Forum: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

Issue #28-01: Addressing Issues Within the Juvenile Justice System

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# **Guiding Questions as you Read**

What did the Juvenile Justice system look like initially? How is it different from today?

What causes children to be part of the Juvenile Justice system? What environment do they come from?

What are the factors that lead youth into delinquency?

## Introduction

Key Terms

Convention on the Rights of the Child Deprivation of liberty Punitive

Youth is still developing, so society treats kids and adults differently in certain subjects such as driving and serving in the military. Yet, in the criminal justice system, we tend to treat youth as adults. Many children are arrested for alleged wrongdoings and are often not given the protections they are entitled under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Youth

are brought to trial and sentenced in ways that violate their human rights, and international principles that recognize the deprivation of liberty to be a measure of last resort for children. Although inhumane incarceration of youth in adult facilities is prohibited, these practices remain abundant.



The Illinois Juvenile Court Act of 1899 built the first juvenile court in the world established in Chicago. The act gave the court power over children under the age of who were neglected, dependent, or delinquent. Juvenile courts sprang up throughout the US, and youth were often sentenced to time in residential "training

schools" that aimed to offer "treatment" to change their moral character and opportunities. Court proceedings were held in private and did not include adult system formalities. Juvenile courts viewed children as needing rehabilitation, so they treated delinquency as a social problem instead of a crime. Since then, the juvenile justice system has grown and changed substantially. Today, mission statements highlight children's accountability for crime, and punitive purposes, which are more common in the juvenile justice system.

Juvenile justice is an issue that affects not only children involved in criminal activities but also child victims of poverty, abuse, immigration, and exploitation. Child victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation are often re-victimized in criminal justice systems. Incarceration of young offenders in most cases proves to be more dangerous than beneficial. It often results in severe psychological trauma, making their successful

reintegration back into society is even more difficult. Young people are detained by the juvenile justice system when other systems fail. The majority of kids in youth detention have experienced trauma and other behavioral health issues, and punishment-based systems do not necessarily rehabilitate them. Reforming justice for children, including juvenile justice laws, policies, and procedures is one of the most important strategies for improving the protection of children in society.

#### Comprehension Questions:

What do you think rehabilitation should look like?

To what extent should children be held accountable in the justice system?

## **Definition of Key Terms**

**Juvenile:** Minor under the age of 18 who has committed criminal acts

**The Convention on the Rights of the Child:** rights are set by an international country agreement that protects every children's rights.

**Juvenile Justice System:** An area of the Criminal Law System that is only applied to the juveniles who commit criminal acts since they cannot be imprisoned the same way as adults in the criminal law system.

**Criminal Justice System:** Government system that is used to sentence a criminal when the individual commits a crime. Also aids in crime prevention.

**Juvenile Court:** Special courts are used to prosecute juveniles who have committed a crime or violated the law.

**Rehabilitation:** Act of helping someone stop their addictions, and helping them get better.

**Children's rights:** Rights that are exclusive to the youth, these rights are universal for every child in the world. Examples of these are having the right to education, equality, health, protection, and freedom.

**Deprivation of liberty:** When freedom is taken away from someone which violates their human right to freedom.

**Punitive:** The intention of punishing someone

## **Current Situation**

Currently, kids are supposed to be processed through the juvenile justice system instead of using the same one for adults too. Even though it is similar to the adult justice system in many ways ("processes include arrest, detainment, petitions, hearings, adjudications, dispositions, placement, probation, and reentry") the juvenile justice system bears in mind that minors are very



different from adults in their capacity to rehabilitate and in their levels of responsibility. "The primary goals of the juvenile justice system, in addition to maintaining public safety, are skill development, habilitation, rehabilitation, addressing treatment needs, and successful reintegration of youth into the community," (youth.gov). Even though the idea of the juvenile justice system could be beneficial, many issues with it need to be addressed, to ensure it is abiding by the idea of rehabilitation.

### The Juvenile Justice System During COVID-19

The coronavirus, otherwise known as COVID-19, is a virus that has affected our world and has caused many consequences besides all the deaths. Young people are particularly vulnerable to the disruptions the COVID-19 pandemic has caused, with many at risk of being left behind in education, economic opportunities, and health/wellbeing during a crucial stage of their life development.

