
BEYOND DETENTION: AN EVALUATION OF REHABILITATION AND REFORM IN THE JUVENILE DETENTION CENTRE

Pranav Taneja
Akansha Sharma

ABSTRACT

This paper tries to examine the practical reality of the Indian juvenile justice system through the lens of natural justice. The study examines the gap between the legal framework and its practical application, based on observations made during a field visit to an Observation home for Juveniles. The aim of our visit was to assess the facilities and living conditions offered to the Juveniles, to interact with them and learn about their individual stories, and to examine the scale and effectiveness of the national rehabilitation initiatives. The study points to serious shortcomings in the overall child protection services, rehabilitation initiatives and infrastructure.

Keywords: Juvenile Justice System, Natural Justice, Rehabilitation Initiatives.

“There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.”

- Nelson Mandela

Introduction

India is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which emphasises the need for a child-friendly justice that is sensitive, protective, and responsive to the unique vulnerabilities of children.

The Convention lays down the social, economic, cultural, and political rights of every child, irrespective of caste, creed, class, or background, affirming that childhood must be safeguarded against exploitation and neglect. The Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 embodies these international commitments by prioritising rehabilitation and reintegration over retribution,

recognising that children in conflict with the law require direction, sustenance, and prospects for reform rather than punitive measures. In ordinary parlance, a minor is understood as a child or adolescent below the statutory age of eighteen who has come into direct encounter with the machinery of law.

The screenshot displays the 'STATUS OF RATIFICATION INTERACTIVE DASHBOARD' for India. The dashboard includes a list of countries on the left and a table of human rights instruments in the center. The table lists the following instruments and their status:

Human Rights Instrument : (Date into force)	Ratification Status	Declaration
of All Forms of Discrimination against Women :1753		
Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment :1753	Signature: 1997, Ratification/Accession: NA	
Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment :1753	Signature: NA, Ratification/Accession: NA	
Convention on the Rights of the Child :1753	Signature: NA, Ratification/Accession: 1992	✓
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict :1753	Signature: 2004, Ratification/Accession: 2005	✓
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography :1753	Signature: 2004, Ratification/Accession: 2005	
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure :1753	Signature: NA, Ratification/Accession: NA	
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families :1753	Signature: NA, Ratification/Accession: NA	
International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance :1753	Signature: 2007, Ratification/Accession: NA	
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities :1753	Signature: 2007, Ratification/Accession: 2007	

(<https://indicators.ohchr.org>) *Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)*, December 11, 1992 (a).

Young children wandering the streets have become a pervasive and distressing reality in many developing-country cities, particularly in slum areas where poverty, displacement, and social exclusion converge. UNICEF (2012, p. 32) estimates that tens of millions of children and young people across the world live or work on the streets, often enduring conditions of extreme deprivation and systemic neglect. In India, children are compelled to make the streets

their home either because families are unable to provide for them, or because domestic neglect, abuse, or violence forces them to seek survival elsewhere. For many, the hardships of street life appear less cruel than the suffering within their households.

Street children exist in a fragile liminality unnoticed when they suffer, yet hyper-visible when accused of wrongdoing. Devoid of stable shelter, access to education, or adequate nutrition, they are frequently drawn into clandestine activities such as begging, petty theft, or hazardous forms of child labour. The lure of quick money, the need for group acceptance, or the false sense of protection offered by gangs and traffickers often ensnares them further. In some cases, these affiliations provide a perverse kind of security, even against the violence of state authorities, including the police, who paradoxically are entrusted with their protection.

This vulnerability is compounded by systemic failures of law and welfare. Far too often, street children are treated not as victims of structural deprivation but as offenders, thereby subjected to cycles of criminalization rather than rehabilitation. Their plight thus raises not merely a sociological issue but also a jurisprudential and moral one, implicating the duties of the State to uphold the fundamental rights and human dignity of every child.

The Indian judiciary has, on occasion, intervened to articulate this responsibility. In *Sheela Barse v. Union of India* (1986 AIR 1773), the Supreme Court emphasized that children in custody are entitled to protection from abuse, neglect, and maltreatment, declaring that the

State stands as *parens patriae* for all children. Similarly, in *M.C. Mehta v. State of Tamil Nadu* (1991 AIR 417), the Court held that children must not be employed in hazardous occupations and instead should be provided with education and rehabilitation thus linking child protection to the constitutional mandate of Article 21 (right to life and personal liberty) read with Directive

Principles of State Policy. (Doctrine - *Parens patriae* empowers the state to act as guardian for those unable to care for themselves)

These judicial pronouncements reflect a deeper jurisprudential foundation rooted in both **natural justice** and **human rights discourse**. The principle of *parens patriae* underscores that children, as dependents with evolving capacities, require guardianship and special rights rather than punitive treatment. Internationally, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

(1989), to which India is a signatory, enshrines the right of every child to survival, development, and protection from exploitation. Yet the persistent phenomenon of street children in India underscores the gulf between normative legal commitments and ground realities.

Unless systemic interventions simultaneously address the **structural causes of poverty** and the **immediate vulnerabilities of children**, the cycle of marginalization and criminalization will endure. A jurisprudentially sound response must integrate **welfare with justice** not merely removing children from the streets, but restoring their dignity through education, social reintegration, and legal protection. In this sense, the issue of street children becomes a test case for the moral legitimacy of the legal system itself, challenging whether the law is truly an instrument of justice or merely a mechanism of social control.

