

# Behavioral Changes in Children's After Leaving Juvenile Homes: A Pilot Study

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**Abstract:** *This article examines the evolving landscape of juvenile justice in India, focusing on the rehabilitation and reintegration challenges faced by children post-release from juvenile homes. Drawing on a mixed-methods pilot study, it explores how historical legislative shifts-like the Juvenile Justice Act of 2000 and its 2015 amendment-reflect a tension between reformative ideals and punitive responses, particularly for serious offenses committed by older juveniles. In my view, the study reveals a stark disconnect between the intended rehabilitative purpose of juvenile homes and the lived realities of former residents, who grapple with pervasive societal stigma, inadequate mental health support, and limited educational or vocational opportunities. It is evident that while government schemes such as the Integrated Child Protection Scheme and National Skill Development Corporation offer some promise, their inconsistent implementation leaves many juveniles vulnerable to recidivism. This suggests that true rehabilitation demands not just legal frameworks but robust community engagement and tailored aftercare. Through qualitative insights and quantitative data, the article underscores the need for policy reforms that prioritize long-term social reintegration over short-term containment, offering a nuanced critique of a system caught between justice and welfare.*

**Keywords:** juvenile justice, rehabilitation, social reintegration, societal stigma, mental health support

## 1. Introduction

Juvenile homes, also known as correctional homes or observation centers, play a crucial role in rehabilitating children in conflict with the law. These institutions are designed not just as detention centers but as places that provide care, protection, and opportunities for social reintegration. The concept of juvenile justice in India has undergone significant evolution, shaped by historical events, legislative changes, and evolving societal perspectives on child welfare and rehabilitation.

The history of juvenile justice in India dates back to the British colonial era when legal provisions for children in conflict with the law were first introduced. One of the earliest steps in this direction was the Reformatory Schools Act of 1897, which laid the foundation for a separate legal framework for juvenile offenders. The idea behind this legislation was to focus on reform rather than punishment, recognizing that children require guidance and rehabilitation instead of punitive action. Over time, the Indian juvenile justice system evolved through multiple legal frameworks, culminating in the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000, and its amendment in 2015.

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 marked a significant step forward in the way juvenile offenders were treated. This legislation was enacted to align with international standards, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), to which India is a signatory. The Act emphasized rehabilitation and social reintegration over punitive measures. It also established Juvenile Justice Boards (JJBs) to adjudicate cases involving minors, ensuring that children were provided with a fair hearing in a child-friendly environment. The focus was on care, protection, and the best interests of the child, moving away from punitive approaches. However, as cases of juvenile

delinquency continued to rise, concerns about the adequacy of the existing legal provisions led to amendments. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Amendment Act, 2015 introduced significant changes, particularly regarding children involved in heinous crimes. It allowed juveniles aged 16–18 years to be tried as adults in cases of serious offenses such as murder and sexual violence. This amendment sparked debates on child rights, rehabilitation, and the effectiveness of punitive measures in deterring juvenile crime.

Despite these legal advancements, significant challenges remain in the effective reintegration of children post-release from juvenile homes. While juvenile homes aim to provide education, vocational training, psychological support, and social rehabilitation, the transition from institutional care to mainstream society remains complex. Several factors contribute to this challenge, including societal stigma, lack of family and community support, economic hardships, and limited employment opportunities.

One of the primary challenges faced by children after leaving juvenile homes is **social reintegration**. Many former juvenile offenders struggle to find acceptance in their families and communities. The stigma associated with having been in a correctional facility often leads to social exclusion, limiting their opportunities for education and employment. This isolation can push them toward recidivism, as they may find it difficult to reintegrate into a law-abiding life. Another major issue is educational continuity and skill development. While some juvenile homes offer vocational training and formal education, the quality and reach of such programs vary significantly across different institutions. Many children, upon release, find themselves unprepared for mainstream educational institutions or the job market. Without proper guidance and skill development, they may face difficulties in securing stable employment, leading to economic insecurity and increasing their vulnerability to criminal activities.

