

# Balancing Reformatory Justice and Public Safety: An Analytical Study of Juvenile Justice Laws and Observation Homes in Chhattisgarh

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**Abstract** - The issue of juvenile delinquency and the necessity to strike a balance between reformatory justice and the safety of the population are the context in which this study about juvenile justice laws and observation homes in Chhattisgarh can be carried out. The purpose of the study is to critically review the legal system and evaluate the operation of observation homes in facilitating rehabilitation without causing a lack of protection to the society. They involve examining provisions of reformatory justice and assessment of institutional concerns that influence juvenile reintegration. An analytical, descriptive, and qualitative approach to study is chosen, based on secondary data in the form of legal documents, government publications and scholarly literature. The findings reveal that despite the presence of rehabilitation and reintegration as a fundamental component of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, the deficiency of infrastructures, trained workforce, delays in the processes, and insufficient psychosocial and vocational services support the notion on effective implementation. The debate points to the conflict between the idea of reformatory and the interests of public safety particularly when it comes to serious crimes so more institutional frameworks and concerted policy action is required. The study finds that the juvenile outcomes and social confidence can be improved by improving observation home facilities, enhancing rehabilitation programs, and making adjudication timely. The primary empirical data, comparative studies at the state level, and longitudinal studies of recidivism and reintegration outcomes should be used in future research.

*Index Terms* – Juvenile Justice, Reformatory Justice, Observation Homes, Public Safety, Rehabilitation

## I. INTRODUCTION

The criminal justice system is a complex task and should be reformed in a multi-dimensional manner which means that a thorough description of different

dimensions, such as the principles of restorative justice, the perception of the citizens and the impact of race and gender on this process should be developed. There is a major trend that has seen a shift towards restorative justice, which is emphasized by Zarkasi et al., 2022 who state that the Draft Criminal Code focuses on conflict resolution and restoration of balance, rather than the use of punitive measures. The method is becoming established as a vital component in dealing with modern crime and it is recommended that reforms are based on healing and community engagement as opposed to punishment by itself (Atrey, 2023).

Furthermore, the dynamics of the social perceptions concerning criminal justice reform are too complicated to be ignored. Evidence shows that the lay population and law enforcement officials are becoming more cognizant of the issue of wrongful convictions, and change is necessary as soon as possible (Ermasova, et al., 2025). This consciousness traces back to a wider social discussion that moves towards the realization of the shortcomings of the system, such as the effects of systemic biases, which are discussed by Hansen and Navarro according to whom the opinions on reforms by the population are influenced by the elements of political partisanship and demographics (Hansen, & Navarro, 2023). This implies that successful reform should address the issues of different communities and should ensure that on issues that have historically marginalized some communities, it should participate in addressing the blind spots.

The racial gender intersectionality also makes the criminal justice reform landscape difficult. Study has revealed that racial biases are a major factor in reform attitude, and inequalities in the system have only sustained the gaps in policing and sentencing

(Dupont, & Al-Mansoori, 2024). Indicatively, the study by Mahamba highlights the importance of the comprehensive approach that considers the interdependence of different issues, such as economic opportunities and the involvement of a community, and works towards the practical change (Beck, 2021). This is in line with the observations of Beck who asserts that reforms should not only be on legal structures but also on the social injustices that are part of violence against women and other marginalized groups. Also, as Corda and Hester have argued, the concept of community involvement and other methods of justice is getting momentum. Restorative justice as a concept promotes the change in the punitive approach to the community-based solutions that emphasize the healing and reconciliation (Arifin, et al., 2023).

Table 1: Juvenile Crime Statistics in Chhattisgarh

Year	Total Juvenile Crimes	Serious Crimes (IPC)	Juveniles Apprehended
2018	1,215	742	1,263
2019	1,308	801	1,354
2020	1,047	612	1,091
2021	1,189	703	1,236
2022	1,432	881	1,487
2023	1,568	963	1,623

Source: National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) – Crime in India

### 1.1. Role and Functioning of Observation Homes in Chhattisgarh

In Chhattisgarh, the Observation Homes serve the purpose of temporary custodial adult institutions of children in conflict with law pending the inquiry under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015. According to the data provided by the government, there are 13 Observation Homes in the state (and in them, there are about 296 juveniles (as of 2022)). These homes are supposed to give a non-punitive, children friendly, and secure setting so that the juveniles are not detained in police lock ups or the ordinary jails. Observation Homes are primarily aimed at supporting the procedure of initial investigation during Juvenile Justice Boards (JJBs) and protecting the dignity, rights and psychological welfare of the child (Ball, et al., 2024).

