


Chapter 3


Public and Police Response to Juvenile Offenders

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ABSTRACT

The study titled “Public & Police Response to Juvenile Offenders in India” examines the social and institutional responses to juvenile delinquency, focusing on the influence of media, public perception, and police practices. Juvenile delinquency in India is a complex issue, influenced by socio economic factors, media portrayals, and societal attitudes towards crime and punishment. Public fear, often driven by sensationalized media coverage, demands punitive measures rather than rehabilitative approaches, hindering reintegration efforts for juvenile offenders. The research emphasizes the need for police sensitization programs and the development of specialized juvenile units to align policing practices with the rehabilitative goals of the justice system. Through a blend of criminological theories, including Merton’s Strain Theory and Social Learning Theory, the study underscores how public attitudes and institutional responses can either perpetuate or reduce juvenile recidivism.

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INTRODUCTION

Juvenile delinquency poses significant challenges to societies, affecting not only young offenders but also the communities in which they live. In India, this issue is deeply intertwined with the country's cultural, social, and legal fabric. The juvenile justice system, primarily governed by the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, aims to rehabilitate rather than punish juvenile offenders, recognizing their unique vulnerabilities and potential for reform. However, despite legislative efforts to address juvenile delinquency, the complex interplay between public perceptions and police practices often hinders these young offenders' reintegration into society.

Public attitudes toward juvenile offenders in India are shaped by several factors, including media portrayals, community safety concerns, and societal beliefs about crime and punishment. The media often sensationalizes juvenile crimes, which can fuel public fear and drive demands for stricter punishment. This heightened fear frequently overshadows efforts at rehabilitation, perpetuating a punitive mindset that may lead to the stigmatization and alienation of juveniles. Research indicates that negative public perceptions can impede the success of rehabilitative measures, trapping young offenders in a cycle of reoffending and social isolation (Mears et al., 2007).

The media plays a significant role in shaping public perception, often sensationalizing juvenile crimes and portraying young offenders as threats to public safety. This contributes to a fear-driven narrative that calls for harsher punishments rather than focusing on the underlying causes of juvenile delinquency, such as socioeconomic factors, peer pressure, and familial instability. When the public is influenced by such narratives, the push for stricter laws and punitive measures grows, limiting the space for rehabilitative programs that could potentially redirect juveniles away from a life of crime (Zai & Zani, 2020). In India, societal beliefs around crime and punishment are further influenced by cultural values that emphasize collective safety and honour. Juvenile offenders are often viewed through the lens of morality, with their actions seen as reflecting poorly on their families and communities (Garg, 2021). Such beliefs can hinder efforts to reintegrate juveniles back into society, as the stigma of their criminal past may remain long after their legal punishments have been served. This stigmatization can lead to difficulties in finding employment, education, and social acceptance, ultimately contributing to a cycle of recidivism.

The police are often the first point of contact for juveniles who come into conflict with the law. Their approach to handling juvenile offenders can significantly impact the trajectory of a young person's life. In India, police practices are shaped by training, departmental policies, and the expectations of the communities they serve. While the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 emphasizes

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