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**Depression and Deviant Behavior: An Empirical Study of Psychological Strain Among Youth in Pakistan**

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**Abstract**

This study considers the selected research questions presented in the paper by analyzing key social and behavioral factors in a specific institutional and contextual environment. This study is based on a quantitative research design and aims to empirically assess the relationship between the identified independent and dependent variables using structured survey data collected from eligible respondents. To ensure consistency and reliability, data were collected using a standardized questionnaire based on a Likert scale format.

Statistical analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize respondents' characteristics and perceptions, while inferential statistical techniques were used to examine the relationships among the study variables. The results indicate significant relationships between the main variables, highlighting the practical and theoretical importance of the research problem studied. Statistical analysis using Pearson's correlation was performed to examine the relationship between depression and deviant behaviors. The results revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between depression and deviant behavior.

The study contributes to the existing literature by providing context-specific empirical evidence and offers practical implications for policy, institutional management and future research. By addressing an understudied area in a local context, the study adds value to applied social science research and supports evidence-based decision-making.

**Keywords:** Depression; Deviant behavior; Mental health; Psychological factors; Social behavior; Pakistan

**Introduction**

Depression is one of the most common mental health conditions in the world that has extensive effects on the emotional regulation, cognitive functioning, and socialization of individuals (World Health Organization, 2023). It is characterised by chronic sadness, anhedonia and impairment of functions; these clinical expressions go beyond symptomatology to define behavioural and social consequences. In the recent evidence, depressive states increase exposure to maladaptive and deviant behaviours such as aggression, substance use, and antisocial behaviours (Lee and Kim, 2022; Lersch and Hart, 2021). Individuals with depression are often characterized by poor impulse control, dysregulation, and lack of social integration, which is why they are more likely to participate in behaviors that are against the social norms or the law (Cheong and Kim, 2020).

Deviant behaviour, which can be described as the behaviour that does not comply with social standards, can be a delinquent, rule-breaking, or criminal behaviour (Clinard and Meier, 2016). It has been demonstrated

that psychological stress factors, especially depression, can undermine coping mechanisms and increase frustration to the extent of triggering externalising behaviours that cause harm to the individual and the society (Agnew, 2020). The behavioural tendencies of hopelessness, seclusion, and low self-worth that are often related to depression may give rise to risky behavior and rebellion against social norms (Whisman and Baucom, 2021). A reciprocal relationship between depression and deviance is supported by empirical research: depressive symptoms can cause deviant behaviour, whereas deviant behaviour, in its turn, can support the development of depressive symptoms (Huang et al., 2023).

Although there is a significant literature on studies of how mental health is associated with behavioural outcomes, the majority of studies have been examining the impact of anxiety, substance use, or environmental factors, and little has been done on the direct psychological processes by which depression affects deviant behaviour, especially in low-income settings (Rahman et al., 2022). Societies with low access to mental-health resources and persistently stigmatize psychopathological conditions may make those who experience distress internalise it or portray it through norm-breaking behaviour (Patel et al., 2018). Therefore, the explanation of the nexus between depression and deviance is not only significant to the psychological investigation but also to the common health and policy. The present paper conceptualises the problem of depression and deviant behaviour through an empirical approach that utilises the quantitative approach in the analysis of how depressive symptoms influence the tendencies of people to breaking social norms. This study contributes to the new paradigm that mental health is a structural predictor of behavioural risk by predicting depression as a psychological antecedent of deviance. The findings should be used to inform evidence-based prevention programs, inform policy formulation, and assist mental -health interventions in being incorporated into larger social rehabilitation and crime prevention frameworks.

## **Literature Review**

Depression is a complex mental illness that leads to a disruption in emotional stability, cognition and behaviour and is generally acknowledged as a possible predisposing factor of deviant behaviour. Depressed people are often emotionally unstable, experience a lack of self-esteem, and cannot make a correct decision, which all increase susceptibility to maladaptive behaviours (Martel, 2018). Empirical studies based on the psychological strain theory underline that once emotional stress appears to be immobilising, people can also resort to maladaptive coping mechanisms, including aggression, substance use, or other types of rule-breaking behaviour (Yang & Li, 2025; Cullen et al., 2022).

