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# INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO CRIMINAL JUSTICE: INTEGRATING CRIMINOLOGY, PSYCHOLOGY, AND LAW

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## ABSTRACT

The criminal justice system is not a one-way street. There is a law that provides the framework, criminology that examines the causes and patterns of crime, and psychology that delves into the minds of both perpetrators and victims. This paper examines how these different pieces of the puzzle are interwoven in the current Indian scenario, highlighting where a more cohesive approach can help improve the investigation, judicial, and rehabilitation processes. We examine the literature on criminal psychology, forensic analysis, prison reforms, and legal education to identify areas of strength and weakness. Our results indicate that institutions such as the National Institute of Criminology & Forensic Science in India and new legislation such as the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (2023) indicate a recognition of the need for an interdisciplinary approach. However, there are still some significant gaps. For example, forensic psychology is not generally incorporated into law enforcement and court procedures, and penal systems do not have comprehensive rehabilitation programs. Based on local and global research, we would like to propose some ideas: - “Incorporating forensic psychologists and criminologists into investigations and courts; incorporating social science education into law enforcement and legal education; increasing data-driven, evidence-based policing; and implementing restorative justice practices in line with modern penology.” The aim is to remove barriers between different fields and make the justice system in India more efficient and humane, respecting rights and due process.

**Keywords:** criminal justice, criminology, forensic psychology, interdisciplinary, India.

## INTRODUCTION

The criminal justice system is at the intersection of multiple perspectives. The law provides the definition of crime and the process of prosecution and punishment. Criminology and psychology introduce the social scientific and human psychological perspective of crime commission. Criminology provides the psychological, sociological, and economic underpinnings of why crime occurs, which in turn informs legal policies and correctional strategies.<sup>1</sup> Criminology is the bridge that connects theory and practice, providing valuable information about crime patterns and risk factors that can be used in police work. Forensic psychology, on the other hand, applies strict behavioural science to the courtroom, whether it involves evaluating the mental condition of a defendant, evaluating the testimony of witnesses, or constructing a criminal profile based on the evidence that is available. The integration of these fields of study brings a more holistic approach to the study of criminal justice. By incorporating the knowledge that can be gained from the fields of psychology, sociology, economics, and public health, criminologists can come up with comprehensive solutions to the complex problems associated with crime.

In India, there is an increasing trend towards an interdisciplinary approach in the wake of large legal reforms. The 2023 Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) code, which will come into force in July 2024, throws in victim-centred provisions and recognises modern tools of evidence: digital forensics and electronic records are now recognised as evidence, and community service is recognised as an alternative sentence for petty offences.<sup>2</sup>

Such changes reflect the global trend towards evidence-based and restorative justice. However, the Indian scenario is beset by practical challenges. Investigations are still reliant on conventional methods, and there is no institutionalised psychological profiling: a study on serial homicide points out the “significant gap” in the use of forensic psychology, which enables offenders to operate with impunity.<sup>3</sup> It was also observed that behavioural analysis units, which are common in the United States, are “limited and often met with skepticism” in India. This paper examines the current state of integration between criminological and psychological knowledge and the legal systems in India’s criminal justice system. We conduct

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<sup>1</sup>Priyanshi Basudeo, *The Science of Justice: Role of Criminology, Penology and Forensics in India’s New Legal Framework*, 1 *Defacto L.J.*, no. (2025).

<sup>2</sup>*ibid*

<sup>3</sup>Aman Kumar Jha, Sujal Chhajed & Tanishk Bhawsar, *The Psychology of Serial Offenders in India: A Criminological and Legal Analysis*, 5 *Indian J. Integrated Research in L.* 556 (2025).

a qualitative analysis of recent scholarship in India. The key questions are: How does law enforcement, the judiciary, and the penal system integrate knowledge from different disciplines? What are the educational or organisational mechanisms that facilitate this integration? Where are the significant gaps that continue to compartmentalise different disciplines? Finally, we provide recommendations to fill these gaps so that the criminal justice system becomes more efficient, equitable, and humane through interdisciplinarity.

