

Original Research

Received 27 June 2026

Revised 27 July 2026

Accepted 10 Aug 2026

Natural Resources for Human
Health 2026, Vol. 6 (18s): 249–260

KEYWORDS:

Juvenile Delinquency, POCSO
Act, Peer Influence, Recidivism,
Jaipur Commissionerate, Chi-
Square Test, Rehabilitation.

Peer Group Socialisation as a Determinant of Juvenile Delinquency: Comparative Patterns Across POCSO and Non-POCSO Offences and Pathways Towards ‘Habilitation’

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ABSTRACT: Growing urban Commissionerate systems have moral, law and order issues due to the emerging picture of greater juvenile involvement in all forms of crime, including horrendous sexual offenses against other children (Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses Act/POCSO).

The study evaluates the socio-demographic-psychological characteristics, from an empirical primary survey of incarcerated juveniles of Jaipur Commissionerate of the capital city of Rajasthan, a state in India. Mixed method approach of Qualitative (Age brackets, Motive behind committing the crime, Crime Type, Recidivism & Socio-Economic Background by Ration Card holdings) cum Quantitative (statistical Pearson Chi-Square Test of Independence association between Criminal Motive & Type of Crime-POCSO & Non-POCSO) research approach is employed to assess juvenile delinquency. The Chi-square test of goodness of fit of independence so applied proves that juvenile offense type (POCSO against Non-POCSO) is associated with the motive behind the crime (peer-group influence against all others, like, previous animosity, sudden provocation, in state of intoxication, pre-planned & economic). The p-value score was way below the conventional threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$, indicating association between motive with offense type, which clears the air that this occurred by chance, while the Cramér's V Strength of Association test shows moderate strength of association. The authors also take the liberty to amalgamate all the suggestions (self & other scholars) for the amelioration & mitigation of juvenile delinquency ‘habilitation’.

1. INTRODUCTION

Issues & factors of crime have been a hot, swelling topic of research for criminologists & sociologists who consider economic, social, and family situations responsible for disrupting social harmony & rise in juvenile heinous crime rates or mens rea, especially in urban areas (Tittlová, 2018; Zareeen, 2018). Juvenile crime was seen as a growing problem of this hour which found its way under controversial public scrutiny due to children of tender age committing any wrongdoing (Sellin, 1942). Tittlová (2018) shares a different story that it's rather a current problem, it's definitely not new, but a concomitant of a transitioning society. The age of juveniles is of curiosity, insecurity & provocations, which aggravates in India because of high illiteracy & poverty. (Zareeen, 2018).

Contemporary data indicate a steep rise in child perpetrators committing violent & sexual offenses against other minors under The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012. Mens Rea or Guilty Mind has always been the heart of criminal studies and the justice system. But study of child perpetrators has been almost nil (Johnson, 1988). Apart from the crimes Adolescent couples have also been in the fix, the same law, POCSO, that protects minors from sexual offences also puts the young boys behind bars as perpetrators (Anchan et al., 2020). This legal paradox doesn't run on consensual partners but rather the cases are filled by the girl's family members after she elopes or gets pregnant. Even if all cases don't start like this, the end results are the same.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To evaluate the qualitative socio-demographic-psychological variables, like, age group distribution, Motive behind committing crime, Crime Profile, Recidivism, & Socio-Economic Background by Ration Card holdings that guide juvenile inmates toward severe violations within the Jaipur Commissionerate borders.
- To statistically assess the significant association between peer-group socialization & nature of the crime (POCSO/sexual offence against minor children vs. all other) among incarcerated juvenile criminals with Chi-square Test.

2. STUDY AREA

The study area comprises a majorly urban capital centre with peripheral rural umland in the north-eastern region of the state Rajasthan (Dadhich & Hanaoka, 2011). It is also the Socio-economic-demographic hub of the state, which was founded under the royal patronage of *Sawai Jai Singh II* of the *Kachwaab- Dhundhar* Dynasty on 18 November 1727 (Goswami et al., 2025). The boundary of the old city known as parkota is included in the UNESCO Heritage Site (Goswami et al., 2025).

