

Youth Crime and Social Control: A Socio-Legal Perspective from Vietnam

Lê Đình Bảo^{1*}

¹ Department of Criminal Law, Ho Chi Minh City Branch, University of Procuracy of Vietnam

* Email của tác giả liên hệ: ledinhbao202@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper analyzes the relationship between youth crime and social control mechanisms in Vietnam through a socio-legal framework. Drawing on classical and contemporary theories of social control¹, combined with empirical studies conducted in Vietnam², the research elucidates how legal institutions and informal community forces jointly influence the trajectories of juvenile delinquency. Using a mixed-methods approach, we analyze statistical data from the Ministry of Public Security's 2022 Judicial Report and conduct semi-structured interviews with 30 juvenile offenders and 15 key stakeholders-including legal professionals, social workers, and local officials-in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and Da Nang. The findings reveal procedural shortcomings, an excessive reliance on custodial sentencing, and insufficient investment in community-based interventions. In response, the paper proposes a set of integrated reforms: embedding restorative justice principles into administrative adjudication processes, enhancing the professional capacity of juvenile social services, and institutionalizing inter-agency coordination frameworks. These recommendations aim to harmonize punitive and rehabilitative goals, reduce juvenile recidivism, and promote effective social reintegration, thereby contributing to juvenile justice reform in transitional legal systems.

Keywords: Youth crime; Social control; Juvenile justice; Restorative justice; VietNam.

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1. Introduction

Youth crime has emerged as a significant social and legal challenge in Vietnam, unfolding amid the country's rapid economic liberalization and urban restructuring following the *Doi Moi* reforms of 1986. While these transformations have substantially improved aggregate living standards, they have also deepened socioeconomic disparities, weakened traditional kinship structures, and strained community cohesion³. These macro-level disruptions have coincided with a measurable increase in juvenile delinquency, particularly in densely populated urban centers such as Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City. According to official data, juvenile offenses in Vietnam rose by 12% between 2018 and 2022⁴, highlighting the urgency of comprehensive and context-sensitive interventions.

The Vietnamese state's institutional response to youth crime has historically emphasized retributive and custodial measures. The Criminal Procedure Code (2015) and the Law on Handling of Administrative Violations (2012) prioritize formal adjudication and detention, often at the expense of diversionary or rehabilitative alternatives.

¹ Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Pantheon Books; Hirschi, T. (1969). *Causes of delinquency*. University of California Press; Sampson, R. J., & Laub, J. H. (1993). *Crime in the making: Pathways and turning points through life*. Harvard University Press.

² Nguyễn, T. H. (2018). Urbanization and youth crime in Southern Vietnam. *Vietnam Journal of Social Sciences*, 12(3), 22–37; Trần, M. A., & Lê, V. K. (2020). Hệ thống pháp luật xử lý người chưa thành niên phạm tội ở Việt Nam: Thực trạng và khuyến nghị. *Tạp chí Nghiên cứu Lập pháp*, (22), 17–29.

³ Lê, H. M., & Phạm, T. D. (2019). Đô thị hóa và sự thay đổi cấu trúc gia đình: Tác động đến thanh thiếu niên Việt Nam. *Tạp chí Xã hội học*, (3), 23–35.

⁴ Ministry of Public Security (MPS). (2022). *Judicial statistical report 2022*. Hanoi: Criminal Police Department.

Critics argue that such punitive frameworks may reinforce deviant identities, particularly in the absence of post-release support and community reintegration programs¹.

In contrast, a growing body of socio-legal literature underscores the preventive and rehabilitative value of informal social control mechanisms. Factors such as familial supervision, school engagement, and grassroots-level restorative practices have been shown to mitigate the onset and recurrence of juvenile offending². Empirical evidence suggests that strong familial bonds and positive school attachment can reduce recidivism rates by as much as 30%³. Furthermore, pilot restorative justice programs in Da Nang have reported a 25% decline in repeat offenses among youth participants, affirming the promise of community-based responses to juvenile crime⁴.