Economic insecurity and loss of jobs have led to many families struggling to pay for everything and are moving into poverty. This increase in poverty has pushed people into criminality. Because of increased youth crime, juvenile courts and other facilities are approaching maximum capacity. This means the government has less time to focus on each child and what they need to be able to rehabilitate into the real world. This pandemic has elevated youth crime rates and has affected every child across the globe in some way or another.

#### **Child Protection System**

The child protection system, known to be a legal system to protect known victims of abuse, tends to fail at its job. Child protection relies on community members and professionals (teachers, nurses) to identify and report safety issues for individual children. However, these individualized approaches ignore the magnitude of the problem of child neglect and abuse and fail to address the underlying causes and contributing factors. A study about the US shows that "more than 90% of youth in foster care with five or more moves will become involved in the juvenile justice system. Another study found that by age 17, over half of youth in foster care experienced an arrest, conviction, or overnight stay in a correctional facility," (ilc.org).

We must begin to consider the social cost of the failure of the legal system, not only in terms of the well-being of abused and neglected children but also the long-term effect of child abuse on our community. The child who survives an abusive environment is all too often the future runaway, drug addict, or child abuser preying on the next generation of innocent citizens.

#### **Reason of Substance Abuse**

As the rate of adolescent substance use increases, so does the rate of youth who commit crimes (besides drug consumption) or juvenile delinquency. When an adolescent begins to use drugs at an early age, it creates greater consequences to "education, interpersonal, and cognitive development than if they began using later in life." This is because the brain is not fully developed until around the age of 25. Drug use causes irreversible damage to the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for judgment, emotional control, and decision-making. Because adolescent drug use has long-term health and legal consequences, it is essential for prevention and intervention strategies to be implemented in schools to reduce the rate of adolescent substance use and juvenile delinquency.

### **Reason of Poverty**

Poverty is a recurring factor in juvenile delinquency. Youth living in poverty are pressured to survive in low socioeconomic communities that lack resources such as job opportunities, financial support, mental health services, medical services, education,

etc. The lack of resources in these communities impedes the youth from becoming successful in a society that favors those with money. Without an adequate income to maintain stability, they are more likely to lead down a path of crime. When parents are unable to pay for a stable lifestyle for their children, they can look favorably on committing offenses such as burglary, robbery, and drug violations.

### Reason of the Education system

Another system that causes children to end up in the juvenile justice system in the first place is the education system. One of the basic rights of children is the right to education which is an obvious benefit of today's world. Every single child in the globe has the right to get an education, no matter their social class or economic status. However, there is a huge flaw in the system. Not every kid is getting the education they are entitled to. Some kids are even missing out on education because of the justice juvenile system. Detention centers do not provide education which leaves kids in these centers without a learning source. A lack of education can have many consequences like lack of information and possible lack of certain values or ideals that children should learn. This means that children who do not get an education will be more likely to commit crimes than children who do as they will not be taught the difference between right and wrong. Also, it will be harder to get a sustaining job if you did not receive an education. Not having income can push people towards crime, so having an education is also important for children's future and safety.

#### Mental Health and Rehabilitation

The relationship between mental health and involvement in the juvenile justice system is complex, but they go hand-in-hand. Studies have suggested that two-thirds of youth in detention or correlation settings have at least one diagnosable mental health problem compared with an estimated 9-22% of the general youth population (Schubert and Mulvey 2014; Schubert, Mulvey, and Glasheen 2011). Inside Juvenile Detention and correctional facilities, youth may experience and gain more mental health issues due to overcrowding, separation from support systems (family and friends), forms of violence, and solitude. However, despite the prevalence of mental health disorders, only a small percentage of those in need of mental health services can access treatment. This illustrates how increasing resources and access to mental health professionals are

important in the juvenile justice system.

Comprehension Question(s): What are the issues with the Juvenile Justice system and how can they be improved? Why is this an issue of importance?

## **Major Parties Involved and Their Views**

#### **United States**

The United States has the obscene distinction of being number one in the world for the worst policies on the treatment of youth in the justice system, and youth of color bear the brunt of our harsh and regressive policies. According to the American Civil Liberties Union, nearly 100,000 youth are cycled through adult jails and prisons annually. No other country in the world comes close to the U.S. dependence on incarceration in juvenile detention centers and youth prisons. The United States specifically struggles with children of color and immigrants when it comes to juvenile justice. Detention is no place to offer this necessary protection and support, but a 2019 Amnesty International USA report finds too many children are experiencing prison-like conditions while in the care and custody of the U.S. government.

"As an outlier among nations on how we treat youth in the justice system, our policies violate major provisions of international human rights conventions such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), a treaty that we have not signed onto yet."