Figure 1 shows the Jaipur Commissionerate ($26^{\circ}31'30''\text{N}$ – $27^{\circ}12' \text{N}$, $75^{\circ}27'44'' \text{E}$ – $75^{\circ}59'40''\text{E}$) system, which is the study area for this research, is a police administrative system started in 2011 for a faster & better management of the criminal landscape in this growing region (Mehta, 2011). The police commissionerate system for a city in India is a unified command structure with Deputy Inspector General or above rank as the sole head allowing for quicker law & order response; change of hierarchical structures within the police force, delegated greater responsibilities & transfers magisterial authority to police officers especially, IPS officers (Chaturvedi, 2017).

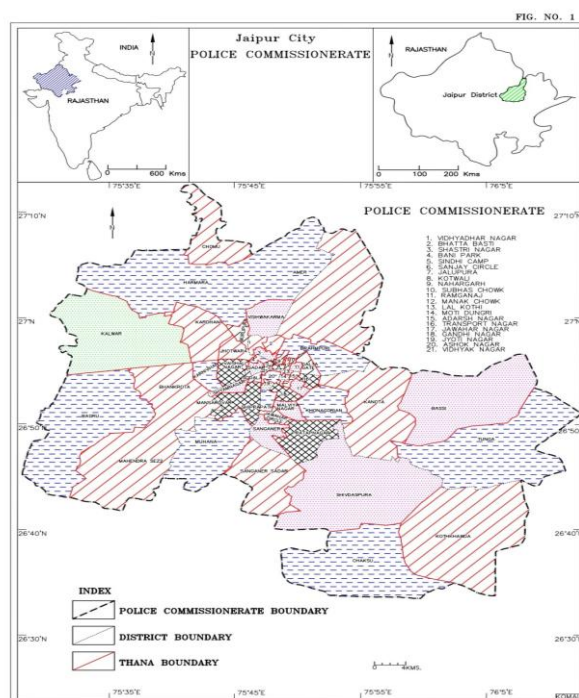


Figure 1. Key map of Jaipur Commissionerate (prepared by the researcher)

3. THE MAKING OF A JUVENILE DELINQUENT

The making of juvenile delinquents in criminal behavioral studies across the globe focuses on understanding their psyche & social aspects: who are they dealing with, why did they commit such acts, what is their thought process, etc (Abhishek & Balamurugan, 2024). The factors identified are as follows:

Individual Factors include various mental health factors like, high Callous-unemotional (CU) traits (like lack of empathy, deficient guilt, & shallow affect) (Simmons et al., 2018; Frick et al., 2013), anger issues, low psychosocial maturity (PSM) (Simmons et al., 2018; Frick et al., 2013) like developing 3 components like responsibility, temperance, & perspective Steinberg & Cauffman, (1996), wanting fast results leading to illegal methods to get what they want: physical-socio-economic factors (Abhishek & Balamurugan, 2024), & having anti-establishmentarianism thought process which wants them to challenge/ violate the existing laws or norms or socio- economic morals (Abadi et al., 2024). Other than mental health factors, traumatic experiences from childhood also lead to juvenile walking on the violent path (Wilson et al., 2013). If not PTSD, being bullied in early age also fertilises *mens rea* (Sasi & Antony, 2024). The above two factors plunge the delinquents down a vicious path of addictions, substance abuse, & other such escapist tendencies (Abhishek & Balamurugan, 2024).

Familial factors play a vital role in youth development or establishing the projected criminal future of most children. “It takes a village to raise a child but sometimes that village could kill a child. If the Child doesn't feel a part of that village they would burn it down to feel its warmth (Sendrey, 2019).” This African proverb doesn't just sit right with us, it conveys the dark realities of dysfunctional homes where the child is neglected leads to the child feeling invisible & lonely where the parents don't participate in the child's socialization process, i.e., lack of correction, supervision or rejections (Gupta et al., 2022); where they aren't an emotional anchor; don't prioritize the core family; don't pick the right friend circle in early childhood or; unsupervised social media use or accessing non-age appropriate materials by children (Chen, 2025); don't know the battle the child is facing; no accountability when the child is disrespectful towards adults or does bad things (Flanagan et al., 2019; Hoeve et al., 2009). These lead to the child undermining the authority & don't follow authority well & falling towards delinquency (Agbi et al., 2024). Violent families with parental discord, fighting or intoxication (Garduno, 2021), lead to the child getting abused, tortured, oppressed, exploited, and even sold off; this easily makes the child resort to substance abuse or violence (Abhishek & Balamurugan, 2024). Sometimes the parents are themselves convicts and the child grows up with the normalcy of committing crimes where it brings economic prosperity (Abhishek & Balamurugan, 2023). Parents sometimes don't emphasise on teaching sharing leading to the child never learning empathy or sharing wisdom, sharing their own experiences/ mistakes/ critically analyzing situations & their repercussions (Chen et al., 2019).

