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# **Struggling Behind Bars: A Qualitative Analysis of Overcrowded Prisons in Punjab Province**

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## **Abstract**

Prison overcrowding is a long-standing global issue, and Pakistan, notably Punjab, is no exception. Yet, there appears to be a dearth of studies or geographical research gap in this region pertaining to the problem of prison overcrowding. This study strives to heighten understanding of overcrowding in Punjab prisons by investigating its prevalence, consequences, major causes, and potential intervention. Employing a qualitative research method, the study relies on a secondary data framework, containing diverse sources such as news articles, research reports, official records, and academic literature. The assembled data exposes Punjab's penitentiaries as the most overpopulated in the country, grappling with an average overcrowding rate of 147% across 42 facilities. Inmates endure extreme health risks, epidemics of diseases, and fundamental human rights violations. The root causalities determined encompass systemic flaws in pre-trial detention, delays in judicial processes, and deficiencies in the broader criminal justice apparatus, including police investigations and prosecution. Recommendations include reforms in bail practices, reclassification of non-violent offenses, and alternatives to imprisonment, providing a roadmap for alleviating overcrowding. The study's implications extend to policymakers, legal authorities, and civil society, advising collective efforts for meaningful and lasting transformation in Punjab's criminal justice landscape.

**Keywords:** Prison Overcrowding, Punjab Province, Human Rights Violation, Pre-Trial Detention, Criminal Justice Reforms, Non-violent Offenses, Bail Procedures.

## **Introduction**

United Nations (2021) describes prisons as, "All authorized places of detention within a criminal justice system, including those used for the purposes of pretrial detention and imprisonment upon conviction." (p. 2). It is an accepted fact that anyone sentenced to prison for a crime punishable by imprisonment, whether a felony or a misdemeanor, is legally required to serve time in a correctional facility. Contemporary prisons also play a vital role in incarcerating accused individuals awaiting trial, and in some countries, this population constitutes the majority of the prison population (Coyle, 2023).

Imprisonment is one of the most prevailing forms of punishment globally. The widely recognized purpose of punishment is to safeguard society, and this objective is feasible only when prisons prioritize the rehabilitation and reform of offenders rather than merely punitive actions (Vadackumchery, 2000). According to Pakistan's Law and Justice Commission, prisons are designed to fulfill the 6 Cs, which include custody, care, control, cure, correction, and community readjustment (Gul, 2018).

The World Prison Brief reveals that there are over 10.77 million people incarcerated worldwide, including pre-trial, detained, and convicted inmates, (Fair & Walmsley, 2021) and Pakistan is ranked 24th on this list (World Prison Brief, 2019). According to Murdoch and Griffiths (2009), overcrowding in prison is defined as a condition in which the number of individuals confined in a prison is greater than the capacity of the prison to provide adequately for the material and psychological needs of the confined persons. The significant numbers of individuals in prisons are

worsening the long-standing issue of overcrowding in many nations, and Pakistan is no exception to this serious challenge within the criminal justice system.

Moreover, overcrowding has a negative impact on the mental health of all inmates, especially those who are vulnerable to bullying and abuse or have pre-existing mental health issues. These risks aggravate due to insufficient healthcare staff, medication, and access to specialized care in community hospitals. As a result, prisoners are deprived of their fundamental human right to the best possible physical and mental health, as established in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. As a result, overcrowding is the root cause of numerous issues and human rights violations inside global jail systems. This condition not only jeopardizes the prospects for social reintegration but also endangers the lives of inmates in the worst-case scenario. In several cases, the Human Rights Committee ruled that harsh incarceration circumstances, exacerbated by overcrowding, violated Article 10(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ICCPR due to a clear infringement of The Standard Minimum Rule SMR (UNODC, 2013).