## **METHODS**

This research paper is based on a qualitative analysis of interdisciplinary studies on criminal justice with a focus on India. For the past decade or so, we have analysed various academic and professional sources such as peer-reviewed articles, books, analyses of law journals, and official reports. The broad themes included forensic psychology, criminological theories, police training, prison reforms, and current legal updates, such as the 2023 criminal law codes. These sources were obtained from academic databases and official publications using terms such as “criminology India,” “forensic psychology criminal justice India,” and “interdisciplinary law psychology criminology.”

The project had three operational threads. First, Investigation, which includes profiling, forensic analysis, and police procedures. Second, Adjudication, which includes how the courts use expert testimony and the legal frameworks under which psychological evidence is admitted. Third, Corrections, which includes prison administration, the design of rehabilitation programs, and the process of reintegration into society after release from prison. We also examined Institutional Frameworks educational efforts and professional organisations that span disciplines, such as the NICFS in India. The review aims to find real-world examples of interdisciplinary efforts, evaluate their effectiveness, and indicate where one field might inform another but does not yet. Where appropriate, we have included comparative observations from other regions, such as the United States or the UK, to illustrate differences or best practices.

## **CONCEPTUALISING INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

An interdisciplinary approach to the criminal justice system acknowledges that crime is more than just what is written into law; it is also a social and psychological issue. From a criminological perspective, the social and economic factors of crime are understood to influence the commission of crime. Psychology informs us as to why offenders commit crimes,

and law offers the rules, which include what constitutes a crime, the rights of the individual, and the punishment for the crime. When the two are combined, forensic psychology is created, which combines psychology and the law through expert testimony regarding the mental state of the suspect, and victimology, which combines legal rights with the social sciences to provide better support for victims.

The benefits of such integration are well-validated in research. For instance, research in legal education indicates that law school students who are taught sociology and psychology perform significantly better on questions of social justice: students who are taught through integrated content (such as psychology and sociology) average 20% higher on these questions than students who are not.<sup>4</sup> This also illustrates the importance of a well-rounded legal education, which encompasses views from other related disciplines. On the same note, legal scholars who conduct research across disciplines argue that the importance of understanding public views and human biases cannot be overemphasised in ensuring justice. The psychology that underlies decision-making can influence laws in both civil and criminal cases because jurors can easily be swayed by cognitive biases.<sup>5</sup>

Practically speaking, the criminal justice system is already full of cross-disciplinary connections. Forensics, for example, involves biology, chemistry, and computer forensics, all of which are governed by legal rules of evidence. Probation and rehabilitation involve psychology and social work to modify offender behaviour. Correctional policy is increasingly informed by penology, the study of punishment, and counselling theory. However, these connections are often ad hoc, pieced together rather than integrated. The literature suggests that the partnership between disciplines should be formalised. The idea is that criminology should not be a stand-alone social science but rather a field that is “embedded in multiple fields” such as sociology, psychology, and law.<sup>6</sup> Policymakers would be able to develop evidence-based crime policies only by tearing down walls, finding solutions in sociology and economics, and considering consequences in law and rehabilitation.

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<sup>4</sup> Sugapriya S & Rhenius Caleb J, *Law and Related Disciplines: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, 10 Int'l J.L. 167(2024).

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

<sup>6</sup> Arnold Binder, *Criminology: Discipline or Interdisciplinary?*, 5 *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies* 41 (1987).

## CURRENT PRACTICE AND INITIATIVES

### 1. Academic and Training Programs

In recent years, Indian institutions have been incorporating interdisciplinary strands into criminology, psychology, and law. One such example is the National Forensic Sciences University (NFSU) in India, which provides a Master of Arts in Criminology with a Specialization in Forensic Psychology. This is a deliberately interdisciplinary course that combines aspects of forensic science, criminal law, victimology, and psychological testing. NFSU considers criminology to be an interdisciplinary science, encouraging students to apply their knowledge of different subjects to the study of crime and its prevention.<sup>7</sup> The objective is to produce the next generation of investigators, lawyers, and policymakers who think in an interdisciplinary manner, learning about legal concepts while taking courses in criminal behaviour, psychopathology, and forensic procedures.