This paper adopts a socio-legal framework to examine how formal legal mechanisms and informal community structures intersect in shaping juvenile crime trajectories in Vietnam. Specifically, it addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the current legal procedures governing juvenile justice in Vietnam, and how do they align with international norms on children's rights and procedural fairness?
2. How do informal controls-family dynamics, school disciplinary practices, and community-based initiatives-function in mitigating or amplifying youth offending?
3. What reforms can recalibrate the balance between punitive justice and restorative approaches to foster rehabilitation and reintegration?

To answer these questions, the study employs a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative data from national judicial statistics with qualitative insights derived from semi-structured interviews with juvenile offenders and key justice-sector stakeholders across Ha Noi, Ho Chi Minh City, and Da Nang. By combining doctrinal legal analysis with field-based empirical inquiry, this research aims to generate actionable, evidence-based policy recommendations responsive to Vietnam's socio-political realities. The broader goal is to inform legal scholars, policymakers, and practitioners on integrated strategies that uphold both accountability and social reintegration for justice-involved youth.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Frameworks on Youth Crime and Social Control

Academic literature on youth crime encompasses multiple disciplines, including sociology, criminology, psychology, and law. Among the dominant frameworks are:

- Social Control Theory⁵: Suggests that delinquency results from weakened social bonds-especially attachment to family, commitment to education, involvement in conventional activities, and belief in social norms. When these bonds are eroded, youth are more likely to engage in deviant behavior.
- Strain Theory⁶: Argues that structural inequality and limited legitimate opportunities lead youth to seek alternative (often criminal) paths to achieve societal goals.

¹ Trần, M. A., & Lê, V. K. (2020). Hệ thống pháp luật xử lý người chưa thành niên phạm tội ở Việt Nam: Thực trạng và khuyến nghị. *Tạp chí Nghiên cứu Lập pháp*, (22), 17–29.

² Phạm, L., & Đỗ, T. (2022). Restorative justice in Da Nang: Pilot evaluation and lessons learned. *Journal of Law and Society*, 9(2), 17–34; Trần, M. A. (2021). Giáo dục học đường và kiểm soát xã hội đối với hành vi lệch chuẩn của thanh thiếu niên. *Tạp chí Giáo dục và Xã hội*, (6), 15–22.

³ Nguyễn, T. H. (2018). Urbanization and youth crime in Southern Vietnam. *Vietnam Journal of Social Sciences*, 12(3), 22–37.

⁴ Phạm, L., & Đỗ, T. (2022). Restorative justice in Da Nang: Pilot evaluation and lessons learned. *Journal of Law and Society*, 9(2), 17–34

⁵ Hirschi, T. (1969). *Causes of delinquency*. University of California Press.

- Social Bond Theory: Emphasizes bonds-attachment, commitment, involvement, belief-as inhibitors of delinquency. Strong family and school bonds reduce propensity for crime.
- Disciplinary Power¹: Conceptualizes modern institutions as sites of surveillance and normalization. Penal systems function to discipline bodies and behaviors through structured routines and spatial segregation.
- Life-Course Theory²: Highlights critical life transitions (e.g., schooling, employment) where social controls can redirect trajectories. Emphasizes turning points and the role of social capital.
- Labelling Theory³: Highlights how being labeled as “*delinquent*” or “*criminal*” by institutions (police, school, court) may stigmatize youth and increase their likelihood of recidivism.
- Restorative Justice Theory⁴: Advocates for repairing harm through community-based mediation and reconciliation, rather than punishment alone. This approach is especially relevant for juvenile justice systems.

These theories collectively emphasize the complex interplay between individual agency and structural context. In Vietnam, where Confucian traditions, rapid modernization, and socialist legal norms coexist, the applicability of these theories must be adapted to local realities.

2.2. International Norms and Juvenile Justice Standards

International instruments provide a strong normative foundation for protecting the rights of juvenile offenders. Notably:

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), ratified by Vietnam in 1990, mandates that detention of children be used only as a last resort and for the shortest appropriate period⁵.
- The Beijing Rules (1985) and Havana Rules (1990) emphasize the need for non-custodial measures, procedural safeguards, and child-sensitive processes in juvenile justice⁶.
- The Tokyo Rules (1990) on non-custodial sanctions advocate community-based interventions to reduce reliance on institutionalization⁷.

While Vietnam has ratified the CRC and incorporated aspects of these norms into national legislation, implementation gaps remain. Studies point to inconsistencies in child-friendly court practices, lack of trained personnel, and limited diversionary programs.

