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# The impact of social capital on crime reduction: Empirical evidence from young people in Malang, East Java

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**A B S T R A C T**

This study investigates the impact of social capital on youth crime reduction, with a particular focus on the mediating role of group participation. Utilizing Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS), the research examines data from 600 youth respondents in Malang Raya, Indonesia. Social capital is operationalized into three dimensions: bonding, bridging, and linking. The findings reveal that all three forms of social capital significantly reduce criminal behavior among youth, both directly and indirectly. Bonding social capital, which reflects close emotional ties and strong interpersonal trust, exhibited the most consistent influence by reinforcing informal social control through family and neighborhood networks. Bridging social capital, representing diverse and cross-community networks, enhanced tolerance and social awareness that mitigated deviant behavior. Linking social capital, which connects youth to formal institutions, showed a more complex pattern effective when direct, yet potentially counterproductive when mediated by passive or symbolic group participation. Group participation emerged as a significant mediating variable, transforming social ties into behavioral norms and collective accountability. While bonding and bridging social capital strengthened participation that led to crime deterrence, the mediating role of linking social capital highlighted the need for meaningful engagement in institutional settings. These findings underscore the importance of promoting authentic, inclusive, and sustained youth involvement in both grassroots and institutional group settings. The study offers policy recommendations emphasizing participatory governance, youth-led community initiatives, and investment in social infrastructure as essential strategies for crime prevention. Overall, the research contributes to the growing body of literature that frames social capital as a foundational resource in building safer and more resilient communities.

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## 1. Introduction

Crime continues to be a central concern across many nations, particularly in developing countries where institutions are still in the process of maturation. The presence of criminal activity significantly affects public safety, economic growth, and the overall well-being of citizens. In Indonesia, the issue of crime remains complex, especially among young populations. According to national crime statistics, the total number of reported criminal cases has seen a slight decline over the years from 294,281 cases in 2018 to 247,218 in 2020, suggesting that certain preventive policies may be taking effect (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2021). However, the number remains relatively high and calls for more nuanced and targeted intervention strategies.

In regions like Malang Raya, which consists of both urban and rural zones, youth crime is often rooted in a mixture of socio-economic disparity, lack of educational opportunities, community disengagement, and exposure to deviant peer groups. Addressing this issue requires a deep understanding of not only institutional factors but also the role of interpersonal and communal dynamics that influence individual behaviors. In this context, social capital has emerged as a key theoretical and practical construct to explain variations in social outcomes, including crime rates. Social capital broadly refers to the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively (Putnam, 2000). The concept has been central to discussions in sociology, political science, development studies, and economics, with influential contributions from Bourdieu (1986), who emphasized power relations and social reproduction, (Coleman, 1988),

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who linked social capital with educational outcomes and Putnam (2000), who highlighted its role in civic engagement and democratic governance. Social capital is characterized by features such as social networks, trust, reciprocity, and shared norms. These elements have the potential to foster a sense of belonging and mutual accountability, making them valuable in efforts to reduce crime. In particular, high levels of interpersonal trust and community participation can lead to enhanced informal surveillance, early intervention in deviant behavior, and greater social pressure to conform to community standards (Coleman, 1988).

Empirical studies conducted across various cultural and geographical contexts further support the relationship between social capital and crime reduction. Akhuai et al. (2022), for instance, found that regions in the Indonesia with higher social capital levels experienced significantly lower crime rates. In Japan, Matsukawa and Tatsuki (2018) demonstrated how tight-knit community networks could lead to reductions in criminal activity and increases in societal well-being. Saegert et al. (2002) in the United States emphasized the importance of neighborhood trust and mutual aid in preventing crime, while Gilbert (2008) in Russia and Ghalambordezfooli and Hosseini (2019) in Iran found similar associations in transitional economies. These studies provide valuable insights but often adopt a macro-level focus, analyzing large-scale data without fully exploring the underlying individual-level or community-level mechanisms. Additionally, many studies do not distinguish between different environmental contexts urban versus rural nor do they examine the youth demographic in sufficient detail, despite its strategic importance in crime prevention policies.

