

Rehabilitating Juveniles in Serious Crimes

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Memories of horrific incidents, such as the Nirbhaya episode in Delhi, remain etched in our collective consciousness. Sadly, similar tragedies continue to occur in both urban and rural areas across India. These incidents often involve gang rapes of helpless young girls, sometimes belonging to Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes, or girls deceived by false identities. Shockingly, videos of these heinous acts are often made, and if the victim survives, she is subjected to ongoing blackmail and repeated abuse. In cases where the victim refuses to marry her attacker, she is ruthlessly murdered and her body disposed of in a remote location.

Investigations reveal that many of these crimes are committed by juveniles aged 16-18. Beyond sexual violence, juveniles are also involved in other serious crimes such as dacoity, murder, and reckless or drunk driving. These reckless actions, often involving

posh cars, result in the tragic deaths of innocent pedestrians or two-wheeler riders.

These incidents highlight a grave societal issue that demands urgent attention and compassionate action to protect the vulnerable and bring the perpetrators to justice.

Invariably, these incidents result in widespread public outcry, with electronic and print media demanding explanations from law enforcement authorities and the government regarding their effectiveness. Oftentimes, public anger escalates to the point where there are calls for the immediate



hanging of the accused, even if the suspect is a juvenile.

The National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB), which compiles data on these offenses from all States, reveals an increasing number of incidents involving juveniles aged 16 to 18 as suspects. According to the Juvenile Justice Act (JJA) 2015, a person below the age of 18 is considered a juvenile. The JJA allows for minors aged 16-18 to be treated as adults in cases of heinous crimes, defined as offenses where the punishment is more than seven years.

This growing trend of juvenile involvement in serious crimes underscores the need for a balanced approach that ensures justice while considering the potential for rehabilitation. The public's demand for immediate and severe punishment reflects the deep frustration and pain caused by these crimes, but it is essential to navigate these emotions with a focus on effective, compassionate, and lawful solutions.

Several important factors



contribute to children becoming juveniles involved in crime. The absence of care and affection from parents, often due to divided families, large family sizes, and poverty, leads to a lack of essential facilities and support. Urbanisation and easy internet access expose children to inappropriate content or addictive pornographic videos. Advertisements, TV/OTT series, and cinema also negatively influence young minds.

In red light areas, children are often forced outside by women while they go about their business, leading children to fall into bad company. These children may become

addicted to drugs, alcohol, smoking, and other harmful substances. Adolescents, in an attempt to impress their female friends and meet various needs, may resort to theft and other criminal activities without hesitation.

Understanding these underlying reasons is crucial for developing comprehensive strategies that address the root causes and provide support and rehabilitation for at-risk youth. Compassionate interventions can help prevent children from falling into criminal behaviour and guide them toward healthier, more positive paths.





An analysis of undertrial juveniles reveals that most come from deprived backgrounds. Their statements indicate that many had either dropped out of school or were never regular attendees. Lacking education or vocational skills, these youths often worked as casual labourers. Dysfunctional families left these children without mental or social support. The family situations of these undertrials are marked by poverty, forced child labour, inadequate parenting, continuous stress, or sudden crises such as death or desertion.

The NCRB data also highlights a troubling trend: an increasing number of children from affluent families, despite having parents, are indulging in heinous crimes due to drug addiction.

These insights underline the

complex interplay of socio-economic factors that contribute to juvenile delinquency. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive strategies that include education, vocational training, mental health support, and family counseling to help vulnerable children and prevent them from falling into criminal behaviour. Compassionate and targeted interventions can make a significant difference in altering the life trajectories of these young individuals.

Though these children might have come into conflict with the law, it is crucial for police officers to remain sensitive to their plight. As Commissioner of Police in Nagpur, I ensured that these children received counseling from social workers. Those eligible to attend school were sent there, while others

were provided with vocational skills, including driving. Many of them turned into responsible individuals, contributing to their families' incomes.

Police officers should strive to move the Juvenile Justice Board to take action against the parents of such children and protect them from adult offenders who might be coercing them into criminal activities. It is essential to seek assistance from voluntary organisations, child psychiatrists, child guidance clinics, social care workers, and probation officers to address the root causes of these incidents. Efforts should be made to identify children at pre-delinquent stages and to isolate destitute and neglected children.

In urban areas, identifying geographic locations that are breeding grounds for delinquency is vital. These areas should be regularly patrolled. My initiatives, such as organising recreational programmes including sports, holiday camps, and band displays, had created enthusiasm among the community.

This holistic approach, combining enforcement with compassion and proactive intervention, can help rehabilitate at-risk youth and prevent them from becoming entangled in criminal activities. ■

