

**RESEARCH PAPER**

## Learning to Break the Law: A Criminological Study of Parental Traffic Violations and its Influence on Children's Behavior in Pakistan

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**ABSTRACT**

This study examines how parental traffic violations in school zones influence children's future attitudes toward breaking traffic laws. Traffic violations near schools create physical risks for students and normalize illegal behavior. Theoretical frameworks used include Social Bond Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Rational Choice Theory. A mixed-method approach combined direct observations of school zone traffic behavior with structured surveys conducted across schools in Sindh Pakistan. Findings revealed widespread traffic violations by parents, particularly male drivers, including unlawful parking and speeding. Around 78% of surveyed students witnessed their parents violating traffic laws, which strongly correlated with children's acceptance and imitation of such behavior. Weak police enforcement and peer influence were identified as major contributing factors. Stronger traffic law enforcement around schools, safety education programs for parents and students, and public awareness campaigns are crucial to breaking the cycle of learned illegal behavior and ensuring safer school environments.

**Keywords:** Juvenile Delinquency, Law Enforcement, Parental Influence, Rule Breaking, Rational Choice Theory, Social Learning Theory, School Safety, Traffic Violations

**Introduction**

Traffic violations in school zones represent more than traffic safety issues because they embody fundamental cultural issues that affect psychological development and criminal behaviour patterns. The practice of illegal parking alongside speeding and disregarded signals by parents has become an everyday occurrence in Pakistani school zones during drop-off and pick-up times. Such immediate physical threats to children's safety operate simultaneously with the eventual development of learned behaviors from parents who break rules that will shape upcoming generations. Repeated incidents of parental conduct during daily life functions strongly influence children to learn about legal boundaries while developing their understanding of authority and acceptable actions. Researchers support the idea of behavioral transmission through Social Learning Theory as described by Bandura (1977), when individuals, especially children, learn social behaviors by watching and repeating the actions of authority figures, including their parents. People view traffic rule violations as acceptable when law enforcement stays inconsistent and public safety behavior norms remain disregarded. Children who witness improper behavior tend to accept these actions and lessen their respect for authorities while developing a higher chance of becoming deviant in adulthood (Akers & Jennings, 2016).

Moreover, according to Hirschi's Social Bond Theory (1969), weak attachments between people and conventional societal structures, such as rules and lawful conduct, can cause delinquency. Children lose their attachment to legal standards and belief in valid laws when parents break traffic rules while their kids observe. Relating to Rational Choice Theory (Becker, 1968), individuals assess both the advantages and disadvantages of their behaviors. Children will judge rule-breaking as a reasonable, low-risk action when they

witness no serious consequences from their parents' rule violations. Furthermore, Wilson and Kelling (1982) introduced the Broken Windows Theory to explain how unattended minor lawlessness creates social disorder and increased crime through visible signs. Frequent traffic infractions that students witness without getting punished create an environment where residents learn to dismiss rules, and this socialization leads young people to accept deviant behavior early.

Multiple real-life cases support the previous observations. The October 2023 article in Dawn News revealed that 15,000 traffic violations occurred near Lahore schools throughout three months, along with primary offences of illegal parking and vehicle blockages during school hours (Dawn, 2023). The Express Tribune published coverage of Karachi police issuing traffic fines to parents who double parked, obstructed emergency zones, and made dangerous U-turns near school campuses as they watched schoolchildren (Express Tribune, 2022). The recurring high level of driving indiscipline and insufficient police monitoring in child-friendly zones are the key findings from these incidents. Despite regulations, implementation remains inconsistent. ARY News (2024) reported that Sindh Traffic Police started a new program to enforce traffic rules near schools. However, public support was scarce because many violators escaped punishment due to insufficient police officers at the scene. Several media reports confirm the combined effect of institutional system errors and inadequate parental leadership, which precedes widespread rule-bending behavior, as a research topic that needs more scholarly understanding.