Peer network may improperly motivate or the fear of their rejection positively correlates with delinquency (Gifford-Smith et al., 2005).

Socio-economic & neighbourhood instability : children who belong to the lower middle-socio-economical class, who are rejected by society, & are financially deprived showed more aggressive behavior (Agbi et al., 2024). This is further magnified by illiteracy amongst the juveniles as well as their family. In backward areas like slums (inner city in USA, jhuggad-jhompdi in India, Barrios in Mexico, etc), where poverty leads children & youth to take up the household & breadwinning responsibilities like working adults, so that more family members contribute to earnings & caregiving (Aber et al., 2012). Children here are on the giving side of the geography of care, sometimes working to clear debt of parents, heightening Callous-unemotional (CU) traits risks (Simmons et al., 2018; Frick et al., 2013). This semi or un-skilled unorganised exploitative work environment fertilises the risk of deviating towards committing crime due to the peer group. The state of Rajasthan isn't alien to modern slavery where poor children work in unsafe conditions (mines, industries, etc) to repay family debt, where they are underpaid (Rajpurohit, 2021).

4. JUVENILE JUSTICE (CARE AND PROTECTION OF CHILDREN) ACT, 2015

This India Act, replacing its 2000 predecessor, provides certain prerogatives while prosecuting children in conflict with law as adult humanitarian impulses signal protective behaviour, as children have higher chances to change as they are still growing (physically & psychologically) (Sellin, 1942). This protective umbrella encompasses all aspects of juvenile delinquents leaving little or no room for guessing.

Apart from this, it also allows juveniles (16-18 years old) to be tried as adults for some heinous cases as a neo-liberal approach, which its preceding act didn't allow it (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2016).

5. MATERIALS & METHODS (DATA COLLECTION) & RESULTS

Data Collection & Methodology

The study utilizes primary micro-empirical survey data of 53 male 'Children in Conflict with Law' cohorts residing in the Rajkiya Samprekshan Grah (Government Observation Home) in Sethi Colony within Jaipur Commissionerate through scheduled responses, in the first half of 2026. These observation homes are set up (separately for girls & boys), operated & maintained by the Social Justice & Empowerment Department, Government of Rajasthan or under an agreement with voluntary organisations & funds for this are provided by the Central Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) to the State government or Union Territory Administration for Government- Civil Society Partnership (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2020). The children in conflict with law enter these facilities through Juvenile Justice Boards (JJBs) All such responses face the same challenges, like memory bias (Rosomon effect) (Roth & Mehta, 2002) & participant's openness to answer about the crime in general (Barry et al., 2012). This might lead to subjective dishonesty in heightened CU traits in people (Frick et al., 2013). The data consists of only male respondents as no female juvenile delinquent was in any institution at the time of data collection. Studies show that males are highly involved in delinquent behaviours compared to the females, it also shows males are more vulnerable to delinquency risk factors (Moffitt et al., 2001).

Motive behind committing the crime		Age Bifurcations		
		8-13	14-18	Total
1	Peer Influence	8	22	30
2	Previous Animosity	4	3	7
3	Sudden Provocations	5	2	7
4	Economic Factor	3	2	5
5	In a State of Intoxication	2	1	3
6	Pre-Planned	0	1	1
Crime Type		Age Bifurcations		
		8-13	14-18	Total
1	POCSO	3	14	17
2	Non Pocso (Theft, property offense, etc)	17	19	36
Rcidivism		Age Bifurcations		
		8-13	14-18	Total
1	Yes	7	9	16
2	No, 1st time	13	24	37
Socio-Economic Background by Ration Card holdings		Age Bifurcations		
		8-13	14-18	Total