The legal education landscape is changing. At the Jindal Institute of Behavioural Sciences, which is a part of the OP Jindal Global University, new centres are bringing together a variety of disciplines. Among the most interesting of these centres is the Centre for Criminology & Forensic Studies, which was formed to focus research and teaching by bringing together forensic science and criminology in legal education and practice. Its focus is on the interdisciplinary approach that combines a variety of related disciplines such as forensic science, law, criminology, and legal psychology, to bring about changes in the criminal justice system.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, the Centre for Victimology & Psychological Studies at JGU integrates knowledge from victimology, psychology, criminology, and other areas of knowledge to develop a body of knowledge that is praxis-oriented. Its mission statement highlights the integration of criminology, law, forensic sciences, and behavioural sciences. These centres conduct conferences, courses, and research activities that go beyond the usual departmental divisions.<sup>9</sup>

The National Law University Delhi has also set up a Centre for Criminology and

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<sup>7</sup>M.A. Criminology (with specialization in Forensic Psychology), Nat'l Forensic Scis. Univ. (India), <https://www.nfsu.ac.in/Programs/programinfo/56?deptid=94> (last visited Feb. 23, 2026).

<sup>8</sup>Centre for Criminology & Forensic Studies, Jindal Inst. of Behavioural Scis., O.P. Jindal Glob. Univ., <https://www.jgu.edu.in/jibs/centre-for-criminology-forensic-studies> (last visited Feb. 23, 2026).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

Victimology, which has been vested with the task of identifying gaps in both the criminal justice system and the victim justice system through interdisciplinary research.<sup>10</sup> Through its advisory work with government agencies and organising workshops on victimology, the centre shows how law departments in academic institutions are beginning to recognise the social scientific aspects of crime.

## 2. Investigative and Judicial Practices

In reality, the police and judicial systems are slowly integrating psychological tools, although their application is still irregular. In the context of investigations, techniques like criminal profiling, polygraph tests, and behavioural analysis are being taught in some police academies. Forensic psychology, including the evaluation of offenders' mental states and witnesses' credibility, has the potential to be used in criminal investigations and trials. A recent empirical study carried out in India shows that, among police officers, lawyers, and judges in Delhi and Kerala, the knowledge of modern forensic-psychological approaches (such as polygraph, narcoanalysis, and so on) is generally poor, although it is higher in Delhi than in Kerala. Even in those environments where knowledge is gradually increasing, the actual application of these approaches is thwarted by several obstacles, such as a lack of training and institutional support. The authors highlight the need for training programs and policy changes to extend the application of forensic psychology in the Indian criminal justice system.<sup>11</sup>

The courts have been increasingly incorporating scientific and psychological knowledge into the adjudication process. Mental health professionals can give expert opinions on the accused's competency or insanity i.e. *"Nothing is an offence which is done by a person who, at the time of doing it, by reason of unsoundness of mind, is incapable of knowing the nature of the act, or that he is doing what is either wrong or contrary to law."*<sup>12</sup>

For example, the diagnosis of mental illness during the trial process requires an interface between psychiatric and legal knowledge. Specialised courts, such as those

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<sup>10</sup>Centre for Criminology and Victimology, Nat'l L. Univ. Delhi, <https://nludelhi.ac.in/research/centre-for-criminology-and-victimology> (last visited Feb. 23, 2026)

<sup>11</sup> Muhammed Munavvir P.K. & Beulah Shekhar, Forensic Psychological Investigative Techniques in Indian Justice: Regional Insights from Kerala and Delhi (Sept. 29, 2025).

<sup>12</sup> Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, No. 45 of 2023, § 22 (India).

dealing with juvenile justice or mental health courts, implicitly require interdisciplinary adjudication. Nevertheless, the integration of psychology into the court process is still in its infancy. Often, the judges do not have any guidelines to follow when evaluating psychosocial evidence. Victim support is another interdisciplinary area in the justice system. In India, the criminal justice system has recently expanded victim compensation provisions, and laws such as the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act of 2013 have been amended to consider the impact of crime on victims. However, true victimology, which considers the sociological, psychological, and legal aspects of victim needs, is still a nascent area.

Research institutions (such as the National Law University Delhi's Centre for Criminology and Victimology) are actively working towards filling this gap; however, in reality, many victims still do not have access to psychosocial support.