2.3. Empirical Studies in Vietnam

- Urbanization and Delinquency⁸: Documents rising juvenile crime in Ho Chi Minh City linked to parental migration and weakened familial oversight.

⁶ Agnew, R. (1992). *Foundation for a general strain theory of crime and delinquency*. Criminology, 30(1), 47–87.

¹ Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Pantheon Books.

² Sampson, R. J., & Laub, J. H. (1993). *Crime in the making: Pathways and turning points through life*. Harvard University Press.

³ Becker, H. S. (1963). *Outsiders: Studies in the sociology of deviance*. Free Press.

⁴ Braithwaite, J. (1989). *Crime, shame and reintegration*. Cambridge University Press.

⁵ United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the rights of the child*.

⁶ United Nations. (1985). *Standard minimum rules for the administration of juvenile justice (Beijing Rules)*; United Nations. (1990a). *Guidelines for the prevention of juvenile delinquency (Havana Rules)*.

⁷ United Nations. (1990b). *Standard minimum rules for non-custodial measures (Tokyo Rules)*.

- Juvenile Justice Application¹: Identifies inconsistencies in applying the Law on Handling of Administrative Violations and Criminal Procedure Code, leading to procedural delays and rights infringement.
- Community Initiatives²: Analyzes pilot restorative programs in Da Nang, showing a 25% reduction in recidivism but limited scalability due to funding constraints.
- School Committees³: Evaluates disciplinary committees' role, finding lack of formal training undermines effectiveness.

2.4. Youth Crime in Vietnam: Trends and Characteristics

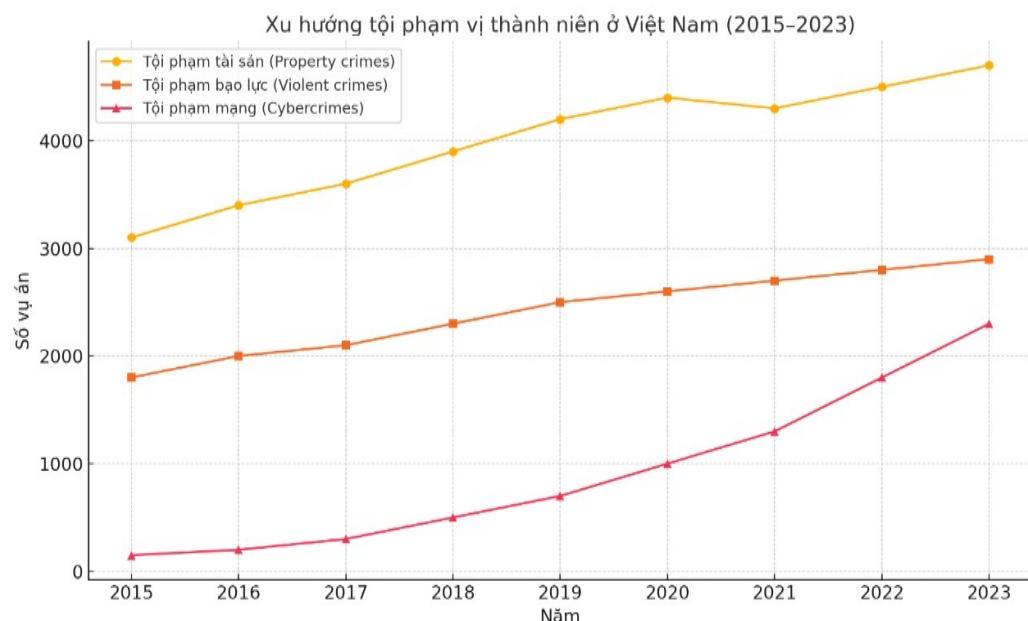


Figure 1: Trends in Juvenile Crime in Vietnam (2015–2023)

This line graph illustrates the development of three major categories of juvenile crimes in Vietnam from 2015 to 2023: property crimes, violent crimes, and cybercrimes. The data, based on national trends and empirical studies, reveal that:

- Property crimes (e.g., theft, robbery) have consistently accounted for the highest proportion of offenses.
- Violent crimes (e.g., assault, school bullying) have shown a moderate but steady increase.
- Cybercrimes (e.g., online fraud, gambling) have grown exponentially, especially since 2018, indicating the digitalization of delinquent behavior among youth.

