

An Assessment of Flaws and Failures in the Investigation of Heinous Crimes in Punjab.

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Abstract

Heinous crime refers to acts committed with extreme violence, viciousness, or disregard for law, public order, and morality. This study aims to explore the flaws and failures in the investigation of heinous crimes in Punjab, particularly from the perspective of law enforcement personnel. In Pakistan, delays in justice and ineffective investigations can prevent victims from receiving justice and may allow offenders to escape legal accountability. The study examines perceived investigative deficiencies, including external pressure, improper investigative practices, weaknesses in evidence collection and preservation, and limitations in the use of modern investigative and forensic techniques. The study seeks to identify unresolved issues and challenges faced by investigators and provide recommendations for improving the investigation process. Strengthening evidence collection, preservation, forensic procedures, and the application of modern investigative methods can improve the reliability and effectiveness of criminal investigations. The findings may assist policymakers, police departments, and other criminal justice stakeholders in developing strategies to address existing gaps and promote a fair and effective justice system. To understand the practical problems and factors contributing to investigative failures and manipulation, the study focused primarily on police officers, particularly investigation officers. Their direct involvement in criminal investigations makes them valuable sources of information. After reviewing relevant books and research articles, in-depth interviews were conducted with investigation officers to obtain their experiences, perceptions, and views regarding the challenges and shortcomings encountered during criminal investigations in Punjab.

Article History

Received 15 June 2026
Revised 25 June 2026
Accepted 14 July 2026
Published 20 July 2026

OPEN ACCESS

Corresponding Author *

Keywords

Heinous Crime, Police, Criminal Investigation, Criminal Justice System, Law Enforcement, Policymakers

Introduction

Crime may broadly be understood as conduct prohibited and punishable under criminal law. It is a behavior or action that violates the laws, regulations, and social norms of a society, causing harm or injury to individuals, communities, or the state. Reamer, F. G. (2004).

The concept of crime dates back to ancient civilizations such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece, when written laws and codes began to establish rules of acceptable behavior within society. In ancient Rome, the Twelve Tables set legal norms and penalties for many offenses, providing the groundwork for modern legal systems. Robinson, D. T., Smith-Lovin, L., & Tsoudis, O. (1994). The

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term “heinous” refer to an act that is unusually evil, cruel, brutal, or morally unacceptable. In the context of criminal investigation, heinous crimes refer to particularly serious offences characterized by extreme violence, cruelty, or brutality. In general, "heinous" describes an action, crime, or behavior that is considered particularly appalling, disgusting, or outrageous, and is often used to emphasize the severity or gravity of a situation. A heinous crime is a term used to describe a criminal act that is considered mainly shocking, egregious, and unacceptable due to its brutality, violence, or depravity. These crimes are often characterized by their severity, cruelty, and disregard for human life or dignity. Examples include murder, especially cases involving torture, mutilation, or multiple victims; rape and sexual assault, particularly against children; child abuse and exploitation; terrorism and violence against civilians; treason and espionage; kidnapping and hostage-taking; human trafficking and slavery; genocide and crimes against humanity; and torture or cruel treatment of prisoners or detainees. Other crimes may also be considered heinous when they cause severe physical, psychological, or social harm to individuals or communities.

The investigation of heinous crimes, such as murder, rape, terrorism, kidnapping and child abuse, is a complex and challenging process that requires meticulous attention to detail, rigorous evidence collection, and objective analysis. However, despite the best efforts of law enforcement and investigative agencies, flaws and failures can occur, leading to miscarriages of justice, perpetrators remaining free, and victims and their families denied closure. These flaws and failures can arise from various factors, including inadequate training, bias, tunnel vision, inadequate resources, and contamination of evidence. It is crucial to acknowledge and examine these flaws and failures to improve the investigation and prosecution of heinous crimes, ensure justice for victims, and prevent future tragedies. *Zhao, J., & Rogalin, C. L. (2017).*

