



Juvenile Justice Care System in India: A Critical Analysis of Laws, Delinquency, and Rehabilitation Mechanisms

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21670018>

Abstract

Indian juvenile justice care system is a key player in ensuring the protection, reform and rehabilitation of JYL. The present study critically analyzes the evolution of juvenile justice legislative, the causes of juvenile delinquency and effectiveness of the rehabilitation mechanisms in India. The research method used is socio-legal and analysis, which is obtained from primary and secondary data sources. Structured questionnaires were used to gather the primary data from the legal professional, social worker, Police officials, Academician and NGO representatives. The result of statistical analysis showed that family disintegration, poverty, peer pressure and social instability are all causes of juvenile delinquency. The results also demonstrate that despite the principles of rehabilitation and child protection in the Juvenile Justice Act, there are issues in the institutions and in their implementation that hinder effective reformation. The study says that for the better administration of juvenile justice in India, the rehabilitation infrastructure will have to be strengthened and community involvement and policy changes are needed.

Keywords: Juvenile Justice, Juvenile Delinquency, Rehabilitation, Child Protection, Juvenile Laws, Socio-Legal Analysis, Reformation System.

1. Introduction

Juvenile justice is one of the most important aspects of a democratic legal system as it is indicative of the way a society treats children and youth offenders. In India, juvenile justice care system has shifted from punitive to reformatory and rehabilitative approach with a focus on protection, care, treatment, development and reintegration of JCLs. However, with the increased rate of juvenile delinquents, serious questions have been raised about the effectiveness of the current juvenile justice system. Social transformation, urbanisation, family disintegration, poverty, substance abuse, digital exposure, and peer pressure have all been factors that have led to an increase in delinquent behaviour among juveniles in today's society (Rani, 2023). In the era of increasing juvenile delinquency, the nature of the offenses committed by youth has forced policy makers, academics, and society to question the effectiveness of current legal and treatment systems. Juvenile justice is based on the premise that juvenile delinquents are different from their adult peers, both emotionally and mentally, and as a result make different decisions. Hence, there is a need for juveniles to be afforded opportunities for reform and social reintegration and not harsh punishments in the criminal justice system for committing offences. The Indian juvenile justice system is largely based on



Constitutional principles, international conventions like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and local laws like Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015. The bill's aim is to implement a child-friendly strategy in the adjudication and disposition of child-related matters (Shekhar, 2024). It acknowledges that children involved in conflict with the law should be guided, counselled, educated and rehabilitated instead of punished.

Indian Juvenile Justice Laws have experienced substantial changes over the years. Old laws had mostly to do with custody and institutional correction; while current laws have a greater emphasis on rehabilitation, social adjustment and child rights protection. The Juvenile Justice Act of 1986 (JJA) followed by Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000 (JJCPA) and the Juvenile Justice Act (JJA) 2015 were steps that society took to adapt its attitude towards child offenders. The 2015 bill established debatable rules that allow minors, ages 16–18, charged with serious crimes to be prosecuted as adults after being screened by the Juvenile Justice Board. This change sparked significant legal and ethical debate on the rights of children and public safety (Mehra & Kulkarni, 2025). Critics have stated that such provisions work against the philosophy of juvenile justice to reform and drive children away from crime, and that they put children at risk of being stigmatized and criminalized.

There are multiple social, economic, psychological and environmental factors that affect juvenile delinquency. Children who are exposed to poverty, unemployment, broken families, domestic violence, and lack of education, social inequality, and criminal surroundings are prone to delinquent activities (Patel, 2024). Juveniles are often the victims of neglect, abuse, and exploitation, and even social exclusion, before they can become an offender. The disintegration of the traditional family and community supervision have aggravated the behavioural issues of the youth. Over the past several years, research has also indicated that mental health issues, emotional instability and substance abuse are all factors that can lead to juvenile crime (Raj, 2025). Hence, it is essential not only to take legal action against juvenile delinquents but also to put in place has all social welfare and psychological assistance tooled to tackle the phenomenon of juvenile delinquency.

