

# Social Roots of Youth Criminality in Modern India

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## Abstract:

Youth criminality has become a significant socio-legal issue in India, indicating underlying structural and social problems within contemporary society. The socioeconomic origins of young delinquency are intricately associated with evolving family dynamics, poverty, unemployment, urbanisation, educational disparities, peer influence, and exposure to violence. Accelerated industrialisation and socio-economic transition have disrupted old value systems, often resulting in societal disorder that fosters adolescent criminality. Comprehending the socioeconomic determinants of juvenile delinquency is crucial for formulating preventative measures, rehabilitative justice frameworks, and impactful policy initiatives focused on social welfare and youth advancement. This research analyses the main societal elements contributing to juvenile criminal conduct in contemporary India and underscores the need for social, educational, and institutional changes.

**Keywords:** Youth Criminality, Juvenile Delinquency, Social Roots of Crime, Family Disintegration, Urbanisation, Peer Influence, Socio-economic Factors, Social Control Mechanisms.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 OVERVIEW

Before 1850, there were no laws governing teenage cases. In 1850, the first implementation of the Apprentice Act was enacted, which delineated the regulations for equipping sentenced youths for vocational work. The Indian Penal Code of 1860 was enacted shortly thereafter, providing complete immunity from criminal liability for children under the age of 7 as stipulated in Section 82, while Section 83 offers partial immunity to children from 7 to 12. This statute designated those above the age of 12 as adults. A possible adverse consequence of incarcerating these youths in an adult facility was present. The Reformatory School Act of 1897 facilitated the creation of reformatory schools for those under the age of 15. Multiple states authorised the punishment of local children's offences under the Additional Children Act of 1960, enacted in that year. The Juvenile Justice Act of 1986, which addresses juvenile crime, was long overdue and was enacted in that year. Its latest amendment occurred in 2015 with the introduction of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act, which is applicable throughout India, except in Telangana. Following this presentation, at least one teenage equity board was formed to harness and empower the abilities of youth in legal disputes. Adolescents aged 16 years or older who commit a Heinous Crime may be prosecuted as adults, as shown by the Lok Sabha's protest in 2015. The adolescent Justice board will assess the teenager's suitability for adult sentencing for three months. Children are born innocent; it is their environment that instils a feeling of shame in them. Genuine enhancement is crucial, as is enough access to resources, equitable liberty, and unpolluted air for children to develop with an untainted intellect. Physical and mental development are crucial for genuine advancement, offering several advantages. Numerous individuals contend that children are innocent until proved guilty; nonetheless, their circumstances often hinder them from evading criminal behaviour, necessitating effective management, guardianship, excellent education, and care.

**1.1.1 Juvenile Delinquency: Theories and Observations**

The traditional hypothesis posits that individuals are rational and typically choose their actions before a demonstration. To perpetrate any misconduct, juvenile delinquents first collect information on the specific incident and then analyse facts on the wrongdoing before determining whether to proceed. The fundamental premise in sociological theory on teenage misbehaviour posits that youths are likely to engage in unlawful behaviour in the absence of external control over their behaviour. Adolescent misconduct is seen as normative from this viewpoint. The principal objective was to curtail adolescent criminality at the earliest possible moment.

The social tie theory has four elements: connection, obligation, contribution, and conviction. Young individuals will have a reduced propensity for criminal behaviour if their feeling of connection to others is more firmly established. The probability of juvenile engagement in criminal behaviour diminishes as they concentrate on their careers and education. Research indicates that children who have a robust connection with their parents and comprehend the significance of 'Qualities' and 'Convictions' are less prone to delinquency. Robert Merton posits that the principal impetus for teenage delinquency is the aspiration for resources to achieve their objectives, leading them to eschew appropriate methods and partake in actions that contravene established regulations. The proportion of cases registered under the IPC involving teenagers in confrontation with the law and criminal activity from 2013 to 2023.