According to the data, the existing prison population in Pakistan stands at 88,687, distributed across 116 correctional facilities as of December 2022 (Human Rights Watch, 2023) this represents a noteworthy overcapacity, as the authorized limit for inmates is 65,168 (Abbasi, 2021). Overcrowding has consistently been a serious problem in Pakistan's prison system, giving birth to a variety of social pathologies within these institutions. These challenges include contaminated food, a lack of adequate healthcare infrastructure, sexual assault, and brutality (Rani & Khan, 2021). Furthermore, overcrowding harms the ability of prison personnel to fulfill the fundamental needs of convicts regarding their living conditions in correctional facilities (Bjerk, 2009).

## Literature Review

There is no doubt, the definition of humane treatment and care for prisoners is subject to debate. When the conditions within prisons are perceived as relatively better than those in the external environment, there is a tendency for the prison population to grow. This is because individuals may be willing to endure incarceration to access amenities that they cannot afford in the free world (Katz, et al., 2003). However, the more harrowing the prison conditions, the less likely people are to engage in criminal activities and consequently end up in prison (Bedard and Helland, 2004; Katz, et al., 2003).

Despite this fact, the considerable increase in the imprisoned population presents a significant and serious challenge to worldwide criminal justice systems. According to the International Centre for Prison Studies, more than 9.8 million people are currently imprisoned in correctional facilities around the world, including both convicted offenders and those awaiting trial (Walmsley, 2003).

Moreover, the return of parolees to prison has played a role in the escalation of prison populations in certain countries. In the case of England/Wales, there is a noted increase in the number of individuals incarcerated due to parole revocation. Similarly, in California, parole violators constitute nearly 40% of prison admissions, with the majority of revocations occurring as a result of technical violations, rather than new criminal offenses (Padfield & Maruna, 2006; Legislative Analyst's Office, 2008).

Thus, the issue of overpopulation in jails is important to recognize that it is not solely the responsibility of the criminal justice system in any state. Rather, it is the result of a complex interplay of factors such as social well-being strategies, access to healthcare facilities, policies on education, and employment opportunities for citizens (French & Gendreau, 2006). The concept

that prisoners are entitled to humane treatment implies the existence of standards governing their treatment and activities within the prison setting (Coyle, 2002b; Murdoch and Griffiths, 2009; Van Zyl Smit, 2010; Willems, 2014).

The occurrence of prison overcrowding has been noted across various prison systems, encompassing both affluent and impoverished nations, jurisdictions following common and civil law, as well as diverse forms of governance (Allen, 2010). Increasingly, the issue of prison overcrowding poses a significant obstacle to the proper management of prisons, the effective care and treatment of inmates, and adherence to established standards about the rights of both prisoners and prison staff (UN, 2010). Additionally, in the literature on criminal justice system policy and research-related topics, one of the most predominant themes over the past two decades has been the challenge of prison overcrowding (Albrecht, 2011).

Correspondingly, most of the countries from the First World have also successfully implemented alternatives to imprisonment, including fines, community service, electronically monitored house arrest, and probation or suspended sentences within their criminal justice systems. While some countries have discontinued the practice, early release on parole remains an essential tool in the majority of correctional systems. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge, that the alternatives to imprisonment and parole carry inherent risks of incarceration in the event of fine non-payment, violations of associated conditions, or reoffending. Fines, in particular, are susceptible to being converted into substitute imprisonment, especially under conditions of economic hardship and widespread poverty. Reports from countries grappling with extreme poverty illustrate that a substantial number of offenders face imprisonment simply because they are unable to fulfill even minor fine obligations (Prison Fellowship International; Albrecht, 2012).

Apart from that, arbitrary arrests can be reduced through legislative and pragmatic steps. This encompasses diverting suitable cases from the criminal justice system, precluding pre-trial detention in some instances, and doing away with the necessity for pre-trial detention in others. Also, there should be increased access to non-monetary alternatives (UNODC, 2013). Notably, to address the serious challenge of prison overcrowding, the Special Rapporteur by Human Rights Council recommends comprehensive structural reforms such as reducing the number of detainees, increasing prison capacities, modernizing facilities, removing non-violent offenders from pre-trial detention, and increasing the use of non-custodial measures (Melzer, 2017).