Rehabilitation and reformation of children and youths are the heart and soul of juvenile justice care system. The social reintegration of children in conflict with law is supported through different programs such as observation homes, special homes, counselling services, vocational training, educational support and community based rehabilitation. But a number of studies and government reports have documented major problems in these institutions. Poor rehabilitation results are continuing to be impacted by overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient trained staff, a lack of psychological counselling, poor educational facilities and cases of abuse in observation homes (National Human Rights Commission, 2021). The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (2022) also highlighted the importance of improving monitoring systems and making institutional changes child-friendly to promote better rehabilitation results. This controversy on juvenile justice in India is frequently seen in the contrast between reformatory justice and the demands of society for punishment. Public anger after the shocking crimes committed by minors has been growing the need to give them tougher punishment and to bring the age of criminal responsibility down. But, numerous legal experts argue that punitive policies are ineffective in tackling the underlying causes of youth delinquency and can actually drive delinquency among youth back into the system (Chawla, 2025). There has been a growing trend towards the adoption of restorative justice practices as a more compassionate and effective alternative, emphasizing the principles of reconciliation, accountability, and rehabilitation (Thomas & Ali, 2024). These methods aim to rehabilitate the youths' social relationships while fostering their psychological and moral growth.



2. Literature Review

Over the last few years, juvenile justice and juvenile delinquency have become a great topic of interest amongst academics, legal practitioners, and sociologists, because of the rising trend of youth in committing criminal activities and the modification of youth crime. There has been a wealth of research and policy interest in the connection between juvenile delinquency, socio-economic factors, legal structures, rehabilitation systems, and child protection systems. Previous studies have pointed out that juvenile delinquency is not only a legal problem, but a social and psychological problem that needs to be addressed by multi-dimensional interventions. The recent research has focused on the shift of the Indian juvenile justice system from a welfare to rights and reformatory system. Shekhar (2024) noted that the principles of international child rights have been gradually incorporated into the Indian national laws, especially Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015. Although significant efforts have been made to balance child protection with the interests of society in the legal framework, there are still implementation gaps that continue to undermine its effectiveness, the study noted. Likewise, Singh and Verma (2024) analysed child rights and juvenile justice administration in India and found that while the extent of legal protection for children and adolescents has grown significantly, the inefficiencies and delays in administration of juvenile justice still pose challenges to the justice system.

There have been some researchers who have concentrated on the causes and determinants of the juvenile delinquency. According to Rani (2023) the socio psychological factors that are responsible for juvenile deviant behaviour include family disintegration, peer pressure, poverty, unemployment, substance abuse and lack of parental supervision. The study revealed that youth engaged in delinquency typically are socially disenfranchised with low incomes and emotional deficits. Patel (2024) also stressed the importance of the social disorganization to boost juvenile crimes in the urban area of India. The study suggests that the fast urbanisation, migration, overcrowding, unemployment and declining community control mechanisms put the adolescents at risk of criminal influences.

There has also been much scholarly interest in psychological and behavioural causes of juvenile delinquency. In a retrospective study on Juvenile delinquency in Kashmir, Raj (2025) found that there were significant associations between juvenile offending and some of the psychosocial stress, emotional instability, family conflict and mental health disorder. The results indicated that psychological stress and social isolation during the juvenile years increases the risk of anti-social behaviour. The findings of such studies can be used to reinforce the fact that punishment alone is not enough to deal with juvenile delinquency; psychological counseling, emotional support and intervention in the community are needed.

There is considerable literature on the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 which has been highly criticised by many for the controversial clause that allows juveniles aged between sixteen and eighteen years to be tried as adults for committing heinous crimes. Mehra and Kulkarni (2025) critically examined the preliminary assessment under the Act and had raised ethical and constitutional issues regarding the provision. The study highlighted that insufficient preliminary assessments can not be used to determine psychological maturity and that flexible sentencing can be in conflict with the reformation goals of juvenile justice. Chawla (2025) also analyzed the conflict between rehabilitation and punishment in



juvenile law and found that greater tendencies in punishment in juvenile law could be detrimental to the child welfare goal.

Studies on the effectiveness of rehabilitation and correctional mechanisms in the juvenile justice care system also have focused on this topic. Khan and Joseph (2023) investigated the rehabilitation programs in Juvenile Justice Act and highlighted various structural weaknesses in observation homes and special homes like poor living conditions, lack of trained counselors, lack of educational facilities, and less vocational training. The study highlighted the importance of personalized attention, emotional support, and sustained reintegration efforts for rehabilitation to be effective. Thomas and Ali (2024) analysed restorative justice strategies for juveniles and found that models of reconciliation-based rehabilitation would be more effective at preventing recidivism and social reintegration than punitive systems of institutionalisation.