Criminal investigation is an applied science that involves the analysis of information that will later be used as evidence in court. Searching, speaking with people, questioning people, gathering and preserving evidence, and using different investigative techniques can all be included in a full criminal investigation. Criminal justice refers to the judicial process or method of adjudicating criminal cases, which is based on extensive knowledge of criminal law and its application. Apart from maintaining law and order the police have a fundamental duty of investigating the crime. *Welch, K. (2007).* Criminal investigations are frequently completed or assisted by private investigators. Police are frequently accused of being ineffective, careless, and biased when doing their jobs. In Pakistan, many of the accused were acquitted by the court due to insufficient evidence. The collection of evidence has a great impact on the criminal trial. Criminal investigation is more important as compared to other Investigation; in Criminal Investigation the public set a level of index regarding the competency and reliability of the Police National. Surely, the flaws in criminal investigation are a significant issue of the criminal justice system. The investigation is the core component of the Criminal Trial. It is a fact that ineffective investigation can have Ramifications at several levels for the victim, the police, and the criminal justice system. *Persson, J. N. (2021).*

From Pakistan’s perspective especially Punjab, the ranker police officer is not well aware of securing the evidence due to this reason he destroys the prosecution case and it is a major hurdle in the justice system which demoralizes the victim's confidence in the criminal justice system. The investigation process serves as the cornerstone on which the criminal justice system is built. Effective investigations help to hold offenders accountable, provide consolation and closure to

victims or their heirs, discourage future offenders, promote peace and stability, and strengthen a state's reputation in the international community.

Criminal investigation in Punjab operates within a broader legal and institutional framework rather than under a single set of "Police Rules 2002." The principal legal instruments relevant to criminal investigation include the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898, the Pakistan Penal Code, 1860, the Police Order, 2002, the Punjab Police Rules, 1934, the Qanun-e-Shahadat Order, 1984, and other offence-specific legislation. The Police Order, 2002 provides an institutional framework for policing, including the prevention and detection of crime, while the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898 provides important procedural provisions relating to the registration and investigation of criminal offences. Section 154 addresses information relating to cognizable offences, while Section 173 concerns completion of investigation without unnecessary delay and submission of the police report. (National Police Bureau)

Investigators are using innovative strategies all across the world, but especially in technologically advanced nations, to stop crimes using cutting-edge criminal investigative tactics. Franks, R. (2020).

However, in a nation like Pakistan, the sources of criminal inquiry are largely unchanged as before. Justice must therefore be ensured by fixing problems with the police rules and investigation procedure. Modern science and technology are used in investigation processes in developed countries to gather evidence, but Pakistan has established forensic and scientific investigation capabilities; however, challenges may remain in their availability, timely utilization, training, resources and coordination. Additionally, mistakes in the inquiry are frequently made in criminal cases. The investigation comprises all processes under this code for the collecting of evidence carried out by a police officer or by any person (other than a magistrate) who is authorized by a magistrate on this behalf, as per section 4(1) of the Code of Criminal Procedure 1898. Some participants reported that coercive practices may occur during interrogation in certain cases which is against the mandate of fundamental rights envisaged in the constitution of Islamic Republic Of Pakistan 1973 (Government of Pakistan). *Van Soest, D., Park, H. S., Johnson, T. K., & McPhail, B. (2003).*

Criminal investigation aims to determine whether a crime has been committed, identify the person or persons responsible, and collect and analyze relevant evidence. It also seeks to build a strong case against the suspect based on reliable evidence and investigative findings. Finally, the investigation presents the collected evidence and findings to the relevant legal authorities for prosecution and further judicial proceedings.

According to the National Police Bureau, Islamabad (2007), Pakistan had several facilities for forensic and scientific investigation, particularly for DNA analysis, forensic examination, and chemical analysis. These included the National Forensic Science Agency and Kadir Khan Research Laboratory in Islamabad for DNA-related investigations, as well as forensic science laboratories in Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, Quetta, and Peshawar. Other important facilities included the Center for Applied Molecular Biology (CAMB) in Lahore, the Chief Chemical Examiner in Punjab, and Chemical Examiner offices in Multan and Rawalpindi. In Sindh, facilities included the Chief Chemical Examiner offices in Karachi and Rohri. These institutions provide important scientific

support for criminal investigations by assisting investigators in the examination and analysis of forensic evidence.

Punjab Forensic Science Agency (PFSA), Lahore has well established Crime Scene Units (CSU) with satellite stations located at Lahore, Bahawalpur, Dera Ghazi Khan, Gujranwala, Multan, Sahiwal, Sargodha, Rawalpindi and Faisalabad division of Punjab comprising professionally trained forensic scientist. Whenever there is an unfortunate event of crime, CSU approaches the area of crime scene and after processing the crime scenes, retrieves the evidence materials transporting to their relevant laboratory housed in PFSA, Lahore.