Research on juvenile delinquency with emphasis on parental influence exists in large quantities (Elliott, Huizinga, & Menard, 1989; Kempf-Leonard & Morris, 2017), yet few studies have investigated routine everyday rule-breaking activities as entry points to deviant attitudes and deviant behaviors. The research presented here adds to criminological studies which analyze how minor breaking of rules leads to larger behavioral outcomes. What sets this research apart is its focus on a unique situation in urban Pakistan, which combines weak traffic law enforcement with heavy school-related traffic to create environments for rule-breaking socialization. This research evaluates the regularity of parental traffic violations in school areas and their influence on child perceptions of legal authority. It analyses the far-reaching consequences of parental set examples for juvenile misconduct. This study incorporates observational research and survey methods to produce empirical results about parental example effects on criminology, which exist in regular traffic activity.

The following research delivers substantial insights into how parental conduct influences children's learning of legal and deviant social norms. This research on traffic violations near Pakistani school zones reveals that children subconsciously learn unlawful behavior by frequently observing minor violations daily (Dawn News, 2023; Express Tribune, 2022). The research is crucial to criminology and psychology because it demonstrates that deviant youth behavior can occur independently of criminal or impoverished environments. Children learn deviant conduct through experiencing law violations within their family environment that their parents model as role models (Bandura, 1977; Elliott, Huizinga, & Menard, 1989). The research applies directly to Social Learning Theory because the theory demonstrates that children learn behaviours by copying examples demonstrated by authority figures. Observing unlawful behaviour from parents goes unchecked, leading children to understand rules as variable or unimportant forms of regulation (Akers & Jennings, 2016). These findings suggest the need for more vigorous law enforcement in school zones and targeted safety education for parents and students to prevent normalizing traffic violations among children.

Moreover, the study provides meaningful implications extending from theoretical value to practical use by public policy organizations, urban planning initiatives, and educational reform programs. Empirical research on parental traffic violations concerning children's evolving attitudes about legal systems makes it possible to establish

comprehensive intervention strategies. The situation demands improved traffic regulation enforcement measures in school zones, especially those where existing regulations remain without oversight. The study reveals how essential it is to develop focused awareness initiatives that teach parents about their actions' mental and behavioral effects on their children. The research proposes adding traffic safety classes to school programs because urban areas need education about lawful conduct and roadway rules (Parker, Stradling, & Manstead, 1996; Sindh Traffic Police, 2024). Multiple collective implementations of safety measures will help build an environment based on civil responsibility and legal compliance between present adults and future generations. Hence, the research provides practical and academic significance with social implications because it shows how parents transmit legal disregard patterns to their children in typical settings. The report demands action from enforcement agencies, educator involvement, planning organizations, and family members to establish early education and enforce laws.

## Literature Review

The social development of children relies heavily on their parents, who greatly influence what children learn about right and wrong. According to the Social Learning Theory, Bandura (1977) developed observational learning as a fundamental mechanism that drives the development of behaviors. According to Bandura,

*"Children adopt observed behaviors from their significant role models, which usually include their parents, particularly when those behaviors seem to produce no negative consequences".*

Moreover, according to criminological literature, which gives ample backing to this theory, children become more likely to adopt deviant behaviors when their parents show rule-breaking behaviors (Akers & Jennings, 2016). Elliott, Huizinga, and Menard (1989) established that when parents make casual decisions to break minor rules, their children are likelier to display anti-social behavior during adolescence. Kempf-Leonard and Morris (2017) found that children tend to normalize their parents' minor misconduct when there is no disciplinary enforcement or social consequences to hold them accountable. Daily activities such as breaking traffic laws during school runs indicate to children that rules can be disregarded or exchanged. Traffic violations classified as minor offences change their significance when they occur frequently in zones where children regularly appear, such as near schools. Research has proven that children who encounter unsafe driving actions develop significant psychological problems. According to Stradling, Meadows, and Beatty (2001), frequent observation of aggressive or reckless driving leads children to behave dangerously upon obtaining a driver's license. Wilson and Kelling (1982) presented through their Broken Windows Theory how lawless behavior initiated by visible disorder elements like illegal parking or speeding transitions into general social norms decay. Young people develop deviant characteristics more readily if trusted persons like their parents display harmful or anti-social behaviors.