Mental health concerns also play a crucial role in post-release reintegration. Many children in juvenile homes have experienced trauma, abuse, neglect, or poverty before entering the correctional system. The time spent in a juvenile home, despite its rehabilitative intent, can be stressful and isolating. Without adequate psychological counseling and support, these children may struggle with emotional and behavioral issues upon their release. Studies indicate that untreated trauma and mental health conditions can increase the likelihood of recidivism. The role of government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is critical in addressing these challenges. Several initiatives have been introduced to provide support to children post-release. Programs such as aftercare homes, skill development workshops, and employment assistance initiatives aim to facilitate smooth transitions for these children into society. However, gaps remain in the implementation and accessibility of these services. Many children lack awareness of the available resources or face bureaucratic hurdles in availing them. Moreover, the legal and institutional framework governing juvenile homes and post-release programs requires continuous monitoring and improvement. While laws exist to ensure the rights and welfare of juveniles, inconsistencies in implementation often lead to disparities in the quality of care and rehabilitation. Strengthening policy measures, improving inter-agency coordination, and increasing funding for aftercare services are necessary steps to bridge these gaps.

Community participation is another essential aspect of juvenile rehabilitation. Society plays a crucial role in either facilitating or obstructing the reintegration process. Awareness programs aimed at reducing stigma, encouraging community acceptance, and fostering a supportive environment for rehabilitated juveniles can make a significant difference. Local communities, educators, and employers must be sensitized to provide equal opportunities for former juvenile offenders, ensuring that they do not fall back into a cycle of crime.

In conclusion, juvenile homes serve as an important mechanism for reforming and rehabilitating children in conflict with the law. However, the success of the juvenile justice system is not determined merely by legal provisions but by the actual impact on children's lives post-release. Addressing societal stigma, improving educational and vocational training, providing robust mental health support, and strengthening aftercare services are essential steps in ensuring that juvenile offenders can lead productive and law-abiding lives. Future policy reforms must focus on bridging the gap between institutional rehabilitation and community reintegration, creating a system that truly prioritizes the best interests of the child while balancing justice and social welfare.

## 2. Literature Review

According to Indian law, a child is defined as an individual below 18 years of age. The Constitution of India mandates the protection of child rights, ensuring access to education, healthcare, and social security. However, despite these legal safeguards, children in juvenile homes often struggle with reintegration due to societal stigma. The social label attached to formerly institutionalized children can limit their

educational and employment opportunities, perpetuating cycles of exclusion and vulnerability.

The transition of children from juvenile homes into mainstream society is often accompanied by profound social, emotional, and behavioral changes. Research has highlighted that children who leave institutional care frequently experience heightened anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal, impacting their long-term development and reintegration prospects (Rodriguez-Perez & Castellanos, 2024). Furthermore, these children often display externalizing behaviors such as aggression and defiance, which contribute to difficulties in forming social relationships and increase the risk of recidivism (Vis et al., 2016; Fernandez, 2008). This literature review examines the key challenges faced by children post-release, focusing on behavioral changes, social functioning, and long-term psychological outcomes. Children released from juvenile homes frequently exhibit a range of psychological and behavioral changes. These can be classified into externalizing behaviors, such as aggression and delinquency, and internalizing behaviors, such as anxiety and depression. Several studies have identified a significant rise in anxiety and depressive symptoms among children post-release (Rodriguez-Perez & Castellanos, 2024). The trauma associated with institutional care, coupled with uncertainty about the future, contributes to these emotional struggles. Research on children released from out-of-home care has found that such conditions persist into adolescence, exacerbating social withdrawal and emotional distress (Vis et al., 2016; Fernandez, 2008). Externalizing behaviors, such as aggression and defiance, are frequently observed among children transitioning from juvenile homes (Shechory & Sommerfeld, 2007). Studies have shown that children in residential care often develop oppositional behavior as a coping mechanism in response to institutional discipline and perceived social exclusion. Furthermore, a longitudinal study by Hukkanen et al. (1999) found that children in residential care show increased symptoms of delinquency and attention-related problems post-release. These findings suggest that juvenile homes, while aiming to rehabilitate, may unintentionally reinforce aggressive tendencies due to the environment and disciplinary practices. Internalizing behaviors, particularly social withdrawal, are prevalent among children post-release (Rodriguez-Perez & Castellanos, 2024). The absence of stable relationships during institutionalization often leads to difficulties in engaging with peers in the outside world. Studies have shown that insecure attachment patterns developed during residential care correlate with more severe behavioral problems, particularly when children are removed from family settings at an older age (Shechory & Sommerfeld, 2007). The long-term mental health consequences of juvenile home placements significantly impact children's ability to engage socially. Research on children who have experienced trauma, such as those released from immigration detention, indicates a strong correlation between past trauma and ongoing social difficulties (Zayas et al., 2024).

