

THE INFLUENCE OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND LACK OF LEGAL INCOME ON THE INCREASE IN PROPERTY CRIME

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the influence of unemployment and lack of legal income on the increase in property crime through a literature review method. Unemployment and lack of legal income are two economic and social factors that contribute significantly to individuals committing property crimes, such as theft, robbery, and embezzlement. The literature review shows that unemployment creates strong economic and social pressures, while the absence of legal income narrows opportunities to earn a legitimate income, thereby encouraging criminal acts as an alternative. This study concludes that reducing unemployment and increasing access to legal income through effective economic and social policies are essential to reducing property crime rates and improving community welfare.

Keywords: unemployment, lack of legal income, property crime, criminality, literature review.

Introduction

Unemployment is a complex social and economic problem that has a widespread impact on society. High unemployment rates not only affect individual economic welfare, but also have the potential to cause various negative effects on the social order (Freeman, 1996). In this context, unemployment is one of the triggers for various forms of crime, particularly property crime. Property crime, which includes theft, robbery, embezzlement, and destruction of property, is often associated with difficult economic situations. Therefore, a deep understanding of the relationship between unemployment and the increase in property crime is very important as a basis for effective social and economic policy-making (Hjalmarsson & Lochner, 2012).

In addition to unemployment, the absence of legal income or income obtained through official channels is another factor that is equally important to examine in relation to property crime. When a person does not have access to or the opportunity to earn a legal income, it is likely that they will seek other alternatives to meet their daily needs (Ajimotokin et al., 2015). In many cases, these alternatives may involve income obtained from illegal activities.

This lack of legal income is one of the factors that drives a person to commit criminal acts, particularly property crime, in order to obtain an alternative source of livelihood (Oliver, 2002). Property crime itself is a form of crime that occurs quite frequently in various countries, and this problem has a significant impact not only on the direct victims, but also disrupts the security and order of society as a whole.

Property crime is considered an indicator of social instability, which often stems from economic factors such as poverty and unemployment (Dulkiah, 2020). Therefore, examining factors such as unemployment and the absence of legal income in relation to property crime is important in order to understand the underlying causes of this criminal phenomenon.

Theoretically, there are several approaches that attempt to explain the relationship between a person's economic condition and their tendency to commit crimes. Strain theory, for example, states that the mismatch between expected social goals and the legitimate means available to achieve them can cause pressure that triggers deviant behaviour such as crime. In this context, unemployment and the absence of legal income are variables that cause strong social and economic strain, prompting individuals to commit property crime as a way out of this pressure (Peterson & Greene, 2016).

Previous studies have also shown a positive correlation between unemployment rates and incidents of property crime. Areas with high unemployment rates tend to experience higher crime rates, especially in the category of property crime. However, a scientific explanation of the mechanism behind this relationship still requires further study, particularly in relation to how unemployed individuals divert their economic and social needs through crime.

Theoretical and empirical studies will provide a comprehensive picture of the causes and effects of this phenomenon (Christiani et al., 2012). The absence of legal income is a phenomenon that is also closely related to criminality, especially for certain groups who face limited access to formal employment and an unequal income distribution system.

In this situation, some people choose to seek income through illegal means, which leads to an increase in criminal activity, including property crime. The absence of legal income is not only influenced by economic factors, but also by social and structural factors such as discrimination, lack of skills, or biased economic policies (Mardiatmoko, 2020).

In this study, it is also important to analyse in detail the types of property crimes that occur as a result of unemployment and the absence of legal income. Property crimes can take various forms and modes of operation, ranging from simple theft to violent robbery.

Understanding the variety of these crimes will help in analysing the relationship between economic conditions and criminal behaviour, as well as in formulating targeted

prevention strategies. The social impact of the increase in property crime cases is not only felt by individual victims, but also has implications for the wider social and economic environment.