### **Objectives**

- Explore the Prevalence and Consequences of Overcrowding in Punjab Province.
- Investigate Pre-trial Detention as the Primary Cause of Overcrowding in Punjab Prisons.
- Suggest Potential Solutions to the Identified Problem.

### **Significance**

The prison population is arguably one of the most overlooked and underserved segments of our society. Despite the disturbing fact that prison overcrowding in the Punjab region has reached an alarming 147%, making it the highest in the country, there is a notable scarcity of research on this critical issue. Although various authorities, NGOs, and news media outlets have raised their voices on the matter, the stigma associated with the prison population persists, hindering political-will and public acceptance of policies aimed at improving the well-being of prisoners.

Public sentiment tends to view inmates solely as subjects of punishment rather than individuals in need of correction. This misconception, coupled with a lack of awareness about the far-reaching consequences of overcrowding, perpetuates the narrative that prisons serve as breeding grounds

for criminal behavior. To challenge this perspective, it becomes the responsibility of every stakeholder, researcher, and media outlet to address the issue, raise awareness among the general public, and advocate for measures to rectify this longstanding problem within the prison system. Therefore, this research makes a minor but crucial contribution to promoting the reformation of the prison system in Punjab. This collective effort to address prison overcrowding and improve conditions is crucial, as it ultimately leads to a reduction in recidivism rates, contributing to the creation of a safer and more secure society.

### **Research Methodology**

This study primarily employs a secondary research method under the framework of a qualitative approach to investigate the prevalence, causes, repercussions, and possible remedies associated with prison overpopulation. Regarding sampling, this study adopts a non-probability purposive technique to obtain data from a variety of sources, including news articles, research reports, videos, official government records, non-profit organization accounts, and academic literature. Key references, including Human Rights Watch, Al Jazeera's YouTube Channel, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Punjab Prisons, and the World Prison Brief, were selected based on their data relevance to the prison system, specifically in the context of prison overcrowding. The information acquired is systematically organized, classified, and presented coherently via narrative analysis, allowing for a thorough understanding of the subject matter. The study acknowledges considerable limitations, including the possibility of subjective bias in secondary data, a relatively limited literature review that may not adequately address the multifaceted components of the problem, and chances of discrepancy in statistical data due to multiple timeframe cutoffs, various sources, and unavailability of certain data.



## Results and Discussion:

### 1. Prevalence and Consequences of Overcrowding

This study delves into the issue of prison overcrowding in Pakistan, with a specific focus on the Punjab province. It aims to understand the prevalence and identify the primary contributors to and consequences of overcrowding. Testimonies from various sources, including inmates, as well as Deputy Superintendent, lawyer, ex-prisoner, and journalist, highlight the harrowing conditions within Pakistani prisons. The findings reveal that prisons in Punjab are particularly alarming, experiencing a staggering 147% overcrowding (Table.1) beyond their authorized capacity.

On October 9, 2019, Al Jazeera released a documentary film by Tazeen Bari on their YouTube channel. The documentary focused on Mazhar Farooq, a former death row inmate at Central Jail Kot Lakhpat in Lahore. Through Mazhar's letters and testimonies, the documentary sheds light on his harrowing experiences. In his own words, Mazhar revealed the harsh conditions of his confinement, stating, *"In that eight by eight-foot cell, there were 15 of us crammed in together. That's where we ate, used the bathroom, and prayed. You can't even imagine how mentally disturbing it is."* Similar revelations and testimonies echoing the challenging conditions within the prison system are commonly encountered in Punjab province, as exemplified in the Human Rights Watch interview with Jalal Khan, conducted in Lahore on May 9, 2022, unveils a distressing portrayal of the conditions experienced by individuals within the prison system. Jalal, a former prisoner, shares a poignant detail, stating, *"Due to the insufficient space in the cell, it was not possible for all of us to lie down together at the same time."* Likewise, Human Rights Watch interview with Shafiq Ghafoor in Lahore on May 10, 2022. Shafiq, aged 33, who spent four weeks in a Lahore prison in 2021, vividly describes the overcrowded situation, stating, *"The room was so*

*crowded at night that it was nearly impossible to get up and go to the bathroom without stepping on anyone, forcing you to wait until morning.*" These concise yet powerful statements capture the essence of the challenges faced by inmates, highlighting the severe overcrowding within the prison cells. The use of the word "impossible" emphasizes the extreme nature or severity of the situation.

Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of prison overcrowding, delineating the distribution of this phenomenon across provinces. Notably, the data discerns that the population in Punjab province is not only surpassing the authorized capacity of Punjab prisons but also exceeds the cumulative authorized capacity of the entire country's prisons. Specifically, with 64,210 inmates in Punjab, this figure stands in stark contrast to the nationwide authorized capacity of 49,875 inmates. This disparity underscores a significant and concerning overcrowding scenario within the prison system, warranting a comprehensive examination of the contributing factors and implications for the academic reader. Furthermore, Table 2 presents data from specific jails, indicating a disturbing overpopulation trend. The overcrowding ranges from a maximum of 272.48% in District Jail, Multan, to a minimum of 12.68% in Sub Jail Chakwal. Additionally, only three prisons in the entire province are underpopulated, including two juvenile jails and one women's jail.

**Table.1 "Provincial Distribution of Prison Population"**


S.No	Provinces	Authorized Accommodation	Under-Trial Population	Total Prison Population	Overcrowding Rate (%)
1.	Punjab	26045 <sup>3</sup>	47209 <sup>1</sup>	64210 <sup>1</sup>	147%
2.	Sindh	13538 <sup>2</sup>	13899 <sup>2</sup>	19447 <sup>2</sup>	44%
3.	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	7707 <sup>3</sup>	N/A	10245 <sup>3</sup>	33%


4.	Baluchistan	2585 <sup>3</sup>	N/A	2685 <sup>3</sup>	3.8%
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>49875</b>	-	<b>96587</b>	<b>94%</b>

Source:

1. [Punjab Prisons, Government of the Punjab \(Latest, 2023\).](#)
2. [Sindh Prisons & Corrections Service \(Latest, 2022\).](#)
3. [Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan \(Rani & Khan, 2021\).](#)

**Table.2 "Distribution of Prison Populations Across Punjab Province Jails"**

S.No	Name of Jail	Authorized Accommodation	Prison Population	Overcrowding Rate (%) 
1.	District Jail, Multan.	229	854	272.48%
2.	District Jail, Gujrat.	385	1407	263.12%
3.	District Jail, Sheikhpura.	590	2107	257.63%
4.	Central Jail, Gujranwala.	913	3109	240.65%
5.	District Jail, Kasur.	444	1506	238.29%
6.	Central Jail, Lahore.	1053	3537	236.69%
7.	District Jail, Muzaffargarh.	180	582	223.33%
8.	District Jail, Shahpur.	292	887	204.79%

S.No	Name of Jail	Authorized Accommodation	Prison Population	Overcrowding Rate (%) 
9.	District Jail, Sialkot.	722	2177	201.39%
10.	District Jail, Lahore.	1050	2895	176.19%
11.	District Jail, Rahim Yar Khan.	316	815	157.59%

12.	District Jail, Faisalabad.	853	2162	153.56%
13.	District Jail, Sargodha.	563	1318	134.37%
14.	Central Jail, Faisalabad.	1190	2708	127.73%
15.	Central Jail, Rawalpindi.	1994	4337	117.06%
16.	District Jail, Mandi Bahauddin.	279	573	105.73%
17.	District Jail, Jhang.	916	1783	94.52%
18.	District Jail, Toba Tek Singh.	500	898	79.44%
19.	District Jail, Jhelum.	416	742	78.85%
20.	Central Jail, Dera Ghazi Khan.	582	1031	77.85%
21.	Central Jail, Mianwali.	1050	1851	76.57%
22.	Central Jail, Multan.	1460	2234	53.56%
23.	District Jail, Attock.	539	804	49.91%
24.	District Jail, Vehari.	500	741	48.20%
25.	District Jail, Bahawalnagar.	347	505	45.21%
26.	Central Jail, Bahawalpur.	1334	1912	43.46%
27.	Sub Jail, Chakwal.	142	160	12.68%
28.	Borstal Institution and Juvenile Jail, Faisalabad.	224	146	-34.38%
<b>S.No</b>	<b>Name of Jail</b>	<b>Authorized Accommodation</b>	<b>Prison Population</b>	<b>Overcrowding Rate (%) ↑</b>
29.	Women Jail, Multan.	166	94	-43.37%
30.	Borstal Institution and Juvenile Jail, Bahawalpur.	434	91	-79.59%

