

The Erosion of Innocence: An Examination of Violation of Human Dignity

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ABSTRACT

The concept of human dignity is fundamental to the protection of individual rights, yet it is often profoundly violated in cases of juvenile crime and child abuse. Both of these issues represent severe breaches of a child's inherent worth and dignity, leading to the erosion of innocence and lasting psychological, emotional, and social consequences. Juvenile crime, often rooted in a history of trauma, neglect, or abuse, not only affects the offenders but also the victims, perpetuating cycles of harm. Similarly, child abuse, whether physical, emotional, sexual, or through neglect, assaults the very core of a child's self-worth, limiting their potential for healthy development. The paper, *The Erosion of Innocence: An Examination of the Violation of Human Dignity*, delves into the critical issue of juvenile crime and child abuse, two of the most pervasive violations of human dignity in India. Children, being among the most vulnerable members of society, face significant risks of exploitation and harm due to their dependency on adults for protection and guidance. The study aims to explore the incidence of crime against children, assess the increasing trends of juvenile crime, and examine the gender variations in juvenile delinquency over a period from 2010 to 2015. By analysing statistical data from Crime India Reports, this paper identifies the disturbing rise in child victimization across various categories—such as murder, rape, procurement of girls for prostitution, kidnapping, abduction, and abetment to suicide—and the growing involvement of juveniles in criminal activities. Despite advancements in legal frameworks and societal awareness, challenges like underreporting, regional disparities, and inadequate resources persist. This research underscores the urgent need for systemic change, including enhanced child protection services, stronger law enforcement, and the addressing of socio-economic factors contributing to juvenile delinquency. The paper concludes by emphasizing the importance of a holistic approach, where parents, teachers, and the state collaboratively ensure the safety, well-being, and development of every child, thus safeguarding the future of the nation.

Keywords: Child Abuse, Juvenile Delinquents, Dignity, Holistic Approach, Systemic Change

INTRODUCTION

Children are among the most vulnerable members of society, often unable to protect themselves from harm due to their dependency on adults for guidance, care, and protection. Their inability to defend themselves leaves them exposed to various forms of exploitation, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Crimes against children not only violate their fundamental rights and lead to an erosion of innocence, the most loved characteristic of a child, but also leaves deep, long-lasting psychological and social scars that can affect their entire lives. Similarly, juvenile crime represents a growing and complex issue, where young offenders often find themselves trapped in cycles of poverty, family dysfunction, peer pressure, and educational shortcomings. Understanding the root causes, far-reaching consequences, and appropriate responses to these offenses is vital for creating effective strategies that can prevent and mitigate the harm they cause.

At the heart of these issues lies a fundamental concept, i.e. human dignity. Human dignity is an intrinsic and inalienable right that must be upheld for every individual, especially children, who are still in the critical stages of emotional, cognitive, and social development. Unfortunately, both juvenile crime and child abuse pose significant threats to this essential aspect of humanity. These forms of violence not only undermine the safety and security of young individuals but also deprive them of their potential for a healthy, productive life. The impact of these violations extends beyond the individual to affect families, communities, and society at large.

Children being the most vulnerable section of society are easy to intimidate, hush up and thus they become the unfortunate victims of crime. They get involved in the situations of crime as victims or as offenders and both are of

equally grave concern and it is therefore significant to safeguard the children from violence, exploitation and abuse. Innocence, lack of experience, exposure, improper care, guidance are external factors that contribute to their vulnerability. There are innumerable incidences available in which they are dragged into the most heinous crime as the persistent rape, on being allured by say such small articles like that of pencils, erasers, chocolate etc. totally ignorant of the fact as to what is happening to them. The impact of such incidences is so strong that it proves disastrous for their physical and mental well-being. Likewise, reasons of poverty, illiteracy, circumstances, drug abuse drag the children towards committing crime. These are the serious issues that command attention of the law makers, social activists and society as a whole. Child protection encompasses two aspects, 'Crime Against Children' as well as 'Juvenile Delinquency'. The paper thus proposes to examine both the aspects.

Objective

The paper, *The Erosion of Innocence: An Examination of the Violation of Human Dignity*, aims to examine the violation of human dignity through the lens of Juvenile Crime and Child Abuse.

- To analyse the Incidence of Crime Against Children in India along with the scope and trends in victimization across various categories of crime. The objective is to present a clear picture of how prevalent these crimes are in India and how they impact the dignity and well-being of children.
- To Assess the Percentage of Juvenile Crime in Relation to Total Cognizable Crime.
- To examine the gender variations in juvenile crime and explore the growing concern of juvenile delinquency and its implications for societal safety, the justice system, and the violation of human dignity.

METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of the study period (2010-2015) has been selected and relevant statistical data from various Crime India Reports has been used.

