

Family Environment, Psychological Behaviour, And Juvenile Justice: A Study of Children in Conflict with Law

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Abstract:

The present study examines the relationship between family environment and psychological behaviour among children in conflict with law, with a focus on understanding how socio-familial conditions influence juvenile delinquency. The objective of this research paper is to analyse the impact of family environment on psychological behavioural patterns of juveniles and to assess implications for the juvenile justice system.

The study was conducted in Indore district of Madhya Pradesh, India. A total of 50 children in conflict with law, aged between 10 To 18 years, were selected through purposive sampling from observation homes. A descriptive research design was adopted and primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire, the Family Environment Scale, and a Psychological Behaviour Assessment Scale. Secondary data were gathered from legal documents, research articles, and relevant literature on juvenile justice.

The findings reveal that children coming from disturbed, conflict-prone, and neglectful family environments show higher levels of aggression, anxiety, emotional instability, and antisocial behaviour. A significant relationship was observed between adverse family environment and poor psychological adjustment among juveniles.

The study concludes that juvenile delinquency is strongly influenced by socio-psychological conditions rather than individual behaviour alone. It emphasizes the need for strengthening family support systems, psychological counselling, and rehabilitative interventions within the juvenile justice framework to ensure effective reintegration of children into society.

Keywords: Children in Conflict with Law, Family Environment, Psychological Behaviour, Juvenile Justice, Socio-Psychological Factors.

Introduction:

Children are regarded as the most valuable asset of any society and play a vital role in shaping the future development of a nation. However, the increasing involvement of children in criminal and antisocial activities has emerged as a serious social concern in contemporary India. According to the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, individuals categorized as "Children in Conflict with Law"

are those under the age of eighteen who are accused or determined to have committed an offense. Consequently, juvenile delinquency has emerged as a significant field of academic research, as it reveals underlying social, economic, familial, and psychological challenges.

Juvenile delinquency should not be viewed solely as an individual behavioral anomaly; rather, it is the result of intricate social and environmental factors. Among these, the family plays a central role in the process of socialization and emotional development. A stable and supportive family environment fosters discipline, emotional security, and positive behaviour, whereas adverse conditions such as broken families, parental neglect, domestic violence, poverty, substance abuse, and lack of supervision significantly increase the risk of delinquent behaviour. Empirical studies consistently indicate that weak family bonds and emotional deprivation are strongly associated with antisocial tendencies among juveniles.

Psychological factors further contribute to delinquent behaviour. Emotional instability, aggression, low self-esteem, frustration, anxiety, impulsivity, and peer influence frequently influence the behavioral patterns of adolescents. This developmental stage is particularly sensitive, making children more vulnerable to external social and psychological pressures. In numerous instances, children who are in conflict with the law are, in fact, victims of adverse familial and environmental circumstances.

The juvenile justice system in India is based on reformatory principles, emphasizing care, protection, rehabilitation, and social reintegration rather than punitive action. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, provides a structured legal framework through institutions such as Juvenile Justice Boards and Observation Homes to ensure the rehabilitation of children in conflict with law. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited implementation capacity, social stigma, and insufficient rehabilitation programmes continue to hinder its effectiveness.

In this context, the present study adopts a socio-legal and interdisciplinary approach by integrating sociological, psychological, and legal perspectives to examine the causes of juvenile delinquency and to evaluate the role of the juvenile justice system in the rehabilitation and reintegration of children into society.

Review of Literature:

• Family Environment and Juvenile Delinquency

The family environment is broadly acknowledged as a key factor influencing juvenile behavior. A large body of research indicates that adverse family conditions significantly increase the likelihood of delinquent behaviour among children in conflict with law.

Dev and Kumar (2025) and Mahajan and Tigga (2024) found that family disintegration, parental neglect, poverty, and weak emotional bonding are major contributing factors to juvenile delinquency. Similarly, Sharma (2024) and Pathak (2019) emphasized that lack of parental supervision, broken homes, and inadequate emotional support increase vulnerability toward antisocial behaviour.

Across these studies, a consistent pattern emerges: juveniles from economically weaker and emotionally unstable families are more likely to engage in criminal behaviour. However, while most studies highlight structural family problems, fewer have examined how family dynamics interact with psychological traits to influence behaviour, indicating a need for integrated analysis.

• Psychological Factors and Behavioural Patterns

Psychological traits significantly influence the development of delinquent behavior in adolescents.