Children suffering from anxiety and depression often experience reduced social interaction opportunities, exacerbating feelings of isolation and loneliness (Ernst et al., 2023). Social anxiety further impairs their ability to process interactions, particularly with unfamiliar peers, contributing to heightened depressive moods (Ernst et al., 2023). In the long

term, these challenges hinder social recovery, as poor friendships serve as a strong predictor of persistent mental health issues (Goodyer et al., 1991). Additionally, experiences of interpersonal rejection intensify anxiety symptoms, creating a cycle of social withdrawal and worsening depressive states (Kraines et al., 2019). Conversely, studies have suggested that fostering positive social interactions can mitigate depressive symptoms, highlighting the importance of supportive environments in post-release rehabilitation (Ernst et al., 2023).

In the Indian context the higher representation of males in juvenile homes in India can be attributed to a combination of socio-cultural factors that perpetuate gender biases and influence delinquent behavior. The socio-cultural factors contributing to the higher representation of males in juvenile homes in India include gender issues in development, learned helplessness among boys, peer pressures, and a traditional mindset that grants boys more freedom and fewer restrictions than girls. (Chowdhury, 2008) These factors include traditional gender preferences, socio-economic conditions, and systemic issues within the juvenile justice system. Gender preference in India, deeply rooted in patriarchal values, has led to skewed sex ratios favoring males (Singh, 2010) and a higher prevalence of boys in juvenile facilities. Socio-demographic factors such as lower maternal education, single parenthood, and non-supportive parenting correlate with increased delinquent behavior among males, who are more frequently involved in serious offenses like rape and murder (Dhal et al., 2022; Panigrahi, 2022). The juvenile justice system often reflects societal gender biases, reinforcing notions of masculinity that contribute to the criminalization of male youth rather than addressing underlying socio-cultural issues (Hudson, 1987). While the focus is largely on male juveniles, it is crucial to acknowledge that females also face significant challenges, albeit shaped by different socio-cultural dynamics. Addressing these disparities requires a nuanced understanding of gender influences in India's juvenile justice system.

This literature review suggests that structured community integration programs and peer support networks may be instrumental in improving long-term outcomes for formerly institutionalized children.

### 3. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods pilot study approach to examine behavioral changes in children after leaving juvenile homes. By integrating quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, the study captures both measurable behavioral patterns and in-depth personal experiences. This exploratory design provides an initial assessment of post-release challenges and lays the groundwork for future large-scale studies.

The target population consists of children aged 12 to 18 years who have been released from juvenile homes within the past one to three years. A purposive sampling method was used to select 30 participants from three juvenile rehabilitation centers in urban and semi-urban areas. Participants were recruited with the assistance of social workers, NGOs, and juvenile

justice authorities to ensure ethical considerations and voluntary participation.

Data collection involved three primary methods: structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and behavioral observations. The structured questionnaire was designed to assess behavioral changes post-release, focusing on emotional well-being (e.g., anxiety, depression), social interactions and peer relationships, externalizing behaviors (e.g., aggression, defiance), and internalizing behaviors (e.g., withdrawal, low self-esteem). Likert-scale questions were included to standardize responses, and the survey was administered through face-to-face interviews or phone calls to ensure accessibility. To gain deeper insights, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 children and 5 caregivers/social workers, exploring themes such as challenges during reintegration, emotional and social adjustments, and coping mechanisms. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis. Additionally, researchers conducted non-intrusive behavioral observations during structured social interactions in NGO-run rehabilitation sessions. These observations focused on social engagement, emotional regulation, and interactions with peers and caregivers to provide a contextual understanding of post-release adaptation.