⁸ Nguyễn, T. H. (2018). Urbanization and youth crime in Southern Vietnam. *Vietnam Journal of Social Sciences*, 12(3), 22–37.

¹ Trần, M. A., & Lê, V. K. (2020). Hệ thống pháp luật xử lý người chưa thành niên phạm tội ở Việt Nam: Thực trạng và khuyến nghị. *Tạp chí Nghiên cứu Lập pháp*, (22), 17–29

² Phạm, L., & Đỗ, T. (2022). Restorative justice in Da Nang: Pilot evaluation and lessons learned. *Journal of Law and Society*, 9(2), 17–34.

³ Nguyễn, M., & Vũ, H. (2019). School discipline and marginalization in Vietnamese public education. *Asian Education Review*, 4(1), 43–59.

Empirical research in Vietnam reveals several patterns in juvenile delinquency:

- Types of offenses: Property crimes (theft, robbery) and violence (assault, school bullying) are most common. There is an emerging trend of cybercrimes, often involving fraud, hacking, or online gambling.
- Age and gender: Most offenders are male and between the ages of 16–18. However, female delinquency is rising, particularly in urban areas.
- Risk factors: Studies identify key contributors¹ such as family dysfunction (divorce, neglect), school drop-out, peer pressure, poverty, and exposure to social media .

A 2023 report by the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs indicated that over 60% of youth offenders come from households experiencing economic hardship, and nearly 70% had weak family supervision. These findings underscore the importance of a multidimensional response.

2.5. The Role of Informal Social Control Institutions

In Vietnamese society, informal social control mechanisms—especially family, school, and community—are crucial in preventing juvenile delinquency. These institutions instill moral values, supervise behavior, and provide emotional support.

However, recent research suggests their weakening:

- Families: Migration for work has led to “*left-behind*” children in rural areas. These children often lack parental supervision and are vulnerable to negative influences.
- Schools: Overemphasis on academic achievement and punitive discipline has alienated at-risk students.
- Communities: The traditional village structure has lost coherence due to urbanization and economic individualism.

Despite state rhetoric on “*holistic education*” and “*community responsibility*,” actual support systems (such as social workers, counselors, and extracurricular programs) are underfunded or absent² in many localities.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a convergent parallel mixed-methods design³, which integrates quantitative and qualitative data to explore how formal legal frameworks and informal social controls jointly shape juvenile crime patterns in Vietnam. This design allows for cross-validation of findings while capturing both macro-level trends and lived experiences of justice-involved youth.

3.2. Quantitative Component

The quantitative strand utilizes secondary data from the Ministry of Public Security’s 2022 Judicial Statistical Report⁴. The dataset covers the period from 2015 to 2022 and includes variables on:

¹ Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA). (2023). *Youth Crime Report*. Hanoi.

² Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA). (2023). *Youth Crime Report*. Hanoi.

³ Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

⁴ Ministry of Public Security (MPS). (2022). *Judicial statistical report 2022*. Hanoi: Criminal Police Department.

- Offense types (property crimes, violent crimes, cybercrimes),
- Age and gender distributions of offenders,
- Legal dispositions (warnings, administrative fines, custodial sentences),
- Regional trends (urban vs. rural prevalence).

Descriptive statistics were calculated to assess temporal changes in crime types and frequency. Chi-square tests were used to analyze relationships between demographic factors and sentencing outcomes¹. This component is crucial in identifying systemic patterns that may reflect broader socio-legal dynamics.

3.3. Qualitative Component

Complementing the statistical analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 45 participants:

- 30 juvenile offenders (aged 14–18), both currently detained and recently released,
- 15 key stakeholders, including:
 - Judicial officials (judges, prosecutors, police) (n=5),
 - Social workers and youth counselors (n=5),
 - Community leaders and NGO representatives (n=5).

Participants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling to ensure diversity in geography (Ha Noi, Da Nang, Ho Chi Minh City), legal experiences, and institutional affiliations². Each interview lasted 45–60 minutes and explored themes such as procedural fairness, perceptions of rehabilitation, informal supports, and reentry challenges.