Addressing this gap requires closer scrutiny of how social capital is operationalized at the micro level, particularly through mechanisms such as participation in social groups. Social group participation whether in formal organizations like youth clubs, religious associations, and community cooperatives or informal networks such as peer circles and neighborhood collectives serve as a conduit through which social capital exerts its influence on behavior. Participation in these groups fosters regular interactions, trust-building, the reinforcement of shared norms, and access to collective resources, all of which can reduce the likelihood of youth involvement in crime. Furthermore, the intensity and impact of these groups can differ markedly between urban and rural settings. Urban environments, while more densely populated, often suffer from weaker interpersonal ties and lower levels of community involvement (Putnam, 2000). Conversely, rural areas may enjoy closer social bonds and stronger informal control, but may lack the institutional resources available in cities. In regions such as Malang Raya, where both settings coexist, the dual influence of urban and rural social dynamics makes it a particularly valuable context for empirical investigation.

## 2. Research Method

This study was conducted in two distinct administrative regions of East Java, Indonesia: Malang City and Malang Regency. These locations were purposively selected to reflect contrasting socio-economic environments and varying levels of urbanization. Malang City, as a prominent urban hub and educational center, attracts a high volume of youth migrants from across the country, contributing to a socially diverse and dynamic urban setting (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2021). In contrast, Malang Regency encompasses more rural and traditional community-based structures, although it has also seen increasing youth migration for employment and vocational training. The youth population in both areas engages in active mobility and social interaction, making these regions ideal for studying the role of social capital in shaping youth behavior, including the potential reduction of criminal activities. The research was carried out between August and December 2024 and involved structured surveys and field interviews.

This study applied a quantitative explanatory research design using Structural Equation Modeling with Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) to evaluate the hypothesized causal relationships between social capital, group participation, and youth crime. The explanatory approach was chosen to test how specific independent variables influence dependent variables, both directly and indirectly. SEM-PLS was deemed appropriate due to its ability to handle complex models involving multiple latent variables and indicators, as well as its tolerance for non-normal data distributions and relatively large sample sizes (Hair et al., 2010). This approach facilitates the simultaneous testing of measurement models (outer model) and structural models (inner model), allowing researchers to evaluate not only the strength of relationships among variables but also the pathways through which social capital influences criminal behavior.

The population of the study included young individuals aged 16 to 30 years who had resided for at least six months in either Malang City or Malang Regency. This age range is consistent with the Indonesian Youth Law (Law No. 40 of 2009) and was selected due to the high level of social activity, technological engagement, and susceptibility to deviant behavior within this demographic. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling based on three inclusion criteria: (1) age between 16 and 30, (2) minimum six-month residency in the study location, and (3) ability and willingness to participate in the study. Six representative urban neighborhoods (*kelurahan*) and six rural villages (*desa*) were selected, with 50 respondents drawn from each site. This resulted in a total sample of 600 respondents 300 from Malang City and 300 from Malang Regency. The sampling framework also adhered to the recommendation by Hair et al. (2010), which suggests a sample size of at least 5–10 times the number of indicators used in SEM analysis. Given the study's use of 29 indicators, a sample size of 600 was considered sufficient to ensure reliable and valid structural estimations.

Data were collected using structured questionnaires administered through face-to-face interviews. The questionnaire consisted of close-ended items designed to measure latent constructs, including bonding, bridging, and linking social capital, group

participation, conventional crime, and cybercrime. The indicators for each construct were adapted from validated instruments in the literature and modified to suit the local cultural context (Putnam, 2000). A five-point Likert scale was used to measure levels of agreement or frequency, depending on the nature of the indicator. For instance, statements measuring social attitudes and perceptions were rated on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), while questions on frequency of behaviors or participation were rated from 1 (never) to 5 (very often). The constructs were carefully operationalized to capture the multidimensional nature of social capital and its behavioral outcomes among youth.

Data analysis was performed using SEM-PLS to assess both direct and indirect (mediated) effects. The direct effects tested included the influence of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital on both crime and cybercrime, as well as their impact on group participation. In turn, the effect of group participation on crime and cybercrime was also evaluated. The structural model was expressed using path equations to represent each causal relationship. Additionally, indirect effects were tested to examine whether group participation mediated the relationship between each form of social capital and the two types of criminal behavior. The mediation analysis employed a bootstrapping method to test the significance of indirect effects, with statistical significance determined at $p < 0.05$ (Hair et al., 2010). This analytical strategy provided a comprehensive view of how social capital operates, both independently and in conjunction with group participation, to influence youth involvement in criminal activities in both urban and rural contexts of Malang.