Research indicates that emotional instability, aggression, impulsivity, and low self-esteem are frequently

seen in juveniles who are in conflict with the law.

Subakade and Lawani (2022) reported that juveniles often exhibit behavioural instability, aggression, and emotional immaturity, which are strongly associated with parental neglect and poor peer relationships. Similarly, Rachel and Gunavathy (2022) also identified psychological distress, social stigma, and peer pressure as key factors influencing delinquent behaviour.

These findings indicate that juvenile delinquency cannot be understood solely through social conditions; rather, psychological vulnerabilities significantly mediate the impact of adverse environments. However, existing studies largely treat psychological and social factors separately, with limited focus on their combined effect.

• **Juvenile Justice System and Rehabilitation Approaches**

The juvenile justice system in India is based on reformative and rehabilitative principles, focusing on care, protection, and reintegration rather than punishment. However, several studies highlight operational and institutional challenges.

Chandel and Prasad (2023) emphasized rehabilitation through counselling, education, and vocational training, but noted systemic issues such as overcrowding and inadequate facilities. Similarly, Gautam (2021) highlighted implementation gaps, case pendency, and lack of institutional capacity within the juvenile justice framework.

Dev and Kumar (2025) further observed that despite the willingness of juveniles to reform, limited infrastructure and weak rehabilitation mechanisms restrict effective reintegration into society. Collectively, these studies suggest that while the legal framework is reformative in nature, practical implementation remains inconsistent.

• **Social Work Interventions and Reintegration**

Several studies highlight the importance of social work and community-based interventions in addressing juvenile delinquency. Rachel and Gunavathy (2022) and Dev and Kumar (2025) emphasized counselling, family support, educational guidance, and rehabilitation programmes as essential tools for reintegration. These studies collectively suggest that effective rehabilitation requires a multi-dimensional approach involving family, school, community, and legal institutions. However, most research focuses on institutional interventions, with limited attention to family-centered psychological interventions.

Research Gap:

The review of existing literature provides valuable insights into the causes and rehabilitation of juvenile delinquency, several gaps remain. First, most studies focus either on family environment or psychological behaviour independently, with limited integration of both variables. Second, there is a lack of district-level empirical studies in regions such as Indore district, Madhya Pradesh. Third, insufficient attention has been given to how family environment and psychological behaviour interact in influencing juvenile delinquency.

To address these gaps, the present study examines the combined influence of family environment and psychological behaviour on children in conflict with law and evaluates their implications within the juvenile justice system.

Objectives of the Study:

The present study aims to examine the impact of family environment and psychological behavioural factors on children in conflict with law. It also analyses the role of socio-economic conditions and

evaluates the effectiveness of the juvenile justice system in the rehabilitation and reintegration of juveniles into society.

Hypotheses:

- **H1:** Disturbed family environment significantly influences delinquent behaviour among children in conflict with law.
- **H2:** Psychological instability is positively associated with delinquent behaviour among children in conflict with law.
- **H3:** A rehabilitation-oriented juvenile justice system positively contributes to the rehabilitation and social reintegration of children in conflict with law.

Research Methodology:

The present study is based on a socio-legal and interdisciplinary research approach integrating sociological, psychological, and legal perspectives to examine issues relating to children in conflict with law. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used for the study. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires and interviews with respondents, while secondary data were collected from books, journals, research articles, government reports, and the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015.

The study was conducted on 50 children in conflict with law selected through purposive sampling from selected Observation Homes and Juvenile Justice institutions in Indore District. The study adopted descriptive and analytical research methods to examine the impact of family environment and psychological behaviour on juvenile delinquency. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure the responses of respondents.

The collected data were analysed using SPSS and various descriptive statistical techniques, including tabulation, percentage method, descriptive statistics, reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha), and correlation analysis. The analysed data were presented through tables for clear interpretation and systematic analysis of the findings.

Area of Study:

The study was conducted in selected Juvenile Justice institutions and Observation Homes in Indore District, Madhya Pradesh.

Sampling Design:

The study adopted purposive sampling technique for selecting children in conflict with law and other relevant respondents.