<https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/wyr11/FactSheetonYouthandJuvenileJustice.pdf>

Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015

A seminal legislative framework delineates under Section 2(35) of the Juvenile Justice Act defines a juvenile as any person below the age of eighteen, while Section 2(13) specifies that a child in conflict with the law is one who has been alleged or found to have committed a criminal offence before crossing that age threshold. The Juvenile Justice Board, established under the Act, functions through observation homes designed not merely for custody but for care, protection, and reformative services. The underlying assumption is that juveniles lack cognitive maturity, they often fail to comprehend the nature and consequences of their acts. Countless are driven into crime by poverty, parental neglect, illiteracy, or fragile social nurture. Hence, the law seeks not retribution but rehabilitation, aiming to prevent recidivism by fostering cognitive, emotional, and vocational growth. Detention, instead of facilitating reintegration, frequently hardens tendencies and increases the risk of relapse into crime.

This legislative framework rests on a reformist and rehabilitative ethos, envisaging the holistic care, treatment, development, and social reintegration of young offenders through a childfriendly, empathetic judicial process. When minors are detained and brought before juvenile courts, the obligation of the state is not to punish them as adult criminals but to rehabilitate, heal, and prepare them for constructive re-entry into society. Yet, this approach

raises urgent questions: Are these children truly being afforded genuine opportunities for development and reintegration? Are their constitutional and human rights safeguarded in practice? Disturbingly, a large number of juveniles remain unaware of their fundamental rights, despite these being both legally guaranteed and ethically essential. Such ignorance often results in systemic neglect, institutional indifference, and violations within judicial processes, which jeopardize the very ideals of juvenile justice.

Therefore, the discourse on juvenile justice must remain vigilant, compassionate, and unwaveringly dedicated to the best interests of the child, as mandated by both national law and international conventions. Only through this commitment can the justice system transcend punitive instincts and uphold its higher purpose of nurturing children into responsible, reformed citizens. <https://cara.wcd.gov.in/pdf/jj%20act%202015.pdf>

Jurisprudential Foundations - Natural Justice

The jurisprudential foundation of the juvenile justice framework rests upon the Latin maxim *Doli Incapax*, which translates as “incapable of doing harm.” This principle asserts that children of a tender age lack the cognitive capacity to form *mens rea*, or criminal intent, which is a necessary condition for culpability in most legal systems. By recognising that a child cannot be judged by the same moral and legal standards as an adult, the doctrine not only functions as a jurisdictional shield but also reflects a broader philosophical acknowledgment of human development and moral responsibility. Indian law explicitly incorporates this principle. Section 82 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) provides that nothing is an offence which is done by a child under seven years of age, and Section 83 extends a qualified immunity to children between seven and twelve years, depending on their capacity for understanding. These provisions embody *Doli Incapax* within statutory law and reflect the wider philosophical underpinnings of the juvenile justice system.

Parallel to this principle runs the doctrine of natural justice, which transcends mere procedural legality and insists on fairness, equality, and respect for human dignity. The maxims *Audi Alteram Partem* (the right to be heard) and *Nemo Judex in Causa Sua* (no person should be a judge in their own cause) are not only cornerstones of administrative law but also deeply relevant to juvenile proceedings, where impartiality and fair hearing are crucial. Indian jurisprudence has consistently upheld these values. In *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India* (1978 AIR 597, SC), the Supreme Court expanded the scope of “procedure established by law” to

include fairness, reasonableness, and justice, thereby grounding natural justice within Article 21 of the Constitution. Similarly, in juvenile contexts, courts have emphasized that due process and fairness must be elevated when dealing with children, as seen in *Sheela Barse v. Union of India* (1986 AIR 1773, SC), where the Apex Court stressed the need for humane treatment of children in institutions and underscored the importance of legal aid and care.

The philosophical lineage of these ideas can be traced back to Aristotle and Aquinas. Aristotle's conception of distributive justice required proportionality, where individuals are treated in accordance with their capacities and needs. Children, by virtue of their vulnerability, demand a higher standard of care, one that nurtures rather than disciplines. Aquinas further reinforced this moral dimension of law by arguing that *Lex Injusta Non Est Lex*, an unjust law is not law at all thereby reminding us that legal systems are bound to conform to ethical standards, especially in matters involving the most vulnerable.

In the modern era, Roscoe Pound reinterpreted these principles within his theory of law as a tool of social engineering. For Pound, law is not static but an instrument for balancing competing interests in order to advance social harmony, welfare, and reform. Within this framework, a juvenile justice system that prioritizes containment or retribution undermines its social function. Pound's philosophy calls for the protection of dependents, recognizing that children are not miniature adults but evolving beings whose rights and abilities develop over time. The law must therefore safeguard their welfare by focusing on rehabilitation, education, and reintegration rather than punishment. Indian jurisprudence has echoed this approach; in *Pratap Singh v. State of Jharkhand* (2005 3 SCC 551), the Supreme Court reaffirmed that the juvenile system is founded on reformatory rather than retributive principles, giving primacy to welfare and the best interests of the child. Comparative jurisprudence supports this evolution. The United States Supreme Court in *Roper v. Simmons* (543 U.S. 551, 2005) abolished the death penalty for juveniles, explicitly citing developmental psychology and international human rights norms to argue that juveniles lack the maturity and culpability of adults.

Likewise, in the United Kingdom, the House of Lords in *C v. Director of Public Prosecutions* [1996] AC 1 reaffirmed the presumption of *Doli Incapax* for children under fourteen, reinforcing the centrality of capacity and fairness in juvenile law.