- Liz Ryan

#### Germany

Concerning youth imprisonment, Germany is known for reintegration and its innovative organizational style. This includes a range of educational and vocational training and proper staffing of psychologists, social workers, and teachers. In 1953, German law was changed to allow youth up to age 21 when they committed their offense to be tried as juveniles. Responding to the "fatherless generation" of young

people after World War II, German leaders decided not to institutionalize youth in high numbers; but rather to rehabilitate and shield them from some of the harsher aspects of their adult system. Allowing defendants under 21 to be tried and sentenced according to juvenile law lowers the chances of repeat offenders by providing judges with more leeway in issuing appropriate sentences. The Youth Court Law focuses on the educational and rehabilitative needs of juvenile offenders. The German system prioritizes diversion and minimized interventions, mediation and restorative practices, and educational community sanctions.

#### **Belgium**

Children in Belgium have more access to the justice system than anywhere else in the world, according to the results of a survey by the Child Rights International Network (CRIN). The first-ever global study on children's access to justice ranks countries according to how effectively minors can use the law to challenge violations to their rights. Belgium is number one in the list, according to the CRIN study, followed by Portugal, Spain, Finland, and the Netherlands.

Belgium's Juvenile Justice System is not a system of juvenile criminal law, but Juvenile protection law. It focuses on the protection of minors instead of awarding them with punishment. Belgium juvenile protection law is divided into two categories, firstly, minors living in problematic situations, Secondly, minors committed an act defined as an offense. There is no uniform consolidated "act" on children's rights, provision can be found on both federal and community legislation.

#### India

In India, a person below the age of 18 years is considered a "child". The Juvenile Justice system contemplates the legal responsibility in respect to two categories of children, namely those who are "in conflict with law" (an individual under the age of 18 years who is accused of committing an offense); and those in need of care and protection (children from deprived and marginalized parts of society as well as those with different needs and vulnerabilities).

Before the coming of the British in India, the actions of children were governed under existing Hindu and Muslim laws, where the respective families of the person

concerned were held responsible for monitoring the actions of their children. In India, the need for new legislation and children was felt under British rule; some specific laws were passed between the 1850s and 1990s (like The Apprentice Act, The Code of Criminal Procedure, and the Reformatory School Act). The latest trends of juvenile delinquency analyzed in India are in respect of age patterns and the nature of the offense committed. The juvenile justice system in India was meant to be reformative and not punishment. However, by pleasing the public view, the government has passed a law that could have conflicting results in the long term. By labeling children as "criminals," providing for inconsistent tests to decide the mental capacity of a child, and incarcerating children with adults, it is likely that the Act has already defeated its objective of rehabilitation and has instead paved the way for increased reoffense.

Due to a lack of infrastructure (such as police corruption and the excess time taken to determine the actual age of the juvenile), many juveniles are stuck in prisons and subjected to abuse and violence. So, India needs to strengthen the use of the law to ensure proper rehabilitation.

## **UN Involvement**

Over the years, the United Nations has reaffirmed and expanded its mandate to strengthen Juvenile Justice through the adoption of the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) (United Nations, 1995) and the work of OHCHR, UNICEF, the Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and the Interagency Panel on Juvenile Justice (IPJJ).

#### Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is a legally binding international agreement setting out the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of every child, regardless of their race, religion, or abilities. In all decisions taken within the context of the Juvenile Justice System, the best interest of the child should be a primary consideration. Children differ from adults in their physical and psychological development in such ways that constitute the basis for the lesser culpability for children in conflict with the law. The traditional objectives of criminal justice must give way for rehabilitation and restorative justice objectives in dealing with

child offenders.

#### The Riyadh guidelines Resolution

December 14th of 1990, the United Nations General Assembly adopted guidelines for the prevention of juvenile delinquency to be known as the "Riyadh Guidelines". The Riyadh guidelines affirm the importance of reducing juvenile delinquency plays in reducing crime. In the resolution, one of the fundamental principles is "The successful prevention of juvenile delinquency requires efforts on the part of the entire society to ensure the harmonious development of adolescents, with respect for and promotion of their personality from early childhood." The Riyadh Guidelines call upon the Member States, in their comprehensive crime prevention plans, to apply the Riyadh Guidelines in national law, policy, and practice and to bring them to the attention of relevant authorities.