1	Above Poverty Line	4	11	15
2	Below Poverty Line	16	22	38
a.	AAV: Antyodaya Anna Yojana	7	10	17
b.	PHH: Priority Household	3	3	6
c.	Remaining only BPL card holders	6	9	15

Table 1. Variables quantified with their age brackets (Jaipur Commissionerate)

Qualitative Indicators (Thematic Contextualization)

a. Age Group

Age is seen as a geographical & historical concept but in criminal studies age is also sometimes seen as situational or psychological concept. Older age group juveniles with more delinquent peers are likely to become delinquents (Mears & Field, 2002) proving that delinquency & delinquent peer association both increase with age amongst juveniles (Elliott & Menard, 1996).

Institutionalization of 'Child in Conflict with Law' can only start post completion of the 7 year age mark according to the section 20 of BNSS (previously IPC Section 82) below which quote unquote "Nothing is an offence which is done by a child under seven years of age." (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2023).

With respect to the study 37.73% fall in the 8-13 age bracket while 62.26% are the older children falling in the 14-18 age group bracket (Table 1). These children come from varied socio-economic brackets, who followed a wide range of criminal paths & ended up in this correction centre.

b. Motive

Table 1. shows the motive behind committing the crime by the respondents: Peer Influence accounts for 56.6%; Previous Animosity accounts for 13.2%; Sudden Provocations accounts for 13.2%; Economic Factor accounts for 9.43%; crime committed in the State of Intoxication accounts for 5.66%; & Pre-Planned accounts for 1.88%. Peer influence amounts for the highest proportion of all motives behind committing the crimes for which it has higher influence in the elder age group, as shown in figure 2. All crime motives have the domination of the 8-13 year age group except peer influence & pre-planned (Figure 2). 85.71% of the perpetrator children from the age bracket of 8-13 & 88.88% from the age bracket of 14-18, who take drugs or alcohol at the time of the study didn't give this motive behind committing the crime.

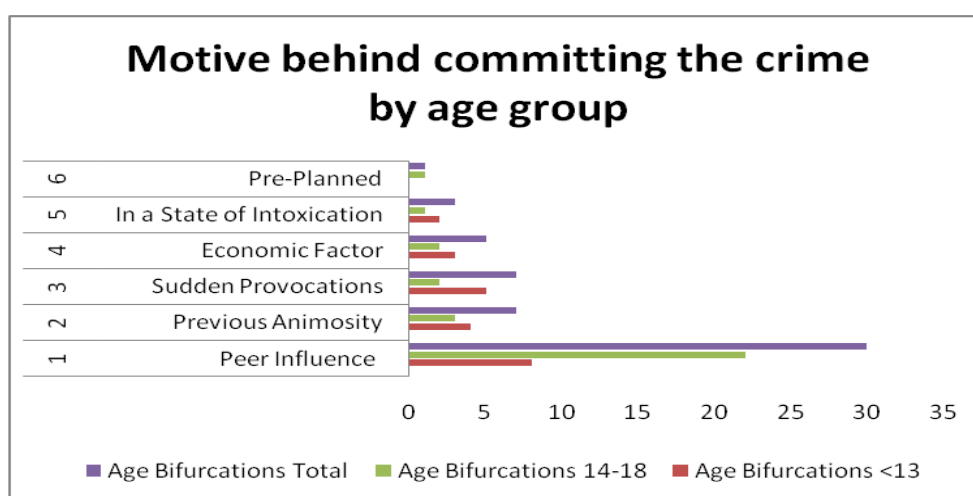


Figure 2. Motive behind committing crime against Age brackets of Jaipur Commissionerate

c. Crime Type

POCSP cases are just more than physical sexual assaults, they have long term psychological & behavioural effects (Aggarwal et al., 2022). Aggarwal et al. (2022) find that, the most vulnerable age group of victims is of 12-18 (post puberty), especially from low socio-economic strata. The child-on-child sexual abuse has accelerated after the ease of access due to wider internet access. The maturation process includes sexual curiosity & when majority of the perpetrators had a victimized history of incest & physical abuse by the people they knew (family member/ sibling/ school setting), it becomes predators for the children they know, especially siblings (Johnson, 1988). Shaw et al. (2000), show that children (majority males) victim to other children portray elevated levels of emotional and behavioural problems.