To empirically examine the relationship between social capital and youth crime, this study proposed a structural model that incorporates both direct and indirect effects. The model consists of three exogenous latent variables bonding social capital (Bond), bridging social capital (Brig), and linking social capital (Link) and two endogenous latent variables, namely group participation (Kel) and youth crime (C). These constructs reflect both the structure of social networks and their behavioral outcomes, allowing for a comprehensive evaluation of how different dimensions of social capital influence youth involvement in criminal activities, either directly or through mediated pathways. The analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS), which is particularly suited for evaluating complex models involving multiple latent variables, non-normal data distributions, and moderate to large sample sizes.

The structural relationships in the model are represented by the following equations:

$$Kel = \beta_1 Bond + \beta_2 Brig + \beta_3 Link + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

$$C = \beta_1 Bond + \beta_2 Brig + \beta_3 Link + \beta_4 Kel + \varepsilon \quad (2)$$

In these equations, C represents youth crime, Kel represents participation in social groups, and Bond, Brig, and Link represent the three distinct dimensions of social capital. The path coefficients (β) denote the magnitude and direction of influence between variables, and ε represents the residual error terms associated with each endogenous construct. To explore the mediating role of group participation, the study tested three key indirect effect pathways where each type of social capital influences youth crime through participation in social groups. These indirect effects are calculated as follows:

$$IE_1 = \beta_1.\beta_4 : Bond \rightarrow Kel \rightarrow C \quad (3)$$

$$IE_2 = \beta_2.\beta_4 : Brig \rightarrow Kel \rightarrow C \quad (4)$$

$$IE_3 = \beta_3.\beta_4 : Link \rightarrow Kel \rightarrow C \quad (5)$$

Each of these pathway tests whether the relationship between a specific dimension of social capital and youth crime is partially or fully mediated by participation in social groups. The significance of these indirect effects was assessed using the bootstrapping method with 5,000 resamples. An effect was considered statistically significant if the p-value < 0.05 and the bias-corrected confidence interval did not include zero. This structural model provides a nuanced understanding of how social capital operates within youth populations to reduce crime. It not only identifies the direct deterrent effect of social capital on deviant behavior but also highlights the importance of group-based social engagement as a key mediating mechanism. The model allows policymakers and community organizations to identify strategic intervention points that reinforce social networks and increase group participation as a pathway to crime prevention among youth, especially in diverse socio-geographic settings such as urban and rural areas of Malang.

## 3. Result and Discussion

### *3.1 Descriptive Statistic*

The descriptive profile of the 600 youth respondents provides a comprehensive overview of their demographic, social, and economic characteristics, which are essential for understanding the broader context of the study. The average age of respondents was 21.44 years, indicating a predominance of early adults in the sample. In terms of gender distribution, the majority were male (mean = 0.63, where 1 = male), showing a slight overrepresentation of male respondents. Education levels were relatively high, with a mean score of 3.69 on a scale where 4 indicates university-level education, suggesting that most respondents had either completed or were currently enrolled in higher education. The average number of household members was 4.39, reflecting common family sizes in the Indonesian setting. Access to digital infrastructure was widespread, with 99% of respondents reporting access to the internet, underscoring the increasing digital connectivity among youth. Moreover,

ownership of basic household assets was also high, as reflected in home ownership (mean = 0.82) and private vehicle ownership (mean = 0.96), indicating a relatively stable economic baseline for most of the respondents.

In terms of economic indicators, the average monthly household income was IDR 4,468,633, suggesting moderate income conditions that could influence access to education, mobility, and social participation. The mean score for occupational category was 9.94, which based on the predefined coding scheme indicates a dominance of students, job seekers, and informal workers within the sample. Most respondents were unmarried (mean = 1.05), aligning with the targeted youth demographic. The ethnic distribution showed that Javanese ethnicity was predominant (mean = 1.81), with some representation from other ethnic backgrounds, particularly among migrant youth. Regarding geographic distribution, 40% of respondents resided in Malang City, while the remaining 60% were from Malang Regency, allowing for balanced comparisons between urban and rural youth. Additionally, the average score for ownership of additional assets such as land, buildings, or investments was 1.32, suggesting that some respondents reported multiple forms of asset ownership. Overall, this diverse socio-economic composition strengthens the empirical basis for analyzing variations in social behavior, group participation, and youth crime across different social settings in Malang Raya.