The juvenile justice framework is deeply embedded in the principles of *Doli Incapax* and natural justice. It is a system that demands more than procedural compliance; it requires substantive fairness, proportionality, and a recognition of the child's dignity. By integrating Aristotelian proportionality, Aquinas's moral conception of law, and Pound's instrumentalism, juvenile justice emerges as a jurisprudence of welfare and human development. True justice in this domain lies not in condemning the child, but in creating the conditions for their reformation and reintegration into society as responsible individuals.

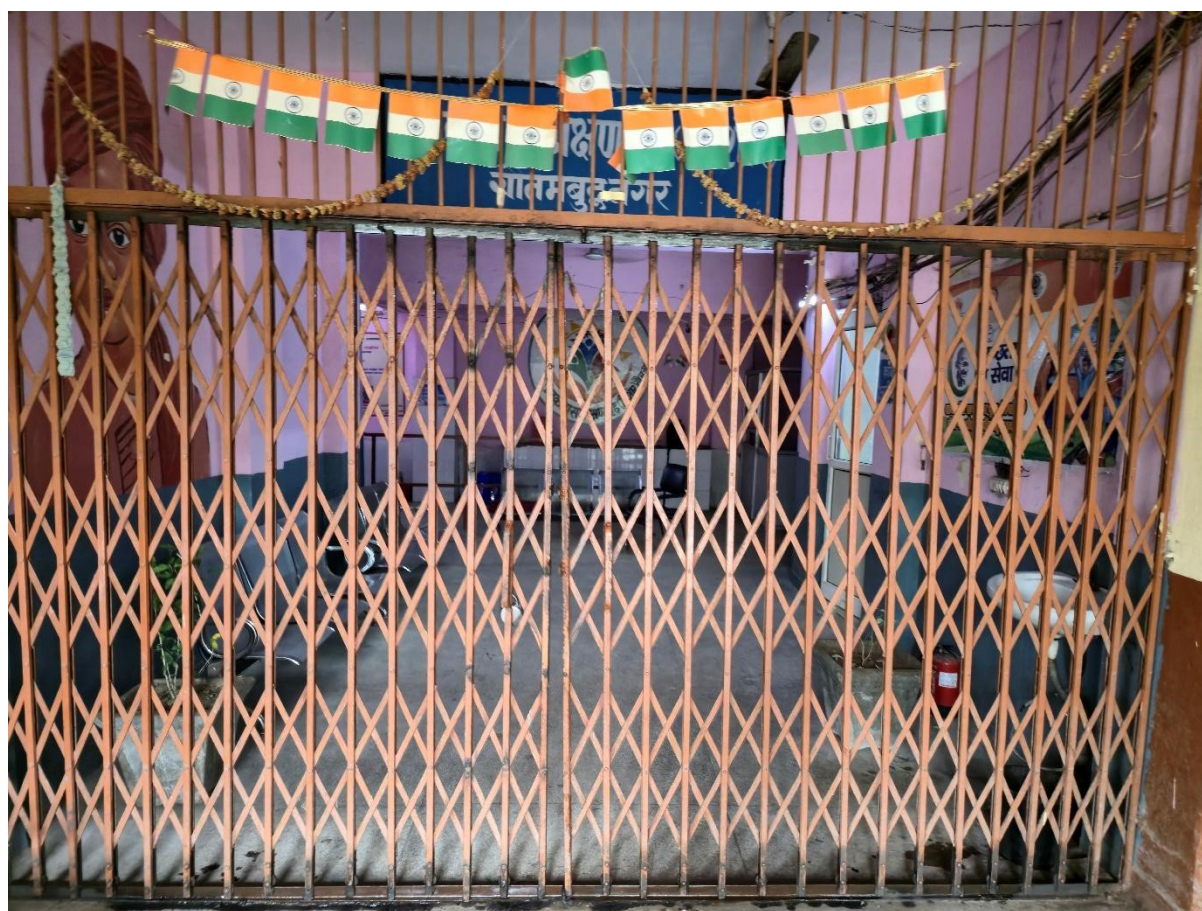
Visit by the word

The visit was focused on systemic issues in the juvenile detention system, including inadequate infrastructure, a lack of vocational training, and limited legal communication. It was based on interactions with administration and Juveniles. The paper illustrates the urgency of reform is required to guarantee children who have run afoul of the law appropriate rehabilitation, reintegration, and access to justice.



A view of the Juvenile Observation Home from outside.

The juvenile justice system in India, codified in the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, emphasizes care, protection, and rehabilitation over punitive measures. Juvenile Observation Homes serve as temporary detention facilities for children alleged or found to be in conflict with the law, offering a vantage point into how legislative ideals translate into lived realities. While legal frameworks highlight the principles of reformation, scholarship on the actual conditions of Indian juvenile detention facilities remains limited. Much of the existing literature focuses on statutory provisions and judicial pronouncements, with insufficient attention to the everyday realities of institutional life. This visit sought to bridge that gap by analysing the lived conditions, rehabilitative structures, and systemic shortcomings within one such facility. The objectives of the study were to examine the infrastructural and environmental conditions of the Observation Home, to assess the rehabilitative, educational, and vocational programs offered, and to evaluate the psychological and social needs of juveniles with reference to their aspirations, regrets, and perceptions of justice.



The Juvenile Observation Home's entrance.