Year	Cases Registered Against Juveniles in Conflict with Law	Under Cognizable Crimes	Total IPC	% Cases to Total Cognizable Crime	Rate
2013	31,725	2,647,722		1.2	2.6
2014	33,526	2,851,563		1.2	2.7
2015	31,396	2,949,400		1.1	2.5
2016	33,628	Not reported (new format)		Not available	Not available
2017	35,949	Not reported		Not available	Not available
2018	31,391	Not reported		Not available	Not available
2019	32,563	Not reported		Not available	Not available
2020	29,768	Not reported		Not available	Not available
2021	31,402	Not reported		Not available	Not available
2022	31,783	Not reported		Not available	Not available
2023	31,365	Not reported		Not available	7.1 (per lakh children)*

From 2013 to 2023, the number of evidentiary cases involving adolescents in legal dispute rose from 17,819 to 31,396, indicating that the rate of adolescents in legal conflict has fluctuated between 1.1 percent and 1.2 percent.

**1.1.2 Factors of the Social Environment:**

Adolescents may establish delinquent subcultures because of socioeconomic adversity and dissatisfaction with their social standing. Due to peer pressure, they are more prone to yield to their criminal inclinations. Adolescents, as noted by Walter B. Mill man (1958), subvert conventional culture, leading to the relinquishment of societal values and the formation of an opposing framework of esteem. Consequently, adolescent delinquents abandon their moral principles and seek to assert dominance in areas of strength, dominating their classmates and indulging in activities that invigorate them, provided that certain societal ethics are maintained. Recent research in the United States has used the notion of delinquent subculture to investigate the emerging adolescent mindset in China about law enforcement. Cloward and Ohlin (1960) assert that adolescents develop criminal inclinations contingent upon the opportunities available in their

surroundings. When allowed to engage in unlawful activities, adolescents are more inclined to violate the law.

### Objectives of the Study

1. To identify and examine the major social factors contributing to youth criminality in modern India, including family disintegration, poverty, unemployment, educational deficiencies, urbanization, peer influence, and media exposure.
2. To analyze the relationship between socio-economic conditions and juvenile delinquency and assess how these factors influence the involvement of young individuals in criminal activities.

### Research Questions

1. What are the key social and socio-economic factors responsible for the rise of youth criminality and juvenile delinquency in modern India?
2. How do family environment, economic conditions, education, urbanization, peer groups, and media exposure influence the criminal behavior of young people in India?

### Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method research design based on secondary data, combining doctrinal and empirical approaches to examine the social roots of youth criminality in modern India. The research is descriptive and analytical in nature and seeks to identify and analyze the social and socio-economic factors contributing to juvenile delinquency, including family disintegration, poverty, unemployment, educational deficiencies, urbanization, peer influence, and media exposure. Secondary data are obtained from National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reports, government publications, legislative enactments, judicial decisions, books, research articles, and relevant reports on juvenile delinquency. The collected data are analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques such as frequencies and percentages, along with thematic analysis to interpret qualitative responses. The study adheres to ethical principles by ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation of all respondents.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

**Naik, Abdul & D, Dr. (2025)** In every country, juvenile delinquency is a serious crime that jeopardises societal stability. Juvenile delinquency is rising universally, with adolescents increasingly participating in violent offences. Comparable trends of an increase in violent crimes committed by juveniles are seen in India. This is a significant problem for the nation, and resolving it will need substantial deliberation. In reaction to these changes, the Indian court and legal system have amended certain legislation about juvenile justice in India. This research study examines the factors contributing to juvenile crime and the remedies proposed by scholars across several disciplines to mitigate the problem. An analysis of statistics data from government websites indicates an increase in juvenile participation in serious crimes. The legislation concerning juvenile delinquency has been amended to tackle the problem of juvenile crime in India. Consequently, minors charged with grave offences are now prosecuted as adults.

**Sehgal, Dhaarna (2025)** All youngsters need is little assistance, direction, optimism, and an individual who has faith in them. Juvenile delinquency is a significant issue that requires our focused attention. Juvenile refers to a young individual, particularly one below a legally established age, who may be prosecuted as an adult for a criminal offense. They exhibit immaturity and do not comport themselves according to their age. The crucial element is to concentrate on the factors that contribute to their transformation. Juvenile delinquency stems from a defeatist mindset in the youth, which, in my view, indicates a deficiency in their understanding of effective decision-making. Social and economic growth, together with political instability, contributes to the propensity of youth to engage in juvenile delinquency. During their journey from infancy to adulthood, individuals encounter increasing complexity and confusions in the world. The study examines the identity of a juvenile, the factors contributing to their

impaired decision-making ability, strategies for fostering autonomous decision-making, the prospective future, and the existing legal framework in India regarding juvenile delinquents.