**Table 1**
Statistic Descriptive Respondent

| Variabel | Definisi & Indikator | Mean |
|---|---|---|
| Age | Age (Years) | 21.44 |
| Gender | Gender (1 = Male, 0 = Female) | 0.63 |
| Education | Education Level (1 = elementary school, 2 = middle school, 3 = high school, 4 = university) | 3.69 |
| Family Size | Family Size in Household (Person) | 4.39 |
| Internet | Dummy internet acces (1= Yes, 0 = No) | 0.99 |
| House Ownership | House ownership status (1 = Owner, 0 = Otherwise) | 0.82 |
| Personal Vehicles | Personal Vehicles status (1 = Owner, 0 = Otherwise) | 0.96 |
| Household Income | Total household income (Rupiah) | 4468633 |
| Type of Work | Respondents' main occupation: (1. Farmer 2. Livestock 3. Trader 4. Other Business 5. Civil Servant 6. Private Employee 7. Student 8. Housewife 9. Retiree 10. Job seeker 11. Student 12. Others) | 9.94 |
| Marital Status | Respondent's marital status (1 = Unmarried, 2 = Married, 3 = Widow/Widower) | 1.05 |
| Etnichs Group | Respondent's ethnic origin (1 = Javanese, 2 = Madurese, 3 = Arab) | 1.81 |
| City | City of Respondent (1 = City Malang, 0 = Outside City Malang) | 0.4 |
| Ownership of Other Assets | Ownership of additional assets such as land, buildings, or other investments (1 = Yes, 0 = No) | 1.32 |

### *3.2 Impact Social Capital on Crime Reduction in Malang*

To explore the role of social capital in mitigating youth involvement in criminal behavior, this study conducted a structural equation modeling analysis focusing on the direct and indirect pathways linking various dimensions of social capital bonding, bridging, and linking to youth crime reduction. The analysis was designed to assess not only whether social capital has a statistically significant effect on reducing criminal tendencies among young people but also how group participation mediates these relationships. This section presents the empirical findings related to those hypotheses and discusses the extent to which different forms of social capital influence criminal behavior among youth in the urban-rural contexts of Malang Raya. By examining both the strength and significance of structural paths within the model, the analysis provides evidence-based insights into the potential of social capital as a mechanism for fostering safer, more cohesive communities.

