



JUVENILE DELINQUENCY IN WESTERN VIDARBHA: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF OFFENDER VULNERABILITIES AND REFORMATORY CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Juvenile delinquency is a pressing challenge in India's rapidly urbanizing agrarian regions. This study examines juvenile offenders' challenges in Western Vidarbha's reformatories (Amravati, Akola, Yavatmal). Using NCRB data (2012–2023) (National Crime Records Bureau, 2021, 2022) and current literature, it analyzes crime trends, socio-economic drivers, and institutional responses. Maharashtra's share of national juvenile crimes dropped from 25.2% (2013) to 16.8% (2023). However, vulnerability remains concentrated among 16–18-year-old males, comprising 79.8% of apprehended juveniles in 2023. Key predictors include poverty, slums, family breakdown, domestic violence, school dropout, and adult unemployment (Atrey & Singh, 2024; Biswal & Mishra, 2020; Dutta et al., 2020; Hazra, 2021). Despite the progressive Juvenile Justice Act 2015, implementation suffers from understaffed Juvenile Justice Boards (JJB) and Child Welfare Committees (CWC) (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2023). Western Vidarbha's reformatories face overcrowding and poor vocational training. This paper advocates for community-based rehabilitation, family counselling, and robust aftercare to break recidivism cycles.

KEYWORDS : Juvenile delinquency, Western Vidarbha, Reformatory, NCRB, Juvenile Justice Act 2015

1. INTRODUCTION

Juvenile delinquency—offenders under 18 defined as Children in Conflict with Law (CICL)—reflects structural inequalities and weakened socializing institutions, exacerbated in India by rapid urbanization and agrarian distress. Recent NCRB data (2017–2021) shows approximately 31,000–32,000 national cases annually, with rising crime rates but declining convictions. Many of these juveniles face severe socio-economic pressures and limited education (Abhishek & Balamurugan, 2023).

This issue holds immense sociological weight in Western Vidarbha, a region marked by farmer suicides and seasonal migration. While reformatories and observation homes are vital for rehabilitation, they operate in severely resource-starved environments. This paper examines Maharashtra's juvenile crime trends (with a focus on Western Vidarbha), socio-economic determinants, legislative challenges, and regional institutional problems.

2. Theoretical Framework and Socioeconomic Determinants

Contemporary Indian scholarship views delinquency through structural paradigms rather than biological ones.

- **Urban Disorganization:** Hazra (2021) found that higher poverty rates and slum proliferation significantly increase juvenile crime. In Western Vidarbha, expanding informal settlements around Amravati and Akola undermine neighborhood cohesion.
- **Economic Determinants:** Dutta et al. (2020) demonstrated that states with low per capita income and high adult crime see sharp rises in juvenile crime alongside growing inequality. This is highly relevant to Vidarbha's agrarian-distressed economy.
- **Family Disintegration:** Hazra (2021) empirically linked domestic violence to delinquency. Studies in Rajasthan (Atrey & Singh, 2024) and Odisha (Biswal & Mishra, 2020) confirm that broken families and parental neglect foster maladaptive coping. In Vidarbha, male out-migration leaves youth with weak parental supervision.
- **Educational Attrition:** Limited education increases vulnerability to deviant subcultures (Abhishek & Balamurugan, 2024). While education deters crime (Hazra, 2021), school-based counselling and vocational training act as critical preventative supplements (Ghosh & Kumar, 2020).

- **Psychosocial Factors:** Abhishek and Balamurugan (2023) highlight that late adolescence (16–18 years) brings emotional immaturity, making youths highly susceptible to socio-economic pressures.

3. Legislative Background

India's juvenile justice system shifted from a punitive to a welfare-oriented model, albeit with recent retributive tweaks (Sharma, 2021; Roj & Raj, 2024).

Table 1. Legislative Milestones in Juvenile Justice in India

Year	Act / Code	Significance
1850	Apprentices Act	Diverted youth offenders to vocational training
1897	Reformatory Schools Act	Separated juveniles from adult prisons
1960	Central Children Act	Standardized juvenile welfare provisions
1986	Juvenile Justice Act	Defined juvenile status and created Welfare Boards
2015	Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act	Created JJB & CWC; allowed trial of 16–18 year-olds for heinous crimes as adults

The Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act of 2015 created the JJB for CICL and the CWC for children needing care. Agarwal (2018) notes the 2015 provision—allowing 16–18-year-olds accused of heinous crimes to be tried as adults—was a direct response to the 2012 Delhi gang rape. However, Sharma (2021) argues that police remain inadequately sensitized, often treating juveniles as hardened criminals.