**Raghu, Abhishek & Balamurugan, J. (2024)** Juvenile delinquency seems to be the most prevalent social problem relative to other societal concerns. Societal variables and situations significantly influence the prevalence of delinquency. Individuals who commit criminal acts before turning 18 are often designated as juvenile offenders. This study seeks to thoroughly clarify the research and efforts conducted on juvenile offenders, emphasizing the significant influence of social variables on all aspects of juvenile delinquency. This study aims to examine the societal origins and elements that lead to the criminal conduct of juvenile offenders. This article uses a literature review technique to examine studies on societal variables affecting juvenile criminality. It integrates and assesses previous research to comprehend the intricate relationship between social conditions and the engagement of young adolescents in delinquent behaviors. The research examined 80 publications from reputable internet sources, concentrating on adolescent delinquency, offenders, criminal behavior, and societal determinants. Of the 80 publications, 53 were referenced and fulfilled the inclusion requirements, which included publishing between 2000 and 2023, stringent peer review, and indexing in recognized databases. Research results indicate that children raised in environments characterized by compassion, friendliness, and encouragement are relatively less vulnerable to the emergence of social maladies. Children who have undergone parental abandonment are at an increased risk of exhibiting delinquent tendencies. Negative family dynamics and relationships with delinquent peers are acknowledged as major factors in the emergence of drug misuse behavior. Policymakers and preventative efforts must possess a thorough understanding of this intricate link. This literature analysis provided a clear summary of the impact of socioeconomic variables on juvenile offenders in India.

**Subrahmanyam, Prof & Hasan, Beema & Vijayan, Laya (2024)** Juvenile delinquency is a significant problem in India, reflecting broader social, psychological, and legal challenges. The rise in juvenile delinquency necessitates a comprehensive analysis of the underlying causes, legislative measures, and rehabilitation efforts. This research study examines the origins, effects, and legal context of juvenile delinquency in India, highlighting preventative and policy approaches.

**Abhishek, Raghu & Balamurugan, J. (2023)** This research seeks to analyze the patterns of juvenile delinquency based on variables such as age, gender, offense type, and features outlined in NCRB reports, as well as to understand the many reasons contributing to juvenile crime. This research used secondary data obtained from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reports from 2017 to 2021, as provided by the Government of India. The data analysis indicates a heightened incidence of youth criminality in India, particularly across many states. A considerable percentage of juveniles have regrettably succumbed to various socio-economic factors, such as poverty, insufficient parental direction, restricted educational opportunities, and peer group influence. The crime rate in India has seen a significant increase over the years, coupled with a troubling decrease in the conviction rate. The problem of juvenile delinquency requires targeted attention and a strategy that emphasizes children's welfare, emphasizing protection and preventive efforts to avert their engagement in deviant behavior. The results may influence policymakers and educators in the field of pedagogical development. Moreover, it is vital for family members and other stakeholders who help promote the holistic growth and development of children.

**Ahmad, Sartaj & Pant, Bhawana (2022)** A juvenile delinquent is an individual below the legal age who does antisocial acts that constitute a violation of the law. The subject of "Juvenile Delinquency" is ambiguous, including several circumstances and susceptible to various concerns and interpretations on the timing, techniques, and strategies for preventing such delinquent behavior among the youth of our country.

### 3. YOUTH CRIMES IN INDIA: CONTEMPORARY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

India's demographic dividend, characterized by its substantial young population, presents significant opportunities with notable challenges. A significant concern in contemporary Indian society is the increase in juvenile delinquency. Teenage delinquency, rather than being a statistical anomaly, signifies deeper social divisions, economic disparities, psychological intricacies, and evolving cultural norms. This article examines the current issues and problems associated with adolescent crime in India, focusing on many causes, the shortcomings of the existing legal framework, and the need for a more comprehensive and reformative strategy.