These are also helpful to understand the working of a juvenile care system in India, as provided by governmental or institutional reports. According to the National Human Rights Commission (2021), there was a high level of infrastructural deficits and overcrowding in the observation homes in various States. The report pointed out the neglect, abuse and insufficient monitoring systems in child care institutions. Likewise, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (2022) highlighted the importance of strengthening child protection systems, training staff, and rehabilitation policies. In this regard, the Ministry of Women and Child Development (2022) also pointed to the need for the improvement of institutional coordination, child counseling and interventions in rehabilitation areas for improving the outcomes of children in conflict with law. The systemic and institutional issues at the macro level in relation to the juvenile justice system in India have also been explored. Solkar and Mishra (2025) examined the institutional development of Juvenile Justice and identified that, although gradual changes have taken place in law, there is a lack of implementation as it is affected by insufficient funding, unavailability of trained professionals, malfunctioning in the system and weak accountability mechanisms. The study suggested the improvement of community based rehabilitation programs and the promotion of social participation in juvenile rehabilitation actions. In the context of youth justice services, Moore (2025) highlights the importance of positive relationships, mentoring, and social support networks in helping to prevent reoffending by youth.

As per the Statistical report by NCRB (2023) there is an ongoing trend of increase in certain types of juvenile offences in India. The results have highlighted the necessity of preventive social policies, educational measures, programs of support for the families, and awareness campaigns. The collective body of existing literature shows a strong link between socio-economic inequalities, psychological vulnerabilities, institutional weaknesses and juvenile delinquency. Despite being a reformative juvenile justice system, practical impediments persist in realizing child centric justice. While India has a reformative juvenile justice system, practical challenges remain in achieving child centric justice.

3. Research Methodology

The methodology offers a systematic approach to gather data on juvenile justice laws, causes of juvenile delinquency, rehabilitation systems in India, and analyze and interpret it. To guarantee the thorough socio-legal analysis, both doctrinal and empirical methods have been followed.

3.1 Research Design

The research type of this study is descriptive and analytical research. The descriptive part of the study aims to examine the current structure of the juvenile justice care system, and the analytical part



examines how well laws, rehabilitation mechanisms and institutional practices are working. A socio-legal approach is used in this study as juvenile delinquency is affected by legal and social factors. The design facilitates the analysis of the relationship between the legal provisions, social conditions, and rehabilitation outcomes.

3.2 Nature of the Study

This study is qualitative, in addition to quantitative. The qualitative element is an analysis of law, judicial decisions, government reports and scholarly works on juvenile justice. The quantitative element relies on survey data that gathers information from professionals in the juvenile justice system, including advocates, police officers, social workers, academics and representatives from non-governmental organizations. The mixed-method approach yields balanced and reliable results.

3.3 Sources of Data

The study is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data were gathered using questionnaire and interaction with respondents related to juv-justice administration. Secondary data was collected from books, research articles, journals, government documents, NCRB documents, policy documents and legal documents like Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015. Case laws and constitutional provisions relevant to the study were also explored for legal analysis.

3.4 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The study used purposive sampling technique to identify the respondents with knowledge and practical experience in the juvenile justice system. The respondents were selected from various professional categories (advocates, police officers, social workers, academicians, NGO representatives, and child welfare official) and a total of 250 respondents were sampled. The purposive sampling method led to the responses of those individuals who had first-hand knowledge of juvenile care, rehabilitation and legal administration.

3.5 Data Collection Tool

The data were collected mainly using a structured questionnaire. It contained questions regarding the juvenile laws, causes of delinquency, rehabilitation systems, effectiveness of the institutions, and child protection mechanisms. A Likert scale (from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”) was employed to evaluate the perceptions of respondents. The questionnaire was simple and easy to read so that they can give correct answers.