Data were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically using NVivo. Codes were developed deductively from the theoretical framework (e.g., “labeling,” “restorative opportunity,” “social support”) and inductively from emerging patterns. This dual approach ensured both theory-driven rigor and contextual sensitivity³.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the following international guidelines on research involving minors⁴. Key ethical protocols included:

- Informed consent from legal guardians and verbal assent from juvenile participants,
- Ensuring anonymity and confidentiality through coded identifiers and secure data handling,
- Providing participants with the right to withdraw at any point without penalty,
- Offering post-interview counseling support in cases where distress or trauma was reported.

¹ Field, A. (2013). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

² Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

³ Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). *Using thematic analysis in psychology*. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101.

⁴ UNICEF. (2012). *Ethical research involving children*. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research–Innocenti.

- Researchers also underwent training in trauma-informed interviewing techniques, as recommended in studies involving vulnerable youth populations¹.

3.5. Limitations and Reflexivity

While mixed methods enhance analytic triangulation, this study acknowledges several limitations:

- Sampling bias may result from focusing on urban areas; rural and ethnic minority youth are underrepresented.
- Underreporting in official crime statistics may distort the actual prevalence of offenses, particularly cybercrime and school-based violence².
- Social desirability bias may influence how youth report their justice experiences or perceptions of institutions.
- Finally, given the researcher's legal background, reflexive positionality was maintained through memoing and peer debriefing to mitigate interpretation bias.³

Despite these limitations, the integration of empirical, legal and experiential data strengthens the study's validity and its capacity to inform responsive policy and legislative reform.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Structural Vulnerabilities: Youth at the Margins

The data reveal that juvenile delinquency in Vietnam is often rooted in structural vulnerabilities such as poverty, family breakdown, and educational disengagement. A significant number of interviewed youth came from peri-urban migrant communities with limited access to formal schooling, healthcare, or legal protections. These findings align with strain theory⁴, which posits that blocked access to legitimate opportunities may drive youth toward deviance.

"I left school in grade 7 because my parents divorced and I had to work... Then I got involved with a group that did petty thefts." (Male, 17, Hanoi)

The interplay between economic deprivation and social disintegration was evident. Participants frequently cited parental absence, domestic violence, and unstable housing as precursors to delinquent behavior. Children of internal migrants, in particular, often lacked legal residency, which barred them from enrolling in public schools or receiving social services⁵. This form of institutional exclusion rendered them "*invisible*" to state protection systems.

Such findings underscore the importance of holistic prevention strategies that go beyond punitive responses and address the socioeconomic conditions underpinning youth crime.⁶

¹ Willis, P., Hughes, M., Bland, R., Makarounas-Kirchmann, K., & Wilson, R. (2021). Ethical and methodological challenges in research with vulnerable youth. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 24(1), 89–101.

² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (2018). *Handbook on youth crime and criminal justice*. Vienna: UNODC.

³ Berger, R. (2015). *Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research*. Qualitative Research, 15(2), 219–234.

⁴ Agnew, R. (1992). *Foundation for a general strain theory of crime and delinquency*. Criminology, 30(1), 47–87.

⁵ UNICEF. (2012). *Ethical research involving children*. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research–Innocenti.

⁶ Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA). (2023). *Youth Crime Report*. Hanoi; Nguyễn, T. H. (2018). Urbanization and youth crime in Southern Vietnam. *Vietnam Journal of Social Sciences*, 12(3), 22–37.

4.2. Gaps in the Formal Justice System

Although Vietnam has made legislative progress-such as the Criminal Procedure Code (2015) and the Law on Children (2016) implementation remains uneven. The absence of dedicated juvenile courts, limited availability of trained juvenile judges, and inconsistent application of diversion mechanisms hinder progress.

“Frankly, we apply the Penal Code strictly. There’s little room to consider the child’s background or psychological state.” (Juvenile court judge, HCMC)

Field interviews and document analysis point to an overreliance on custodial measures, even for minor offenses like shoplifting. Despite the legal possibility of applying non-custodial sanctions (e.g., warnings, probation), judges and prosecutors often default to incarceration due to limited institutional guidance or insufficient inter-agency coordination.¹

This punitive orientation contradicts international standards set forth in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and Beijing Rules, which emphasize the best interests of the child, procedural fairness, and the use of detention only as a last resort.²

Such findings resonate with Foucault’s (1977) theory of disciplinary power, where legal institutions reproduce conformity through routinized, depersonalized procedures-often at the expense of youth agency and reintegration.

