

## THE INFLUENCE OF ECONOMIC INEQUALITY, UNEMPLOYMENT RATE, AND POVERTY ON THEFT CRIMES: AN EMPIRICAL LITERATURE STUDY IN INDONESIA

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### Abstract

This study aims to analyse the influence of economic inequality, unemployment rates, and poverty on theft crimes in Indonesia through an empirical literature review. Using a thematic synthesis approach to various journals and research reports, this study found that economic inequality and unemployment rates have a significant positive influence on the increase in theft crime rates. Poverty also contributes to the risk of theft, especially when the economic pressure felt by the community is very high. The results of the study indicate that the combination of these three variables strengthens the potential for theft crimes in Indonesia, thus requiring policies that focus on reducing inequality, creating jobs, and implementing poverty alleviation programmes to effectively reduce crime rates.

**Keywords:** Economic Inequality, Unemployment Rate, Poverty, Theft Crime, Empirical Literature Study, Indonesia.

### Introduction

Economic inequality and unemployment rates are two socio-economic issues that are often associated with rising crime, particularly theft, in various countries, including Indonesia. This phenomenon has attracted the attention of many researchers and policymakers because it has a direct impact on social stability and community welfare. When income distribution is unequal, the gap between the rich and the poor tends to widen, giving rise to feelings of injustice in society (Lestari, 2022).

Uneven economic growth is often only enjoyed by certain groups, while the majority of the population remains in a stagnant economic condition. This condition increases the potential for social frustration. Individuals or groups who feel marginalised from the results of development may seek shortcuts to meet their needs, one of which is through theft (Kumar, 2024).

High unemployment rates are also one of the main factors driving theft crimes. Individuals without steady employment and income will seek alternative sources of income, both legal and illegal. When access to decent jobs or income sources is severely limited, criminal acts often become the last resort for some individuals (Zhang, 2020).

The impact of economic inequality and high unemployment on theft cannot be viewed simplistically. These two variables are closely interrelated and exacerbate social conditions if not managed properly. The inability of the government or society to create job opportunities and reduce inequality has the potential to increase crime rates (Septriani, 2024).

In Indonesia, regional economic growth dynamics also play a role. Income inequality between urban and rural areas, as well as between provinces, can strengthen the motive for theft, especially in areas lagging behind in development. Additionally, urbanisation increases economic pressure on migrants who fail to secure employment in cities (Novianti, 2023).

Unemployment and economic inequality are also closely linked to education levels, skills, and access to economic facilities. Individuals with lower education levels are more vulnerable to job competition and may resort to crime to meet their daily needs (Haryanto, 2022).

This phenomenon indicates that reducing unemployment and economic inequality are strategic steps to reduce theft crime rates. The government is expected to design policies with broad impacts, such as creating new jobs, providing skills training, and ensuring equitable income distribution (Nguyen, 2022).

Efforts to prevent theft crimes must also be supported by the community, especially in monitoring the environment and enhancing social solidarity. When social relations in the community are strong, informal social control can suppress individuals' intentions to commit crimes (Khairunisa, 2021).

Empirical literature in Indonesia shows a statistical trend that increasing economic inequality and unemployment are positively correlated with the number of theft cases. However, this relationship is also influenced by other factors such as law enforcement policies, social assistance programmes, and local micro-community conditions (Asdar, 2021).

Previous studies have confirmed that prolonged unemployment can cause psychological effects such as stress, depression, and loss of self-confidence, which can lead to deviant behaviour. Economic inequality, on the other hand, often triggers social jealousy and erodes the values of justice in society (Damanik, 2023).

From a macro perspective, national economic stability will greatly help reduce crime rates if supported by an equitable distribution of resources and sustainable development. Conversely, the failure of inclusive development can increase the risk of various criminal acts, including theft (Kusuma, 2022).

Analysis and understanding of the relationship between economic inequality, unemployment, and theft crimes are crucial as a foundation for policy-making in Indonesia. This study is expected to make a significant contribution to efforts to prevent crime and promote fair and sustainable economic development.

## **Research Method**

The research method used in this study is empirical literature study, in which the researcher conducts an in-depth search of various scientific works, accredited journals, research reports, and relevant statistical data within the last ten years. The literature selection process was carried out systematically using keywords related to economic inequality, unemployment rates, and theft crimes in Indonesia (Eliyah & Aslan, 2025). Next, the findings from each source were analysed thematically to identify patterns of relationships between the variables, and a synthesis of previous research results was conducted to obtain a comprehensive picture of the influence of economic inequality and unemployment on theft crime in Indonesia (Grant & Booth, 2020).