In contemporary India, juvenile delinquency is a multifaceted issue arising from a complex interplay of historical, legal, social, and contemporary factors. India's juvenile justice paradigm has undergone considerable transformation, transitioning from punitive colonial practices to the rehabilitative framework established by the Children Act of 1960, the Juvenile Justice Act of 1986, and, most prominently, the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act of 2000, which aligns with international conventions such as the UNCRC. In response to popular calls for more severe penalties for egregious offenses, the Juvenile Justice Act of 2015 controversially altered the framework by allowing individuals aged 16 to 18 to be prosecuted as adults under certain circumstances. The rise in juvenile delinquency poses a significant threat in India. The Amendment Act 2021 further augmented this by attempting to accelerate adoption; nonetheless, it controversially classed some major acts against children as non-cognizable, prompting worries around reduced child safety. In Telangana, juvenile criminal incidences have risen, with 2,607 instances recorded in 2022, up from 2,212 cases in 2021. Telangana is rated fourth overall. Currently, several challenges confront law enforcement and the juvenile justice system in India.

#### 3.1 Right to Remedy Under Judicial Approaches

In India, the right to redress for juveniles in dispute with the law is fundamentally grounded on constitutional principles and distinctly influenced by the child-centric ethos of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, as amended. This right is contingent upon the purported infringement of a child's basic or statutory rights, with courts using a "parens patriae" doctrine, sometimes utilizing Public Interest Litigation (PIL) to guarantee access to justice for the most vulnerable populations. Four The principal method for redress entails engaging specialized entities such as Juvenile Justice Boards (JJBs) or Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) initially, while higher courts (pursuant to Articles 32 and 226) may invoke writ jurisdiction (Habeas Corpus, Mandamus, Certiorari, etc.) to rectify serious infringements, thereby ensuring rigorous compliance with due process and the tenets of natural justice, as highlighted by the focus on appropriate preliminary evaluations. The judicial approach emphasizes remedies that align with the rehabilitative objectives of the JJ Act, focusing on the child's best interests and the principle of a fresh start. It advocates for interventions that foster reformation and social reintegration rather than punitive actions, thereby preserving the child's dignity and future.

#### 3.2 The Impact of Education on Youth Delinquency

Although access to education is often seen as a protective factor against crime, in modern India, its deficiencies may paradoxically foster young delinquency. This does not represent a direct causal relationship from education itself; instead, it arises from factors such as inadequate access to quality education, especially for vulnerable kids, resulting in early school dropouts and a deficiency of essential skills required for legal work and social mobility. This educational deficit often results in unemployment and inactivity, making youngsters particularly vulnerable to adverse peer influences and recruitment by criminal organizations. Moreover, the pronounced inequalities in educational quality and the significant academic pressure in competitive settings can engender frustration, resentment, and considerable mental distress among students, occasionally resulting in maladaptive coping strategies such as substance abuse or impulsive criminal behavior. The education system's inadequate focus on life skills, values, and responsible digital literacy may render youth unprepared to address intricate ethical dilemmas, resist

online temptations, or avert exposure to harmful content, thereby inadvertently facilitating their engagement in contemporary socio-digital crimes.

### 3.3 Promptness and Effectiveness

This study on adolescent criminality in India must be conducted swiftly and efficiently to maintain relevance and effectiveness in a constantly changing context. The evolving Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, notably revised in 2015 and 2021, necessitates timely research to maintain an up-to-date analysis of legal modifications and their practical ramifications, thereby directly influencing current policy discussions and implementation approaches. Moreover, the emergence of contemporary socio-digital offenses, including cybercrime and online fraud, necessitates prompt engagement with current trends to effectively address contemporary issues. A thorough doctrinal analysis is necessary to evaluate the Act's impact on juvenile rehabilitation and protection, including detailed legislative interpretation and an extensive examination of case law.

## 4. SOCIAL ORIGINS OF YOUTH CRIMINALITY IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

Contemporary youth crime in India is a multifaceted social phenomena influenced by rapid socio-economic transformations, cultural shifts, and systemic disparities within society. It represents both individual behavior and the impact of larger societal contexts, including familial environment, economic position, education, urbanization, and social institutions. As modernization progresses, old societal institutions that formerly governed conduct and offered moral direction have diminished, resulting in new problems in managing and avoiding adolescent delinquency.

A significant element leading to juvenile delinquency is the evolving family structure. The shift from conventional joint families to nuclear families, coupled with heightened parental absence owing to economic concerns, has diminished supervision and emotional care for children. This often results in psychological distress, absence of ethical direction, and heightened susceptibility to aberrant conduct. Moreover, home problems, neglect, and fractured familial ties foster emotions of insecurity and dissatisfaction in kids, potentially leading to anti-social behavior.