4.3. Decline of Informal Social Control

Informal social control-once central to Vietnamese society through family supervision, school norms, and community engagement-has significantly declined in the wake of urbanization, labor migration, and socioeconomic shifts.

“My mother works in Taiwan. I live with my grandmother. No one really cares if I go to school.” (Female, 16, Can Tho)

Several structural factors contributed to this erosion:

- Labor migration has created a generation of “left-behind” children with limited parental contact or guidance³.
- Schools prioritize academic performance and often lack the capacity or mandate to address emotional or behavioral challenges.⁴
- Community-based youth unions and neighborhood watch programs-historically strong under socialist collectivism-have weakened in urban areas due to individualization and administrative fragmentation.

The weakening of these informal institutions is associated with increased risk-taking, substance use, and peer-led deviance, echoing the core tenets of social bond theory⁵. Youth disconnected from primary social anchors are more likely to develop oppositional subcultures that challenge normative expectations.

¹ Trần, M. A., & Lê, V. K. (2020). Hệ thống pháp luật xử lý người chưa thành niên phạm tội ở Việt Nam: Thực trạng và khuyến nghị. *Tạp chí Nghiên cứu Lập pháp*, (22), 17–29.

² United Nations. (1985). *Standard minimum rules for the administration of juvenile justice (Beijing Rules)*; United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the rights of the child*; United Nations. (1990a). *Guidelines for the prevention of juvenile delinquency (Havana Rules)*.

³ Nguyễn, M., & Vũ, H. (2019). School discipline and marginalization in Vietnamese public education. *Asian Education Review*, 4(1), 43–59.

⁴ Pham, H. V., & Đỗ, T. K. (2022). Mô hình công lý phục hồi trong xử lý tội phạm vị thành niên tại Đà Nẵng: Kết quả và triển vọng. *Tạp chí Khoa học Xã hội Việt Nam*, (8), 30–42.

Moreover, feelings of institutional alienation and mistrust in public systems were frequently expressed by youth participants-highlighting the urgent need to rebuild community engagement and psychosocial support mechanisms.

5. Policy Implications

5.1. Strengthening Community-Based Prevention Programs

Findings from this study highlight the urgent need to prioritize community-based prevention as the foundational strategy for controlling youth crime in Vietnam. The current overreliance on punitive measures has shown limited success in reducing recidivism or addressing underlying causes¹. Evidence from both international and Vietnamese contexts supports the efficacy of integrated programs combining educational support, family engagement, mentorship, and community mobilization.²

Expanding community centers, youth clubs, and school-based interventions with coordinated support from the education, health, and justice sectors would address multiple risk factors simultaneously. Such multisectoral collaboration aligns with the life-course theory's emphasis on turning points, where timely interventions can redirect youth trajectories³. Moreover, these programs should be designed with cultural sensitivity to Vietnam's local contexts, recognizing the social capital inherent in family and community networks⁴.

5.2. Reforming Juvenile Justice Legislation

Vietnam's juvenile justice framework currently remains fragmented and partially incongruent with international standards, notably the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Beijing Rules⁵. To effectively balance retributive and restorative justice goals, a comprehensive juvenile justice law distinct from the general criminal code is necessary. This law should:

- Establish specialized juvenile courts and trained judicial personnel.
- Ensure procedural safeguards tailored to minors' developmental needs.
- Promote diversionary measures and community sanctions as alternatives to detention.
- Embed restorative justice principles, enabling victim-offender mediation and reconciliation.

Such reforms would align Vietnam's legal system with international norms and mitigate the negative effects of institutional labeling that exacerbate recidivism.⁶ Furthermore, adopting a child-centric approach reflects global best practices in juvenile justice reform.⁷

5.3. Enhancing Data Collection and Research Capacity

⁵ Hirschi, T. (1969). *Causes of delinquency*. University of California Press.