The study was conducted through a structured academic visit on 11th February 2025 by us, The methodology employed included observations of physical infrastructure, vocational workshops, and communal living areas, semi-structured interviews with staff such as the superintendent and the kitchen supervisor, and informal conversations with juveniles during cafeteria interaction. Confidentiality and sensitivity were maintained throughout, with questioning of juveniles kept limited to avoid traumatization. Challenges included restrictions on access to certain spaces, inability to interact with select juveniles, and the artificial setting of group interactions, where juveniles appeared instructed to present themselves in a particular manner. The facility accommodated over 100 boys, eight of whom were under 15, Shared dormitories were overcrowded, with limited sanitation facilities capable of serving only a few at a time. Windows were sealed with hard plastic sheets, preventing visibility of the outside world. A small temple created by the juveniles reflected spiritual coping mechanisms, while recreational facilities were virtually absent, with an unused and dust-covered table tennis board as the only visible equipment. The vocational training room contained three sewing machines, and hand-made bags produced by the juveniles adorned the walls. However, not all juveniles were familiar with sewing, and the absence of certification or incentives reduced the program's value. Educational initiatives included a small library with outdated books, a computer lab with non-functional monitors, and a nursery-style classroom taught by a non-governmental teacher.



Window view from the outside

The emotional terrain of the juveniles was revealed through drawings found on their beds, most of which depicted family members and reflected a longing for unity. Conversations with juveniles disclosed recurring themes of regret and desire for reintegration, while regional clustering among them indicated persistence of group identities even within confinement. Nutritional provisions consisted of milk and packaged snacks for breakfast, fruit in the evening, and standard North Indian meals of rice, chapati, vegetables, and lentils for lunch and dinner. Approximately 25 Liters of milk, 25 kilograms of rice, and 400 chapatis were consumed daily.

Meals were prepared on the floor, signalling inadequate kitchen infrastructure.

Legal communication was a particularly striking limitation. Juveniles were allowed a single five-minute phone call per week, often forcing them to choose between contacting their families or legal counsel. Court hearings took place in an adjacent juvenile court, and family visits were permitted once a week, but the restrictions on communication highlighted both ethical and legal concerns.

The findings reveal stark discrepancies between the rehabilitative ideals of the Juvenile Justice Act and the realities of institutional practice. While infrastructure ensured basic sustenance, deficiencies in sanitation, overcrowding, and recreational outlets undermined holistic rehabilitation. Educational and vocational initiatives, though present, lacked systematic design and practical value. Without certification, incentives, or structured follow-up, skill development risked becoming symbolic rather than transformative. The emotional and psychological insights revealed by the juveniles emphasized the toll of confinement, yet institutional routines did not adequately address these needs through counselling or structured recreation. The restriction of legal communication raised serious concerns regarding access to justice and fair trial rights, reinforcing critiques of the tension between administrative control and juvenile rights.

We can see India's pressing need to reform its juvenile justice system. Our visit identified many serious flaws, like deteriorating infrastructure, a deficiency in recreational opportunities, and limited access to the law, investing in recreational, ventilation, and sanitation facilities, as well as implementing standardized certification and training scholarships for juveniles, are some of the recommendations. the resurgence of computer labs with contemporary educational materials, the extension of legal communication to guarantee

access to family and counselling services, and the incorporation of structured mentorship programs, psychological counselling, and outdoor play for juveniles. The goal of juvenile justice is to prepare these young people to rejoin society as contributing adults, not to keep them incarcerated.



A view of the juvenile observation home from the north-south.

That, although training was available, the lack of incentives hindered the long-term retention of skills and motivation after release. The problem we saw was a vocational training programme, children were making beautiful bags, but if they weren't motivated to work, Giving them the right certification then it's worthless. Skill building is important, but providing some form of motivation and responsibility would also help. A proper system of certification of the skills they learn should be put in place, so that certification can be used for jobs outside in the real world. As their communication with the outside world was limited to a single five-minute phone call per week, forcing many to choose between their parents and legal counsel, this limitation on legal communication presented an ethical and practical dilemma, curtailing access to justice.

This academic excursion was not merely an observational exercise it was a window into the forgotten margins of justice. It underscored the intersection between legal theory and lived reality, offering lessons no textbook could convey. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed, strengthen digital infrastructure, particularly the computer

lab, ensuring access to modern learning tools. Introduce modest compensation for vocational work to encourage sustained engagement. Facilitate more frequent and flexible access to legal aid for juveniles. Expand recreational and educational programs to foster holistic rehabilitation. In summation, the visit left a profound imprint on our minds, bridging the gap between legal education and the moral imperatives of justice, compassion, and reform. Outdoor playtime should be introduced in a controlled environment to improve their mental and physical health. A mentorship, or guidance program should be set up where professionals as well as students like us can visit regularly to interact with the juveniles, inspire them, and guide them toward better futures.

Recreation - The Missing Pulse in the System

After a juvenile is incarcerated, the focus should be not on how to confine them but how to engross these juveniles and further the rehabilitation. The juveniles are often restless and impressionable, counselling, and structured engagement is exceedingly essential. Recreational programmes play a pivotal role in this regard. These activities, both structured and semistructured, provide opportunities for cognitive stimulation, emotional expression, and social interaction within a non-threatening environment. Beyond diversion and entertainment, such programmes can bolster self-esteem, nurture confidence, and encourage holistic development by exposing juveniles to perspectives and experiences they may never have encountered. Many young offenders, driven to crime by poverty or lack of skill, will likely revert to delinquent behaviors unless they acquire practical skills and alternative pathways for income. Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian framework suggests that punishment is justifiable only if it prevents greater harm; in the case of juveniles, punitive measures often cause long-term societal damage rather than preventing it. Recreational programmes, through sports, creative arts, and vocational engagement, can interrupt this cycle by keeping juveniles productively occupied and assessing individual progress in meaningful ways.

In India, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), ratified on 11 December 1992, establishes minimum standards for child rights and protection. Article 31 of the Convention recognizes the right of children to rest, leisure, play, recreation, and participation in cultural life and the arts, emphasizing that states must provide equitable access to such activities. While Indian law reflects these principles, their implementation remains inconsistent. Observation homes and juvenile institutions often fall short of translating these

standards into effective programming, leaving gaps in rehabilitation and engagement.



