

---

# **THE ALARMING RISE OF HEINOUS CRIMES BY JUVENILES IN INDIA: AN EVALUATION OF CONTRIBUTING FACTORS AND THE NEED FOR EARLY INTERVENTION**

---

Simran Sheikh, Vaikunta Baliga College of Law, Udupi, Karnataka, Affiliated to  
Karnataka State Law University, Hubballi.

## **ABSTRACT**

For all the efforts of the Indian legal administration to minimise crimes rates, heinous offences committed by juveniles persists to build momentum. Factors such as strained family ties, poverty and drug abuse contribute markedly to this issue. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Amendment Act, 2015 implemented provisions to try juveniles committing heinous offences as adults, prompting intense debate between the proponents of punitive and rehabilitative approaches. This Article evaluates the subtleties of Juvenile Justice in India, exploring the dynamics between legislative frameworks, socio-economic factors, and reformation policies. To effectively combat this problem, it is vital to employ a balanced approach that caters a sense of sensibility and accountability among youths while upholding the rule of law to avert the manipulation of loopholes. A meticulous solution can help reduce the upward trajectory of heinous crimes among juveniles.

**Introduction.**

Juvenile crimes are an issue across the globe. The number of offences committed by persons below the age of adulthood is a matter of concern in several nations such as the United States of America, England and many others. India is no exception to this unfortunate happening. In particular to the Indian context, what is more alarming is that though the overall juvenile crime rate has decreased at the present times, the rate at which violent crimes are being committed by juveniles are on the rise. This, therefore poses serious concern about the direction in which the younger generation is heading and the efficiency of the Indian juvenile justice system in tackling them. It is a calling for a more alert, active and comprehensive legal intervention.

According to the latest data reported by The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) in 2022 the number of juvenile crimes showcases a downfall from 37,402 cases in 2017 to 33,261 cases in the year 2022. But this report by the NCRB also points out the increase in the percentage of violent crimes committed by children below the age of 18. Where in 2016 the statistics on commission of violent crimes by juveniles was at 32.5%, a rapid hike to 49.5% has been witnessed in the year 2022. This is to the exclusion of petty offences such as theft, rash driving, trespass and others. Furthermore, a state wise analysis of juvenile crimes across various states of the country indicates that the state of Madhya Pradesh tops the list of highest incidences of juvenile crimes with 59,372 cases, followed closely by states like Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu with 55,852, 24,301 and 21,368 cases respectively<sup>1</sup>.

**Juvenile administration in India: Definitions and Recent Amendments.**

The Juvenile Justice system in India is governed by the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Amendment Act, 2021. Originally enacted as the Juvenile Justice Act of 1986, the enactment was the result of Beijing Rules or the United Nations Minimum Rules for Administration of juvenile justice, 1985 adopted by the United Nations. The enactment of the Juvenile Justice Act testifies India's commitment to providing protection and rehabilitation to its minor offender.

The Act defines 'Juvenile' as a person below the age of eighteen years<sup>2</sup>. Heinous offences are defined as inclusive of those offences for which the punishment under Indian penal code (akin

---

<sup>1</sup> The National Crime Records Bureau, "Crime in India" (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2022)

<sup>2</sup> The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Amendment Act, 2021 (Act 23 of 2021), s.2(35)

to Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023) or any other law for time being in force is imprisonment for seven years or more<sup>3</sup>. Instances of heinous crime would include acts such as Murder, Rape, assault, arson, dacoity etc. The Juvenile Justice Act caters to the basic needs of children who are in conflict with law and who require care and protection through development, treatment, social integration, by adopting a child friendly approach in the adjudication and disposal of matters in the best interest of children<sup>4</sup>. The principle of child welfare focusing on securing the best interest of the child forms a matter of paramount consideration at all stages and runs like a golden thread throughout the legislation.

It was held that the children who are below 18 years of age and are intellectually, mentally capable of understanding the nature and consequences of their heinous crimes must be tried by the regular penal code in the ordinary courts<sup>5</sup>. However, since the primary object of the act is to reform the children who come in conflict with law and not to punish them, a rehabilitative approach was taken. In 2015, an amendment was brought forth to the act by which the children who commit heinous offences and are within the age brackets of 16 to 18 years would be treated as adults. In such cases the Juvenile Justice Board shall conduct a preliminary assessment of the child's mental and physical capacity to commit the offence, his ability to comprehend the outcome of the act and the circumstances under which the offence was committed<sup>6</sup>. Such a child shall then be initially sent to a place of safety and will later be transferred to a regular jail upon completion of 21 years of age<sup>7</sup>.