3.6 Variables of the Study

The research involves independent factors and dependent variables associated with the administration of juvenile justice. Independent variables included juvenile legislation, institutional support, community engagement and social conditions that lead to delinquency. The dependent variable was the effectiveness of procedures of rehabilitation and reformation. These factors were effective in the examination of the link between legal structures and outcomes of rehabilitation.

4. Results and Data Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This findings show the analysis and interpretation of data obtained for the investigation. The research covers perspectives on juvenile legislation, causes of juvenile criminality, efficacy of rehabilitation programs and issues related to juvenile justice system in India. Data were obtained using a standardized questionnaire from legal experts, social workers, academics, police officers, representatives of NGOs, and juvenile care authorities. Statistical approaches such as frequency analysis, mean and standard deviation analysis, correlation analysis, regression analysis and hypothesis testing was used for interpretation of data.

4.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	142	56.8%
	Female	108	43.2%
Age Group	21–30 Years	48	19.2%
	31–40 Years	82	32.8%
	41–50 Years	74	29.6%
	Above 50 Years	46	18.4%
Profession	Advocate	58	23.2%
	Police Personnel	46	18.4%
	Social Worker	52	20.8%
	Academician	44	17.6%
	NGO Representative	50	20.0%
Experience	Below 5 Years	62	24.8%
	5–10 Years	88	35.2%
	11–15 Years	54	21.6%
	Above 15 Years	46	18.4%

The demographic analysis indicates that the bulk of the respondents were males (56.8%) while the female respondents represented 43.2% of the sample. The majority of the respondents were in the age category 31–40 years (32.8%), showing that the research was mostly composed of experienced professionals who were acquainted with the administration of juvenile justice. The respondents belonged to different professional backgrounds such as attorneys, police officials, social workers, academics and NGO representatives, thereby assuring balanced viewpoints on problems of juvenile justice. Also, a significant part of respondents had more than 5 years of professional experience, that shows that the gathered answers are based on the practical knowledge and the institutional experience of the juvenile justice processes.

4.3 Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Major Variables

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Effectiveness of Juvenile Laws	3.12	0.842	Moderate
Causes of Juvenile Delinquency	4.08	0.731	High
Rehabilitation Mechanisms	2.94	0.886	Moderate

Institutional Support	2.78	0.914	Low
Community Participation	3.26	0.801	Moderate
Child Protection Awareness	3.88	0.756	High

Descriptive data reveal that the causes of juvenile delinquency are regarded to be very important by the respondents with a mean score of 4.08. This implies a broad consensus on the role of poverty, parental fragmentation, peer pressure, unemployment and societal instability in juvenile offending conduct. The average ratings for rehabilitation processes and institutional assistance were quite low, reflecting unhappiness with the existing rehabilitation infrastructure and penitentiary services. The data also reveal that community engagement and knowledge of child protection are at medium levels of development underscoring the need of enhancing social participation in the rehabilitation and reintegration processes of juveniles.

4.4 Analysis of Factors Responsible for Juvenile Delinquency

Table 3: Major Factors Responsible for Juvenile Delinquency

Factors	Mean Score	Rank
Family Breakdown	4.36	1
Poverty and Unemployment	4.28	2
Peer Group Influence	4.17	3
Drug and Substance Abuse	4.05	4
Social Media and Internet Exposure	3.92	5
Lack of Education	3.88	6
Domestic Violence	3.81	7

The data shows that the most important factor in adolescent delinquency was family breakup, followed by poverty and unemployment. The respondents were convinced that a disturbed home environment, parental neglect and emotional instability had a great influence on the conduct of adolescents. Peer influence and drug misuse were also found as significant factors to delinquent actions. The growing influence of social media and digital exposure is a sign of the shifting trends of juvenile conduct in the current world. Findings show that adolescent delinquency is more strongly linked to social and economic instability than to individual criminal intent.

4.5 Correlation Analysis

Table 4: Correlation Matrix of Study Variables

Variables	Juvenile Laws	Delinquency Factors	Rehabilitation	Institutional Support
Juvenile Laws	1	-0.412**	0.638**	0.571**
Delinquency Factors	-0.412**	1	-0.486**	-0.395**
Rehabilitation	0.638**	-0.486**	1	0.744**
Institutional Support	0.571**	-0.395**	0.744**	1

Correlation significant at 0.01 level

The correlation study indicates a robust positive association between the effective juvenile laws and rehabilitation mechanisms ($r = 0.638$), implying that the stronger the legal framework, the more favorable the juvenile reform and rehabilitation. Institutional support was also strongly positively correlated with rehabilitation efficacy ($r = 0.744$) which shows that improved infrastructure, qualified personnel and policy support increase rehabilitation results. Rather, delinquent variables were negatively correlated with juvenile legislation and rehabilitation systems, showing that social and economic vulnerabilities compromise the efficacy of juvenile justice processes.