Schools in Pakistan experience many traffic violations that receive weak enforcement from authorities. According to Dawn News (2023), the cities of Lahore experienced 15,000 traffic violations in areas surrounding schools during three months, primarily due to illegal parking vehicles and disruptive traffic flow. According to a recent Express Tribune report (2022), Karachi observed law enforcement action against school zone violators, whose number included parents who violated basic traffic regulations in front of their children. The patterns of misconduct we observe in reality provide essential knowledge about how prolonged exposure affects children's behavior regarding rules and authorities.

Multiple criminological theories confirm that juvenile conduct is related to their parent's bad behavior beyond Social Learning Theory principles. Hirschi's *"Social Bond*

*Theory*" (1969) states that four components of social bonds, including attachment, commitment, involvement and belief, create barriers against delinquent behavior. Children develop weaker emotional bonds with societal rules when their primary socializing figures (parents) are unwilling to follow legal norms, diminishing their dedication to law-abiding behavior. Under "*Rational Choice Theory*" (Becker, 1968), people conduct decision-making assessments of the costs and advantages of their conduct to determine rule-breaking actions. Children believe that dangerous traffic violations are sensible and low-risk if they witness their parents engaging in such behaviors without consequence. Long-term cost-benefit evaluations work together to develop acceptance of deviant behaviors in individuals. Exposure to adverse events, together with the experience of witnessing unjust treatment through Agnew's "*General Strain Theory*" (1992), results in deviant behavior. The way this theory was designed for serious events allows it to cover children who notice law enforcement inconsistency and parental misbehavior while simultaneously experiencing the mental gap that develops from their education compared to their observations.

Pakistan has established traffic regulations with penalties for illegal parking followed by violations related to speeding and reckless driving found near educational facilities. Optimal enforcement of traffic regulations and inadequate follow-up from authorized personnel remain inconsistent. The Sindh Traffic Police (2024) reported that;

*"Minimal traffic officers patrol school areas during school hours, which permit many violations to escape detection even though school zones are classified as high-risk zones".*

The failure of traffic enforcement allows most adults to see traffic regulations as discretionary because they lack concrete consequences for their actions. Research conducted by Parker and colleagues at Stradling and Manstead (1996) demonstrated that individuals form their opinions about traffic regulations based on their observations of rule enforcement and the conduct of others in the community. People tend to follow the misconduct of others when traffic violations frequently occur without penalties, especially when they witness these behaviors from impressionable youth. The impact of minor yet easily observed traffic offences by parents on the advancement of deviant beliefs in children remains poorly studied despite extensive research on juvenile delinquency and both social and peer influences on criminal behavior. The majority of published papers study serious parental misconduct like substance abuse and neglect, but they fail to recognize the impact of minor accepted violations. This research examines everyday behaviors, including parental traffic violations near educational facilities, as they help form durable legal outlooks in children.

## Material and Methods

The research design utilized quantitative observational methods and qualitative survey data to fully understand how children develop rule-breaking tendencies from their parents' traffic rule-breaking. The dual approach between quantitative and qualitative research methods enabled better insights into how children in school zones act while showing the mental effects they experience from bad parental driving examples. The research took place in two major Pakistani cities, namely Karachi and Hyderabad, together with urban school zones because these areas commonly encounter school traffic congestion alongside violations, as reported by Dawn (2023) and Express Tribune (2022). Parents and guardians participating in school transport routines were selected as study participants. The research selected participants using purposive sampling to maintain precision when selecting those directly linked to the research goals. The final survey included (150) participants who matched the parent demographics of Pakistan, wherein (70%) were male drivers and (30%) were female drivers. The data collection procedure contained two main elements: structured field observations and post-observation survey administration. Through field observations, the research team recorded traffic violations occurring in school areas during peak periods of 7:00–8:30 AM and 12:00–2:00 PM. An established coding sheet