<https://www.teenvogue.com/story/rikers-island-drama-club>

Comparative examples from abroad illustrate the potential impact of recreational and creative interventions. At Rikers Island in New York City, a Drama Club engages court-involved youth in improvisational skits, culminating in certificates of completion that serve as evidence of positive engagement during upcoming hearings. Since its inception in 2013, the program has reached multiple juvenile facilities, demonstrating that structured artistic outlets can mitigate the alienating effects of detention and reduce recidivism, which remains alarmingly high in the United States. Similarly, in Boise, Idaho, music and “healthy hobbies” programs, including gardening and fly fishing, have been implemented to provide life skills, communal engagement, and productive outlets for detained youth. In Maryland, sports activities like basketball championships enable teenagers to experience normalcy and positive social interaction, encouraging engagement in productive activities rather than delinquency. In Kenya, art competitions for young probationers allow children to express their experiences, aspirations, and reflections on crime, empowering them to participate meaningfully in society and highlighting the rehabilitative potential of creative programming.

<https://jjie.org/2018/08/06/recreational-therapy-is-lifesaver-for-kids-in-juvenile-detention/>



(Photo by Marvin Joseph/The Washington Post)

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2025/04/14/maryland-department-of-juvenile-services-basketball-game>

In Cheltenham Youth Detention Centre in Rosary Ville, Maryland, Fresh sneakers squeaked across the basketball court. Teenagers from across the state were clad in blue and gold uniforms instead of the juvenile detention scrubs they usually wear. Maryland Department of Juvenile Services' officials, staff, case managers and parents clapped and cheered from the bleachers as the hoopers traded buckets. Maryland Secretary of Juvenile Services Vincent Schiraldi, who attended Monday's championship game, said "There's a lot of research on how positive youth development engages young people in productive activities that they can then latch onto and steer them away from crime," They get out there, they can do this regular, normal thing, and the more they do good stuff, the less they're going to do bad stuff."

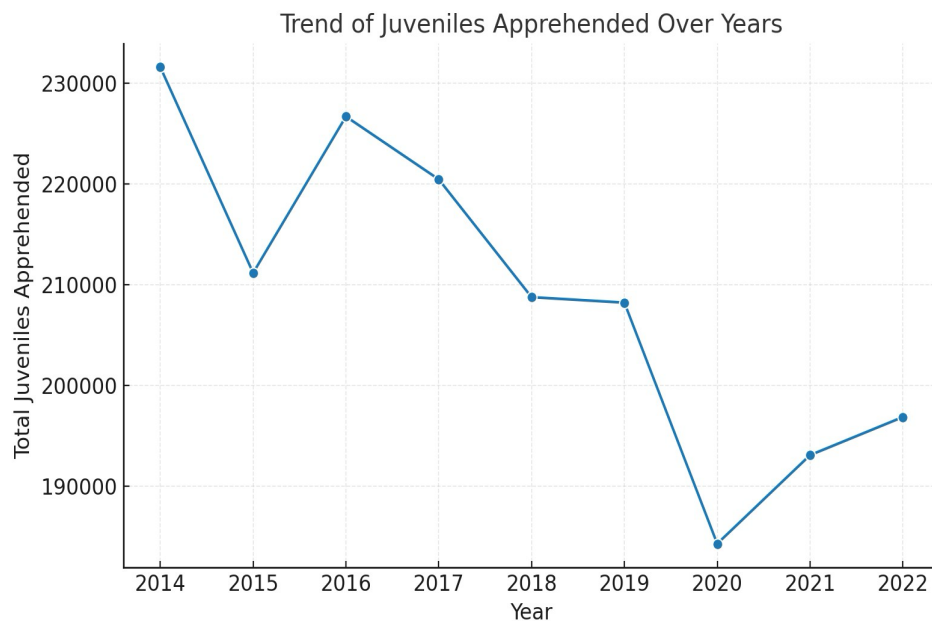
In contrast, juveniles in India frequently leave observation homes unchanged in attitude and mindset, reflecting persistent gaps in the domestic juvenile justice framework. The system largely relies on preventive isolation, emphasizing custody over reform, rather than adopting a reformatory approach that includes education, vocational training, counselling, and recreational programmes. Key shortcomings include overcrowding, underfunding, a lack of trained psychologists and social workers, minimal structured counselling, and limited creative or cultural outlets. Institutional stigma further undermines self-confidence and reintegration, while vocational training often lacks relevance or practical application. Consequently, these

institutions, instead of fostering growth, reinforce alienation and leave juveniles ill-prepared to reintegrate into society.