By employing these methods, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the behavioral and social challenges faced by children after leaving juvenile homes, offering valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and future research.

## 4. Data analysis

### Qualitative Data Analysis

This section presents a qualitative analysis of the higher male representation in juvenile homes and behavioral changes observed after release, based on thematic analysis of the provided data. Thematic analysis is employed to identify recurring patterns and insights regarding gender disparities, post-release challenges, and reintegration experiences.

#### RQ.1 Why Higher Male Representation in Juvenile Homes?

##### 1) Gender Roles and Social Norms

A recurring theme in the data suggests that societal expectations of masculinity play a crucial role in the overrepresentation of boys in juvenile homes. Cultural norms often associate aggression, dominance, and risk-taking with masculinity, leading boys to engage in more overtly delinquent behaviors. This is aligned with existing research indicating that boys are socialized to be more physically assertive, which can increase their involvement in activities that lead to juvenile justice system encounters.

##### 2) Legal and Reporting Bias

The data also highlights that crimes committed by boys are more frequently reported than those committed by girls. This could be due to gender-based stereotypes, where boys' offenses, particularly those involving violence, theft, or vandalism, are considered more serious and thus more likely to result in legal action. Conversely, delinquent behaviors

exhibited by girls, such as running away from home or substance abuse, may be dealt with informally within families or social services rather than the legal system.

### 3) Nature of Offenses

Another key finding is that the types of offenses differ between boys and girls. Boys are more commonly involved in violent crimes, theft, and vandalism, whereas girls tend to be involved in domestic escape, substance abuse, or prostitution. This distinction reflects broader gendered pathways to delinquency, where boys are often drawn into crimes of aggression and dominance, while girls' offenses are often linked to personal distress, abuse, or survival strategies.

### 4) Access to Support Services

An important theme emerging from the analysis is that girls receive better rehabilitation opportunities compared to boys. This disparity may stem from societal attitudes that view girls as more vulnerable and in need of protection, leading to greater institutional and community support for female rehabilitation programs. Boys, on the other hand, may face harsher punitive measures rather than rehabilitative interventions, reinforcing cycles of delinquency and recidivism.

## RQ2. What are Behavioral Changes After Release from Juvenile Homes?

### 1) Behavioral Adjustments

The post-release experiences of children show divergent behavioral patterns. Some children exhibit positive behavioral adjustments, demonstrating improved decision-making and reduced criminal tendencies due to rehabilitation programs and external support. However, others struggle with reintegration, indicating that institutionalization alone does not guarantee successful reform. The effectiveness of rehabilitation appears to depend on individual support systems, community acceptance, and personal resilience.

### 2) Educational Impact

A key post-release challenge identified in the data is educational continuity. While some children return to school, others drop out due to social stigma or lack of financial and emotional support. This suggests that education-based reintegration programs must be strengthened to ensure that former juvenile offenders are not excluded from academic opportunities due to their past.

### 3) Social Relationships

The data indicates two contrasting social reintegration patterns: Some children successfully rebuild familial bonds and peer relationships, which aids in their transition back to normal life. Others face social exclusion, often due to the stigma associated with their juvenile home experiences. This reinforces existing literature on social reintegration challenges, where community rejection increases recidivism risk.

### 4) Mental Health Challenges

Mental health emerges as a critical post-release issue, with children experiencing emotional distress, trauma, and anxiety. The institutional environment, separation from families, and post-release uncertainty contribute to psychological struggles, underscoring the need for ongoing mental health support.

**Employment and Skill Development** The transition to economic independence is a significant post-release challenge. While some children gain vocational training, many struggle to secure stable employment. This suggests that juvenile rehabilitation programs must strengthen vocational training and employment placement services to enhance economic reintegration and reduce recidivism.

The findings highlight the need for gender-sensitive policies, improved community reintegration programs, and stronger employment support to ensure that juvenile justice interventions lead to long-term rehabilitation rather than cycles of delinquency and exclusion.