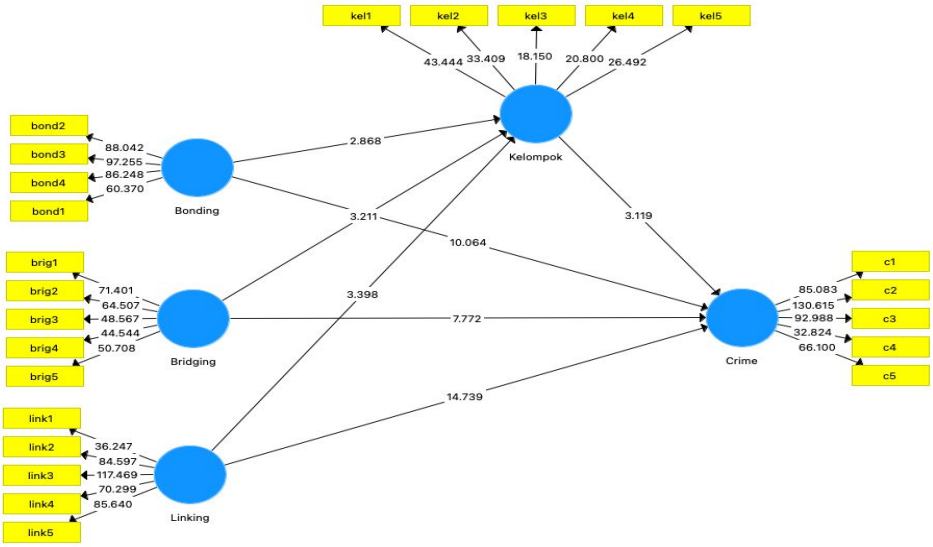


**Fig. 1.** Empirical Model of the Influence of Social Capital on Crime Reduction and Group Participation as a Mediator

The structural equation modeling (SEM-PLS) analysis conducted in this study clearly demonstrates that social capital plays a dominant and multidimensional role in reducing youth crime, both directly and indirectly through group participation. Among the three dimensions of social capital, linking social capital emerged as the most influential, with the strongest negative effect on youth criminal behavior ($\beta = -0.396$, $p < 0.001$), followed by bonding ($\beta = -0.368$, $p < 0.001$) and bridging social capital ($\beta = -0.288$, $p < 0.001$). These findings highlight that when young people are embedded in strong vertical relationships such as connections with institutional actors, religious leaders, and community organizations they are more likely to feel visible, accountable, and integrated into the broader social system. This supports previous research that emphasizes the importance of vertical institutional trust and access to legitimate social support structures in reducing deviance (Claridge, 2018). The prominence of linking capital in this context reflects the unique socio-cultural fabric of Malang Raya, where formal institutions such as religious organizations and local government bodies hold substantial normative authority.

Bonding social capital, representing the intimate ties within families and close communities, also had a significant impact in deterring criminal acts. The findings affirm that strong emotional bonds and mutual trust within close-knit circles such as family, extended relatives, and neighbors can function as informal systems of social regulation (Buonanno et al., 2009). These micro-level social networks contribute to behavioral conformity through mechanisms like shame, fear of exclusion, and moral obligation, aligning with Putnam (2000) assertion that bonding capital reinforces inward-looking solidarity and reinforces norm compliance. In Malang Raya, cultural values such as *rukun* (harmony), *tepa selira* (empathy), and *rasa isin* (shame) are internalized within family and neighborhood structures, amplifying the regulatory function of bonding ties.

Bridging social capital, although slightly less dominant, was nonetheless significant in its contribution to crime reduction. Youth who engaged in cross-group interactions, such as inter-community forums, student networks, and volunteering circles, exhibited lower levels of criminal behavior. This supports the idea that diverse social networks broaden moral exposure, provide access to resources, and foster empathy across social lines (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Putnam, 2000). In heterogeneous urban environments like Malang City, such bridging interactions promote resilience against social isolation and offer non-deviant pathways for identity and achievement development.

In terms of indirect effects, group participation served as a partial mediator between all three forms of social capital and youth crime. Bonding ($\beta = 0.211$, $p = 0.004$) and bridging ($\beta = 0.242$, $p = 0.001$) positively and significantly influenced group participation, which in turn exerted a small but meaningful negative effect on crime ($\beta = - 0.074$, $p = 0.002$). These findings confirm previous assertions that social capital contributes to civic engagement, which subsequently instills collective values and accountability (Coleman, 1988; O'Brien & Tyler, 2020). Interestingly, linking social capital had a negative effect on group participation ($\beta = –0.119$, $p = 0.001$), suggesting that while institutional engagement is crucial in crime prevention, it does not always translate into active involvement in horizontal or grassroots group settings. This may be attributed to hierarchical or bureaucratic barriers within institutional interactions that do not nurture emotional or voluntary commitment (Calhoun, 2019).

Overall, the dominant finding of this study is that linking social capital serves as the most effective mechanism in reducing criminal behavior among youth, not only because of its direct deterrent effect, but also due to its role in enhancing perceived institutional legitimacy and socio-political inclusion. When combined with strong bonding and bridging networks, as well as meaningful group participation, social capital forms a comprehensive ecosystem of social protection. These results not only align with theoretical perspectives on the multidimensionality of social capital (O'Brien & Tyler, 2020), but also offer practical insights for crime prevention policy. In rapidly transforming societies like Indonesia, reinforcing vertical trust and institutional presence, while simultaneously encouraging grassroots social interaction, may offer a balanced strategy for addressing youth delinquency at scale.

### *3.3 Impact Social Capital on Crime Mediated by Group Participation Variables*

Beyond the direct associations between social capital and youth criminal behavior, this study also explored the mediating role of group participation in translating the latent values of social capital into observable behavioral outcomes. The analysis of indirect effects revealed that group participation significantly mediated the relationship between all three dimensions of social capital bonding, bridging, and linking and crime reduction among youth in Malang Raya. This finding confirms that social capital does not operate solely through dyadic or institutional ties, but rather through the collective processes that occur within group settings. Group participation acts as a social conduit, enabling individuals to internalize shared norms, experience peer accountability, and access informal supervision mechanisms that are crucial in deterring criminal tendencies (Coleman, 1988; O'Brien & Tyler, 2020). The empirical evidence supports this framework, as all mediated pathways demonstrated statistically significant coefficients ($p < 0.05$), with bonding → group → crime ($\beta = - 0.016$), bridging → group → crime ($\beta = - 0.018$), and linking → group → crime ($\beta = 0.009$).