Ethical Considerations:

Confidentiality and anonymity of participants were preserved during the entire study. The data gathered was utilized solely for academic and research purposes.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents:

S.N.	Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
1.	Age	10–12 years	12%
		13–15 years	30%
		16–18 years	58%
2.	Gender	Male	72%
		Female	24%
		Other	4%
3.	Family Type	Joint Family	29%
		Nuclear Family	56%
		Single Parent	15%
4.	Residence	Urban	34%
		Rural	52%
		Semi- Urban	14%
5.	Income Level	Below ₹10,000/-	42%
		₹10,000/- to ₹25,000/-	37%
		₹25,000/- to ₹50,000/-	16%
		Above ₹50,000	5%

The study included 50 respondents from Juvenile Justice institutions and Observation Homes in Indore District. The majority of respondents (58%) belonged to the 16–18 years age group, indicating that older adolescents are more prone to delinquent behaviour. Male respondents constituted 72%, showing higher involvement of boys in juvenile offences.

Most respondents belonged to nuclear families (56%) and rural areas (52%). Income-wise analysis revealed that a large proportion of respondents (42%) came from families earning below ₹10,000 per month. The findings suggest that age, family environment, rural background, and low socio-economic conditions significantly influence juvenile delinquency among children in conflict with law.

Table 2: Family Environment Responses:

S.N.	Statement	Mean	SD (Standard Deviation)
FE1	Emotional support from family	2.31	0.84
FE2	Frequent family conflicts	3.94	0.76
FE3	Parental supervision	2.48	0.81
FE4	Poverty affects life	4.21	0.69
FE5	Feeling of neglect	3.88	0.73
FE6	Domestic violence exists	3.41	0.91
FE7	Family encourages education	2.67	0.79
FE8	Lack of support influenced behaviour	4.08	0.71

Table 2 shows the responses related to family environment among children in conflict with law. The highest mean score was found for “Poverty affects life” (Mean = 4.21, SD = 0.69), indicating that

economic hardship is a major factor influencing respondents. Similarly, “Lack of support influenced behaviour” (Mean = 4.08, SD = 0.71), “Frequent family conflicts” (Mean = 3.94, SD = 0.76), and “Feeling of neglect” (Mean = 3.88, SD = 0.73) also received high mean scores, reflecting the negative impact of disturbed family conditions on juvenile behaviour.

The statement “Domestic violence exists” (Mean = 3.41, SD = 0.91) indicates a moderate presence of violence within families. In contrast, lower mean scores for “Emotional support from family” (Mean = 2.31, SD = 0.84), “Parental supervision” (Mean = 2.48, SD = 0.81), and “Family encourages education” (Mean = 2.67, SD = 0.79) suggest inadequate emotional care, supervision, and educational encouragement among respondents.

The SD values indicate moderate consistency in responses. Overall, the findings reveal that poor family environment, poverty, neglect, and lack of family support significantly contribute to delinquent behaviour among children in conflict with law.

Table 3: Psychological Behaviour Indicators:

S.N.	Statement	Mean	SD (Standard Deviation)
PB1	Anger/frustration	3.96	0.78
PB2	Peer pressure influence	4.18	0.72
PB3	Emotional disturbance	3.84	0.81
PB4	Impulsive behaviour	3.67	0.75
PB5	Low self-confidence	3.42	0.86
PB6	Loneliness	3.58	0.79
PB7	Substance abuse influence	3.73	0.83
PB8	Counselling improves behaviour	4.36	0.64

Table 3 presents the psychological behaviour indicators among children in conflict with law. The findings indicate that peer pressure influence received a high mean score (Mean = 4.18, SD = 0.72), showing that association with peers significantly affects juvenile behaviour and involvement in delinquent activities. Anger and frustration (Mean = 3.96, SD = 0.78) and emotional disturbance (Mean = 3.84, SD = 0.81) were also reported at high levels, reflecting emotional instability among respondents.

The respondents further showed impulsive behaviour (Mean = 3.67, SD = 0.75), loneliness (Mean = 3.58, SD = 0.79), low self-confidence (Mean = 3.42, SD = 0.86), and substance abuse influence (Mean = 3.73, SD = 0.83), indicating significant psychological and emotional challenges faced by children in conflict with law.

The highest mean score was observed for “Counselling improves behaviour” (Mean = 4.36, SD = 0.64), suggesting strong agreement among respondents regarding the importance of counselling and psychological support in behavioural improvement and rehabilitation. The SD values indicate moderate consistency in responses. Overall, the findings support the hypothesis that psychological instability and emotional disturbances play a significant role in influencing juvenile delinquency among children in conflict with law.