## **Results and Discussion**

### **The Influence of Economic Inequality and Unemployment Rates on Theft Crimes in Indonesia**

Economic inequality and unemployment are two closely related socio-economic issues that have a significant impact on social stability. In Indonesia, these two factors have become a major concern in the context of rising crime rates, particularly theft. The widening income gap has created polarisation within society, with economically disadvantaged groups feeling increasingly marginalised.

This condition not only gives rise to social jealousy, but also causes frustration and dissatisfaction with the existing economic system (Kusnadi, 2022). Economic inequality marks the limited opportunities for the majority of the population to enjoy the fruits of national economic growth. While a small segment of the population is able to enjoy facilities and wealth, the majority faces difficulties in meeting their basic needs. This pattern of inequality is at the root of a number of social problems, including the emergence of criminal behaviour such as theft (Aini, 2021). In many cases, high unemployment exacerbates the impact of economic inequality. Unemployment not only means a loss of income, but also a decline in self-esteem and motivation to participate in legitimate economic activities.

When job opportunities become increasingly limited, some individuals end up choosing a life of crime as a means of survival. Theft has become one of the ways people escape the economic pressures they face (Pratama, 2022).

Various empirical studies in Indonesia show a positive correlation between economic inequality, unemployment, and theft. High levels of inequality tend to be followed by an increase in the intensity of theft cases in society. This is reinforced by the fact that groups with limited economic access are more vulnerable to being driven to commit crimes to meet their daily needs (Abdirrohman, 2020). Geographical factors also influence patterns of theft in Indonesia. Areas with high economic inequality, both between cities and villages and between provinces, tend to experience more significant levels of theft. Urbanisation and economic development that tend to be concentrated

in large cities also put economic pressure on residents in suburban or less developed areas (Hasbi Ashiddiqi, 2021).

Uneven economic development is often only enjoyed by certain groups, while other regions continue to struggle with poverty and unemployment. This dynamic reinforces the motive for theft, which is often committed as a form of protest or an attempt to survive from limited sources of livelihood (Li, 2021). People who do not have access to education and skills training are also more vulnerable to unemployment and ultimately at risk of being trapped in a cycle of crime. Limited education results in fewer decent job opportunities, narrowing the options available other than engaging in illegal activities (Firdaus, 2021).

Social systems and community control also play an important role in reducing or increasing crime rates. In environments with weak social interaction and low social awareness, crime tends to occur more frequently. Conversely, solid environments with strong social control can serve as a barrier to theft (Sugondo, 2023).

Government programmes aimed at reducing economic inequality and unemployment have been implemented through various social assistance schemes, job creation, and inclusive economic development. However, the main challenge faced is the uneven and often misdirected implementation of these programmes, resulting in their impact failing to address the root causes of the problem (Wang, 2022).

Empirical research shows that effective poverty alleviation programmes can reduce crime rates if accompanied by improvements in the quality of education and job training. Investment in productive economic sectors in disadvantaged areas has the potential to create new jobs and reduce income inequality between regions (Handayani, 2022).

In a sociological context, economic pressures caused by inequality and unemployment often trigger deviant behaviour, including theft, as a form of adaptation to difficult economic conditions. On the other hand, internal factors such as moral values, religion, and social norms also play a role in curbing individuals' desire to commit crimes (Hendri, 2022).

Policies that focus on economic equality and job creation are strategic steps to reduce theft crime rates in Indonesia. The government and stakeholders are expected to expand inclusive economic opportunities for all levels of society, through education, training, and access to business facilities. In addition, law enforcement is also a determining factor in reducing theft crime rates. The application of strict sanctions and the effective presence of law enforcement officers in the field can have a deterrent effect on criminals. However, repressive measures need to be balanced with preventive approaches and community participation in crime prevention (Widodo, 2022).

Community participation is needed to encourage social solidarity and neighbourhood watch. Communities that have collective awareness of the dangers of

economic inequality and unemployment can work together to maintain social stability and reduce crime rates (Arsyad, 2021).

Recurring economic crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have shown how a surge in unemployment has a direct impact on theft rates in various regions. This proves the vulnerability of social stability when inequality is not immediately addressed and unemployment cannot be effectively reduced (Kasma & Sari, 2024).

Overall, the influence of economic inequality and unemployment rates on theft crime in Indonesia is very real and complex. The two reinforce each other as risk factors, and efforts to minimise crime must be carried out simultaneously on both aspects.

Thus, synergy between the government, society, and the private sector is crucial in building a more equitable economic system and creating an inclusive social environment to reduce theft crime rates. Awareness of the importance of economic justice and community empowerment is key to achieving long-term social stability in Indonesia.