The scientific evidence shows that the depressive symptoms, especially irritability, impulsiveness, and poorer self-control may be associated with antisocial or deviant behaviour (Cheung, 2016; Vaughn, Salas-Wright, & Jackson, 2020). Hopelessness and anger often result in the expression of frustration, such as delinquency or substance abuse, which are often caused by emotional strain (Ash-Houchen, 2018). Besides, the absence of support and social isolation, which are common in states of depression, increases the likelihood of deviant behavior by weakening social controls and exacerbating mental disorder (Rasskazova et al., 2019). General Strain Theory (GST) is a powerful theory of interpreting these associations because it assumes that emotion-based coping mechanisms are born out of strain-induced attitudes like anger and depression and might violate social norms (Rapp, 2024; Johnson, 2018). The moderating effect of self-control is especially topical; the people who feature low self-control are more likely to be driven by impulsive behaviour and take part in delinquent behaviour under the influence of psychological distress (Najafov, 2025a; Tirrell & Kapalka, 2015).

Although there is ample evidence that mental health is associated with deviance, most studies have focused on the Western population. Little emphasis has been given to the effects that cultural context has on behavioural expression of depression in developing countries (Najafov, 2025b). The ways in which depression is manifested into deviant behaviour are shaped by cultural stigma, poor mental-health services, and disparaged societal reactions to psychological distress (Vaughn et al., 2020). There are few studies with

quantitative data of non-Western settings, which highlights the necessity of context-specific studies that investigate depression as an independent predictor of deviant behaviour.

### **Research Gap**

Although the linkage between mental health and deviance has been generally made in the past, the special predictive value of depression has not been properly studied. The literature puts much emphasis on anxiety, substance abuse or social factors as opposed to direct behavioural consequences of depression. Further, the research done by developing nations is also insignificant hence limiting cross cultural comprehension of depression as a causative factor of deviant behaviour. The proposed research will help fill that gap by empirically examining the specific role of depression in deviance in communities, which will complement criminological and mental-health theories with culturally based findings.

### **Methodology**

This study used a quantitative research design to investigate the relationship between depression and deviant behavior. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered to respondents in accordance with the research context. This questionnaire was developed using a Likert scale to measure the level of depression and tendency to engage in deviant behavior. Non-probability sampling techniques were used to select participants who met the study criteria. The instrument contained standardized items to ensure clarity and consistency of responses. Data collection was conducted within a limited time frame and participation was voluntary with guarantees of confidentiality. The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The statistical description is applied to analyze the data of personnel, analyze the techniques of analyzing statistics, perform analysis to analyze correlations, and examine the relationship between depression and composure deviant. Pearson correlation analysis was used to test the relationship between depression and deviant behavior.

### **Findings**

The research findings are based on quantitative data analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The results indicate that there is a significant relationship between depression and deviant behavior among the respondents. This analysis shows that people who report higher levels of depressive symptoms are more likely to engage in behaviors that deviate from accepted social norms.

Correlational analyzes show a positive relationship between depression and deviant behavior, suggesting that increases in depressive symptoms correspond to increased propensity to engage in deviant behaviors. Respondents experiencing psychological distress, feelings of hopelessness, and social isolation were more likely to engage in behaviors such as aggression, rule-breaking, or other antisocial behavior. Pearson correlation analysis showed a moderate positive relationship between depression and deviant behavior ( $r = 0.52, p$

Descriptive findings further highlight that depressive symptoms influence behavioral outcomes by reducing emotional regulation and coping. These findings support the argument that depression functions not as a simple internal emotional state but as an important psychological risk factor contributing to deviant behavior.

Overall, the results empirically support the research proposition that depression plays important role in shaping deviant behavior and emphasize the importance of addressing mental health issues as part of broader crime prevention and social intervention strategies.

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Depression</b>
Deviant Behavior	<b>0.52**</b>
Sig. (2-tailed)	<b>0.001</b>
N	45

### **Pearson Correlation between Depression and Deviant Behavior**

**Note.  $p < 0.01$**

#### **Interpretation**

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive relationship between depression and deviant behavior ( $r = 0.52, p < 0.01$ ), indicating that higher levels of depression are associated with increased deviant behavior.