Roj and Raj (2024) highlight that poor resource allocation and low accountability cripple JJB performance. The Ministry of Women and Child Development (2023) reports severe staffing shortages, with observation homes operating at 30–40% vacancies and single JJBs covering multiple districts—an acute reality in Western Vidarbha where Amravati's JJB also serves Yavatmal.

4. Empirical Analysis: Crime Trends (2012–2023)

Data originates from *Crime in India* reports (National Crime Records Bureau, 2021, 2022).

4.1 Crime Trends:

Maharashtra accounted for nearly 25% of India's juvenile

crimes in 2013, dropping to 16.8% by 2023.

Table 2. Juvenile Crimes in Maharashtra Relative to National Data

Year	India (Total)	Maharashtra	% Share
2012	27,936	6,630	23.7%
2013	31,725	8,012	25.2%
2019	32,235	6,454	20.0%
2023	31,365	5,280	16.8%

This decline aligns with Hazra's (2021) finding that economic and educational growth reduces crime. However, Arora (2025) cautions that heinous offenses among juveniles have proportionally increased.

4.2 Gender Distribution:

Girls consistently represent under 5% of juvenile offenders.

Table 3. Gender Distribution of Juvenile Offenders in Maharashtra

Year	Boys	Girls	Total	% Girls
2013	7,673	339	8,012	4.23%
2017	7,703	68	7,771	0.88%
2023	5,230	50	5,280	0.95%

Nationally, over 95% of apprehended juveniles are boys (Abhishek & Balamurugan, 2023). This reflects gendered socialization, stricter informal controls on girls, and cultural pressures on boys to exhibit toughness.

4.3 Age Distribution:

Late adolescence overwhelmingly dominates crime statistics.

Table 4. Age-wise Classification of Juvenile Offenders in Maharashtra

Year	<12 years	12–16 years	16–18 years	Total
2013	171 (2.1%)	2,247 (28.0%)	5,594 (69.8%)	8,012
2019	75 (1.1%)	1,518 (23.5%)	4,861 (75.3%)	6,454
2023	31 (0.6%)	1,034 (19.6%)	4,215 (79.8%)	5,280

Identity crises, peer conformity, and risk-taking peak in late adolescence. Agarwal (2018) notes this demographic was the 2015 JJ Act's focal point. In 2023, 79.8% of apprehended juveniles in Maharashtra were aged 16–18, closely mirroring the 76.2% national average (Abhishek & Balamurugan, 2023).

5. Institutional Responses in Western Vidarbha

Under the JJ Act 2015, three institutional mechanisms operate locally (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2023):

- **Observation Homes:** Provide temporary reception. Amravati's home houses 45 children against a capacity of 30, with just one counsellor. As Biswal and Mishra (2020) observed, such overcrowding facilitates deviant peer learning rather than reformation.
- **Special Homes / Reformatories:** Designed for long-term rehabilitation. Field observations in Western Vidarbha reveal outdated vocational trades lacking market linkages, taught by contractual staff. Sharma (2021) argues that without integrating initiatives like the Skill India mission, reformatories produce unemployable youth.
- **Place of Safety / Probation Hostels:** Intended for heinous offenders and aftercare. Aftercare organizations are virtually non-existent in Vidarbha, causing abrupt releases without reintegration plans.
- Sharma (2021) urges child-friendly police training, while Roj and Raj (2024) demand strict resource monitoring. The Ministry of Women and Child Development (2023) concedes that rehabilitation and post-release restoration remain the system's weakest links.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Juvenile delinquency in Western Vidarbha is a sociological byproduct of intersecting inequalities—poverty, family

disintegration, and educational exclusion—not merely individual moral failure. While NCRB data (National Crime Records Bureau, 2021, 2022) indicates a proportional decline in Maharashtra's total cases, structural vulnerabilities and the deep concentration of offenses among 16–18-year-old boys remain alarming.

Economic factors heavily outweigh punitive deterrence; slum residence and adult unemployment strongly predict delinquency (Hazra, 2021; Dutta et al., 2020). Addressing this requires macroeconomic improvements combined with prioritized family support, as curbing domestic violence and school dropouts is vastly more cost-effective than custodial measures (Atrey & Singh, 2024; Biswal & Mishra, 2020; Abhishek & Balamurugan, 2024). Furthermore, institutional reform must prioritize rehabilitation over incarceration. Ghosh and Kumar (2020) rightfully advocate for community-based supervision and open shelters.

For Vidarbha, the JJB must urgently converge with District Child Protection Units and NGOs, backed by urgent staffing overhauls (Roj & Raj, 2024; Sharma, 2021). Reformatories in Amravati, Akola, and Yavatmal must transition into genuine centers of reformation equipped with market-relevant vocational training, dedicated psychological care, and structured reintegration programs (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2023; Arora, 2025). Only a holistic approach bridging sociology, law, and community action can effectively break the cycle of recidivism.

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