Besides offering custodial care, the Observation Homes at Chhattisgarh shall also be supposed to execute a reformatory and rehabilitative role. The inmates of these juvenile facilities are given

fundamental education, vocational training, counselling, health care and recreation, which helps in behavioural reform and reintegration into society. Nonetheless, the rising numbers of juvenile criminals and cases of juvenile crime that are pending before JJBs are straining on the capacity and the resources of these homes, which in some cases lead to overcrowding and a lengthy duration of stay (VISHWAKARMA, 2021). This has direct influence both on reformatory justice objectives as well as on the safety of people since the probability of recidivism is high when the rehabilitation is delayed. As such, the successful operation of Observation Homes is important in achieving equilibrium between the two purposes of protecting the society and rehabilitating juveniles to become responsible citizens (Abrams, et al., 2021).

Observation Homes are provided under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 under Section 47 of the Act to receive, care and rehabilitate juveniles in conflict with law temporarily till the inquiry process is pending. These homes operate in the supervision of the State Child Protection Society and the District Child Protection Units in Chhattisgarh in which the juveniles are not retained in the police or prisons as required in Section 12, which highlights the use of a non-custodial approach and bail (Singh, 2022). Under the provisions of the Act in reformatory justice, the Observation Homes are obligated by law to offer a child friendly environment which implies education, counselling, medical services and vocational training. As a way of balancing the goals of child welfare and public safety, Observation Homes in Chhattisgarh are critical in ensuring that the objectives of juveniles are not exposed to hardened criminals and therefore incorporated back into the society (Rossner, & Taylor, 2024).

### 1.2. Juvenile Justice Framework in Chhattisgarh

The juvenile justice system of Chhattisgarh is also regulated by the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, which is focused on the principles of care, protection, rehabilitation, and social reintegration of the juveniles who have violated the law. To ensure that the procedures are child friendly, timely inquiry, and fair decision-making, the state has developed Juvenile Justice Boards (JJBs) and Child Welfare Committees (CWCs). The goal of these institutions is to examine

given the individual situation of any juvenile considering a range of factors, including age, mental stability, socio-economic status, and the offence committed, and ensure that reformative justice is given more importance than punishment (Parveen, 2025).

Chhattisgarh is characterized by a strong legal system that has multiple implementation issues, which influence the performance of juvenile justice administration. The rural areas with distant tribes restrict access to legal aid, counselling services, and rehabilitation programs (Singh, 2022). The problems faced by a few of the Observation Homes and Special Homes include poor infrastructure, absence of professionals to take care of children, and lack of vocational and education. These gaps should be filled by focusing on capacity building, better funding, and community-based rehabilitation programs to achieve the goal of making the juvenile justice system in Chhattisgarh well balanced in terms of accountability, child welfare, and public safety (Pandey, & Student, 2024).

The present study is important because it addresses the practical compromise between the reformative justice and public safety in the juvenile justice system of Chhattisgarh. Through juvenile justice legislations and the operations of observation home in the study, also the study throws light on the gaps between the legislative purpose and the ground level operation. The study helps in the realization of the effect of the institutional practice on the rehabilitation outcomes, the risk of recidivism, and the safety of the community. Its results can help policymakers, judicial systems, and child protection services to enhance rehabilitation processes and ensure accountability, which fosters a more efficient, child-focused, and socially safe system of juvenile justice.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ermasova, N., et al., (2025) studied the relationship between the perceived wrongful conviction and the beliefs in criminal justice reform and the influence of experience in law enforcement on those beliefs. Results indicated that the two categories of people embraced reform, but with different priorities, which meant that successful reform mechanisms had to be shaped to respond to different viewpoints and interests.

Parveen, A. (2025) studied restorative justice as a substitute for the punitive criminal justice system in

India, focusing on its principles, implementation, and issues. It determined that new judicial and legislative trends favoured the transition into reformative justice and that restorative mechanisms could force the creation of a more equitable, humane, and inclusive criminal justice system.

Dupont, C., & Al-Mansoori, A. (2024) examined criminal justice reform by evaluating the balance between the rights of people and their safety. The results revealed substantial evidence on support of reform and restorative justice, the effects of race and gender on attitude and concluded that integrative, ethically based, community-centred strategies were necessary in order to have a just and successful justice system.

MURUGESH, T., & KALIRAJ, S. (2024) considered the necessity of limited juvenile justice reforms of offenders between 16 and 18 years, with accountability versus rehabilitation. It concluded that specific laws and early and targeted action helped to decrease recidivism, enhanced the level of trust in the community, and better correlated the severity of the offence with the penalties and helped the juveniles reintegrate in the community.