For the ease of the study the data has been divided crimes into POCSO & Non-POCSO. 32.07% of all crimes are Sexual Crimes against Children, while 67.92% cases belong to crimes against women, cheating, property, theft, against Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes, Cyber Crimes, etc. Out of all POCSO crimes 15% were committed by children of the age group of 8-13, while 85% were committed by older juveniles of the age bracket of 14-18 (Table 1.).

d. Recidivism: making of a chronic delinquent

The topmost goal of the juvenile justice system & the family is to rehabilitate the young criminals while deterring them from reentering the same system. Chowdhury et al. (2021) tried to answer the question of why majority of the offenders follow 'desistance', while some commit future crimes? Here it was established that aging plays the most critical role in desistance (Chowdhury et al., 2021). Moreover prisons are like revolving doors, where imprisonment and labeling (as a theory and ground reality) itself increases recidivism chances of any individual (McCuish et al., 2024; Sellin, T. (1942). Family conflict has continuous impact before incarceration, while being incarcerated & post release. Familial conflicts post release shows significant associated with higher recidivism. 30.19% of all juveniles are chronic repeat offenders, which could be an important factor for life long criminality, while 69.81% have been arrested for the 1st time (Table 1.). Table 1. also shows that 43.75% fall in the age category of 8-13, while 56.25% are of the older juvenile category of 14-18 years of age.

e. Socio-Economic Balance

National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013, covers two-thirds of rural and half of urban population of India, where households receive food grains at subsidised price called the Central Issue Price & supplied via Targeted Public Distribution System. Households (with the eldest adult woman as the head) are identified on the basis of NSS Household Consumption survey data of 2011. Out of all BPL cards, Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) covers the most vulnerable & poorest households & Priority Households (NHH) are identified by the State Government (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2013).

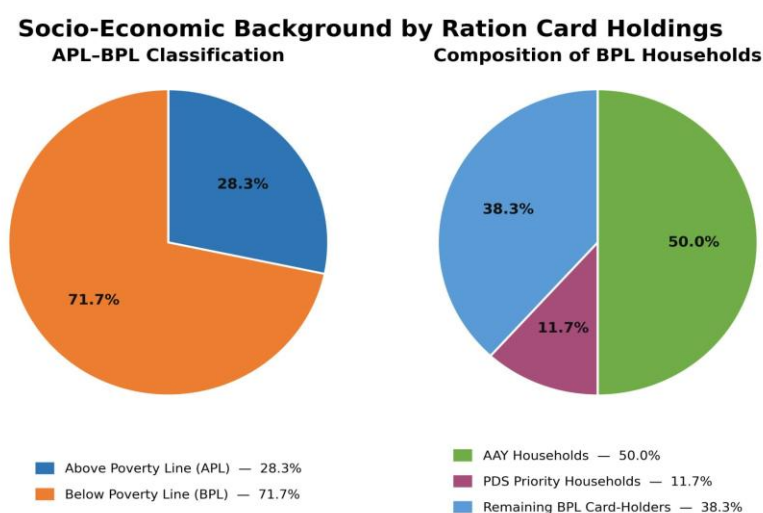


Figure 3. Socio-economic background by ration card holding with age brackets of Jaipur Commissionerate

Figure 3 shows that 71.7% of all juvenile delinquents belong from Below Poverty Line Ration Card Holder families (45% of all BPL card holders have Antyodaya Anna Yojana card, while 16% of all BPL cards are Priority Household cards). 28% of all incarcerated juveniles are from Above Poverty Line households (Figure 3).

Quantitative Analysis by Chi-Square Test & Cramer's V

Hypothesis testing by renaissance scientist Karl Pearson gave us the present day Non Parametric Chi-Square test or the test for goodness-of-fit or test of independence (Singhal & Rana, 2015). It is used for a large (more than 30), randomly drawn, unique categorical data (where no variable is counted twice & expected count isn't less than 5) for two reasons: to test independence between variables & to test goodness-of-fit (Singhal & Rana, 2015).

$$\chi^2 = \sum (O_i - E_i)^2 / E_i$$

Formula of Chi Square Test

The next statistical test is based on Pearson's Chi-Square test & was given by Harald Cramér in 1946. Cramer's V, like the Chi-square test, is also used for categorical (nominal data) variables (Kearney, 2017). As explained by Kearney, 2017, this test gauges the strength (not only significance) of this association [range between 0 (lowest) to +1 (highest)] by reporting the effect size.