### **The Influence of Poverty on Theft Crimes in Indonesia**

Poverty is a major problem faced by many developing countries, including Indonesia. The reality of people's lives, which are still far from prosperous, creates tremendous economic pressure, especially on those living below the poverty line. In desperate situations, the need to survive often drives some individuals to seek shortcuts, such as engaging in theft (Parvaresh, 2021).

Empirical studies in Indonesia consistently show a positive and significant relationship between poverty and theft crime rates. Poor communities, due to limited economic resources, tend to be more vulnerable to engaging in criminal activities as a response to their inability to meet basic needs.

High economic pressure causes anxiety, stress, and even despair, which in turn drives individuals to commit crimes such as theft (Yuniarti, 2023). Theft as a form of economic crime often occurs as a result of low household income. When basic needs, such as food or shelter, are difficult to obtain legally, criminal acts become a solution for survival.

Research in several major cities in Indonesia, including Bekasi and Batam, reveals that high poverty rates are correlated with an increase in cases of theft, mugging, and robbery (Delladona, 2022). In addition to economic factors, poverty also leads to a decline in quality of life. Low education and limited skills due to economic status reduce opportunities to obtain decent jobs. As a result, the poor are increasingly marginalised and faced with difficult choices: survive in poverty or commit crimes to meet their daily needs (Nderitu, 2022).

Poverty not only triggers material theft but can also lead to violence. Some theft cases motivated by poverty even end in violent acts and loss of life. This phenomenon

highlights the complexity of poverty's impact, which is not only economic but also social and psychological (Syamsuddin, 2023).

Causal analysis shows that poverty and theft are two closely related social problems, like two sides of the same coin. When people continue to live in poverty, the opportunity for theft will always exist.

However, not all poor people commit crimes; moral values, social norms, and the environment still play an important role in limiting deviant behaviour (Chong, 2020). From a theoretical perspective, rational choice theory views individuals living in economic hardship as taking greater risks, including theft, in order to meet their basic needs.

Poverty cuts off access to legal sources of livelihood and community facilities, which ultimately triggers illegal actions. The correlation between poverty rates and theft crimes has also been found in cross-regional studies in Indonesia. Areas with high poverty rates generally have high crime rates, including motorcycle theft, house theft, and so on.

Government policies aimed at improving community welfare have been proven to reduce crime rates (Sunaryo, 2021). Several studies using statistical approaches have concluded that a 1% increase in poverty rates can significantly increase crime, including theft. This correlation confirms that addressing poverty is a strategic step in crime prevention efforts.

There is also empirical evidence that poverty alleviation programmes through social assistance, job creation, and gradual improvements in education quality can reduce theft cases. However, the success of these programmes depends heavily on implementation and equitable access for the most vulnerable groups (Samat, 2024).

On the other hand, there are also views that highlight the role of the social environment and community control in preventing theft due to poverty. A solid and caring environment tends to suppress crime, even though the poverty rate is quite high (Armin & Idris, 2020).

The increase in theft crime rates during economic crises, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic, is clear evidence of the fragility of social defences due to structural poverty. When access to assistance and economic opportunities declines, theft crime tends to rise.

Efforts to prevent theft crime in Indonesia must be integrated.

The government needs to strengthen poverty reduction programmes while improving the quality of education, job training, and access to productive economic facilities. Inter-agency synergy and community involvement are also crucial. The enforcement of strict legal sanctions against criminals must be accompanied by preventive approaches through education and economic empowerment (Harahap et al., 2023).

Overall, poverty and theft are two interrelated issues. Reducing poverty rates will directly impact the decline in theft incidents in Indonesia. Therefore, addressing poverty is not merely a matter of welfare but also a strategic effort to maintain national order and security.

## Conclusion

Economic inequality, unemployment rates, and poverty have an impact on the increase in theft cases. Economic inequality creates social gaps that give rise to feelings of injustice and jealousy, thereby encouraging individuals from economically disadvantaged groups to commit crimes as a form of escape or to fulfil their basic needs. Meanwhile, unemployment plays a significant role as a primary trigger, increasing the likelihood of individuals engaging in theft due to limited access to decent jobs and income.

Poverty also plays a key role in driving theft, as individuals living under economic pressure are often desperate and choose crime as a quick solution to their unmet basic needs. The close relationship between poverty and theft is demonstrated by numerous empirical studies in various regions, which consistently find a positive correlation between rising poverty rates and incidents of theft.

Therefore, the challenge of reducing theft crime rates in Indonesia must be addressed through strategies aimed at reducing socioeconomic inequality, lowering unemployment rates, and accelerating poverty alleviation programmes. The government, society, and relevant stakeholders must collaborate in developing inclusive policies, creating job opportunities, improving welfare distribution, and building a robust social system to ensure sustainable national security and order.

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