



JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AND REHABILITATION OF CHILDREN

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Children tend to become delinquents due to lack of proper guidance and adequate protection. Therefore, a programme at national level to rehabilitate such children are very much in need today. Advice was sought from Great Britain in this regard, and Mr. J. V. Hill, a child specialist from the country, came to Sri Lanka in 1952 and started a programme of rehabilitation of delinquents. In order to extend this programme a Department of Probation and Child Care was set up in 1956.

Mr. Hill introduced the system of certified schools in Sri Lanka for delinquents by starting the Certified School at Hikkaduwa. Its aim was to admit children between the years of 12 to 16 who had got involved in illegal activities. This

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The question is do we have to offer services to these young people or do we have to serve them?

Security and a healthy environment coupled with proper understanding of their problems can make a street child or street youth to be indistinguishable from his more fortunate contemporaries. It is said that when nature and nurture are reconciled, youngsters with the grimmest histories can show an astonishing power of recuperation.

was to be done through a legal process and the object was to mould the character of these children on a positive way.

A pilot programme concentrating on juvenile delinquents scattered throughout the island was implemented at Hikkaduwa. By 1960 the number of juvenile delinquents thus admitted reached 736.

It was difficult to rehabilitate such a large number of children in one institution. Therefore, seven certified schools were set up subsequently at different places in the island. Local officials were sent to Great Britain and were trained to carry on with the management.

At this time the most serious offence committed by child delinquents was acts of minor thefts. Minor offences included disobedience to parents, aggressiveness, addiction to smoke, ticketless travel in trains, loitering and running away from school. Therefore simple guidance was adequate to rehabilitate those children. Rehabilitation was also effective because there were adequate human and maternal resources.

Though rehabilitation project was very popular at the beginning from 1979 onwards there has been a speedy decline of such projects as indicated by the following data.

Year	No. of certified Schools	No. of inmates
1979	7	308
1980	6	212
1981	5	190
1982	5	184
1983	5	176
1984	5	162
1985	4	148
1986	4	136
1987	4	122
1988	4	108
1989	4	102
1990	3	92

These data show how Certified Schools have been closed down from year to year and how the number of child offenders benefiting from rehabilitation decreased. There has not been a corresponding decline in juvenile delinquency.

A major reason for this state of affairs the laws have not been changed adequately with the pass of time. Although the laws and regulations relating to many other spheres of activity have been revised to suit the requirements of the times, the laws relating to juvenile delinquents have not been revised for the last forty five years. Under the provisions of the law only a police officer or the relevant officer of the Municipal Council (in the case of a city) can arrest a child delinquent and bring him/her before a court of law. Due to this shortcoming in the law the number of juvenile delinquents who are subjected to rehabilitation is going down steadily.

There should be close coordination between the police, the judiciary, the prisons and the Department of Probation and Child Care. But unfortunately the reality is from this. In fact, the coordination that should exist especially between the prisons and the Probation Department appears to be declining in the recent times. According to the provision in the law every delinquent child of less than sixteen years must be sent to a certified school. Instead more and more such children are being sent to prison as its shown in the table.

Year	Male	Females	Total
1983	927	121	1,048
1984	808	113	921
1985	485	78	513
1986	453	96	549
1987	486	91	577

Source: Administrative Report of the Prison Department (1987)

Due to the shortening in the law, relating to child delinquents these 3,668 children have been deprived of their fundamental rights. The law specifies that children should not be kept with adult prisoners because they might be subjected to molestation by the adults or might start imitating the adults. But this condition has not been fulfilled.

The manner in which young children become delinquents has changed greatly. Today city streets have become training camps for juvenile delinquents. The tendency of mothers to leave their children and seek foreign employment, the homosexual practices which have invaded the country mainly due to tourism, and the use of narcotics have created fertile breeding grounds for juvenile delinquency. Although new delinquent tendencies have emerged among the young, legal provisions or programmes to combat those tendencies have not come into existence.



Drug Abuse and Rehabilitation

A major challenge to young children today is narcotics. Thousands are addicted to drugs although reliable statistics are not available. The

Age Group	Year 1983	Year 1984	Year 1985	Year 1986	Year 1987
22-30	913	1,097	1,133	1,407	1,294
30-40	698	709	748	957	823
40-50	312	314	286	573	388
50-60	177	169	118	13	172
Above 60	86	90	63	8	80
	2,186	2,381	2,348	3,138	2,837

number of these getting addicted is rising rapidly but there are no institutions to provide these with the necessary treatment. It is questionable whether the volunteer organisations which provide services have any sympathy for these people. However, society must pay attention to these persons.

There are no suitable institutions in which children below 16 years who are addicted to narcotics can receive indoor treatment. The available non-government institutions are not at all adequate. About 50% of child prisoners are drug addicts. This situation is likely to get worse in the future. Therefore it is essential to make use of the funds allocated for the purpose and to create new means of treatment.

Another major fact for delinquency is illiteracy. The levels of literacy of those who have been identified as juvenile delinquents are as follows:

1. Those who never went to school 16%
 2. Those who went to school for two or three years but are illiterate 64%
 3. Those who have received primary education and can write their name 18%
 4. Those who have gone to school upto the 8th year 02%
- 100%

What these statistics prove is that illiteracy and ignorance have greatly contributed to child delinquency.

Another fact or contribute to delinquency is the mother being sent to prison for some offence. The number of mothers who were imprisoned in the last few year as follows:



The children of such mothers deprives of these cases and protection go astray and most of them end up by becoming servants of the underworld and later a delinquents. Imprisonment of mothers, more than that of fathers, affects young children adversely.

Those families troubled by quarrels and disunity in the family, imprisonment of mother or father, or death or remarriage of mother or father are identified as disorganised families. These disorganised families also have become a serious contributory factor to the spread of juvenile delinquency.

A change in type

In the act the juvenile delinquents came from uneducated families. A

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theft was committed to fulfil hunger or to meet ordinary requirements. But today the type of offender has changed and even children from families which are economically well-to-do and are considered educated have become dangerous criminals. They rob and murder for a life of luxury. Some of them are of school going age.

Attention of Parents

It has now become clear that lack of parental attention is a major factor

of affairs. This situation is widespread in the families of those who have gone abroad for employment. There are many educated and affluent persons in society who are reluctant to reveal the actual state of their children. They seek treatment only after the illness has gone too far. But by that time the children concerned have reached a very low physical and psychological level.

The family system

The collapse of the extended family support system in recent times has a resulting social collapse. Social relations have diminished due to this.

A child gone astray is a loss to the country. The measures adopted by adults and the society as a whole to combat child delinquency are out of date. Most of these do not meet today's requirements. Therefore there is a great need of a new thinking and new rehabilitation programme for children.

The programme of humanising children must be given priority above all others. The time has come when the attention of all adults must be paid to be need to set up a massive and strong programme for humanising the children with the aim of developing the human resource of our country. ■