- Incidence of Crime Against Children in India would be examined through the looking glass of:
 - i. Crime Rate i.e. incidence of crime committed against children per one lakh of child population.
 - ii. Scope and Trends of Child Victimization Across Various Categories (Calculated as a percentage of total cases reported in that year).
- Juvenile Crime would be examined through:
 - i. Percentage of Juvenile Crime in Relation to Total Cognizable Crime in the country.
 - ii. Gender Variations

Table: 1 Incidence of Crime Against Children in India

Year	Crime Rate	Crime Against Children as a Rate of Total Cognisable Crime
2010	2.3	0.39
2011	2.73	0.52
2012	8.89	0.63
2013	13.23	0.87
2014	20.1	1.23
2015	21.12	1.29

From the table it is quite apparent that there has been an increase in the crime against children in the country over the period of study. Though an increase can be attributed to the growing awareness that has led to an increase in reported cases, yet the very fact that the increase has been per lakh of child population is sufficient to state that there has been an increase in crime. Crime against children as a rate of total cognisable crime in the country has also registered an increase which makes it quite lucid that it is a cause of concern.

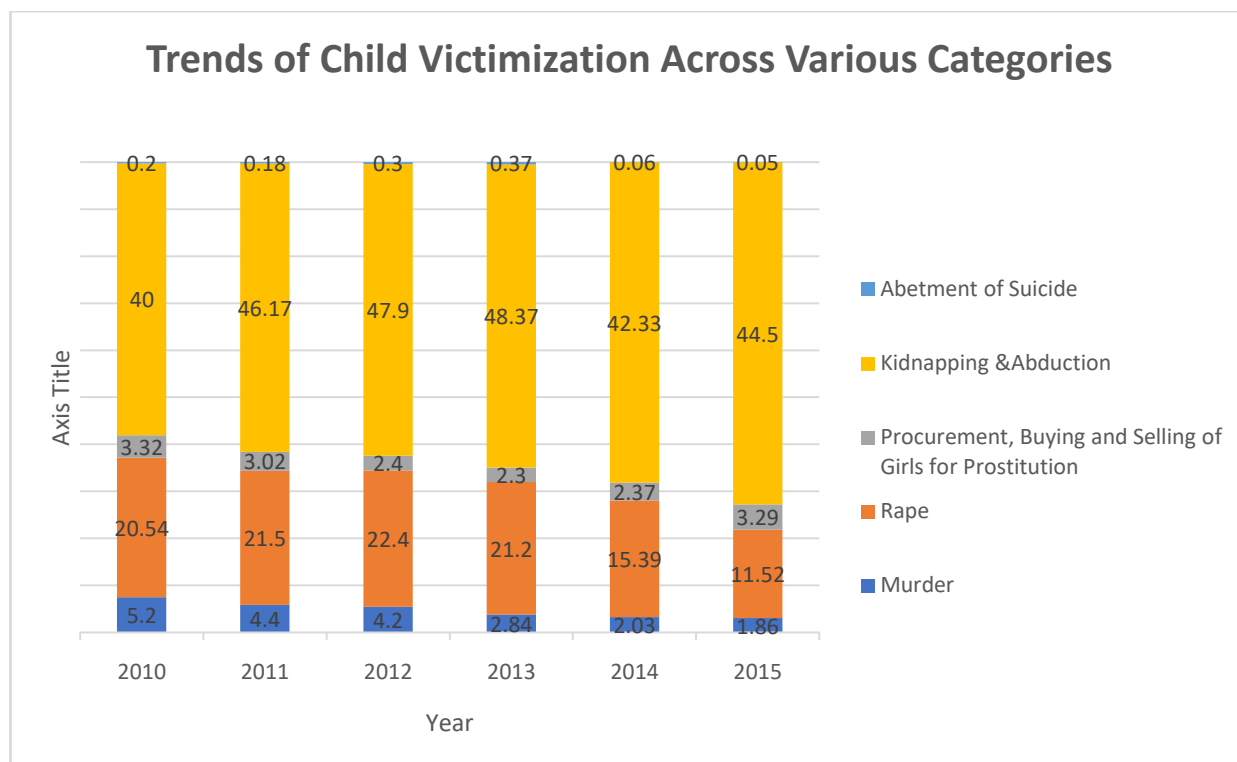


Figure: 1

In India, child victimization across these categories remains a serious and multifaceted issue. While there has been an improvement in terms of legal protections, awareness, and intervention, challenges such as underreporting, inadequate resources, and regional disparities persist. Comprehensive approaches, including strengthening enforcement, providing better child protection services, addressing societal attitudes, and improving mental health support, are crucial to curbing these trends.