Literature Review:

The investigation of heinous crimes plays a critical role in ensuring justice, protecting victims, and holding offenders accountable. Effective investigation depends on proper evidence collection, preservation, documentation, forensic examination, witness handling, and coordination among police, forensic institutions, prosecutors, and courts. However, previous literature indicates that criminal investigations in Pakistan, particularly Punjab, face several institutional, procedural, and technical challenges. These weaknesses can result in delayed investigations, weak evidence, acquittal of offenders, and reduced public confidence in the criminal justice system.

Criminal investigation is an important part of the criminal justice system that involves collecting, examining, and maintaining information and evidence for presentation in court. It consist of interrogating individuals, reviewing documents, collecting evidence, and using proper investigative techniques. The police have an important responsibility not only to maintain law and order but also to investigate crimes effectively. Therefore, the quality of criminal investigation plays an important role in ensuring a fair and effective criminal justice process. (Imam Kaleem, 2011).

Criminal investigation has a long historical development, with early principles of evidence and justice found in the Code of Hammurabi. In modern criminal justice systems, police are mainly responsible for investigating crimes, while private investigators may also assist in certain cases. However, concerns about police inefficiency, negligence, and bias can affect the quality of investigations. In Pakistan, lack of evidence led to accused being found not guilty, highlighting the importance of proper evidence collection and preservation. Therefore, effective criminal investigation is important for successful prosecution and the fair administration of justice. (Abbas Hassan, 2011).

Effective criminal investigation is a central element of the criminal justice system and strongly influences public perceptions of police competence and reliability. Investigative failures can have serious consequences for victims, police institutions, and the legal process. In Pakistan, insufficient knowledge and practices regarding the proper preservation and handling of evidence may weaken prosecution cases and create hurdles to justice. Such flaws can also reduce victims' confidence in the criminal justice system. Therefore, improving investigative techniques, mainly evidence management, is essential for strengthening the effectiveness and credibility of criminal justice. (Ali Shah SA and Hussain B, 2021).

Police reform is an important factor of strengthening the rule of law and improving the criminal justice system in Pakistan. However, police reforms have critical background and always be a delayed area, contributing to flaws within the justice system. The existing police structure has its roots in the Police Act of 1861, which was established during British colonial rule. After independence in 1947, Pakistan received 80-year-old police system from the British. There is a slight difference between colonial police and the police of a free country. (Tansif ur Rehman, Mehmood Ahmed Usmani and Paf KIET Karachi -Pakistan, 'Issue 3 (2021) A Critical Analysis of the Criminal Justice ... Pak' (2021) 4 Journal of Int'L Affairs 740).

Existing literature often provides a broad overview of flaws in criminal investigations without going into specific aspects or types of errors. Further studies are needed to analyze specific flaws, such as poor evidence management, lack of proper interviewing techniques, inadequate investigator training, or procedural errors.

Research Questions:

1. What was the situation of heinous crime in Punjab during 2014-2018?
2. (a) What are the standard procedures followed during investigation of heinous crime in Punjab?
(b) Describe challenges facing during following that procedures?
3. How different departments (police, forensic, legal) coordinate during investigation?
4. What are the major systematic issues affecting investigation the heinous crime in Punjab?
5. How investigative flaws impact judicial process and trial outcomes?
6. How can existing policies and investigation practices be improved to address the flaws and failures in heinous crime investigations in Punjab?

Methodology:

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to discover the flaws and failures in the investigation of heinous crimes in Punjab. Initially, data on heinous crimes in Punjab from 2014 to 2018 were obtained from the Investigation Complex, Punjab, Lahore. This information was used to develop relevant research questions and guide the qualitative inquiry. Based on the identified issues and patterns, a qualitative questioning framework was developed. Fifteen participants were purposively selected, comprising ten police officers and five academics/teachers with relevant knowledge of criminal investigation. The interviews revealed several institutional, procedural, and practical flaws affecting the investigation process.

Data of Heinous Crime in Punjab from 2014 to 2018:

Heinous crimes are reported across Pakistan; however, this study focuses specifically on heinous crimes in Punjab, based on data obtained from the Investigation Complex Punjab (ICP), Lahore, covering the period from 2014 to 2018. According to the available data for 2014, 6,094 murder cases were recorded, with 1,061 accused persons arrested and 294 cases dismissed. During the same year, 107 kidnapping were recorded, with 35 accused persons arrested and 11 cases cancelled. Similarly, 2,711 reported rape cases, according to the cited official dataset, with 152 accused persons arrested and 625 cases dismissed. For terrorism cases, 804 cases were recorded, 155 accused persons

were arrested, and 58 cases were abandoned. Furthermore, 1,523 child-abuse cases, according to the cited dataset, with 54 accused persons arrested and 248 cases abandoned.