However, despite these measures the incidence of heinous offences by juveniles is not under control. There are several instances that get reported almost every other day which features a child committing grave offences, most of which are due to trivial reasons. The incident of children – students of class XI and XII threatening and then stabbing their school principal repeatedly, killing him in a village of Haryana, after the latter reprimanded them over behavioural issues is an incident that sent chills down the entire education system<sup>8</sup>. This is not an isolated event. There are instances similar to this where the children commit grave offences

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., s.2(33)

<sup>4</sup> The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 (Act 2 of 2016)

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Subramanian Swamy And Ors vs Raju Thr. Member Juvenile Justice Board and An., AIR 2014 SC (CRI) 1008

<sup>6</sup> Supra note 4, s. 15(1)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., s.20(2)

<sup>8</sup> Ashok Kumar, "Hisar school principal stabbed to death by students" *The Hindu*, July 10, 2025, available at <<https://www.thehindu.com/national/Haryana/private-school-principal-stabbed-to-death-by-two-teenage-students-in-haryanas-hisar/article69795685.ece>> (last visited on 26/7/25, 6:23 am)

and show no trace of remorse. What then causes them to commit such brutal acts remains a question that needs to be answered.

### **Causes for the rise in Heinous Crimes by Juveniles.**

No person is born a criminal. A child does not enter the world with an intention to cause evil. There are factors, either external or psychological that leads one to such acts. Thus, an effective means of reducing the occurrences of the heinous crimes by juveniles is to understand the possible factors that cause and trigger them and then to curb and eliminate them to an extent as far as possible.

#### ***1. Dysfunctional Homes: -***

Family is the primary unit of learning. Home is where a child is first exposed to interactions and communications. It is for a fact that children as babies and teenagers imbibe the behaviour, conduct and norms which are presented to them within their domestic sphere by the elders of the family. Families play a vital role in shaping a child's early character and personality.

Broken homes, lack of availability and supervision, poor parent child relationship, domestic abuse all have a share in contributing to juvenile delinquency. It is shown that kids who have witnessed domestic violence in their households are more leaned towards crimes as it makes them develop a crooked psyche that force and physical abuse is a way out in every situation. It makes violence seem to be an easy solution<sup>9</sup>. Families whose structure consists of only a single parent tend to provide lesser supervision and emotional availability. Studies have showcased that a traditional two parented family tends to provide better environment and supervision<sup>10</sup>. Harsh punishments, constant nagging and scolding are also reasons for deviant behaviour among juveniles.

#### ***2. Peer Pressure: -***

Peer pressure is the influence exerted by a social group upon another individual/s<sup>11</sup>. As children grow into adolescence, the influence of parents upon them is supplanted by the influence of

---

<sup>9</sup> Navya Rathi and Eve Dhariwal, "Family ties, broken Paths: Understanding the Roots of Juvenile Delinquency", 4 Journal of National Law University of Odisha, 77. (2025)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 73(2025)

<sup>11</sup> May Omogho Esiri, "The Influence of Peer Pressure on Criminal Behaviour", 21 Journal of IOSR ,10 (2016)

friends whose actions dictate most of the child's decisions. The kids who get ostracized by their regular friends and associates for being weird or socially awkward find solace in the gangs of delinquent peers. These groups talk about the acts they have committed, laugh and joke about it which leads to further law breaking<sup>12</sup>. Besides there always exists a fear of being left out among peers. Kids fall prey to the false belief that since their other friends do an illegal act, they can do it too<sup>13</sup>. The child who keeps away from the deviant acts of others is ridiculed for being a coward and bullied until he becomes one of them.