The insecurity that arises from high rates of property crime can undermine public trust in law enforcement and the social system in general. In addition, the economic losses suffered by victims can also worsen the economic conditions of the victims' families, creating a cycle of poverty and crime (Rahmi & Roza Adry, 2018).

In the socio-economic context of Indonesia, unemployment and the lack of legal income are critical issues that are relevant to the existing social reality. Given the significant number of unemployed people and the high level of income inequality, understanding the influence of these two factors on property crime is very important in order to address the challenges of law enforcement and equitable social development (Rahmalia et al., 2019). Through this literature review, it is hoped that a strong conceptual framework can be found as a basis for further research and public policy.

Finally, it is important to emphasise that unemployment and the absence of legal income are not the only factors that cause property crime, but rather part of a more complex system involving many social, economic, and cultural dimensions. Therefore, this study is expected to open up new insights and become the basis for broader interdisciplinary research in comprehensively exploring the issues of crime and social injustice.

Research Methodology

The research method used in this study is a literature review, which aims to collect, analyse, and synthesise various relevant literature sources regarding the influence of unemployment and the absence of legal income on the increase in property crime. This study utilised books, scientific journals, articles, research reports, and official documents that discussed the relationship between socio-economic conditions and crime, particularly in the context of property crime (Eliyah & Aslan, 2025). The analysis was conducted qualitatively by identifying patterns, findings, and theories that support the understanding of the two main variables, thereby providing a comprehensive picture of the mechanisms and impacts that occur, as well as a basis for further policy development and research (Page et al., 2021).

Results and Discussion

The Effect of Unemployment on the Increase in Property Crime

Unemployment is a socio-economic condition that affects many aspects of society, including the potential for crime. Theoretically, unemployment describes the inability of an individual or group of individuals to obtain legal and continuous employment.

This condition creates economic pressure that forces individuals to seek alternative ways to meet their daily needs, and in some cases, encourages them to commit crimes, particularly property crimes such as theft and robbery (Edwart & Azhar, 2019). Several empirical studies show that there is a positive and significant relationship between unemployment rates and property crime rates.

Studies by Witt et al. (1999) and Edmark (2005) suggest that rising unemployment increases the risk and incidence of property crime. This is because unemployment provides a strong economic and psychological incentive for individuals to commit criminal acts in an attempt to meet needs that cannot be met legally.

Following the well-known strain theory in criminology, individuals who experience social pressure and a mismatch between their life goals and the legitimate means of achieving them, such as unemployment, will be more prone to choosing a criminal path. Prolonged unemployment causes frustration that can trigger risky behaviour, including committing crimes as an alternative means of obtaining income (Fajri & Rizki, 2019).

Statistical data in several regions show a clear correlation between unemployment rates and the frequency of property crimes. For example, in Indonesia, provinces with high unemployment rates tend to have more cases of property crimes. This shows that economic instability caused by unemployment can trigger criminal behaviour that targets other people's property (Zaluchu, 2021).

Unemployment also causes a decline in social attachment and a loss of productive roles in society, making individuals vulnerable to increased alienation and feelings of being unappreciated. This social alienation is often the root cause of various criminal behaviours, especially property crimes committed by individuals or groups who are trying to meet their economic needs illegally (Nadilla & Farlian, 2018).

Psychologically, unemployment causes stress and uncertainty about the future, which can lead to feelings of despair. This situation encourages some individuals to act recklessly and commit property crimes as a shortcut to finding a source of income, despite the high legal and social risks (Dari & Asnidar, 2022). Age and education are also correlated with the relationship between unemployment and property crime. Unemployed individuals of productive age with low levels of education are more prone to committing these crimes than those who are educated and have access to work. The lack of job opportunities for young people and low skill levels are factors that reinforce the impact of unemployment on property crime (Todotua, 2016).

From an economic perspective, unemployment is often associated with poverty, which exacerbates social conditions in society. Poverty caused by unemployment increases the likelihood of individuals committing crimes to meet their basic needs, particularly crimes related to robbery, theft, or receiving stolen goods (Ramadhan, 2016).