### International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

The United Nations International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) attempts to ensure the protection of civil and political rights. The ICCPR recognizes the inherent dignity of each individual and undertakes to promote conditions within states to allow the enjoyment of civil and political rights. Countries that have ratified the Covenant are obligated "to protect and preserve basic human rights... [and] "compel[ed] to take administrative, judicial, and legislative measures in order to protect the rights enshrined in the treaty and to provide an effective remedy." There are currently 74 signatories and 168 parties to the ICCPR.

#### The Beijing Rules

On November 29, 1985, the United Nations started to implement them using The Beijing Rules. These rules are based on seeing if juvenile justice is following and respecting the children's rights. In addition, the United Nations believes that The Beijing Rules should always focus on the juveniles' well-being and should be able to have their rights and education. The juvenile needs to be fairly treated and the law needs to be followed fairly and appropriately. The welfare of the juvenile should always be the priority and rule 1.6 "refers to the necessity of constantly improving juvenile justice, without falling behind the development of progressive social policy for juveniles in general and

bearing in mind the need for consistent improvement of staff services.

# **Timeline of Events**

Date	Description of event	Juvenile Justice System Effects
1825	In New York, The Houses of Refuge is established in America, and its the first to be created	Created to help children education, values, and help children in need. And those who are becoming delinquents get on the right path and help them find jobs
1899	The first juvenile court is established in Cook Country, Illinois	Created and known as child savers. It was established to help children who committed crimes, they put them in programs to help them and have a separate system for children
1908	The Children's Act is created to help low-class children	It was created to help children in the lower class and for them to be protected from any type of abuse and be able to have their rights.
1912	The first juvenile justice court is created in France, inspired by the U.S	The juvenile justice court is created yet it is not used yet.  But it will follow some of U.S guidelines and system
1923	There are three guidelines when doing trials	<ul> <li>Those three are:</li> <li>1. help the juvenile learn values, guardianship court can be used</li> <li>2. Children under 14 are</li> </ul>

seen as a youth, 14-18

		are adolescents, and
		juveniles are 19-21and
		are seen as
		accountable for their
		actions.
		3. Juvenile cases
		persecution will have
		different years of
		incarceration, there
		can be even two
		judges depending on
		the seriousness of the
		<mark>case.</mark>
1944	The Supreme Court in Prince	Due to a case that occurred
	V Massachusetts case that	in Price V Massachusetts
	created the establishment of	created the regulation of no
	girls under 18 girls and under	child labor and protection of
	12 boys cannot work	rights and protect them
1955	Low-income countries are	Due to low income,
	not able to follow or have	government policies, and
	juvenile justice systems	values of the country it affects
		the fairness of the trial and
1963	The Children's and Young	This law is created to ensure
	Persons act is created	the safety of the juveniles and
		that they are being treated
		correctly and having support,
		such as programs.
1966	The Supreme Court in Kent	Law that was created whose
	V.United States juvenile court	objective is to rehabilitate
	establishes rehabilitation of	juveniles.
	juvenile	

1970	Due to Wimpship Case, The Supreme Court creates In re Winship	In re Winship is that the proof or evidence that is found the proof for the conviction needs to be the same as the adult conviction.  "preponderance of the evidence" to "beyond a reasonable doubt."
1984	Asian nations start to create their own juvenile justice system laws	Countries' customs need to be followed even when they are incarcerated and during trials. Juvenile behavior can occur due to school and parents' teaching. Therefore their incarceration is flexible
1991	England renames Juvenile Court to Youth court. This causes other countries to rename it to Youth Court. In addition, procedures change.	It was created for juveniles to have trials, it also showed an expansion on how the trials happen and the procedures.
1994	The Minor's Code or Code of the Minor law is created worldwide	Its created to be able to protect juveniles and children
2005	The Supreme court abolishes/cancels the death penalty for juveniles with help of the U.N of Convection on the Rights of the Child.	Due to the death penalty for juveniles is abolished they can now be put in adult prison.  U.N of Convection on the Right of the Child and The Supreme Court allows the death penalty to be stopped.  Countries such as the U.S,

		<mark>Saudi Arabia.</mark>
2006	The Welfare Act is introduced to countries	Created for juveniles protection who have or might be at risk with the law and they are given rehabilitation and special programs
2019	United States Congress establishes the re-use of "1974 Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act"	An act that establishes no more racial inequality, federal protection, no juveniles in adult jails, and protection of children's juvenile system
2020	Juvenile prisons have loads of Covid-19	Due to Covid-19 juvenile prisons are infested with Covid, they are getting sick and even dying, the justice system has not done much to stop this.