## **LACUNAE AND CHALLENGES**

### **1. Fragmented Institutions and Training:**

The police, courts, and social services may operate in separate tracks. Few agencies invite psychologists or criminologists to speak. Forensic psychology professionals are concentrated in a few cities and are usually affiliated with universities or government facilities. A study conducted in Kerala and Delhi identified the hindrance to applying forensic-psychological methods as "inadequate training and limited availability of resources." Without the broader professional education, such as fewer forensic psychology professionals in state investigative bureaus, the knowledge gained from the university's interdisciplinary approach will not be applied.

### **2. Legal framework limitations:**

The criminal justice system in India is based on legislation that predates modern psychology. The Indian Penal Code and Criminal Procedure Code have not been completely updated to include expert psychological assistance, except in the area of mental illness defences and victim compensation. The code regarding the admissibility of scientific evidence allows some judicial discretion regarding expert testimony, but psychologists are not commonly appointed as experts. Modern issues such as cybercrime

and terrorism require an interdisciplinary strategy, but the legal system is slow to respond.

### **3. Gaps in the curriculum remain:**

Law courses are rarely set up to make social science topics compulsory. The curriculum for an LLB degree is generally focused on statutes and cases, with sociology, psychology, or criminology usually relegated to the elective shelf, if offered at all. This creates a gap that leads to a lack of interdisciplinary thinking among lawyers and judges, and also means that students of psychology or sociology are not adequately exposed to how the legal process actually works. Closing the gap requires a change in what is taught, and research shows that law students who study psychology and sociology perform better on questions of social justice.<sup>13</sup>

### **4. Limited data and Research collaboration:**

A lack of data and collaboration between researchers makes interdisciplinary policy in India difficult. The NCRB remains primarily descriptive in its crime statistics, failing to integrate offender demographics, social background, and psychological elements. The chance to combine criminology surveys with police data for collaborative research is rare. Without such integration, policymakers are left blind to the causes of crime and the effectiveness of crime prevention methods. This is indicative of a larger problem: a lack of funding for interdisciplinary crime research means many questions remain unanswered.

### **5. Cultural and Structural Challenges:**

Barriers in terms of culture and structure are looming large for interdisciplinary changes. The legal system tends to consider psychological evidence as “soft,” and criminologists may end up being marginalised in reform debates. The police force, working under the pressure of a heavy workload, may have no leeway for special training. Stigma associated with mental health and behavioural science may also impede the use of scientific approaches in crime studies, such as resistance to offender rehabilitation.

Cumulatively, these gaps are what contribute to the lack of interdisciplinary concepts being adopted. As Binder pointed out in 1987, the problem of disciplinary bias affects criminology

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<sup>13</sup> Supra 4

globally. Psychology, sociology, and law are all stuck in their own theories and never incorporate the other two. The challenge for the modern-day criminal justice reform is to overcome this division and achieve proper integration.<sup>14</sup>

## **INNOVATIVE APPROACHES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

To address these gaps, we propose several strategies grounded in the literature and best practices:

### **Reforming Legal Education:**

It involves expanding the focus of law school education. Law schools should integrate social sciences into the curriculum, drawing from research in the Journal of Legal Education and similar forums. Sociology, psychology, and criminology should be mandatory components of law school education. Clinical education should incorporate psychological themes, such as mock trials examining the validity of eyewitness testimony or juror bias, to enhance future lawyers' understanding of cognitive issues. Interdisciplinary combined degrees in law and psychology or criminology should be explored, as well as interdisciplinary clinics that combine law students with students in social work and forensics.<sup>15</sup>

### **Set up interdisciplinary units:**

Police departments could establish holistic crime analysis units that combine criminologists, psychologists, and forensic experts. They would analyse crime patterns and social data to inform preventive strategies—consider community policing with a sociological twist. Courts could establish interdisciplinary review panels for specific cases—young people's courts staffed by social workers, or mental health courts staffed by psychologists to review cases from all sides. Already, some nations operate “behavioural units” that provide advisory services, such as the FBI's Behavioural Analysis Unit. India could pilot advisory units, like the FBI's Behavioural Analysis Unit.