	<b>Total:</b>	<b>18505</b>	<b>40709</b>	<b>120%</b>
31.	Central Jail, Sahiwal.	1565	N/A	-
32.	New District Jail, Rajanpur.	1000	N/A	-
33.	District Jail, Okara.	750	N/A	-
34.	District Jail, Hafizabad.	1000	N/A	-
35.	District Jail, Pakpattan.	750	N/A	-
36.	District Jail, Bhakkar.	750	N/A	-
37.	District Jail, Layyah.	750	N/A	-
38.	Sub Jail, Shujabad.	250	N/A	-
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>6815</b>	-	-
39.	District Jail, Khanewal.	N/A	N/A	-
40.	District Jail, Narowal.	N/A	N/A	-
41.	District Jail, Lodhran.	N/A	N/A	-
42.	High Security Prison, Sahiwal.	N/A	N/A	-

Source: [Punjab Prisons, Government of the Punjab.](#)

The acute scarcity of fundamental human necessities and resources within overcrowded prisons is an unfortunate and widespread reality. A video featured on the Al Jazeera YouTube channel on March 31, 2023, provided a firsthand look into the dire circumstances faced by inmates at Central Jail Faisalabad. Afzal Bihari, a detainee, expressed the challenges he faces in awaiting trial confinement, noting, *"Every time I go to court, the judge isn't there. If you're late, the police beat you and ask you for bribes, then they tell you to get ready. How can you get ready on time when*

*there are three washrooms for over a hundred people?"* Shafaqat Rafiq, another detainee, added his perspective, stating, *"There aren't enough bathrooms; there's no cleanliness and the food is terrible."* The statements shared by inmates from behind bars reveal the dire situation of the prison system. Their accounts depict the systemic flaws and the violation of basic human rights. Furthermore, these prisoners' stories align with the words of Rana Babar (Lawyer), who endorsed their statements by revealing, *"Prisoners don't have clean water; prisoners sit on cold floors, and if there's a toilet meant to be used by 10 people, it's being used by over a hundred. A normal person can't go inside there; it's so disgusting."* Together, these testimonies create a powerful narrative that exposes the systemic deficiencies and underscores the urgent need for comprehensive reform within prison systems.

The consequences of prison overcrowding extend beyond mere physical space constraints, particularly in the Punjab region, where health-related issues have become a significant concern. A news article published by Dawn on May 9, 2022, underscores this critical problem, revealing that *"inmates in the overcrowded 42 prisons of Punjab face a heightened risk of potential outbreaks or epidemics of infectious diseases such as AIDS, hepatitis B, and C."* The gravity of the situation is underscored by an official report, which discloses that 1,445 prisoners within these 42 jails have been diagnosed with multiple diseases. This alarming statistic highlights the vulnerability of inmates to health risks due to a scarcity of treatment facilities. The report points out that the treatment resources available are inadequate, particularly for prisoners afflicted with infectious diseases, a situation exacerbated by overcrowding and a shortage of medical professionals. The report provides specific details on the health challenges faced by inmates, noting that *"the jails currently house 272 prisoners with HIV/AIDS, 517 with hepatitis C, 137 with hepatitis B, and 460 suffering from Diabetes Mellitus."*