## Quantitative Data Analysis

Key Themes	Findings	Interpretation & Implications
Age Group Distribution	43.8% were above 18 years.	High retention of older juveniles suggests delays in legal processing, lack of rehabilitation alternatives, and challenges in reintegration.
Educational Outcomes	50% resumed education, while 50% dropped out.	Reintegration into the education system remains difficult due to stigma, financial barriers, and lack of academic support.
Employment Status	34.4% secured jobs; 43.8% pursued further education.	Vocational training gaps may limit job placement, highlighting the need for structured career pathways and skill development programs.
Substance Abuse	56.3% reported addiction to alcohol, tobacco, or drugs.	Substance dependence is a persistent post-release challenge, indicating that rehabilitation programs may not be addressing long-term behavioral change effectively.
Peer Influence	46.9% had peers involved in substance abuse.	Negative peer influences increase the likelihood of delinquent behavior, stressing the importance of post-release monitoring and community-based rehabilitation.
Economic Background	46.6% from middle-income families; 34.4% from economically weaker sections.	Delinquency is not limited to extreme poverty but spans diverse socio-economic backgrounds, requiring tailored intervention strategies.
Social Acceptance	96.9% faced discrimination post-release.	Social stigma significantly hinders reintegration, increasing risks of recidivism and emotional distress. Anti-stigma awareness programs are needed.
Psychological Impact	93.8% experienced mental distress due to societal rejection.	High psychological distress rates highlight the need for sustained mental health support, counseling, and peer support networks.
Counseling Support	Only 20% received psychological counseling.	A major gap in mental health services exists, necessitating structured post-release psychological interventions.



Career Aspirations	43.8% showed interest in higher studies, particularly UPSC/MPSC.	Despite challenges, juveniles have strong career aspirations. Providing scholarships, mentorship, and career counseling could improve long-term outcomes.
Parental Response	Some parents considered relocating children to villages.	Relocation may prevent reoffending but could also limit access to education, employment, and psychological resources, requiring alternative reintegration strategies.

This quantitative analysis provides a structured, evidence-based view of post-release challenges and potential interventions for a more effective juvenile reintegration system. Helps us to understand the gravity of topic and need of exploring this research area in detail studies.

## 5. Government Schemes for Juvenile Rehabilitation

Effective rehabilitation and reintegration of juveniles post-release require comprehensive support systems, including education, vocational training, counseling, and employment opportunities. The Government of India has implemented several schemes aimed at addressing the needs of children in conflict with the law, ensuring social reintegration and economic independence. The following initiatives play a crucial role in facilitating rehabilitation: Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS)

**The Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS)** is a flagship program designed to provide shelter, counseling, and vocational training to juveniles in need of care and protection. It focuses on preventive, rehabilitative, and aftercare services, ensuring that children leaving juvenile homes have access to safe spaces, psychological support, and skill-building opportunities. By addressing mental health concerns, social reintegration challenges, and vocational skill development, ICPS serves as a holistic intervention for juveniles.

### Juvenile Justice Act, 2015

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 mandates the establishment of aftercare homes to support rehabilitation and reintegration. These homes provide accommodation, career guidance, and psychological support to juveniles transitioning out of institutional care. Given the high levels of social stigma (96.9%) and psychological distress (93.8%) reported among juveniles post-release, the provisions under the JJ Act are critical in ensuring a structured reintegration process. However, limited awareness and gaps in implementation often restrict access to these services, necessitating stronger enforcement and monitoring mechanisms.

### National Child Labor Project (NCLP)

Many juveniles in conflict with the law come from economically weaker backgrounds (34.4%) and may have engaged in child labor before institutionalization. The National Child Labor Project (NCLP) provides educational and vocational training to rescued child laborers, ensuring that juveniles who missed out on schooling can reintegrate into formal education or acquire employable skills. This initiative directly addresses high dropout rates (50%) post-release and provides an alternative to delinquency by promoting structured learning and career development.