The data provided represent trends in different forms of child victimization across various categories (Murder, Rape, Procurement, Buying and Selling of Girls for Prostitution, Kidnapping & Abduction, and Abetment of Suicide) in India for the years 2010 to 2015, (calculated as a percentage of total cases reported in that year).

From various categories as in Crime in India these have been selected to bring out a broader perspective of crime against children with specific reference to girl child that exhibits that though Murder and Abetment of Suicide have both shown a significant decline, suggesting that improvements in child protection, legal frameworks, and mental health support for children.

Rape and Procurement of Girls for Prostitution though exhibited fluctuating trends, but the fact that they have not significantly decreased over time and have been a greater share of total crime against children suggests that these forms of child victimization remain deeply entrenched in some parts of the country.

Despite laws like POCSO and increased reporting, these crimes require further attention and improved law enforcement. Kidnapping and Abduction have shown a slight increase, reflecting concerns over trafficking, abductions for forced labour or sexual exploitation, and possibly the emergence of new forms of victimization in urban settings, such as trafficking via the internet or organized crime.

Juvenile Crime

As far as the crime committed by children is concerned, 'Juvenile Delinquency' or 'Children in Conflict with Law' refer to any person below the age of 18 years who has come in contact with the justice system as a result of committing a crime or being suspected of committing a crime. It may be kept in mind that, figures for juvenile delinquency till 2000 were collected as per Juvenile Justice Act, 1986.

Male below the age of 16 years and females below age of 18 years were considered as juveniles in this Act. The Act was amended in 2000 according to which, juvenile age of males and females was brought at par as below the age of 18 years.

Juvenile Apprehended under IPC and SLL Crime

Year	Boys	Girls	%of Juvenile Crime to TCC
2010	94.9	5.08	0.45
2011	94.16	5.83	0.54
2012	94.83	5.16	0.65
2013	95.7	4.29	0.66
2014	96.69	3.3	0.68
2015	98	2	0.77

Source: Crime in India Reports

The data clearly brings out a spurt in child delinquency for juvenile apprehended under IPC and SLL crimes as a percentage of Total Cognisable Crime has increased in the country.

Increase in Juvenile Crime is an indication of growing concerns about the involvement of minors in criminal activities in India. The increase could be due to more juveniles engaging in violent crimes (such as murder, rape, and robbery). Systemic factors as lack of education, unemployment, poor family dynamics, drug abuse, and peer pressure, push juveniles into criminal activities. The rise in juvenile crime could also reflect increased reporting, awareness, and better tracking of juvenile crime over the years. Awareness of juvenile delinquency and the impact of crimes committed by minors may have led to better detection and intervention by law enforcement agencies.

Another feature observed is the vast gender variations-Gender disparity in juvenile crime reflects broader societal trends, with boys more likely to engage in criminal activities, such as theft, assault, and violent crimes, while girls are generally less involved in criminal behaviour. Cultural and social factors peer pressure, socioeconomic status, education, and access to opportunities, may influence the higher involvement of boys in juvenile crime and make them more vulnerable to getting involved in criminal activities. Additionally, gender norms and roles may contribute to fewer girls being involved in criminal activity.

CONCLUSION

No child is born a criminal, there are innumerable causes that go to make a child a criminal. It is a question on the socio-economic scenario of family, society and nation as a whole. Juvenile delinquency should be taken care off and stopped at an early age by proper care that is the right of every child both at home and in the school. Parents and teachers play a significant role in nurturing the mind of a child. Instead of labelling them as 'delinquents', steps must be taken to rectify them by rectifying the errors in their lives, involving both the social and psychological so that the heinous crimes committed by young minds that leaves an indelible experience for their entire lives is nipped in the bud.

Future of the nation lies in the hands of the children. The child is builder of the nation and is nation's asset. The children of today are the future of tomorrow. A happy child would make not only the home happy but also the nation. The future of the nation depends upon the right upbringing of its children, for which a congenial environment and adequate opportunities are essential. It is the responsibility of parents, teachers and the State to ensure so. Every child on provision of conducive and enabling environment may blossom into an ever-fragrant flower, to shine in all spheres of life. However, even today after decades of independence and despite various initiatives both on the legal as well as policy and programme levels, the condition of children remains a cause of concern in the country. It calls for an addressal of human rights of the children, their effective and meaningful protection and appropriate steps to be taken where violations are found. The journey of the life cycle of the child involves the critical components of child survival, child development and child protection.

By examining the underlying factors that contribute to these harmful practices, the consequences they leave in their wake, and the societal and legal responses required, this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of how to protect the inherent dignity of young people. In doing so, it seeks to explore the vital steps necessary to prevent such violations and to promote a safer and more dignified future for all children.

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