Pandey, S. V., & Student, L. (2024) studied criminal law reform in India with respect to both legislative and judicial that aimed to increase efficiency without compromising fairness and rights of individuals. It concluded that even with efforts such as the streamlining of procedures, digitalisation of the courts and amendments that were more victim-centred, there was a necessity of adopting a more holistic, institutionalised manner of balancing justice and efficiency.

Arifin, R., et al., (2023) studied the prosecutorial decision-making process in post-conflict Indonesia in terms of restorative justice, with a particular emphasis on the issue of accountability versus reconciliation. It reached the conclusion that the peace-versus-justice dilemma required a holistic, comprehensive approach to consider legal, ethical, and socio-political aspects to facilitate community healing in the context of transitional justice.

Hansen, M. A., & Navarro, J. C. (2023) examined the impacts of gender, race and political partisanship on popular support of criminal justice reforms based on national survey results. Findings indicated that overt gender and racial distinctions were mostly partisan divisions, led by white Republican males, which implied that a lack of demographic

homogeneity in legislatures limited the potential to introduce any meaningful change.

Though, the study analyzes the perception of criminal justice reform by the public (Ermasova et al., 2025), restorative justice in India (Parveen, 2025), and inclusive, ethically driven approaches (Dupont and Al-Mansoori, 2024; Arifin et al., 2023), there is study on juvenile justice on the state level. The role and the efficiency of the observation homes in Chhattisgarh have not been researched, yet targeted interventions with older juveniles (Murugesh & Kaliraj, 2024) and larger legislative changes (Pandey and Student, 2024) are the topics of the research. Furthermore, the socio-demographic factors on the juvenile outcomes (Hansen and Navarro, 2023) are seldom studied in local settings. This is where the necessity to conduct study consisting of legal, institutional, and social approaches to juvenile reform lies.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The proposed study focused on qualitative methodology to investigate the trade-off between reformatory justice and community safety in the context of the juvenile justice law and the observation homes in Chhattisgarh. With the use of descriptive and analytical research design, the study critically examines the available legal provisions, policies and institutional practices concerning juvenile justice. The study is also limited to the state of Chhattisgarh through observation homes and juvenile justice mechanisms that are operating in this state. The study data has been obtained only through the use of secondary sources, such as government reports, legal documents, scholarly articles, and relevant literature, which gives the possibility to understand the operation, the issues, and the potential of the juvenile justice system to be reformed comprehensively.

### IV. RESULTS BASED ON OBJECTIVES

Obj. 1: To examine juvenile justice laws in Chhattisgarh for reformatory justice and public safety.

Laws of juvenile justice in Chhattisgarh are based on the national Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, which emphasises the use of rehabilitation, social reintegration and child friendly adjudication but realizes the need to address the issue of public safety. *The Juvenile Justice Rules in Chhattisgarh* require the setting up of Observation

Homes in which alleged law offenders under the age of inquiry are confined, and segregation by age and offence provided to manage and treat them appropriately at the same time (Atrey, 2023). The aim of the Observation Homes is to balance the needs of the juvenile development with the safety of the people by educating, counselling and organizing the environments to ensure that the juvenile never re-offends as the Juvenile Justice Board undertakes initial assessment. Such a rehabilitative system is indicative of reformatory justice values but conflicts with the imperatives of public safety in cases of serious offences. The High Court of Chhattisgarh has made several recent judgments highlighting this balance by clarifying the sentencing limits and the protection of the process in the JJ Act (VISHWAKARMA, 2021).

The interaction between reformatory justice and the issue of public safety in the juvenile system is demonstrated through judicial interpretation in Chhattisgarh. Under the JJ Act, the rehabilitative spirit of the act, the High Court in *Juvenile in Conflict with Law vs. State of Chhattisgarh (2025)* re-confirmed statutory limits on sentencing juveniles, which stipulate that even juvenile defendants in any high-profile offence cannot be incarcerated beyond three years of their lives, despite the society and their security requirement. Besides, in *Prahlad Prasad Rathour v. State of Chhattisgarh (2025)*. In a case in which the offence was committed by persons below the age of 18 years, the court affirmed that persons should be treated like children in conflict with the law, and those who benefit ought to have the same right as provided by the law. These rulings demonstrate how Chhattisgarh courts are striving to get the local practices of juvenile justice in line with the dual objectives of the national law: to transform juvenile offenders and protect the interests of the community, thus strengthening the legal clarity of the reform and safety factors (Singh, 2022).