#### **Discussion**

The results of this study provide empirical support for the argument that depression is an important psychological factor contributing to deviant behavior. The positive association found between depression and deviant behaviors suggests that people with higher levels of depressive symptoms are more vulnerable to behaviors that violate social norms. This relationship can be understood through the theory of psychological stress and emotional regulation, which emphasizes that prolonged emotional stress weakens coping mechanisms and increases maladaptive responses. The statistically significant results obtained through Pearson correlation analysis strengthen the empirical support of the research findings.

Depression is often accompanied by feelings of hopelessness, frustration, and social isolation, and can reduce a person's ability to cope with stress in socially acceptable ways. As a result, deviant behavior may occur as an outlet for psychological stress or as a response to perceived social rejection. This finding is consistent with previous research linking depressive symptoms to aggression, drug use, and antisocial tendencies, especially among vulnerable populations.

The results also highlight the broader social implications of untreated depression. In contexts where mental health awareness and support systems are limited, depressive symptoms may remain unaddressed, increasing the risk of deviant behavior. Cultural stigma surrounding mental health may further discourage individuals from seeking help, thereby intensifying the behavioral consequences of depression.

Overall, the discussion reinforces the importance of integrating mental health considerations into crime prevention and social intervention strategies. Addressing depression through early identification, counseling services, and community-based mental health programs may help reduce the likelihood of deviant behavior and promote social well-being.

#### **Conclusion**

This study examined the relationship between depression and deviant behavior using a quantitative research approach. The findings provide empirical evidence that depression is positively associated with deviant behavior, indicating that individuals experiencing higher levels of depressive symptoms are more likely to engage in behaviors that deviate from accepted social norms. The Pearson correlation results confirmed a statistically significant positive association between depression and deviant behavior.

These results highlight that depression is not just an internal emotional state, but a significant psychological risk factor. Depression affects emotional regulation, coping, and social interactions, increasing vulnerability

to deviant behavior. These findings highlight the importance of recognizing mental health issues in understanding and addressing deviant behavior.

This study contributes to the literature by strengthening the association between mental health and deviance and highlights the need for integrated mental health and social intervention strategies. Addressing depression with timely support and preventive measures can help reduce deviant behaviors and promote healthier social outcomes.

### **Implications**

The results of this study have important implications for mental health policy, crime prevention, and social intervention strategies. From a practical perspective, the positive relationship between depression and deviant behavior highlights the need for early detection and treatment of depressive symptoms. Educational institutions, community organizations, and health care providers should include mental health screening and counseling services to reduce the risk of deviant behaviors associated with untreated depression. From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that mental health needs to be integrated into crime prevention and social protection programs. Policy makers need to prioritize mental health awareness campaigns to ensure access to affordable mental health support services, especially in communities where stigma and limited resources prevent them from seeking help. Strengthening mental health infrastructure can help reduce deviant behavior at both the individual and societal levels.

This study also provides theoretical implications by strengthening psychological strain and behavioral control theory. By empirically demonstrating depression as a predictor of deviant behavior, this finding extends existing criminological and psychological frameworks and highlights the importance of incorporating mental health variables into models of deviance.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Despite its contributions, several limitations of this study must be acknowledged. First, this study was based on a quantitative cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to establish a causal relationship between depression and deviant behavior. Second, the data were collected over a limited time frame, which may have limited the depth of responses and sample size.

Furthermore, this study focuses on self-report measures that may be influenced by social desirability bias, especially given the sensitive nature of mental health and deviant behaviors. Cultural biases related to depression may also influence respondents' willingness to accurately report their symptoms.

Future research should consider longitudinal studies that examine how depression affects deviant behavior over time. Incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews and case studies allows for a deeper understanding of individual experiences and behaviors. Expanding the sample to different demographic and social groups further increases the generalizability of the results. Future research may also investigate moderating variables such as social support, family environment, and coping strategies to better understand the complex relationship between depression and deviant behavior.

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