Research using panel data in several regions in Indonesia shows that when unemployment rates decline, there is a significant decrease in property crime rates, which can reach a decline of up to 40 per cent. This reinforces the hypothesis that unemployment is one of the main factors influencing this type of crime (Mardinsyah & Sukartini, 2020).

Unemployment not only affects individuals but also has an impact on the broader social structure. High unemployment can weaken social bonds and community solidarity, creating greater opportunities for criminal behaviour to flourish, including in the form of property crime that harms the wider community economically (Ramadhan, 2016).

Unemployment also affects family and community dynamics. The economic pressure experienced by unemployed family members can trigger internal conflicts and create an unfavourable environment, which can indirectly increase the likelihood of family members, especially young people, becoming involved in criminal activities (Chor & Md. Darit, 2015).

There is also a rational choice theory approach which states that unemployed individuals commit property crimes because they rationally assess that the benefits obtained (income from crime) are greater than the risks they must face. Unemployment affects this calculation, making criminal acts appear to be an attractive alternative (Raphael & Winter-Ebmer, 2001).

The government and law enforcement agencies need to understand that unemployment cannot be viewed solely as an economic problem, but also as a social problem that has direct implications for security and social order. Efforts to tackle unemployment will simultaneously reduce the potential for an increase in property crime (Effendi & Julia, 2020).

Effective prevention strategies must involve increasing employment opportunities and skills training programmes to improve the employability of the unemployed. Creating jobs and providing training can reduce the economic and social pressures that trigger property crime. In addition to economic interventions, it is also important to develop social guidance programmes for vulnerable groups of unemployed people so that they maintain a sense of social belonging and positive expectations. This can reduce the despair and psychological pressure that trigger criminal acts (Mariadas et al., 2025).

Thus, unemployment plays a significant role in driving an increase in property crime through economic, social, and psychological pressure mechanisms. Reducing unemployment is key to reducing property crime and improving the socio-economic quality of life of the community.

The Effect of Lack of Legal Income on the Increase in Property Crime

The effect of the absence of legal income on the increase in property crime is a phenomenon that is highly relevant to examine in the current social and economic context. When individuals do not have access or opportunities to earn a legitimate and legal income, the urge to seek alternative sources of income, which are often illegal, will increase. This condition has the potential to encourage various forms of property crime such as theft, robbery, and fraud, which ultimately cause significant economic and social losses (Burt, 2005).

The absence of legal income is not only related to unemployment rates, but also reflects conditions in which individuals are unable to earn a legitimate income due to various factors, such as a lack of access to adequate education and training, discrimination in the labour market, and imbalances in the economic structure. This creates space for individuals to seek income through illegal means as a way out of the economic pressures they face (Rahman & Prasetyo, 2018).

Theoretically, the absence of legal income can be understood through the concepts of social strain and anomie theory proposed by criminologists such as Robert Merton and Emile Durkheim. This theory explains that the mismatch between economic goals and the legal means available to achieve them can create social pressure that pushes individuals towards criminal behaviour as an alternative (Becker, 2005).

In this context, criminal behaviour such as property crime becomes one of the solutions chosen when legitimate sources of income cannot be obtained. Individuals experience pressure and frustration due to their inability to meet the basic needs of their families and live decently, thus encouraging them to take the risk of committing criminal acts to obtain alternative income (Bender & Theodossiou, 2016).

Many empirical studies show that the absence of legal income contributes to an increase in crime rates, particularly in the category of property crime. This condition occurs because of an imbalance in income distribution, which causes some people to be in a very difficult economic situation and vulnerable to committing criminal acts as an economic solution (Durrant & Ward, 2015).