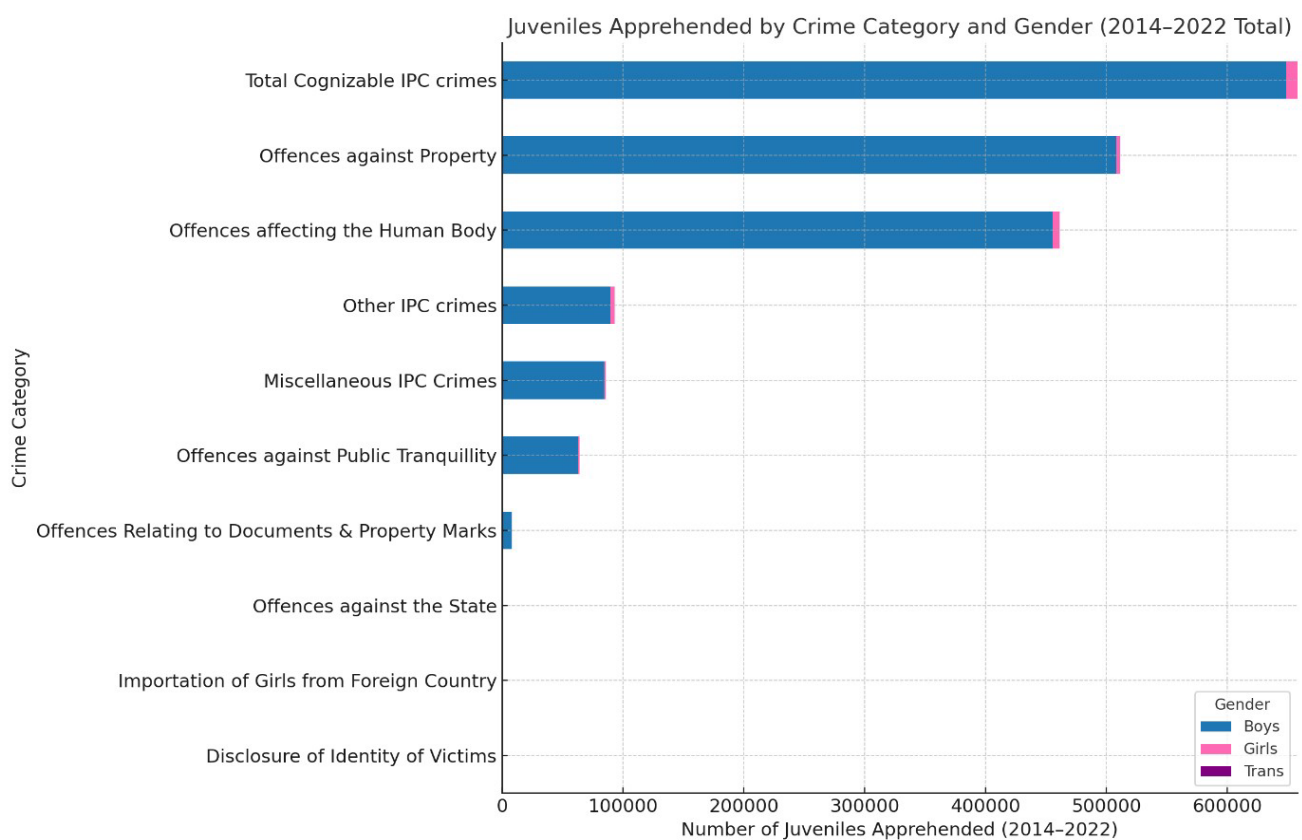
The persistence of these deficiencies underscores the urgent need for India to embrace reformative strategies. Effective rehabilitation requires not just confinement, but a holistic approach that combines skill development, emotional support, and constructive engagement. Recreational and creative programmes are not peripheral luxuries; they are essential instruments for preventing recidivism and guiding juveniles toward productive, law-abiding lives. The challenge lies not in demonstrating the potential of such initiatives, international models provide ample evidence, but in prioritizing their systematic implementation within India's juvenile justice system.

The Crime in India reports, published annually by the National Crime Records Bureau under the Ministry of Home Affairs, provide detailed statistical data on criminal trends across the country. Between 2014 and 2022, We compiled comprehensive information on crimes committed by juveniles, presenting year-wise, and crime-type-wise figures under Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Special. This dataset offers critical insights into patterns of juvenile delinquency over nearly a decade, helping policymakers, researchers, and legal scholars trace shifts in the nature and prevalence of offences involving children in conflict with the law. The NCRB, headquartered on National Highway-48 in Mahipalpur, New Delhi, functions as the principal governmental body responsible for collecting, analysing, and publishing such data, which is made available to the public through its official website (ncrb.gov.in)

Our analysis of these statistics spanning 2014 to 2022 not only quantify the involvement of juveniles in criminal activities but also provide an indispensable foundation for assessing the effectiveness of existing juvenile justice policies, rehabilitation measures, and preventive strategies within India's legal and social framework.