Economic variables significantly influence teenage criminal conduct. Poverty, unemployment, and social inequality engender hardship and restrict prospects for youth. In the absence of lawful avenues for attaining social and economic success, some teenagers may engage in criminal activities for survival or social acknowledgment. Economic inequality exacerbates perceptions of relative hardship, particularly in metropolitan environments where disparities in income are prominently evident.

The acceleration of urbanization and industrialization has significantly contributed to the increase in young delinquency. The migration to urban areas, coupled with congested living circumstances and fragile community relationships, diminishes social control and exposes youth to situations conducive to criminal activity. Peer influence, drug misuse, and affiliation with deviant organizations profoundly impact juvenile behavior, especially throughout adolescence when identity development is pronounced. Furthermore, heightened exposure to violent media and digital platforms may shape attitudes towards aggressiveness and legitimize criminal conduct.

Educational deficiencies and inadequate socialization further exacerbate juvenile delinquency. Restricted access to excellent education, high dropout rates, and insufficient value-based learning undermine the cultivation of discipline and social responsibility in youth. When educational institutions neglect to provide direction, skill development, and opportunity, kids may experience social alienation and have an increased propensity for criminal behavior.

Youth crime in contemporary India arises from the interplay of several social, economic, and cultural elements rather than a single reason. Comprehending these social foundations is crucial for formulating preventative measures, fortifying familial and communal institutions, enhancing education, and advancing social welfare initiatives focused on youth empowerment and societal stability.

#### 4.1 Family Disintegration and Changing Social Structure

The change of conventional family systems is a fundamental societal root of teenage delinquency in contemporary India. The transition from joint families to nuclear families, rising divorce rates, parental discord, and insufficient supervision can lead to emotional uneasiness among young persons. Children raised in unstable family circumstances marked by neglect, domestic violence, or lack of parental direction are more prone to exhibit deviant conduct. Economic strains on parents, particularly in metropolitan environments, diminish the time and focus allocated to children's moral and social development. Moreover, insufficient emotional connection and communication among family members results in frustration, aggressiveness, and antisocial behavior. The erosion of conventional social control mechanisms that formerly governed behavior has considerably contributed to the increase in young participation in criminal activities.

#### 4.2 Poverty, Unemployment, and Economic Inequality

Economic factors significantly influence juvenile behavior. Poverty, unemployment, and insufficient access to fundamental resources foster an atmosphere of hardship and social marginalization. Numerous young adults from economically disadvantaged backgrounds encounter constrained educational prospects and limited social mobility, sometimes resulting in dissatisfaction and estrangement from mainstream society. Economic disparity amplifies perceptions of relative hardship, particularly among youth who juxtapose their circumstances with those of more affluent groups. Under such conditions, crime may manifest as a viable means of subsistence or a method to attain social standing and material prosperity. Urban slums, poor living circumstances, and insufficient social support systems exacerbate criminal inclinations among kids by immersing them in crime-prone situations and restricting lawful possibilities.

#### 4.3 Urbanization, Peer Influence, and Media Exposure

Accelerated urbanization and modernity have substantially influenced juvenile delinquency. Migration to urban areas in pursuit of work and improved living circumstances often leads to congested urban communities characterized by fragile social cohesiveness. Such circumstances expose adolescents to delinquent peer groups, drug misuse, and organized crime. Peer pressure significantly influences behavior, since teenagers often want approval and identification within social groups, even when these organizations endorse illegal activities. Furthermore, exposure to violent material via digital media, films, and social platforms may normalize aggressive conduct and affect susceptible individuals. The lack of sufficient recreational facilities, educational guidance, and community support systems exacerbates the likelihood of youngsters engaging in illegal activities.

### 5. CONCLUSION

Contemporary youth crime in India is not only an individual issue but a manifestation of extensive social, economic, and cultural changes. Elements like familial breakdown, economic deprivation, unemployment, urbanization, peer pressure, and the erosion of social institutions substantially contribute to adolescent criminality. Addressing these social foundations requires a holistic strategy that includes family fortification, educational reform, poverty alleviation, job creation, and community-oriented rehabilitation initiatives. Preventive initiatives emphasizing social welfare, youth empowerment, and moral education are essential in mitigating young crime. Consequently, comprehending the socioeconomic determinants of juvenile delinquency is crucial for establishing a fair and equitable society that fosters good adolescent development and societal stability.

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