

## **INDIA- LOSS OF INNOCENCE**

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***“The only effective way to reduce and prevent juvenile crime is to balance tough enforcement measures with targeted, effective and intervention initiatives.”- Jenet Reno***

The term 'children in conflict with the law' refers any person below the age of 18 who has come in contact with the justice system as a result of committing a crime or being suspected of committing a crime.<sup>1</sup> Most children in conflict with the law have committed petty crimes such as vagrancy, truancy, begging or alcohol use. Some have committed more serious offenses. Some children are coerced into crime by adults who use them as they know they cannot be tried as adults. Often prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination brings children into conflict with law without a crime being committed. More than 1 million children worldwide are detained by law officials. In institutions children are often denied access to medical care and education which are part of their rights. In 2002, 136,000 children in the Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States were found guilty of criminal offenses, compared to 117,000 in 1990. Russia accounted for 65% of these cases.<sup>2</sup>



In India the number of cases of juvenile delinquents has increased from 17,203 in 1994 to 30,943 in 2004. The crimes committed by juveniles have also seen an increase in the same period from 8,561 to 19,229. Some of the increase can be attributed to the definition of juveniles being changed to include ages 16-18, but none the less more and more children are coming into conflict with law in the 16-18 age group.<sup>3</sup>

A major area of concern is the rise of juvenile crimes in the overall crimes committed in the country. In 1994 juvenile crimes amounted to 0.5% of all crimes committed. In 2004 that number has doubled to 1%. The Juvenile Justice system has gives rise to many child rights concerns as children are often denied bail for petty crimes, the responsible stakeholders do not

carry out proper social investigations, the conditions in the homes is often unsafe and inhumane, and juvenile justice boards are not child friendly and functions like an adult court.<sup>4</sup>

With an increasing crime rate in the country as well as increasing number of people being imprisoned either as part of their sentence or waiting trial there is need to consider the needs of children whose parents have been imprisoned.<sup>5</sup> Judicial proceedings or police arrests need to take into account the larger unintended consequences of penal sanctioning. The detainment of parents severely reduces families and communities economic and social abilities to successfully raise children. It also leaves the child in long periods of uncertainty and instability. This is especially seen with illegal immigrant families whose children spend months sometimes years in children's homes awaiting the release of their parents.<sup>6</sup>

According to Centre for child rights there has been a 7.9% increase in crimes committed by children between 2003 and 2004. In 2005 there was an 11.3% increase in crimes by children. There has been an increase especially in certain kinds of crimes which is a grave concern such as rape (by 11.9%), death due to negligence (150.8%), robbery (39.6%), attempt to murder (30.7%), preparation and assembly for dacoit activities (27.6%), auto theft (18.6%) and murder (15.9%) is a matter of concern. Surprising is the increase in number of cases of girls being charged with rape. As most crimes are committed by juveniles from poor families they should also fall under the children in need of care and protection category and should be treated as such. The main legislation that deals with juveniles is the Juvenile Justice Act, 2000.<sup>7</sup>

## **MANAGEMENT**

CHILDLINE India Foundation.<sup>8</sup>

### **Vision**

A child-friendly nation that guarantees the rights and protection of all children.

### **Mission**

CHILDLINE will reach out to every child in need and ensure their rights and protection through the Four Cs.

- CONNECT through technology to reach the 'last mile'.
- CATALYSE systems through active advocacy.

- COLLABORATE through integrated efforts between children, the state, civil society, corporate and community to build a child friendly social order.
- COMMUNICATE to make child protection everybody's priority.<sup>8</sup>

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