Obj. 2: To analyze observation homes' functioning in Chhattisgarh for effective juvenile rehabilitation outcomes.

In the state of Chhattisgarh, observation homes are critical elements of the juvenile justice system, which are temporary custodial places of children in conflict with the law in the inquiry period under Section 47 of *the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015* and applicable state regulations. These homes are required by law

to offer care, education, counselling as well as engagement opportunities if separation by age and the severity of offences is upheld to facilitate priorities of rehabilitation and reintegration (SHAIKH, & AHMED, 2025). But the cases of state observation homes such as six juveniles breaking out of the Surguja Child Observation Home and attacking a guarder reveal that the security system, staffing, and infrastructure have inherent challenges that may compromise rehabilitative objectives and community security. These institutions should therefore be evaluated not just based on statutory compliance but practical outcome such as safety, appearing before Juvenile Justice Boards on time and provision of psychosocial support to juveniles (Sharma, 2024).

The judicial and administrative control can be considered as an attempt to improve the operation of the observation homes in Chhattisgarh as the extension of the efficient juvenile rehabilitation. The Chhattisgarh High Court ordered punitive penalties collected by various court actions to be diverted to child observation homes in 2025 to enhance learning, medical, and psychological growth endeavours, which strengthens the reformatory requirement of these institutions. These guidelines are an indicator of the judicial recognition of infrastructural and resource loopholes that may hinder the results of rehabilitation without mitigation (Goswami, 2021). Prolonged pendency of inquiries in the observation homes in India and elsewhere has been noted by the observers is indicative of a deeper systemic concern in which the juveniles can spend years in institutionalisation before adjudication, which in turn can lead to a psychosocial adverse well-being. An intensive review in Chhattisgarh should thus be able to determine the congruence between the institutional capacity, timeliness, staff training, and rehabilitative services with the legal needs and the goal of juvenile reintegration (NANJUNDA, 2023).

## V. DISCUSSION

The juvenile justice system in Chhattisgarh reflects the very nature of reformism as the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act which focuses more on rehabilitation than punishment (Assembly, 2022). Observation homes are meant to act as temporary care, counselling and social reintegration rooms instead of custodial detention centres (Malvaso, et al., 2024). Nevertheless, empirical patterns show that even the reformatory intent and

ground-level realities are at a complex balance (Wood, et al., 2022). Although in recent years the number of juvenile crimes across the state has been gradually decreasing, it cannot be argued that this decrease is the direct result of the efficiency of the observation homes (Beck, 2021). The usual constraints like inadequate infrastructure, unequal distribution of residential spaces in districts, staffing shortages, and delays in case disposal tend to undermine the results of rehabilitation (Ermasova, et al., 2025). The long stays resulting to the delay of the procedure process can introduce the juveniles to bad peer influence, hence watering down the intended reformatory intention of the law (Parveen, 2025).

Regarding the public safety, the operations of observation homes in Chhattisgarh become extremely important in terms of supervision, security, and post-release monitoring (Maryfield, et al., 2020). The cases of escapes and missing proper risk assessment systems make the juvenile justice system questionable in the eyes of citizens (Desman, & Redi, 2024). Although, reformatory justice is critical to upholding the rights and future of children who commit a crime against law, accountability, structured rehabilitation schemes, and efficient aftercare services are needed to maintain the safety of the citizens (Zarkasi, et al., 2022). The lack of proper psychological evaluation, professional training, and reintegration into society programs provoke the risk of recidivism (VISHWAKARMA, 2021). Thus, to balance between reformatory justice and community safety, institutional capacity and frameworks of better communication between agencies and expedient adjudication need to be reinforced (Helfgott, et al., 2025). The comprehensive strategy of combining both rehabilitation and preventive protection is essential in the process of maintaining both child welfare goals and societal security in Chhattisgarh (Sharma, 2024).

## VI. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the juvenile justice system in Chhattisgarh indicates a robust reform philosophy, yet institutional capacity, infrastructure, staffing, and procedural delays are the barriers to successful rehabilitation and public safety results. The results suggest that it is necessary to enhance observation homes, inter-agency communication, and rehabilitation and aftercare mechanisms to balance between child welfare and security in the

society. The work is constrained, however, by the fact that it uses secondary data and limits the scope to Chhattisgarh, making this limitation to generalizability. Further study needs to include primary field data, comparative state level analyses and longitudinal studies of recidivism and reintegration results to gain deeper policy-relevant information.

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