$$\text{Cramér's V} / \varphi C = \sqrt{[\chi^2 / n \cdot \min(r-1, c-1)]}$$

Formula of Cramér's V or Cramér's phi

This evaluates if peer-group socialization influences the crime type (POCSO/ sexual offence against minor children & all others). The variables used for the test are as follows:

- **Independent Variable (Motive behind the crime):** Categorized into Peer Influence vs. Other (Previous animosity, sudden provocation, economic factors).
- **Dependent Variable (Crime Type):** POCSO vs. Non-POCSO Crimes (Theft, property offense, etc).

Hypotheses:

H₀: The type of juvenile offense committed is independent of the peer-group influence.

H₁: The type of juvenile offense committed is dependent on the peer-group influence.

	Motive: Peer Influence	Motive: Other	Total
Offense Type: Non-POCSO	25	11	36
Offense Type: POCSO	5	12	17
Total	30	23	53

Table 2. Offense Type (POCSO & Non-Pocso) against Motive (Peer Influence & Others) of Jaipur Commissionerate

$$\text{Calculating df} = (\text{number of rows} - 1) (\text{number of columns} - 1) = 1$$

a. Chi-Square Test Results

The Chi-square score of this study ($\chi^2 = 7.53$) is compared against its critical value (predetermined Chi-square distribution table) at 1 degree of freedom [as df=1] & also against a 0.05 level of significance (Singhal & Rana, 2015). This gives us the critical value of **3.841**. As the Chi-square score (7.53) is more than the critical value (3.841), the outcome of this test is **statistically significant**, the probability level (alpha)/ P value being **0.006** ($p < 0.05$), & **Null Hypothesis is rejected**.

b. Cramér's V Strength of Association test's Results

$$\text{Cramér's V} = \sqrt{(\chi^2 / n)}$$

$$V = \sqrt{(7.53 / 53)} \approx 0.377$$

This test (following the chi-square test) indicates a **moderate association/ effect** between the two categorical variables. This rejects the Null Hypothesis as well.

Also noting, since all four expected frequencies (20.38, 15.62, 9.62, 7.38) exceed the minimum threshold of 5, the assumptions underlying the Chi-square test are satisfied, lending validity to the result.

6. DISCUSSIONS & CONCLUSION

This empirical socio-psychological study highlights the swelling, heinous crimes by juvenile delinquents within the borders of Jaipur Commissionerate. The multi-dimensional issues are analysed quantitatively cum qualitatively. Peer groups heavily influence (increases with age within the juveniles) sexual crimes against other minors covered under the POCSO Act. 1 in every 3 Juvenile delinquent is a repeat offender, indicating that standard carceral detention is failing to 'habilitate' them. Recidivism is more dominant in the older age groups (14-18), than the younger (8-13). 71.7% of the incarcerated juveniles belonged to the BPL category. The Chi-square test proves association between juvenile offense type (POCSO against Non-POCSO) & motive behind the crime (peer-group influence against all others). The same result echoes in the Cramér's V test. Consequently, **null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected & alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted**. While examining the observed (O) against expected (E) frequencies, the direction of association came to light. It's as follows: higher frequency of Non-POCSO offenses occurred than that of expected when the motive was due peer influence socialisation (O = 25 vs. E = 20.38), whereas POCSO offenses occurred frequently under all other motives apart from peer influence (O = 12 vs. E = 7.38). Overall, this analysis statistically supports the proposition that peer-group influence is in a differential role while shaping the nature of juvenile offending, particularly in distinguishing POCSO from Non-POCSO crime categories.

Observations while conducting the study:

- All communications with the incarcerated juveniles took place through physical-psychological barriers of glass, bars, & guards, leaving a tough impression.
- While conducting the study, intense shouting was heard from within the campus, giving an indisciplined notion. Children of this age have high energy which can be seen as inner & outer noise both, but it's the outer noise manifested that is seen by all.
- Most delinquents are uneducated, while some aspire to clear exams like NDA (National Defence Academy entrance exam) to become officers, creating a versatile sample.
- The imprisoned children had no planned activities (physical or cognitive) throughout the day to divert their energy into character building.
- They were just like any other young boys, hyperactive, curious, not wanting to sit in one place throughout the study.