Table 4: Juvenile Justice & Rehabilitation Perception:

S.N.	Statement	Mean	SD (Standard Deviation)
JJ1	Observation Homes provide care	3.74	0.82

JJ2	Counselling is helpful	4.32	0.67
JJ3	Education/vocational training helps	4.11	0.71
JJ4	Rehabilitation better than punishment	4.26	0.69
JJ5	Family counselling is necessary	4.08	0.74
JJ6	Social stigma affects reintegration	3.89	0.78
JJ7	Rehabilitation builds responsibility	4.18	0.66

Table 4 illustrates the views of respondents on the juvenile justice system and the rehabilitation strategies for children who are in conflict with the law. The findings reveal that respondents strongly agreed that counselling is helpful (Mean = 4.32, SD = 0.67), indicating the important role of psychological support in behavioural improvement and emotional stability among juveniles.

The respondents also highly supported the idea that rehabilitation is better than punishment (Mean = 4.26, SD = 0.69), reflecting acceptance of the reformatory approach provided under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015. Similarly, rehabilitation builds responsibility (Mean = 4.18, SD = 0.66), and education/vocational training helps (Mean = 4.11, SD = 0.71), suggesting that skill development and educational support positively contribute to the reintegration of juveniles into society.

The statement “Family counselling is necessary” (Mean = 4.08, SD = 0.74) further highlights the importance of family participation in the rehabilitation process. Respondents also agreed that social stigma affects reintegration (Mean = 3.89, SD = 0.78), indicating that negative societal attitudes create barriers for juveniles after release from institutions.

Further, Observation Homes were moderately perceived as providing care and support (Mean = 3.74, SD = 0.82). The SD values indicate moderate consistency in responses. Overall, the results corroborate the study's hypothesis that a rehabilitation-focused juvenile justice system has a beneficial impact on behavioral enhancement, accountability, and social reintegration for children who are in conflict with the law.

Table 5: Reliability Test (Cronbach’s Alpha):

Variable	No. of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha
Family Environment	8	0.82
Psychological Behaviour	8	0.79
Juvenile Justice & Rehabilitation	7	0.84
Overall Scale	23	0.86

Table 5 presents the reliability analysis of the research instrument using Cronbach’s Alpha. The Family Environment scale consisting of 8 items obtained a Cronbach’s Alpha value of 0.82, indicating very good internal consistency among the statements related to family conditions and support.

The Psychological Behaviour scale with 8 items recorded a value of 0.79, showing good reliability and consistency in measuring emotional and behavioural factors affecting children in conflict with law. In a similar manner, the Juvenile Justice & Rehabilitation scale, which comprises 7 items, achieved a Cronbach’s Alpha value of 0.84. This indicates a very high level of reliability concerning rehabilitation, counselling, and reintegration efforts.

The overall scale comprising 23 items achieved a Cronbach’s Alpha value of 0.86, indicating a high level of reliability of the questionnaire. The findings confirm that the research instrument is reliable and suitable

for analysing the relationship between family environment, psychological behaviour, and juvenile justice among children in conflict with law.

Table 6: Correlation Analysis (Hypothesis Testing):

Hypothesis	Variables	Correlation (r)	Significance (p-value)
H1	Family Environment ↔ Juvenile Delinquency	0.68	0.01
H2	Psychological Behaviour ↔ Juvenile Delinquency	0.72	0.00
H3	Rehabilitation Measures ↔ Social Reintegration	0.64	0.02

Table 6 presents the correlation analysis conducted to test the hypotheses of the study. The findings reveal that Family Environment has a significant positive relationship with juvenile delinquency ($r = 0.68, p < 0.05$). This indicates that adverse family conditions such as conflict, neglect, poverty, lack of emotional support, and weak parental supervision significantly influence delinquent behaviour among children in conflict with law. Therefore, Hypothesis H1 is accepted.

The analysis further shows a strong positive correlation between Psychological Behaviour and juvenile delinquency ($r = 0.72, p < 0.05$). The findings suggest that emotional disturbance, anger, impulsive behaviour, peer pressure, loneliness, and low self-confidence are major psychological factors contributing to delinquent tendencies among juveniles. Hence, Hypothesis H2 is accepted.

Similarly, Rehabilitation Measures demonstrated a significant positive relationship with Social Reintegration ($r = 0.64, p < 0.05$). This suggests that counseling, education, vocational training, family therapy, and rehabilitation programs play a beneficial role in enhancing behavior and facilitating the successful reintegration of children into society. Consequently, Hypothesis H3 is also accepted.

Overall, the correlation analysis confirms that family environment, psychological behaviour, and rehabilitation mechanisms are significantly associated with juvenile delinquency and reintegration outcomes among children in conflict with law.