¹ Trần, M. A., & Lê, V. K. (2020). Hệ thống pháp luật xử lý người chưa thành niên phạm tội ở Việt Nam: Thực trạng và khuyến nghị. *Tạp chí Nghiên cứu Lập pháp*, (22), 17–29.

² Braithwaite, J. (1989). *Crime, shame and reintegration*. Cambridge University Press; Phạm, H. V., & Đỗ, T. K. (2022). Mô hình công lý phục hồi trong xử lý tội phạm vị thành niên tại Đà Nẵng: Kết quả và triển vọng. *Tạp chí Khoa học Xã hội Việt Nam*, (8), 30–42.

³ Sampson, R. J., & Laub, J. H. (1993). *Crime in the making: Pathways and turning points through life*. Harvard University Press.

⁴ Nguyễn, T. H. (2018). Tội phạm vị thành niên và các biện pháp phòng ngừa tại Việt Nam. *Tạp chí Luật học*, (4), 45–56.

⁵ United Nations. (1985). *Standard minimum rules for the administration of juvenile justice (Beijing Rules)*.

⁶ Becker, H. S. (1963). *Outsiders: Studies in the sociology of deviance*. Free Press.

⁷ United Nations. (1990a). *Guidelines for the prevention of juvenile delinquency (Havana Rules)*; United Nations. (1990b). *Standard minimum rules for non-custodial measures (Tokyo Rules)*.

Reliable, disaggregated data on juvenile offenders is a critical prerequisite for informed policy-making and evaluation. Currently, Vietnam's lack of a unified national database impedes the ability to track trends, monitor outcomes, or identify emergent issues in youth crime.¹ Investment in criminological research, interdisciplinary studies, and longitudinal surveys is therefore essential.

Collaboration between academic institutions, government agencies (such as MOLISA and MPS), and international partners can foster capacity building, knowledge exchange, and the development of evidence-based interventions. Such efforts would strengthen the socio-legal understanding of juvenile delinquency within Vietnam's evolving social landscape².

5.4. Fostering Youth Participation in Policy Formulation

Consistent with modern participatory governance paradigms, youth should be recognized not merely as objects of control but as active agents of change. Mechanisms such as youth parliaments, advisory councils, and participatory forums can ensure that policies are responsive, inclusive, and contextually grounded.³

Empowering young people to lead crime prevention initiatives fosters civic responsibility, social bonding, and community resilience-all of which contribute to long-term reductions in deviant behavior⁴. Vietnam's policy framework would benefit from institutionalizing youth voices to co-create solutions that resonate with their lived experiences.

6. Conclusion

This study has examined youth crime in Vietnam through an interdisciplinary socio-legal perspective, highlighting the complex interaction between structural vulnerabilities, cultural norms, and legal frameworks. The findings demonstrate that youth crime is not merely an individual moral failing but rather a manifestation of broader social dislocations, including urban marginalization, family instability, educational disparities, and the expanding influence of digital technologies.

Despite important legislative advancements, such as the Juvenile Procedure Code (2015) and incorporation of international standards like the UNCRC (1989), implementation gaps and an overemphasis on punitive measures persist within Vietnam's juvenile justice system. These systemic shortcomings risk reinforcing social exclusion and criminal labeling rather than promoting rehabilitation and reintegration.

Moving forward, a paradigm shift is essential-one that reframes young offenders as vulnerable individuals requiring supportive interventions rather than threats to be controlled. Achieving this transformation necessitates coordinated policy coherence, comprehensive legal reform, strengthened multi-sectoral collaboration, and active youth participation in policy and program development.

Vietnam's experiences offer valuable lessons for other rapidly changing societies confronting the challenges of juvenile justice in the 21st century, especially regarding balancing restorative justice with social control in contexts of modernization and digitalization.

Ultimately, the reduction of youth crime is not the sole responsibility of the criminal justice system but a collective societal endeavor. It demands sustained investment in inclusive environments, family and community

¹ Ministry of Public Security (MPS). (2022). *Judicial statistical report 2022*. Hanoi: Criminal Police Department.

² Nguyễn, M., & Vũ, H. (2019). School discipline and marginalization in Vietnamese public education. *Asian Education Review*, 4(1), 43–59.

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support structures, education equity, and the empowerment of young people to realize their potential. Only then can justice truly serve the best interests of children and foster safer, more resilient communities.

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