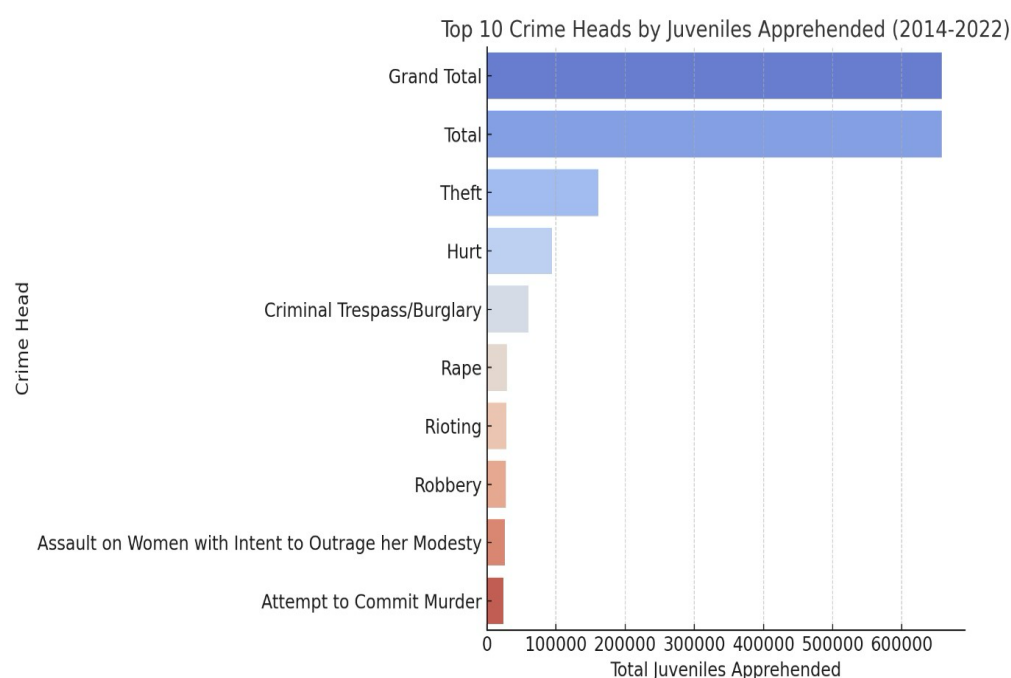


Over the years, there has been a steady decline in the number of juveniles apprehended. This trend may also be partly attributed to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted movement, reduced social interaction, and temporarily lowered opportunities for crime.



The age–gender profile of juveniles apprehended between 2014 and 2022 reveals striking disparities. A vast majority (75%) fall within the 16–18 years bracket, with **701,638 juveniles** of which boys (693K) overwhelmingly dominate, while girls (8.5K) and transgender juveniles (9) remain statistically negligible. The 12–16 years category records **228,479 juveniles**, again largely boys (225K), with girls constituting a marginal **3.5K**. The below 12 bracket is comparatively minimal at **10,428 juveniles**, comprising almost entirely boys, with girls forming only a fraction (400).

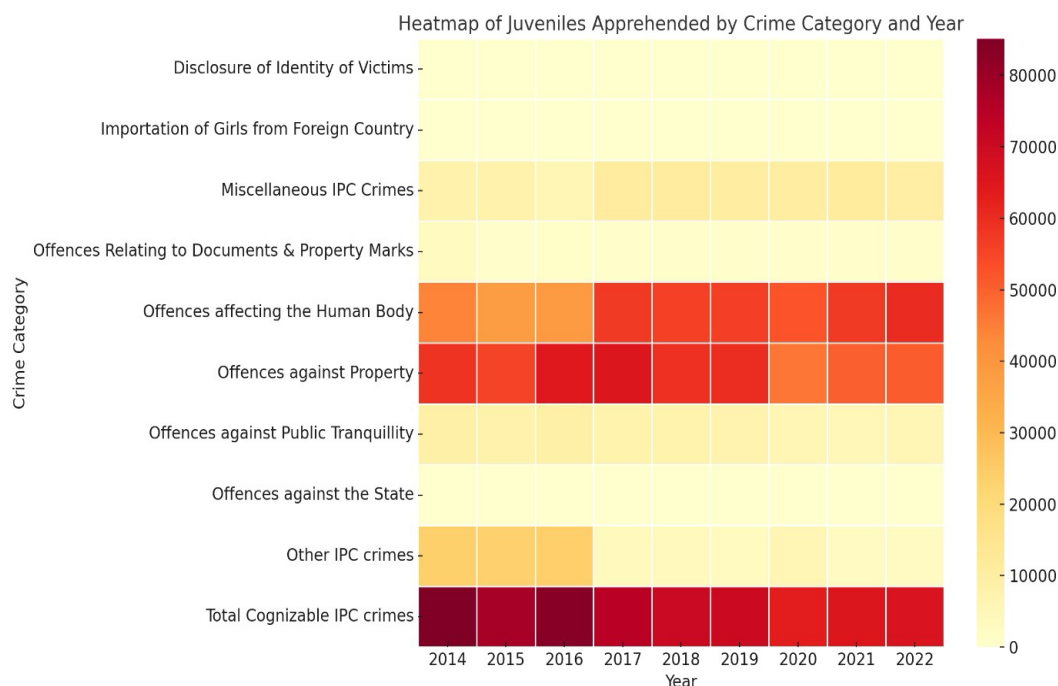
Insight: Boys account for the overwhelming bulk across all age groups, while girls rarely exceed a 3–4% share, and transgender representation is virtually absent. The data underscores that the juvenile justice landscape is profoundly gender-skewed, with older adolescent boys (16–18) driving the trend.



Between 2014 and 2022, the top ten offences committed by juveniles highlight a clear pattern in the nature of crimes. Theft leads overwhelmingly with **161,590 cases**, followed by **Hurt (93,768)** and **Criminal Trespass/Burglary (59,922)**. Serious violent offences also appear prominently, with **Rape (28,778)**, **Rioting (28,470)**, **Robbery (27,352)**, **Assault on Women with Intent to Outrage Modesty (25,990)**, and **Attempt to Commit Murder (24,368)**.

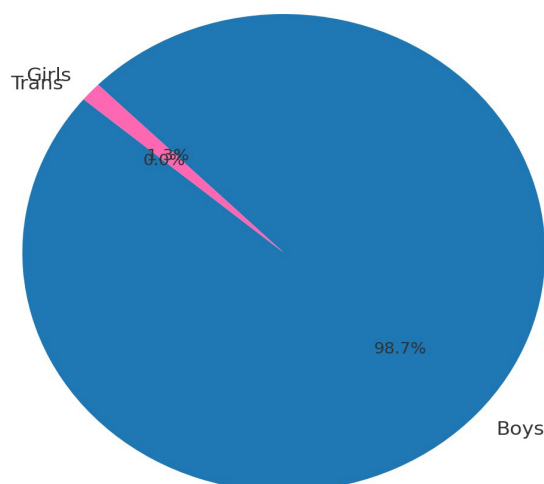
Insight: Property-related crimes such as theft, burglary, and robbery dominate the landscape, while violent offences, including hurt, rape, and rioting form the next significant category,

revealing both economic desperation and aggressive tendencies within juvenile delinquency.