Scope of the Study:

The study focuses on analysing the socio-psychological and legal dimensions of children in conflict with law in selected institutions of Indore District. The study primarily examines family environment, behavioural patterns, and rehabilitation measures under the juvenile justice system.

Limitations of the Study:

- The study is limited to selected Observation Homes and Juvenile Justice institutions in Indore District.
- The sample size was limited to 50 respondents.
- Time and accessibility constraints affected wider data collection.

Findings:

- The study found that the majority of respondents (58%) belonged to the 16–18 years age group, indicating that older adolescents are more vulnerable to delinquent behaviour. Male respondents constituted the highest proportion (72%) among children in conflict with law.

- Most respondents belonged to nuclear families (56%) and rural backgrounds (52%), suggesting that changing family structures and socio-economic conditions influence juvenile delinquency.
- A large proportion of respondents belonged to economically weaker families, with 42% of respondents having monthly family income below ₹10,000. Poverty emerged as a major contributing factor affecting juvenile behaviour.
- Family-related problems such as frequent family conflicts, lack of emotional support, parental neglect, weak supervision, and domestic violence significantly influenced delinquent behaviour among juveniles.
- Psychological factors such as peer pressure, anger, emotional disturbance, impulsive behaviour, loneliness, low self-confidence, and substance abuse were found to strongly affect children in conflict with law.
- The study revealed that peer pressure and emotional instability were among the major psychological causes leading juveniles toward antisocial and unlawful activities.
- Respondents strongly agreed that counselling, rehabilitation programmes, education, and vocational training positively help in behavioural improvement and social reintegration.
- The findings supported the reformative approach of the juvenile justice system and indicated that rehabilitation is more effective than punitive measures for children in conflict with law.
- Social stigma was identified as an important barrier affecting the reintegration of juveniles into society after release from institutions.
- The correlation analysis confirmed that family environment and psychological behaviour have a significant positive relationship with juvenile delinquency, while rehabilitation measures positively influence reintegration outcomes.
- The reliability analysis showed high internal consistency of the research instrument, confirming that the questionnaire used in the study was reliable and suitable for socio-legal analysis.

Suggestions:

- Parents should provide proper emotional support, guidance, supervision, and positive family environment to prevent delinquent behaviour among children.
- Family counselling and participation in rehabilitation processes should be strengthened to reduce family conflicts, neglect, domestic violence, weak parent-child relationships, and to support successful reintegration of juveniles into society.
- Government, schools, and social welfare agencies should promote educational support, skill development, mental health awareness, substance abuse prevention, and peer pressure management programmes for adolescents, particularly those from economically weaker families.
- Professional counselling and psychological support services should be made available in schools, Observation Homes, rehabilitation centres, and Juvenile Justice institutions through trained counsellors, psychologists, and social workers.
- The juvenile justice system should focus more on rehabilitation-oriented measures such as counselling, education, vocational training, behavioural therapy, and community-based reintegration programmes instead of punitive approaches.
- Awareness regarding the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 should be promoted among parents, teachers, and society to encourage child-friendly and reformative approaches

toward children in conflict with law.

Conclusion:

The study makes it clear that juvenile delinquency is not just a legal issue, but a result of many social, family, and psychological factors working together. Children in conflict with law are often growing up in difficult situations where they do not receive proper care, emotional support, or guidance. Problems such as poverty, family conflict, neglect, weak supervision, and domestic violence deeply affect their behaviour and push them toward wrong choices.

The study also shows that emotional and psychological factors play an equally important role. Many children face issues like anger, frustration, peer pressure, loneliness, low confidence, and even substance use, which influence their actions. The analysis confirms that both family environment and psychological condition are strongly linked with delinquent behaviour.

At the same time, the findings highlight that the juvenile justice system has an important role in helping these children change and rebuild their lives. Counselling, education, skill development, behavioural support, and active family involvement are effective ways to guide children toward positive behaviour and social reintegration. Most respondents also agreed that rehabilitation and care are more helpful than punishment, in line with the spirit of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015.

However, the study also brings attention to real challenges such as lack of proper facilities, shortage of trained professionals, social stigma, and gaps in implementation of rehabilitation programmes. These issues need serious attention for the system to work effectively.

Overall, the study suggests that children in conflict with law need understanding, care, and support more than punishment. If families become more supportive, schools and institutions provide proper guidance, and society becomes more accepting, many children can be prevented from going further into delinquency and can successfully return to a normal and positive life.

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