### **Encourage Collaboration for Research:**

It is essential for funding bodies such as ICSSR and UGC, as well as think tanks, to encourage

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<sup>14</sup> Supra 6

<sup>15</sup> Supra 4

collaborative research efforts that cut across law schools, psychology departments, and criminology research institutes. For example, research on gender violence can benefit from legal studies, sociological surveys, and psychological profiling of the perpetrators. Assessments of criminal justice system reforms should be carried out by multidisciplinary research teams. Collaborations between law enforcement agencies, health providers, and research institutions can enable more comprehensive research, such as correlating prison outcomes with mental health interventions for inmates.

**Leverage Technology and Data Science:** As an interdisciplinary report points out, the infusion of analytics and technology in the justice system requires collective participation from the fields of law, psychology, and computer science (AI-based forensic identification, data mining for crime prediction).<sup>16</sup> In the Indian scenario, while pouring resources into criminal intelligence systems that use social media and geospatial analysis to detect crime hotspots, there is a need for independent validation by psychologists on privacy and behavioural issues. Online portals for the reporting of sexual violence, now made mandatory by criminal law, should include psychological triage protocols. The aim is to use data analytics while ensuring legal due process.

However, the above recommendations face challenges in their implementation; still, there are examples that can be followed. In the United States and Europe, there are many law schools that have established clinics and courses that combine the study of law with psychology. The National Education Policy of 2020 in India promotes multidisciplinary education, thus giving a push to law schools to make partnerships with the social science departments of their institutions. Even legislative changes are possible, and Parliament can be approached to make changes to the Evidence Act to better define the role of expert witnesses or to set up authorities to accredit forensic psychologists to complement government efforts by training police personnel in trauma care or by campaigning for changes in victim compensation. The quest for justice is, by its very nature, interdisciplinary. The combination of criminology, psychology, and law will allow the criminal justice system to achieve a deeper understanding of crime and to deal with crime more humanely. As legal scholars have argued, interdisciplinarity improves the effectiveness of legal education and practice, and it will also improve the legitimacy and fairness of justice administration. By overcoming boundaries between disciplines through

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<sup>16</sup> Nomesh Bhojkumar Bolia & Surya Prakash B.S. (eds.), *Technology and Analytics for Law & Justice* (Daksh Ctr. of Excellence for Law & Tech., IIT Delhi eds.

collaborative research, education, and institutional change, the criminal justice system in India will be able to meet the challenges of the 21st century with both rigour and compassion.

## CONCLUSION

The criminal justice system of India is at a crucial juncture. The conventional legal code and policing practices are in a state of evolution to cope with the growing complexities of crime and changes in the dynamics of society. This review highlights the potential and the shortcomings of the ongoing interdisciplinary endeavors. The positives of criminal justice in India are evident from the institutionalisation of the cause through the formulation of new laws and training institutes, as well as the continued academic pursuit of the cause. The negatives of criminal justice in India lie in the implementation of the cause, as evidenced by the discretionary nature of criminal profiling, the lack of behavioural science in the judiciary, and the continued marginalisation of correctional facilities inherited from the colonial era.

Bridge between these domains, it must be noted, is not an elixir, but it does provide us with an even more complete set of tools. As one scholar puts it, the integration of forensic psychology, criminology, and law helps create “a comprehensive framework for understanding the psychological and behavioural dimensions of crime<sup>17</sup>. However, the realisation of this integration also calls for the support of policies, the overhauling of the education system, and the transformation of the organisational culture itself. Specific measures that have been suggested include the establishment of specialised departments, the implementation of evidence-based policing and rehabilitation, and the formation of research organisations. These, if collectively implemented, may be able to move the criminal justice system in the direction it ought to be.

India’s future may well be an extension of its recent attempts at legal reforms, wherein traditional legal systems are blended with the insights of science and social thought. An interdisciplinary approach, with the right safeguards and respect for the rights of the accused, may well be able to provide justice that is not only more effective but also more equitable and humane for all concerned.

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<sup>17</sup> The Psychology of Serial Offenders in India: A Criminological and Legal Analysis, *IJIRL* (2025),