### ***3. Economic disadvantage and destitution: -***

Juvenile crimes are also linked to poverty and limited economic opportunities. A hungry stomach knows no morals. Children belonging to financially unstable and destitute families may often resort to crimes as a means of survival. The lack of financial assistance also deprives kids of quality education and higher studies creating a hollow space which should have been filled with discipline and ethical norms. Consequentially, the absence and the difficulty to gain vocational training, employment and other better facilities may lead to commission of crimes.

### ***4. Adverse surroundings: -***

If the environment to which the child is exposed to consists of people who do not follow the laws and are vulnerable to committing crimes and aggression it will impact the child's compliance. Youths who grow up in such communities get early access to illicit activities and may adopt such acts earlier than other kids who may grow up in a law-abiding area.

### ***5. Drug Abuse: -***

The Substance abuse among minors also leads to juvenile crimes. Most of the drug abusing youth involved in crimes come from underprivileged background<sup>14</sup>. Drug abuse is a threat not just to the individual but to the people in and around such individual. The rampant use of drug may be affiliated to its vivid affects upon consumption such as contentment, mood upliftment and inability to decipher the consequences of the act.

---

<sup>12</sup> Matthew Giblin, "Using Police Officers to Enhance the Supervision of Juvenile Probationers: An Evaluation of The Anchorage CAN Program", 48 Journal of Crime and Delinquency, 116- 137 (2002)

<sup>13</sup> Larry J. Siegel, "Juvenile Delinquency – Theory, Practice and Law", 335 (Cengage, USA ,14<sup>TH</sup> edn., 2023)

<sup>14</sup> Jaggi Pooja and Kumar Garima, "The Drug Addiction in Juvenile Delinquents – A Case Study", 3 Journal of Haryana Police,68 (2020)

## **6. Media Exposure: -**

The impact of media and in particular of social media upon the daily lives of people is undeniable. While it has its own virtues and merits, the destruction it has brought along cannot be overlooked. Children today are exposed to media everywhere. The problem however is the content that is fed to them. Violence pervades through all mediums, be it the video games and mobile phone games that they play or the movies which boast action scenes. Children tend to imitate the criminal actions displayed through these online platforms. Greater exposure to such data diminishes the difference between the reel and real world.

## **Juvenile Interventions: - Punitive and Rehabilitative Methods.**

The Juvenile Administration in India had been traditionally welfare oriented<sup>15</sup>. A drastic change however followed after the 2012 Delhi Gang Rape<sup>16</sup>. The detention of mere 3 years granted to one of the accused, a juvenile of 17 years of age sparked outraged among general public and raised concerns about the efficiency of the Juvenile Justice Act, 2000. Subsequently the act was amended in the year 2015 to inculcate this deficiency. The Amendment bifurcated children on the basis of their age into two categories - those below 16 year, who were presumed to lack cognitive maturity and the children between 16 to 18 years who commit heinous crimes. This marked a shift towards a more punitive juvenile administration in India.

Ever since there has always been a debate over the kind of treatment that has to be provided to the juvenile offenders. While some advocate the deterrent theory of punishment to be applicable others stress on the need to focus on the reformatory theory prevalent in domain of law. In matters of juvenile justice, the deterrent or punitive theory aims at punishing the juvenile offenders for the crimes they carry out. In doing so it aims at setting a deterrent and an example to all those who may share similar ideas and the want of committing like offences. This approach stresses on the need to stabilise the society<sup>17</sup> and free it from crimes. Infliction of punishment provides a sense of justice to the victims and their loved ones. However, it ignores the welfare of children which may be hampered in the process. This approach of dealing with juvenile delinquents undermines the hazardous effect which it may have on the mental framework of young individuals found in conflict with law. Treating children at par with adults

---

<sup>15</sup> Tanushree Das, "Balancing Punishment and Rehabilitation in Juvenile Justice Systems: A Legal Analysis", (2025) (Unpublished LL.M dissertation, Brainware University).

<sup>16</sup> Mukesh & Anr vs State for Nct of Delhi & Ors, AIR 2017 SC 2161

<sup>17</sup> Hiba Irfan Khan, "Juvenile Justice: Punitive or Reformatory", 1 Journal of ILE Legal Review, 35 (2023)

may put the former in close contact with the habitual offenders and with those adults who commit outrageous felonies. This may, instead of curing the juvenile of the criminal impulses further pollute their minds to a greater extent.