Suggestions

We need to decide if juvenile delinquents are growing children or hardcore criminals. So we could invest either in the prisons (punitive approach) or in our children (restorative) (Sharma & Gupta, 2024). These incarcerated children need someone to believe in them, who would see them, willing to teach by example, able to bring back to mainstreams, so they don't become crime statistics. If not, then we will be losing them at an alarming rate to the world in which very few of us wish to enter to bring our children back. This world only leads to institutions meant to isolate them or deeper in darkness or even death. A few underpinnings are:

- Active family-based interventions (Galaguzova et al., 2019) & social support from community for 'habilitation' is an important buffer. This demonstrates well documented success in lowering adolescent crime risk by strengthened family functioning, reduced affiliation with delinquent peers & oversight & monitoring with family therapy reduces delinquency (Anderson et al., 2020).
 - Family blueprint (Hoeve et al., 2009) requires an amalgamation of support & control by finding & kindling child's passions so as to guide the energy positively; change/ socio-economic support the family; keeping negative peer away from the child as much as they can; positive communication with active listening with acceptance heals old wounds (Agbi et al., 2024); supervised social media use so they don't access harmful content imitating a violent streak (Chen, 2025), this cyber space is also

the where others/ peers reach & influence the children; awareness of present day issues faced by the child & the whole generation in general so that in the anger within our kids can be deciphered & channeled towards the same goal properly. These are important as the juvenile will return back to the same social environment & has the highest vulnerability to fall into the vicious cycle of recidivism & end up back in the penal system or even dead.

- Community involvement requires active participation of the whole village with providing job opportunities, including in social activity engagements (Galaguzova et al., 2019).

- Roles of juvenile correction centers, need to 'habilitate' not rehabilitate as they can't go back to the same place. These centres require their humanification, where welfaristic approach is applied like the German justice system, *Sozialstaat* (welfare state) (Heinig, 2011) for personal growth & character building; talks by reformed ex-convicts who share their experiences and reform the next generation of juvenile criminals; counseling for both juveniles and their families for positive behavioral changes (Soneja, 2018); very high emphasis on education as it shows negative correlation with delinquency (Galaguzova et al., 2019) with the development of libraries & research spaces where the children can access newspapers & supervised internet daily; Memorandum of Understanding with regional Universities and schools to provide online educational courses/ diploma within the premises or repurpose the correction homes into offline schools/colleges, a place of learning & hope; meditation techniques like vipashayana or aanapana to be taught & practiced daily to make them grounded in the present reality and accepting it as it is (Chandriramani et al., 1998); weekly or daily vocational courses (like Los Angeles & El Salvador Prisons)/ diploma for skill development, like professional culinary courses, to make them the frontrunners of the economy (Galaguzova et al., 2019; Soneja, 2018) under the New Education Policy & Right to Education Act of 2009 (Ministry of Education, 2020; Ministry of Law and Justice, 2009) courses for creative development, like poetry & painting; athletic development classes & prison under-18 or junior games; speech development via essay competitions; cerebral development gaming activities like chess. All their activities should be associated with real life situations. When they turn 18 they should be given a chance to choose if they want to develop their skills (if this then organisation of career fairs within the campus by private or community based organisations or philanthropic non-profit foundations) or continue with their studies. For the products that are manufactured from within the correctional homes, marketing boost of product shops like 'Aasayin The Jail Shop' of Jaipur Central Jail (Tulsiani, 2017).

- Non-institutional socialization should be practiced with the help of social workers (Devarmani, 2016).

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Thanking the officers, staff, & office of Jaipur Commissionerate & Jail Department for approving, aiding in data collection, sharing their knowledge, & guiding us. Acknowledging the undying support from our guide madam Professor Rashmi Sharma, towards personal & professional growth. We would like to thank the University Grants Commission for providing a Senior Research Fellowship to two of the authors, making the study unchallenging. Recognising the aid provided by students & faculty (Library, teaching & non-teaching) of Banasthali Vidyapeeth. Thanking our parents, spouses/ fiancées/ partners for morally supporting our study.

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