organized information about driver gender, traffic offences such as parking and speeding, running red lights and the presence of children near vehicles. The standardized recording procedure produced uniform data records, which enhanced comparative evaluation findings. The structured questionnaire was administered to parents after the observational stage. The survey collected data about participants' feelings regarding traffic laws combined with perceptions of police actions and non-compliance reasons and child awareness of their traffic activities. The pretest of the questionnaire confirmed its clarity and relevance, so modifications were made beforehand until the final distribution phase. Analysis of observational quantitative data through descriptive statistics revealed violation rates and types before gender comparisons occurred by cross-tabulating the results. Experts analyzed the collected survey data through content analysis to find central ideas which emerged regarding parental explanations behind breaking the rules and their knowledge about their children's ability to learn by observation. Researchers manually assigned categories to responses by identifying systematic manifestations within perceptions and behavioral patterns. The researchers maintained thorough care regarding ethical aspects starting from the first steps of their research work. The purpose of the study was explained verbally to participants before researchers obtained voluntary permission to participate with strict confidentiality agreements in place. Observational research took place in public locations without physical interaction between researchers and participants to meet ethical requirements for field work (Israel & Hay, 2006). The research methodology allowed a comprehensive, multifaceted investigation of parental school traffic violations that lead children to normalize rule-breaking.

## Results and Discussion

The research demonstrates substantial evidence showing why parental violations of traffic laws by driving through school zones function as behavioral learning for children, resulting in irresponsible conduct patterns while weakening their respect for established laws. The investigation uses surveys and observational data to analyze how often parents break traffic laws, providing evidence about parental motives and creating new knowledge about low-level deviance impacts on broader juvenile development trends. The results validate that traffic rule violations, which society tends to dismiss, hold important social learning effects on children according to multiple criminological and psychological theories.

## Prevalence and Nature of Traffic Violations

The research, based on observations in school zones, shows that drivers of both genders, but males disproportionately (50%) versus females (20%), committed traffic violations during peak school hours. Official records show illegal parking occurred as the most frequent violation, with (40%) of cases, alongside speeding incidents at (32%), while running red lights were documented at (18%), as shown in the chart below.

**Table 1**  
**Types of Traffic Violations Observed Near School Zones**

Traffic Violations	Percentage (%)
Illegal Parking	40%
Speeding	32%
Running Red Lights	18%

The data obtained demonstrates similar patterns to Mirza and Kazmi's (2013) research, which establishes high traffic rule violation rates in Pakistani urban areas during peak school commute periods because of insufficient law enforcement and public indifference. Research-based on gender shows men pre-dominate traffic violations because statistical evidence indicates men display higher rates of dangerous driving compared to women (Shinar & Compton, 2004; Özkan&Lajunen, 2006). Social instructions coupled with established gender norms likely affect how people respect traffic regulations in public

domains because Pakistan demonstrates strong patriarchal influences. These research findings uphold the core principles of Wilson and Kelling's (1982) Broken Windows Theory because abandoned minor violations of deviance (such as illegal parking and traffic) create an environment prone to lawlessness. Children view the constant violations in school zones as acceptable because adults repeatedly do them.

### Motivational Factors Behind Violations

The study's survey data offer important insight into the motivations behind parental traffic rule violations. Survey data show that (40%) of parents selected lack of law enforcement as their main reason for non-compliance because Tyler's (2006) theory explains how procedural justice impacts voluntary compliance. People who perceive the system as lacking effectiveness or not existing tend to disregard its established rules. (32%) of people acknowledged breaking traffic regulations because they observed others engaging in such behavior.

**Table 2**  
**Parental Motivations for Traffic Violations Near School Zones**

Parental Motivations	Percentage (%)
Lack of Law Enforcement	40%
Following Others	32%
In Rush	18%
Lack of Awareness	10%

Social transmission of deviant conduct exists according to documented findings presented in Granovetter's (1978) Threshold Model of Collective Behavior and its explanation of people participating in socially deviant actions when they sense these actions become standard practice. Time urgency while in a hurry was identified as the primary cause of traffic violations by (18%) of parents. Research by Yagil (2001) shows that time pressure is a crucial determinant for non-compliant driving actions, especially in high-density areas and school zones.