The pathway from bonding social capital to crime, mediated by group participation, revealed that emotionally intimate relationships within families and close-knit neighborhoods not only deter criminal behavior directly but also foster active involvement in group activities. These groups whether religious, cultural, or civic serve as environments where informal norms are rehearsed, shared responsibilities are nurtured, and deviant behavior is socially sanctioned. This finding is aligned

with studies that emphasize how primary ties encourage sustained engagement in collective settings, thereby reinforcing moral development and internalized control (Baranyi et al., 2022; Weisburd et al., 2014). Similarly, the bridging social capital pathway showed that youth who maintain connections with diverse groups are more likely to participate in inclusive, issue-based communities where values such as tolerance, empathy, and mutual respect are cultivated. Participation in these heterogeneous groups contributes to the diffusion of prosocial norms and offers alternative identities that mitigate the allure of deviance (Clarke et al., 2019; Saegert & Winkel, 2004).

A more complex pattern emerged in the linking social capital pathway, which showed a small but significant positive indirect effect on crime ($\beta = 0.009$, $p = 0.032$). This counterintuitive result suggests that institutional participation when not accompanied by meaningful engagement or emotional investment can produce symbolic or passive forms of involvement that do not support normative reinforcement. Rather than internalizing collective accountability, such forms of participation may lead to disconnection, compliance without conviction, or even exposure to peer influence that normalizes risky behaviors (Claridge, 2018; Hasbullah, 2006). Particularly in bureaucratic settings, where youth are included in programs or formal activities without sufficient voice or ownership, the protective function of group participation may be diluted or reversed. This highlights a critical insight: not all participation is equally effective, and the quality, voluntariness, and intensity of engagement matter more than mere presence (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015; Deuchar, 2009).

Overall, these findings illustrate that group participation functions as both a bridge and a filter: it can amplify the preventive effects of social capital by transforming relational networks into participatory action, but it can also become a hollow mechanism if driven solely by structural obligation. While bonding and bridging capital enhanced group-based control mechanisms and thereby reduced crime, the linkage between formal institutions and group participation demands further scrutiny, particularly in contexts where institutional trust is fragile or social mobility is limited. These insights have practical implications for youth-focused social programs: effective crime prevention must involve not only the promotion of social capital but also the cultivation of participatory spaces where youth feel heard, engaged, and socially embedded. In doing so, societies can harness the full preventive power of collective structures in shaping safe, cohesive communities.

## 4. Conclussion

This study provides robust empirical evidence on the critical role of social capital in reducing youth crime in the urban-rural context of Malang Raya, Indonesia. Through a structural equation modeling approach, the analysis confirmed that all three dimensions of social capital bonding, bridging, and linking had statistically significant effects on criminal behavior, both directly and indirectly through group participation. Bonding social capital emerged as a powerful protective factor, reinforcing social norms and accountability within close-knit communities, while bridging capital promoted exposure to inclusive values and diverse networks that strengthened social empathy. Linking social capital, though initially protective through formal institutional connections, demonstrated a more nuanced pattern when mediated by group participation, indicating that institutional affiliation alone may not be sufficient without authentic and meaningful involvement. The mediating role of group participation was particularly notable; it provided the structural channel through which social capital was translated into behavioral norms and social responsibility, especially in the formation of informal social control mechanisms among youth.

Based on these findings, several policy implications emerge. First, policymakers and community institutions should prioritize programs that not only build social capital but also foster active, inclusive, and meaningful participation among youth. This includes strengthening youth engagement in grassroots organizations, community-based initiatives, and culturally relevant social groups that reinforce positive norms and social cohesion. Second, interventions that promote vertical linkages between youth and formal institutions must be accompanied by participatory models of governance that empower young people as co-creators of solutions not passive recipients of programs. This entails shifting from symbolic to substantive inclusion, where institutional programs are designed to cultivate ownership, trust, and mutual accountability. Finally, investment in social infrastructure such as public spaces, youth centers, and intergroup forums can amplify the collective benefits of social capital, providing safe and supportive environments for the internalization of shared values. In conclusion, crime prevention among youth should be approached not only through legal deterrence but also by leveraging the social fabric of communities, empowering young people through trust-based relationships and participatory engagement that fosters both personal responsibility and collective well-being.

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