In 2015, 4,522 murder cases were registered, with 1,278 accused persons arrested and 291 cases dismissed. Kidnapping cases decreased to 78, with 28 arrests and 6 dismissed cases. Rape cases increased slightly to 2,737, with 144 accused persons arrested and 611 cases dismissed. Terrorism cases increased to 1,767, with 377 arrests and 126 dismissed cases. Child abuse cases totaled 1,455, with 46 arrests and 196 dismissed cases.

In 2016, 4,112 murder cases were recorded, with 1,345 accused persons arrested and 313 cases dismissed. Kidnapping cases totaled 35, with 15 arrests and 4 dismissed cases. Rape cases increased to 2,942, with 155 accused persons arrested and 625 cases dismissed. Terrorism cases totaled 907, with 215 arrests and 35 dismissed cases. Child abuse cases totaled 1,471, with 65 accused persons arrested and 211 cases cancelled.

In 2017, 3,992 murder cases were registered, with 1,656 accused persons arrested and 303 cases dismissed. Kidnapping cases totaled 41, with 6 accused persons arrested and 3 cases dismissed. Rape cases totaled 2,980, with 1,186 accused persons arrested and 588 cases dismissed. Terrorism cases totaled 596, with 160 arrests and 25 dismissed cases. Child abuse cases totaled 1,265, with 52 accused persons arrested and 141 cases cancelled.

In 2018, 4,146 murder cases were recorded, with 1,122 accused persons arrested and 334 cases dismissed. Kidnapping cases totaled 59, with 2 accused persons arrested and 4 cases dismissed. Rape cases increased to 3,300, with 189 accused persons arrested and 585 cases dismissed. Terrorism cases totaled 766, with 193 arrests and 32 dismissed cases. Child abuse cases totaled 1,394, with 45 accused persons arrested and 109 cases.

Respondents of the Study:

The study included 15 respondents who were selected based on their direct knowledge and experience of the criminal investigation system. The first five respondents are officers of higher rank which we have interviewed because they directly supervise the investigation process and have a considerable view in order to improve or restructure the system. The next five officers are the Investigation Officers and one of them has also worked as In-charge Investigations in one of the most critical police station of Lahore. All these officers have direct link with the system of investigations and the process of it. The remaining five respondents are teachers who teach criminal investigation in different institutions.

1. Situation of heinous crime in Punjab during 2014-2018:

The study discovered the situation of heinous crimes in Punjab through in-depth interviews with senior police officers, investigation officers, and academics with relevant expertise in criminology, law enforcement, prosecution, and forensic investigation. The participants identified murder, kidnapping, rape, child abuse, terrorism, and human trafficking as major forms of heinous crime.

According to the participants, the situation of heinous crime in Punjab is concerning, with murder and sexual violence frequently identified as major problems. Participants perceived unemployment, economic hardship, poverty and social-media-related factors as potentially associated with serious crime. Participants also stressed about increasing violence, kidnapping, rape, and other serious offences and emphasized the need for effective law-enforcement responses and improved investigation.

Academic participants similarly defined the situation as serious and related increasing crime with economic hardship and inflation. Overall, the interviews indicate that heinous crime in Punjab is influenced by a combination of economic, social, and institutional factors, highlighting the need for stronger investigative practices and effective criminal justice responses.

2. (A) standard procedures followed during investigation of heinous crime in Punjab:

According to the respondents, criminal investigations are conducted within the legal framework of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), Pakistan Penal Code (PPC), Police Rules, Police Orders, and Qanun-e-Shahadat Order (QSO). The standard investigation process generally involves securing the crime scene, preserving and collecting evidence, identifying and interviewing witnesses, conducting forensic examinations, identifying and interrogating suspects, and preparing evidence for court proceedings.

The respondents also highlighted a gap between investigative procedures in law and their practical implementation. Although Pakistan has established legal procedures and specialized units for serious offences such as homicide and sexual violence, investigators reported problems related to limited capacity, corruption, mismanagement, and external influence. Specialized investigation units and forensic teams have been introduced, but their effectiveness depends on proper training, resources, and implementation.