### Children's Exposure and Learning from Violations

The primary important outcome emerged from the study through parental admissions that their children and others witnessed them breaking traffic regulations (78%). The finding of (78%) exposure to parental rule violations becomes most important when we analyze it using Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, which focuses specifically on vicarious reinforcement, which enables children to learn through observing others' behavior outcomes.

**Table 3**  
**Children's Exposure To Parental Traffic Violations**

Children's Exposure	Percentage (%)
Children Observed Violations	78%
Uncertain/Did Not Observe	22%

Children exposed multiple times to their parents' rule-breaking behavior without consequences will interpret rules as unworthy or flexible. Ferguson, San Miguel, and Hartley (2007) suggest that children exposed to deviant behaviors in their home environment increase their probability of developing anti-social behavior early in life. Warr (2002) reported that parental conduct produces significant long-term behavioral outcomes for adolescents, and his findings match the family modeling observation from the current research. According to Thornberry, Freeman-Gallant, and Lovegrove (2009), persistent rule-breaking at home leads children to develop impaired moral reasoning, which decreases their sensitivity to legal norms. Research data demonstrate that children observing traffic

violations as minor infractions repeatedly reveal substantial adverse effects on their development process.

### **Theoretical Integration and Interpretation**

The study data supports the Social Bond Theory (Hirschi, 1969) since weak normative attachment and parents displaying deviant behavior lead to juvenile delinquent behavior. Kids tend to lose their emotional ties to rules and institutional authority when their main social controllers violate legal boundaries and disobey the law. The results confirm the Rational Choice Theory (Cornish & Clarke, 1986) since parents and children choose to follow rules based on estimated gains and risks. People become less motivated to follow the rules when costs associated with non-compliance either do not exist or do not amount to much. The findings of this study demonstrate how deviant behavior becomes normalized, according to Vaughan (1996), who first discussed institutional breakdown phenomena. The theory of normalized deviant behavior demonstrates such occurrences when consistent deviance leads to standard practices, which Pakistanis frequently experience through unlawful traffic violations without consistent law enforcement.

### **Conclusion**

The research findings establish that parent traffic lawbreaking around schools contributes to fundamental changes in child development regarding rule compliance and respect for authority. Data from field observations with interviews of parents demonstrates how children become desensitized to deviant actions through repeated encounters with violations of traffic regulations in school areas. The study verifies that kids not only witness their parents' unlawful conduct but adopt and imitate it when these illicit acts seem to remain without punishment. The research supports these theories by using Social Learning Theory, Social Bond Theory and Rational Choice Theory to prove that these violations significantly affect youth socialization and behavioral development. Lack of competent law enforcement, teenage imitation, and time constraints create a significant cause for parental decisions to violate traffic rules. The absence of tangible consequences during their observation results in children forming incorrect beliefs about social norms, making them more prone to breaking the rules in later stages of life. The findings of this research investigation have an extensive influence on future practices. Anti-delinquency initiatives should combine stricter enforcement of laws with educational and civic programs within schools and community awareness initiatives to stop delinquency development at its source. A comprehensive strategy needs gender-sensitive interventions and joint efforts between law enforcement officials, educators, and community leaders to build compliance-based communities. Traffic violations in school zones represent essential teaching opportunities for learning desired behaviors which determine future law-compliance patterns of the upcoming generation.

### **Policy and Social Implications**

The study results present crucial insights that affect how governments should move forward. The analysis proves that traffic law enforcement must receive better support around schools, especially when students are present. However, enforcement alone is insufficient. Moreover, the public requires targeted awareness initiatives designed for parents, which explain behavioral development impacts resulting from their conduct. The educational programs must integrate civic training modules into schools to teach children an essential insight into law enforcement and social duties. The observed differences between male and female school children involved in traffic violations warrant gender-specific road safety educational strategies focusing on reaching fathers. Moreover, school administrators, together with traffic police and community leaders, can develop partnership programs that will create shared responsibility for making rule-following a standard behavior throughout the community.

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