On the other hand, the reformatory approach towards juvenile offenders aims at reforming and reconstructing the young minds. It focuses on freeing the child of the criminal inclinations it has slipped into. It puts them on a footing where they are viewed as patients who require treatment in order to lead better lives. The minds of children are still capable of being moulded towards good. Improved supervision and guidance provide scope for building youths with better psychology and behavioural habits. This approach is evident in the Indian Juvenile Justice Amendment Act, 2021 which provides for the placement of children who are in conflict with law in special homes where they are equipped with education, skill development, counselling, behaviour modification therapy and psychiatric support<sup>18</sup>. In addition, the act makes provisions for the children to attend school, vocational training centre, therapeutic centre and de addiction programmes as a means of reformation<sup>19</sup>.

The rehabilitation programmes aid in identifying the root causes of delinquency in juveniles such as the lack of education and employment opportunities, mental health problems, and addiction and thereby assist in tackling their propensity for committing crimes. An effective reformation goes a long way in reducing recidivism rates amongst juveniles. However, a prominent obstacle of such a framework is that it would not be applicable to all individuals. While it may prove fruitful for offenders indulging in petty crimes the same may not hold true in cases of juveniles perpetrating brutal and gruesome crimes<sup>20</sup>.

On the whole both the measures of punishing and reforming juvenile offenders focus at preventing future crimes and protecting the society from further harm. They share the same goal but are diverge in their methodologies. The choice of approach which the justice system may have to make for itself will largely depend on the objectives it wants to achieve. Its approach may either be aimed for short run or long run. Punishing juveniles for their crimes will have an immediate effect of conveying a message hindering other from committing crimes but it does not assist in ascertaining the reasons for commission of offences in the long run. On

---

<sup>18</sup> Supra note 2, s. 18 (1)(g)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., s. 18(2)

<sup>20</sup> Sudha Yadav and Akhilesh Ranaut, "Juvenile Justice Reforms: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Rehabilitation Vs Punishment", 5 Journal of International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research, 5 -3 (2023)

the contrary, Rehabilitation programmes offer a pathway for rectifying the criminal behaviour although they may result in being economical stressful and ineffective if they are not carried on efficiently. Both the methodologies have their own merits and drawbacks and therefore an amicable solution lies in balancing both the approaches in a manner that befits the needs of the minor perpetrators.

### **Key Remedies and Solutions.**

The problem at hand is the one which springs from multifaceted causes making it equally essential that the solution to it must also be diverse and holistic covering all major sectors and relevant fields of root causes. Heinous crimes by juvenile occur owing to social, economic and legislative hindrances and shortcomings. Primary educational institutions and families need to do more in terms of instilling responsibility and accountability in children. They must inculcate in them the spirit of tolerance, patience and endurance which enables them to survive real life situations especially at times of chastisement or divergent human perspectives. Parent training programmes, increased extra-curricular engagements for children and other measures fostering enhanced youth development must be undertaken by the local organisations and clubs providing an environment that promotes intermingling, mutual cooperation and coexistence, An Increased Control over the social media activities of minors, monitoring of the content made available to the juveniles is essential. Counselling and emotional assistance also help in minimizing the risks. While the act provides for counselling and therapeutic sessions as a means of reforming the juvenile offenders, a proactive measure of engaging children in counselling and mental health support centres from the initial period helps in ascertaining the underlying psychological problem and provides scope for better handling of emotion, reducing the chances of criminal delinquency.

The next thing to do would be to overcome the implementational difficulties found in the present enactment. Efforts must be made to recruit those staffs in institutional centres who possess expertise and experience in the field of child care and counselling, provide better flow of funds to the institutions for improved implementation of programmes and make the process faster. Remedy also lies in maintaining good standards in juvenile institution established to reform juvenile offenders.

### **Conclusion.**

Commission of heinous crimes by minors is a sad reality today. Immediate intervention at both

individual, community and state level has become unseeingly important. The growth of this mishap pulls down a pressing demand for revisiting our legal frameworks in this regard. Ultimately no full-fledged solution can be reached unless every section of the state population harmonises their effort to tackle this trouble. The need therefore on one hand is to strengthen the law and on the other to collectively work towards its effective implementation.