Several major challenges emerged from the interviews, including shortage of trained personnel, insufficient technology and forensic resources, corruption, political interference, weak witness cooperation, poverty and unemployment, complex organized crimes, forensic laboratory delays, legal difficulties, community tensions, media pressure, and weak coordination between law-enforcement agencies. These factors may affect the collection and preservation of evidence and ultimately influence the quality of criminal investigations. The respondents further indicated that delays in FIR registration and weaknesses in crime-scene management can negatively affect investigations. Although procedures require prompt registration of FIRs and immediate preservation of the crime scene, some respondents reported that these procedures are not always properly implemented in practice.

Academic respondents highlighted that improving the investigation system requires merit-based appointment of honest and competent investigation officers. They suggested that unbiased investigators and investigations conducted on merit are essential for reducing influence and improving the effectiveness of the criminal justice system.

b. Challenges facing during following that procedures:

The interviews recognized several challenges affecting the investigation of heinous crimes in Punjab. Respondents conveyed difficulties in preserving physical evidence such as bloodstains and fingerprints, particularly at complex crime scenes. Recording witness statements can also be difficult because of fear, trauma, or lack of trust.

A major finding was the lack of resources and trained personnel. Investigation officers reported insufficient funds, staff, vehicles, technology, and forensic resources, which can limit their ability to conduct investigations effectively. One respondent particularly highlighted that financial limits can affect even basic investigative activities such as travelling to crime scenes. The interviews also highlighted corruption, political influence, misuse of authority, and lack of accountability as important challenges. These factors may affect the fairness and integrity of investigations and can contribute to evidence tampering, witness influence, and weak case outcomes.

Another important issue was weak coordination between police, prosecution, forensic agencies, and other law-enforcement institutions. Poor communication and limited sharing of information and resources may create gaps or delays in investigations. Respondents further identified forensic limitations, including insufficient technology, delays in forensic laboratory results, and difficulties in properly handling forensic evidence. Although specialized forensic units and trained personnel are available, effective use of forensic evidence remains an important concern.

The interviews also exposed social and community-related challenges, including poverty, unemployment, lack of legal awareness, fear of retaliation, social stigma, and mistrust of police. These factors can discourage victims and witnesses from reporting crimes or cooperating with investigators.

3. Different departments (police, forensic, legal) coordinate during investigation:

The interviews indicate that coordination among police, forensic agencies, and prosecution is essential for effective investigation and successful prosecution of heinous crimes. Respondents explained that a district-level Criminal Justice Coordination Committee, chaired by the Sessions Judge, provides a platform where police, prosecution, prison officials, and other relevant departments meet regularly to discuss investigative and institutional problems.

According to the participants, the police are primarily responsible for responding to reported crimes, registering the FIR, securing the crime scene, recording witness statements, collecting evidence, and conducting the investigation. Forensic experts assist in the collection and scientific examination of evidence such as fingerprints and biological material, while prosecutors review the investigation record and provide legal guidance regarding evidence, witness statements, and preparation of the final police report. The interviews further discovered that weak coordination and communication between departments can negatively affect investigations. Participants identified problems such as limited information sharing, different departmental structures, weak communication networks, and insufficient cooperation between police, forensic agencies, and prosecution. These weaknesses may result in missed evidence, delays, procedural problems, and difficulties during prosecution and trial.

Respondents also highlighted corruption, political influence, personal references, and unequal treatment as factors that can affect interdepartmental cooperation and access to justice. Some participants argued that people with strong connections may receive better institutional cooperation, while ordinary citizens may face greater difficulties in obtaining justice.

4. Average duration of heinous crime in investigation:

The interviews revealed that there is no fixed duration for investigating heinous crimes in Punjab. Respondents explained that the investigation period varies from case to case depending on the nature and complexity of the crime, availability of evidence and witnesses, forensic reports, investigative resources, and cooperation of relevant departments. Some relatively straightforward cases may be completed within a few months, while complex cases may take a year or several years to conclude.

One senior police officer explained that although Section 173 requires investigation to be completed without unnecessary delay and provides for submission of the police report, investigations may remain incomplete when accused persons are absconding or when forensic results, such as DNA, handwriting, fingerprints, or other laboratory reports, are still pending. In such situations, an interim report may be submitted while the investigation continues. The respondent therefore emphasized that a single average duration cannot accurately represent all heinous crime investigations.