## 2. Causes of Overcrowding and Potential Solutions

Prison overcrowding stands as a significant issue that demands attention and effective solutions. To address this complex problem, it is essential to delve into its root causes. One of the leading factors contributing to overcrowding is the widespread prevalence of pre-trial detention. In Punjab, this issue is particularly pronounced, with the pre-trial detention rate reaching an alarming 73.5%. This rate is undoubtedly the highest in the country, with awaiting-trial inmates numbering 47,209 out of a total prison population of 64,210 (Table.1). However, this issue is closely linked to systemic problems that go beyond the scope of corrections. Delays in delivering judgments are primarily associated with deficiencies in police investigations and a weak prosecution system, as noted by journalist Assed Baig during his visit to Central Jail Faisalabad. He stated, *"Efforts are being made to improve prison standards, and authorities acknowledge the issue of overcrowding. However, they say it's not a problem of the prison system but rather the policing and justice system. It takes a considerable amount of time for trials to commence and verdicts to be handed down."* This statement emphasizes that the root cause of prison overcrowding is closely tied to shortcomings in the broader criminal justice apparatus. Lawyer Rana Babar further endorses this issue by stating that *"the poor judicial system is the primary reason for overcrowding in prisons across Pakistan."*

The data currently available (Table 3) highlights inmates charged with petty offenses, dishonored cheques and thefts. Out of a total of 9,888 individuals, a significant 9,438 are awaiting trial. Table 3 provides a more detailed perspective by outlining specific offense categories and the corresponding number of inmates who are either convicted or awaiting trial. The selection of these offenses is based on the understanding that imprisonment may not be the most effective way to

address them. These offenses often arise from financial deprivation and greed and could be better addressed through fines, property confiscation, and community service interventions.

Furthermore, this trend is also observed in cases of victimless crimes, as exemplified by the situation in Punjab prisons where 53 inmates are detained for attempted suicide under Section 325 of the Pakistan Penal Code, and 64 inmates are confined for gambling (Punjab Prisons, Government of the Punjab). The majority of these inmates are awaiting trial. This aligns with the findings of HJ Albrecht's study, which suggests that minor offenses contribute to the burden on prison systems in some countries. As a response, the study recommends that certain offenses, such as drunken or disorderly conduct and prostitution, be reclassified as administrative offenses, removing the need for prison sentences, and proposing a more rational solution (Albrecht, 2011). This dual perspective, drawn from local data and global research, underscores the urgency of reevaluating the approach to non-violent offenses within the criminal justice system.

Thus, examining and reclassifying offenses is crucial in the legal system. One of the fundamental principles of sentencing is that penalties should be commensurate with the gravity of the offense. However, this principle may need to be reconsidered to reflect changing economic, social, and cultural circumstances, as well as evolving notions of what constitutes a serious crime. This reassessment and depenalization might disproportionately affect marginalized communities based on their socio-economic status. Examples of offenses that could be depenalized include minor economic wrongdoings like petty theft, certain public order offenses, and small-scale fraud, etc. Moreover, reclassification would give courts the option to impose less severe sentences or shorter prison terms for a broader range of offenses. Additionally, depenalization and reducing penalties for certain offenses could lead to these cases being handled in lower courts, which could expedite trials or make bail more accessible (UNODC, 2013).



**Table.3 "Crime-Wise Distribution of Inmates in Punjab Prisons"**

S.No	Offences	Under Section	Under-Trial Inmates	Total Inmates
1.	Miscellaneous	N/A	1951	1983
2.	Theft	379/380/381/381A/401/411/457/454 (PPC)	5490	5799
3.	Dishonestly (Stolen property)	411/412/413/414 (PPC)	499	531
4.	Bogus/Bouncing of Cheque	489-F (PPC)	1093	1153
5.	Offences Relating to Electricity	462I (PPC)	405	422
<b>Total:</b>			<b>9438</b>	<b>9888</b>

**Source:** [Punjab Prisons, Government of the Punjab \(Crime Wise Population | Punjab Prisons, 2023\)](#)

The reformation of bail procedures holds the potential for a substantial positive impact on the reduction of prison overcrowding in Punjab province. A notable drawback in the existing practice is the prioritization of equality over equity when considering an individual's eligibility for bail. Despite this, the Code of Criminal Procedure 1898, specifically in section 498, explicitly emphasizes the power to direct admission to bail or reduction of bail. The stipulation is clear: *the amount of every bond executed under this chapter should be reasonable, taking into account the circumstances of the case, and should not be excessive*. Imposing bail amounts beyond the financial reach of prisoners can lead to prolonged detention.