In some cases, property crimes such as theft and robbery are committed not only to meet urgent economic needs, but also as a strategy for survival in a social environment full of pressure and limitations. The absence of legal income here serves as a social factor that exacerbates economic and social instability in society (Erdal, 2003). In addition, the absence of legal income also increases the opportunity for the emergence of systematic and organised crime networks, in which perpetrators of property crime can engage in larger illegal economic activities. This exacerbates the social and economic impact of such crimes, given the broader involvement in illegal systems (Becker, 2005).

It is also important to understand that the absence of legal income does not occur in a vacuum, but is influenced by structural factors such as employment policies,

unequal education systems, and social injustice. These factors limit legal employment opportunities for some people, thereby increasing the risk of criminal acts in order to earn a living (van Velthoven & van Wijck, 2016).

Government intervention in providing adequate employment and skills training programmes is essential to reduce the absence of legal income. If access to legal employment is expanded and individual capacity is enhanced, their potential for involvement in property crime can be minimised (Khairani & Ariesa, 2019).

On the other hand, social programmes aimed at improving welfare and legal income security also play an important role in preventing crime. Programmes such as social protection, subsidies, and economic incentives can reduce the economic pressures that drive individuals to turn to illegal sources of income (Purwanti & Widyaningsih, 2019).

Case studies from various countries show that reducing the lack of legal income by increasing access to work and strengthening the informal economic system has a positive impact on reducing property crime rates. This shows that legal economic factors are very important in creating social stability and reducing criminal behaviour (Hjalmarsson & Lochner, 2012).

A multidimensional approach is essential in addressing this issue, because only by understanding not only the economic aspects, but also the social and psychological aspects of the absence of legal income, can policies be made that are more targeted and effective in reducing property crime. The absence of legal income is also closely related to the social stigma and marginalisation experienced by certain groups in society.

This marginalisation increases the likelihood of them becoming trapped in a cycle of crime, given their limited opportunities and social support (Sinaga et al., 2025). Psychologically, the economic pressure caused by the absence of legal income leads to feelings of poverty, low self-esteem and despair. These feelings can increase the tendency to commit crimes as a way of fighting back against these pressures, while also seeking social recognition or a new status within certain groups (Oliver, 2002). Furthermore, the absence of legal income creates unstable social conditions, where tensions between different social groups increase.

This condition worsens social dynamics and creates an environment conducive to the spread of property crime (Freeman, 1996).

Thus, it is important for policymakers and researchers to focus on efforts to increase legal employment opportunities, improve the income distribution system, and strengthen the social protection system as effective strategies to address the problem of lack of legal income and its impact on the increase in property crime.

In conclusion, the lack of legal income is a key factor that drives the increase in property crime through various social, economic, and psychological mechanisms.

Efforts to reduce the lack of legal income must be an integral part of crime prevention strategies to create a safer and more prosperous society.

Conclusion

Unemployment and the lack of legal income are two major factors that significantly influence the increase in property crime. Unemployment creates economic and social pressures that drive individuals to seek alternative sources of income, which in many cases leads to criminal acts such as theft and robbery. Prolonged unemployment not only causes frustration and psychological stress, but also weakens social bonds, thereby increasing the risk of involvement in property crime as a way out of life's pressures.

Meanwhile, the absence of legal income creates conditions in which individuals have no legal means of earning a living, prompting them to engage in illegal economic activities to meet their basic needs. Unequal access to education, discrimination in the labour market, and an unequal socio-economic system are structural factors that exacerbate this phenomenon.

The combination of social, economic, and psychological pressures resulting from the absence of legal income increases the likelihood of property crime, while also creating space for systematic and organised criminal networks. Overall, unemployment and the absence of legal income cannot be separated from broader social and economic dynamics in society.

Efforts to reduce property crime must involve comprehensive strategies that focus not only on law enforcement, but also on economic empowerment through job creation, skills training, and improvement of social systems. Thus, strengthening access to legal income and reducing unemployment are key to creating a safer, more stable, and more prosperous society.

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