## **Past International Action**

#### Children's Defence Fund (CDF)

Children's Defense Fund is a non-profit advocacy organization that focuses on children's rights in pursuit of "policies and programs that provide health care to children, reduce the impact of poverty on children, protect children from abuse and neglect, and provide children with educational opportunities." (CDF.) They work with the US Congress and the federal government to create legislative changes. In accordance with juvenile justice, they ensure more humane and rehabilitative prevention and treatment for all children who come in contact with the juvenile justice system, especially children of color who historically have been disproportionately impacted. On a critic's note though, the organization's research and recommendations are often the catalysts for debate. According to Harvard Educational Review, "...the

CDF reports dismiss commonly held myths about the poor, who they are and the impact of poverty on their lives. For example, it dispels the myth that poor children are mostly Black and Brown, living in the inner cities."

## International Juvenile Justice Observatory (IJJO)

The International Juvenile Justice Observatory (IJJO) is a Belgian Foundation of Public Interest. Since 2002, the IJJO has worked to promote the rights of children and young people who come into contact with justice systems and to encourage the implementation of the international standards which guarantee these rights.

#### Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR)

The Inter-American System for the protection of human rights is a regional human rights system, and is responsible for monitoring, promoting, and protecting human rights in the 35 independent countries of the Americas that are members of the Organization of American States (OAS). The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has had multiple occasions to deal with the issue of juvenile justice and its relationship to human rights.

#### **Possible Solutions**

This issue is of the utmost importance as it deals with deciding the future of criminal minors and making sure they have the best possible life without putting other humans at risk. Problems with the execution of the juvenile justice system have been happening for a very long time and it is time every country provides the best for its children.

To find a way forward, nations must work together and set up programs, systems, and standards for the juvenile justice system. The execution of most juvenile justice programs around the world is terrible but can be improved given time and the proper implementation of said programs. As mentioned earlier, one of the biggest issues within the juvenile justice system is the lack of rehabilitation facilities and health care. To help with this, countries must establish support and comprehensive community-based service to meet the needs of youth. By doing this, mental institutions and justice systems will be able to understand the hardships and challenges youth delinquents go through and

how to best overcome them. Also, the mental problems they have will be diagnosed easier meaning that, if treatable, the disorder can be cured or reduced and children can be given a chance to do better. Without these mental health issues, children will have a better chance of avoiding a life of crime. This could be achieved through well-thought-out and well-organized programs, sustained funding, and strong interagency collaboration. These programs need to focus on better rehabilitation facilities equipped to help any child in need, purchasing larger supplies of medicine, and hiring more psychiatrists.

Another grave issue mentioned is substance abuse. There are different programs, implementations, and systems that can be introduced to reduce the amount of teen drug consumption and, therefore, reduce youth crime (beyond drug usage) and delinquency. For example, prevention and intervention strategies can be added in schools; this will decrease the amount of drug usage in the region of the school enforcing the program. Also, governments can implement support groups for minors. Support group meetings would be a safe place for kids to talk about any issues they want to and also hear what other children are going through. This would be a viable solution for minors that are trying to stop using drugs.

Another big problem mentioned before is issues with child protection systems. Solutions to the problems mentioned previously need to be found and agreed upon by nations. More time and effort has to be put into finding the best home for foster children; homes where they are treated well and with respect instead of violence. To help decrease the placement of kids into abusive homes, better background checks need to be made into these homes and the foster parents taking care of the kids. For this to be possible, governmental funding is needed as more social workers will have to be hired. As well as some extra funding, government instated foundations can be created alongside the United Nations Foundation that will help ensure and protect the future of foster kids all around the world. Money raised will go to hiring social tasked with completing routine background checks on foster homes. Also, part of the money will go directly to the foster homes so that foster parents have enough money to support them.

## Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

This issue deeply relates to SDG sixteen; Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. The SDG is as follows; "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels." This issue focuses more on the second half of the SDG, providing access to justice for children and building successful, inclusive, and responsible centers/organizations. This is related to the issues within the Juvenile Justice system as providing rehabilitation facilities and better care within the system will lead to big changes that will help many across the globe. In term, this will also promote peaceful and inclusive societies which tie into the first part of the SDG.

## **Appendix**

#### **Useful Links for Research**

I. Country profile:

https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/

II. Facts about Juvenile Justice:

https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/juvenile-justice/

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