Without a doubt, laws in some places might insist on holding people in jail before their trial for certain types of crimes. However, this goes against global rules that clearly state we must do this in very special cases. Sometimes, the law doesn't offer other options instead of putting people behind bars before their trial. When there are other choices, they often involve giving money as a

promise (like bail). But this makes it hard for indigent people because they might not have enough fortune to do this. For example, in Malawi, many people end up in jail just because they can't pay or promise anything for bail. Similarly, in South Africa, around 40% of people waiting for their trial are kept in jail because they cannot even afford a small amount of 7\$ (US Dollar) for bail, which means they lose their freedom not because of something related to their case but because they are impoverished (UNODC, 2013).

Unavoidably, the actual practice in Pakistan diverges from the law, as highlighted by anecdotal evidence shared by lawyer Imran Qamar during an interview with Human Rights Watch in June 2022. He revealed a case involving a falsely accused rickshaw driver, stating, *"It took a year for the driver to be granted bail, and during this period, the legal proceedings had entirely exhausted his meager financial resources. The bail set by the judge amounted to PKR 500,000 (US\$2,320), significantly surpassing the driver's monthly income of PKR 20,000 (\$93)."* This real-life example starkly underscores the urgent need for bail reforms to ensure fair and accessible justice, preventing undue hardship and prolonged incarceration (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Moreover, it is critical to recognize as Prison Fellowship International asserts that 'millions of prisoners globally endure crowded and inhumane conditions while awaiting trial. Frequently, the duration of their pre-trial detention exceeds the potential maximum sentence they might face if found guilty.' Therefore, reforms on bail provisions with explicit directions for the implementation would be the most potential remedy to evacuate certain portions of prison overcrowding in Punjab.

Correspondently, a few tactics need to be furnished or incorporated; likewise, through a legality assessment of detention, a monitoring system can be set up, perhaps involving judges conducting reviews of prisoners' legal status. This aims to identify individuals eligible for release on bail, those

who've surpassed pre-trial detention time limits, those who've finished their sentences but remain incarcerated, and those suitable for non-prison punishments instead of imprisonment. Also, prison administrations should establish and maintain updated prisoner file management systems in line with internationally accepted standards. It's increasingly important for both prison administrations and courts to have effective ways of exchanging information, especially regarding pre-trial detainees. Regular monitoring of these files should be in place to facilitate the timely transportation of detainees to court on trial dates or to alert courts about any extended stays in prisons. Furthermore, it's essential to ensure that prisoners are transported to court on time and released immediately at the end of their sentences rather than prolonged release after completing their sentences (UNODC, 2013).

## **Conclusion**

In a nutshell, this study uncovers the critical issue of prison overcrowding in Punjab Province, Pakistan, highlighting its profound implications and advocating essential solutions. With Punjab's prisons operating at an alarming 147% overcapacity, the statistical concern transforms into a pressing human rights issue, marked by heightened health risks, potential disease outbreaks, and severe violations of fundamental human rights. Furthermore, this study proposes potential solutions, emphasizing the reform of pre-trial detention practices and the reclassification of non-violent offenses to alleviate overcrowding. By ensuring fairness in bail procedures and promoting alternative measures over imprisonment, the criminal justice system can address the root causes of overcrowding, fostering a more rational, humane, and effective response to the complex challenges within Punjab's prisons. Implementation of these recommendations necessitates collaborative efforts involving legal authorities, policymakers, and civil society to bring about meaningful and lasting change in Punjab's criminal justice landscape.

The study's findings make a minor but meaningful contribution to promoting the reformation of the prison system in Punjab, which opens avenues for numerous future research endeavors focusing on the multifaceted issue of prison overcrowding.

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