in crime prevention.

Lastly, the fifth theme of research methodologies and theoretical perspectives highlighted the need for a robust methodological approach to capture its multifaceted nature. Thematic analyses, such as Hoosen (2022)'s systematic literature review, provide critical insights into youth perceptions of violence, while quantitative studies like Thomsen (2024) utilise sociodemographic risk models to predict delinquency patterns. Mixed-method approaches, as employed by Torres-Soto (2023) and Demissie (2025), allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between environmental stressors, socioeconomic status, and criminal behaviour.

Despite these advances, significant gaps remain. Future research should prioritise longitudinal designs to trace the long-term effects of socioeconomic deprivation on youth criminal trajectories. Greater interdisciplinary integration across criminology, psychology, and urban studies is also required to generate holistic and policy-relevant insights. The literature from 2021 to 2025 indicates that poverty is significantly associated with youth gangsterism, although this relationship is shaped by familial, environmental, psychological and institutional factors. Although all 26 reviewed studies identify similar structural risk factors and document preventive and intervention efforts, youth aggression and gangsterism continue to rise globally, suggesting that existing strategies insufficiently address underlying socioeconomic drivers. Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to address this gap through a qualitative investigation involving semi-structured narrative interviews with incarcerated Malaysian youths convicted under national legislative frameworks, including the Criminal Procedure Code (Act 593), Penal Code (Act 574), SOSMA (Act 747), POCA (Act 297), and POTA (Act 769). In this study, incarcerated youths constitute the units of observation, while the units of analysis comprise the thematic patterns derived from their lived accounts of family socioeconomic conditions and pathways into gangsterism. By foregrounding lived experiences, this research aims to generate empirically grounded insights that extend beyond abstract policy discourse and contribute to more effective, context-sensitive intervention frameworks.

CONCLUSION

This study is situated within the interdisciplinary field of criminology and the sociology of youth crime, with particular emphasis on the relationship between poverty, family socioeconomic conditions and youth involvement in gangsterism. Through a systematic thematic review of 26 peer-reviewed studies published between 2021 and 2025, the study synthesises evidence across socioeconomic, environmental, psychological, policy and methodological dimensions.

The findings indicate that poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage are important structural conditions associated with youth delinquency and gang involvement, but they should not be interpreted as sufficient or deterministic explanations. Rather, the relationship is shaped by interacting family, educational, neighbourhood, psychological and institutional conditions. The five themes collectively demonstrate that socioeconomic disadvantage may affect youth vulnerability through multiple and mutually reinforcing social processes, while the availability and effectiveness of family, educational, community and policy support may influence these pathways.

The review also identifies an important gap in the literature. Although recent scholarship has examined individual socioeconomic, familial, environmental and behavioural risk factors, fewer studies integrate these dimensions into a coherent account of how family socioeconomic

stability relates to youth gangsterism across diverse contexts. The present thematic synthesis contributes to addressing this gap by bringing these interconnected dimensions together and identifying areas requiring further longitudinal and context-specific investigation.

The Social Impact Framework (SIF) proposed in this study provides an organising framework for interpreting these relationships. However, it should be regarded as a conceptual and analytical framework derived from the reviewed literature rather than as a validated causal model. Its principal contribution lies in demonstrating the interconnected nature of socioeconomic, familial, environmental and institutional conditions relevant to youth gangsterism.

From a policy perspective, the findings support approaches that complement crime-control measures with family support, educational opportunities, socioeconomic assistance, community-based prevention and context-sensitive interventions. Future research should employ longitudinal and context-specific designs to examine how socioeconomic disadvantage interacts with family and social processes over time. Such approaches may contribute to more effective and socially responsive strategies for preventing youth involvement in gangsterism.

In conclusion, youth gangsterism cannot be adequately understood through poverty alone. The reviewed literature points towards a complex and multidimensional relationship in which socioeconomic disadvantage intersects with family, educational, environmental, psychological and institutional conditions. Accordingly, a shift from predominantly punitive responses towards more integrated, preventive and socially responsive approaches may provide a more comprehensive basis for addressing youth gangsterism. By positioning marginalised youths within broader structural and social contexts, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of youth gangsterism and highlights the importance of addressing vulnerability while strengthening the social conditions that support positive youth development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors wish to express their appreciation to Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and the Malaysian Indian Intelligence Organisation (MIIO) for the institutional support and academic environment that contributed to the development of this study. The authors are particularly grateful to Prof. Dr. Kartini Aboo Talib and Prof. Dr. Ramalinggam Rajamanickam for their scholarly guidance, supervision and constructive advice throughout the preparation of this manuscript.

Special thanks are extended to Prof. Dr. Kartini Aboo Talib for her valuable advice concerning journal selection and manuscript development, as well as for facilitating research-related support through the Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA). The authors also acknowledge Prof. TS. Dr. Mohd Zairul Mohd Noor, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), for his professional guidance and training in the application of ATLAS.ti 25 and qualitative data-analysis techniques.

Any institutional support provided by UKM towards publication-related expenses is acknowledged separately under the relevant funding or publication-support declaration, where applicable.

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