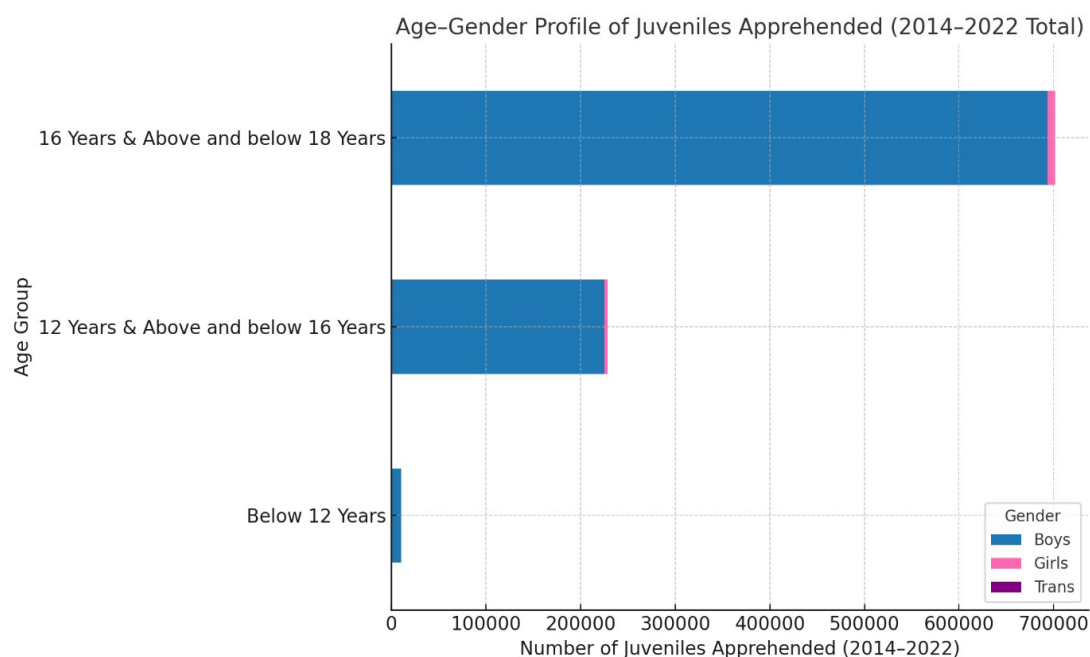


From 2014 to 2022, juveniles apprehended by crime category reveal consistent patterns. Offences affecting the human body and offences against property remain the most persistent and high-intensity categories across all years. Miscellaneous IPC crimes fluctuate, showing a marked peak between 2017 and 2019. Certain offences, such as those against the State or the importation of girls, remain negligible throughout the period. The sharp dip during 2020 reflects the impact of COVID-19 restrictions, visible across nearly every category.

Gender Distribution of Juveniles Apprehended (2014–2022 Total)



Between 2014 and 2022, juvenile crime apprehensions in India are overwhelmingly dominated by boys, who account for approximately **1,856,222 cases (98.7%)**. Girls represent only **24,850 cases (1.3%)**, while transgender juveniles are virtually negligible at **18 cases**. This data makes it unmistakably clear that juvenile delinquency in India is predominantly male driven over the nine-year period.



Between 2014 and 2022, the age–gender profile of juveniles apprehended shows that the **16–18 years** group dominates with **701,638 cases**, of which boys account for **693,000**, girls for **8,500**, and transgender juveniles for 9. The **12–16 years** category records **228,479 juveniles**, mostly boys (**225,000**) with girls at **3,500**. The **below-12 years** bracket is minimal, totalling **10,428 juveniles**, predominantly boys, with girls numbering around 400.

Insight: Adolescents aged 16–18 constitute about 75% of all cases, boys overwhelmingly dominate all age groups, girls rarely exceed 3–4%, and transgender representation is negligible, highlighting a stark gender imbalance in juvenile delinquency.

In conclusion, the analysis of juvenile delinquency in India, grounded in both empirical data and jurisprudential perspectives, highlights a complex interplay of social, economic, and institutional factors. Field observations at Juvenile Observation Homes reveal the fragility of children in conflict with the law, the inadequacy of infrastructure, and the critical need for rehabilitation-oriented interventions that address cognitive, emotional, and vocational

development. Legal frameworks, including the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015, and India's obligations under the UNCRC, emphasize a child-friendly, reformatory, and rights-based approach, yet gaps in implementation persist. Our Analysis of the Data from the National Crime Records Bureau between 2014 and 2022 shows that juvenile crime is overwhelmingly concentrated among adolescent boys, dominated by property-related and violent offences, with older adolescents (16–18 years) forming the bulk of cases. While trends indicate a modest decline, partly influenced by external factors such as COVID-19, systemic challenges such as overcrowding, limited recreational and vocational programmes, and lack of holistic engagement continue to impede true rehabilitation. Comparative insights from international models underscore the transformative potential of structured recreational, creative, and skill based programmes in reducing recidivism and fostering positive social reintegration. Collectively, these findings reaffirm that juvenile justice must move beyond mere containment, embracing a rehabilitative ethos that combines legal protection, social support, and opportunities for personal growth. Only through sustained, evidence-based interventions can India's juvenile justice system fulfil its mandate of nurturing children into responsible, reformed citizens, breaking cycles of delinquency and reinforcing the principles of fairness, dignity, and social welfare.