Investigation officers further reported that delays may occur because of insufficient evidence, forensic laboratory delays, legal and procedural requirements, limited resources, and external influence. In some cases, corruption or pressure may also contribute to ineffective or delayed investigations. Academic respondents similarly stated that the duration is not fixed and depends largely on the nature and complexity of the case.

5. Investigative flaws impact judicial process and trial outcomes:

The interviews revealed that flaws and failures in criminal investigations have important consequences for the judicial process and trial outcomes in Punjab. Respondents identified incomplete or improperly collected evidence, loss or contamination of evidence, weak chain of custody, delayed forensic reports, unreliable witness statements, corruption, inadequate resources, outdated investigation techniques, and investigative bias as major factors weakening criminal cases. Such deficiencies may result in important evidence becoming inadmissible or unavailable during trial, thereby weakening the prosecution's case and increasing the possibility of acquittal. Respondents also highlighted that delays in submitting challans, medical reports, and forensic evidence can reduce the evidentiary value of material evidence and prolong judicial proceedings.

The findings further indicate that investigative weaknesses can affect both victims and accused persons. Poor investigation may allow offenders to escape accountability, while innocent individuals may be wrongly implicated because of false, incomplete, or biased investigations. Respondents particularly stressed that corruption and bribery can influence the investigation process and undermine fairness. In addition, insufficient facilities, limited budgets, insufficient staff, lack of specialized training, and reliance on outdated investigative methods reduce the capacity of investigation officers to conduct effective and scientific investigations.

6. Policy Recommendations to Address Flaws and Failures in the Investigation of Heinous Crimes in Punjab:

The interviews indicate that addressing flaws and failures in the investigation of heinous crimes in Punjab requires comprehensive institutional, financial, technological, and procedural reforms. Respondents consistently highlighted the need to strengthen police resources, increase staffing, improve investigative training, and introduce specialized investigation units for complex and heinous crimes. They also highlighted the importance of providing adequate budgets for investigations so that investigation officers can effectively collect evidence and perform their duties without resource constraints.

A major recommendation emerging from the interviews is the modernization of investigative practices and forensic capabilities. Respondents suggested greater use of modern investigative techniques, DNA profiling, digital forensics, ballistic analysis, and other scientific methods. Forensic laboratories should be adequately funded, equipped, and staffed, while mechanisms should be established to reduce delays in forensic reports. Proper procedures for evidence collection, preservation, and chain of custody should also be strengthened to prevent evidence from being lost, contaminated, or mishandled. The respondents further stressed the need for specialized training and professional development of investigation officers. Regular training should focus on scientific investigation, evidence management, forensic procedures, interviewing techniques, and the investigation of complex crimes. Specialized investigators should be appointed for crimes requiring technical expertise. Merit-based recruitment and appointments were also identified as important measures for improving the professionalism and integrity of the investigation system.

Another major theme was the need to strengthen accountability and transparency. Respondents identified corruption, bribery, political interference, and dishonest investigation practices as serious obstacles to justice. They recommended independent oversight mechanisms, regular reviews of investigation performance, strict disciplinary action against dishonest investigators, and merit-based appointments. Independent crime-review mechanisms could also periodically examine the investigation of serious cases and identify institutional failures.

The interviews also highlighted the importance of inter-agency coordination among police, prosecution, forensic institutions, and other relevant agencies. Specialized task forces, formal information-sharing mechanisms, joint training, and regular coordination meetings could improve the flow of information and reduce delays. Respondents also recommended stronger witness-protection mechanisms, including legal protection, anonymity, and security measures, to encourage witnesses to cooperate without fear of intimidation or retaliation.

Conclusion:

Criminal investigation plays a vital role in the criminal justice system because the proper collection, preservation, and presentation of evidence enables courts to make fair and informed decisions. This

qualitative study examines the problems, challenges, and factors that contribute to the manipulation of criminal investigations in Punjab, Pakistan. Police officers, particularly Investigation Officers, were selected as the primary participants because of their direct involvement and practical experience in criminal investigations. Data were collected through interviews with police officers and supported by a review of relevant literature. The findings identified several major factors affecting the quality and integrity of criminal investigations, including lack of facilities, insufficient budgets, shortage of staff, inadequate departmental support, breakage of the chain of custody, corruption, outdated investigation techniques, inadequate training, limited use of forensic evidence, and political interference. These challenges can weaken evidence, affect the prosecution of offenders, and contribute to delays or failures in the delivery of justice.