### National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)

The National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) plays a crucial role in providing skill-based training programs for juveniles seeking employment post-release. Given that only 34.4% of juveniles secure jobs, NSDC programs focus on market-driven skills, vocational courses, and employment linkages. By partnering with private enterprises and training institutions, NSDC enhances the employability of rehabilitated juveniles, helping them achieve economic stability and reduced recidivism risk.

### Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)

The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) aims to enhance access to secondary education, ensuring that juveniles who wish to resume studies post-release (50%) can do so without financial or systemic barriers. Given the strong interest in further studies (43.8%), particularly in competitive exams like UPSC/MPSC, RMSA plays a critical role in bridging the education gap and supporting long-term career aspirations.

### Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)

A significant challenge for rehabilitated juveniles is securing stable employment post-release. The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) supports skill development and employment generation by offering certified vocational training programs in high-demand industries. By linking skill training with job placement, PMKVY directly addresses the employment struggles (66%) faced by juveniles, reducing their likelihood of reoffending.

The successful reintegration of juveniles depends on effective rehabilitation programs, and government schemes play a crucial role in addressing educational, vocational, and psychological challenges. While initiatives like ICPS, JJ Act, and NCLP focus on social protection and education, NSDC, RMSA, and PMKVY provide long-term economic stability through skill development and job placement. However, the low access to counseling support (20%) and high social stigma (96.9%) suggest that these schemes must be better integrated, widely promoted, and efficiently implemented to ensure that juveniles have real opportunities for a stable, productive future.

## 6. Findings

The findings of this study highlight critical gaps in mental health support, education, employment, and social reintegration for juvenile's post-release. The drastic levels of stigma (96.9%), mental distress (93.8%), substance abuse (56.3%), and school dropouts (50%) suggest an urgent need for Research and Policy Reforms.

## 7. Discussions

The gaps in implementation, limited outreach, and lack of monitoring hinder their effectiveness. Strengthening policy enforcement, increasing accessibility to these schemes, and integrating mental health support within rehabilitation programs will be essential in reducing recidivism and ensuring successful reintegration.

## 8. Conclusion

This study underscores the urgent need for policy reforms, community engagement, and targeted interventions to address the systemic challenges faced by juveniles post-release. Reducing social stigma, expanding mental health services, improving access to education and employment, and ensuring gender-sensitive rehabilitation approaches must be prioritized. Future research should focus on evaluating the effectiveness of alternative rehabilitation models, longitudinal studies on juvenile reintegration, and the role of socio-economic factors in recidivism prevention. By implementing evidence-based interventions, policymakers and social organizations can create a more inclusive and effective juvenile justice system that fosters long-term rehabilitation and social reintegration.

## 9. Future Research

As this study is a pilot investigation, it provides preliminary insights into the behavioral, psychological, social, and economic challenges faced by juveniles post-release. However, the findings indicate several areas that require in-depth exploration through future research to develop more effective rehabilitation policies and interventions.

- 1) Longitudinal Studies on Juvenile Reintegration
- 2) Evaluating the Effectiveness of Rehabilitation Models
- 3) Impact of Social Stigma on Juvenile Recidivism
- 4) Gender-Based Disparities in Juvenile Justice
- 5) Role of Mental Health Interventions in Juvenile Reintegration
- 6) The Influence of Economic Stability on Post-Release Outcomes
- 7) Comparative Analysis of Juvenile Justice Systems in India vs. Other Countries

## 10. Conclusion

This pilot study highlights the critical challenges faced by juvenile's post-release, including social stigma (96.9%), psychological distress (93.8%), high substance abuse rates (56.3%), and low access to mental health support (20%). While some juveniles successfully reintegrate through education (50%) and employment (34.4%), many struggle due to economic instability, peer influence, and lack of structured rehabilitation programs. Government initiatives like ICPS, NSDC, and PMKVY play a crucial role in rehabilitation, but gaps in implementation and accessibility limit their impact. Future research should focus on long-term reintegration outcomes, stigma reduction strategies, gender disparities, and mental health interventions to develop a more effective and evidence-based juvenile justice system. Addressing these challenges through policy reforms,

community engagement, and targeted interventions will be essential in ensuring successful rehabilitation and reduced recidivism.

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