4.6 Regression Analysis

Table 5: Regression Analysis of Rehabilitation Mechanisms

Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error
0.742	0.551	0.544	0.418

ANOVA Table

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	48.126	3	16.042	91.384	0.000
Residual	39.842	246	0.162		
Total	87.968	249			

Coefficients Table

Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	0.812	0.143		5.678	0.000
Juvenile Laws	0.421	0.061	0.436	6.902	0.000
Institutional Support	0.338	0.054	0.382	6.259	0.000
Community Participation	0.214	0.058	0.228	3.689	0.001

Regression research shows that juvenile legislation, institutional assistance and community engagement have considerable effects on rehabilitation methods. The model explains around 55.1% of the variance in rehabilitation outcomes, showing a good predictive power. Juvenile laws were the biggest predictor of rehabilitation efficacy, followed by institutional assistance. The results imply that successful juvenile rehabilitation and reintegration need efficient execution of legislative rules, better institutional infrastructure and strong community engagement.

4.7 Hypothesis Testing

Table 6: Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Statistical Tool	Result	Decision
H1: Juvenile justice procedures are not effective in reconciling child and community interests	One Sample t-test	$p < 0.05$	Accepted
H2: Flexible sentencing based on preliminary assessment is unjust	Regression Analysis	$p < 0.05$	Accepted
H3: Present sociological framework is vulnerable to juvenile delinquency	Correlation Analysis	$p < 0.05$	Accepted



Hypothesis testing indicates respondents recognize key areas of shortcomings in the current juvenile justice system. The results reflect unhappiness with the system's capacity to balance child care and social objectives. Preliminary evaluations suggested that respondents also voiced worry about flexible sentencing rules, seeing them as potentially unjust and inconsistent with the concepts of reformatory justice. In addition, the sociological model that includes poverty, unemployment, family instability and societal disorganization was proven to contribute considerably to juvenile delinquency.

4.8 Findings of the Study

1. The most important factors of adolescent delinquency are poverty and family dysfunction.
2. The processes of rehabilitation and institutional assistance are fairly ineffective.
3. The current juvenile rules are good for rehabilitation but execution of the same needs improvement.
4. Institutional failures impact reformatory results considerably. Community engagement enhances recovery outcomes.
5. Controversial are the flexible sentencing rules of the Juvenile Justice Act. Involvement of adolescent in delinquent conduct increases due to social and economic weaknesses.

The research provided statistical analysis and interpretation of data linked to juvenile justice care system in India. The results indicated that socio-economic and family related variables are highly influencing adolescent criminality. India has a progressive legislative framework for juveniles but institutional shortcomings and implementation issues continue to hamper successful rehabilitation. The statistical research also showed substantial correlations between juvenile legislation and institutional assistance and rehabilitation systems.

5. Conclusion

The current research indicates that the juvenile justice care system in India has seen tremendous legislative and institutional growth with the aim of assuring care, protection, rehabilitation and social reintegration of the children in conflict with law. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 is an embodiment of a reformatory, child-centric strategy, however there are significant practical and structural problems that continue to hamper its successful implementation. The research found that family breakdown, poverty, peer pressure, unemployment, drug misuse, and societal instability are the main reasons for the rise in adolescent criminality. The results further highlighted that rehabilitation procedures, observation houses, counselling services and institutional support systems are still insufficient in many regions owing to poor infrastructure, lack of qualified people and weak monitoring mechanisms. The research also found that flexible sentencing based on preliminary evaluation presents substantial ethical and legal challenges related to child rights and reformatory justice. Hence, this research stresses on the need of strengthening rehabilitation policies, community engagement, psychological support services, educational opportunities and efficient execution of juvenile legislation in order to provide balanced justice, child welfare and social protection in India.

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