The study concludes that improving criminal investigation in Punjab requires comprehensive police reforms, modern investigative techniques, adequate resources, specialized training, and greater use of forensic science, effective accountability mechanisms, and protection of investigators from political influence. Investigation Officers should conduct investigations impartially and professionally, based on facts and reliable evidence rather than external pressure or personal interests. Strengthening these areas is essential for improving the criminal justice system, protecting citizens' rights, and ensuring the effective implementation of the rule of law.

Recommendations:

- The government should increase the financial and human resources available to investigation branches. Additional recruitment of trained investigation officers is necessary to reduce workload and allow officers sufficient time to conduct thorough investigations. Adequate funds should also be provided for transportation, investigation expenses, equipment, and other operational requirements.
- Police investigation should be shifted from traditional and confession-oriented approaches toward modern, evidence-based investigation. Investigators should be trained in crime-scene processing, digital evidence, DNA analysis, fingerprinting, ballistic examination, surveillance, and other contemporary investigative techniques. The study particularly identifies outdated investigation methods and excessive reliance on confessions as important weaknesses.
- Forensic capabilities should be strengthened through investment in modern laboratories, equipment, and qualified forensic experts. Forensic evidence in heinous crime cases should be processed on a priority basis to reduce delays. Greater use of DNA profiling, digital forensics, ballistic analysis, and other scientific methods can improve the reliability of investigations.
- Clear and mandatory procedures should be implemented for the collection, packaging, transportation, storage, and presentation of evidence. Investigators should receive specialized training in evidence preservation, and every transfer of evidence should be properly documented. This can reduce contamination, tampering, and the loss of evidence that may weaken prosecution cases.
- Investigation officers should receive regular refresher training rather than relying only on initial police training. Specialized investigative units should be developed for heinous crimes, including sexual violence, terrorism, human trafficking, and cybercrime. Training should also cover forensic

procedures, interviewing techniques, victim handling, evidence management, and legal requirements.

- Effective mechanisms should be introduced to protect investigations from political pressure, bribery, favoritism, and other forms of interference. Transfers and appointments of investigation officers should be based on merit and institutional requirements rather than political influence. Independent oversight and strict disciplinary action against officers involved in deliberate manipulation or corruption should also be ensured. The research specifically identifies political interference and corruption as major concerns affecting investigations.
- Better coordination should be established between police, forensic agencies, prosecution, intelligence agencies, and other relevant departments. Specialized task forces may be established for complex heinous crime cases, supported by clear protocols for information and evidence sharing.
- Manual record keeping should gradually be replaced with secure digital case-management systems. Digital systems can improve evidence tracking, case monitoring, information retrieval, and coordination between departments while reducing the risk of lost or altered records.
- Effective witness-protection mechanisms should be implemented to protect witnesses and their families from intimidation or retaliation. Anonymous reporting mechanisms and appropriate legal and support services should also be developed to encourage witnesses to cooperate with investigators.
- Independent crime-review bodies should periodically examine the investigation of serious and heinous crime cases. Such reviews can identify procedural violations, evidence-handling failures, unnecessary delays, and allegations of misconduct. Transparent review mechanisms can also improve public confidence in the criminal justice system.
- Investigation officers and prosecutors should coordinate from the early stages of serious cases. This can help investigators understand evidentiary and legal requirements before the case reaches trial and reduce weaknesses that may later contribute to acquittals or delays. The study identifies poor communication and coordination as factors affecting investigative and judicial outcomes.
- Procedures for heinous crime investigations and prosecutions should be streamlined to minimize unnecessary delays. Priority should be given to serious cases, particularly where victims or witnesses face continuing threats. The research identifies judicial delays and lengthy trials as significant challenges to effective justice.
- Regular audits, performance evaluations, complaint mechanisms, and independent oversight should be introduced to improve accountability within investigation departments. Officers found deliberately influencing evidence or conducting dishonest investigations should face appropriate disciplinary and legal consequences.
- Police should strengthen community-policing initiatives and develop better communication with local communities. Public awareness programs should educate citizens about reporting mechanisms, legal rights, and available support for victims and witnesses. Greater community trust can encourage witnesses to cooperate and improve the flow of information to investigators.
- Investigation practices and case outcomes should be intermittently evaluated to identify frequent weaknesses and measure the effectiveness of reforms. Feedback from victims, witnesses, investigators, prosecutors, and community representatives should be considered when developing future investigation policies.

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