

Challenges Faced by Juveniles in The Juvenile Justice System of Bangladesh: An Empirical Study

Md. Shahjalal¹, Nelufer Yesmen², Sumona Sharmin³

¹Student, Department of Criminology and Police Science, Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, Santosh, Tangail-1902, Bangladesh.

^{2,3}Faculty, Department of Criminology and Police Science, Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, Santosh, Tangail-1902, Bangladesh.

ABSTRACT: This study explores the challenges faced by juveniles in the juvenile justice system of Bangladesh, primarily focused on three institutions, which are the police, the court, and correctional centers. Despite efforts to create a juvenile-friendly justice system, this study identifies major gaps in its implementation. As a result, juveniles often experience arbitrary detention, mistreatment by law enforcement agencies (police), delays in court proceedings, and do not receive adequate rehabilitation facilities in correctional centers. The study follows a qualitative data collection method, including semi-structured interviews with juveniles and probation officers across two major Child Development Centers in Gazipur. The data were analyzed by using a theme-based narrative analysis approach, and this analysis technique helped to identify the recurring patterns, challenges, and institutional failures. Key findings of this study show that juvenile offenders frequently faced physical and psychological abuse, a lack of legal representation, and delays in their trials. This study also highlights that juveniles are facing some major problems in correctional centers, such as overcrowding, poor healthcare, unsatisfactory educational service, a lack of gender-sensitive environments, and a lack of resources. The study emphasizes the urgent need for child-sensitive reforms within the justice system, including improved training for justice actors, accessible legal aid services, and investment in rehabilitative infrastructure. This study is intended to support policymakers, legal professionals, and social workers in building a more effective, child-sensitive juvenile justice system.

INTRODUCTION

The global juvenile justice system has changed in principle from punitive punishment traditions to rehabilitative and restorative models that prioritize the developmental needs of children. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989) and the Beijing Rules (1985), the juvenile justice process must be based on rehabilitation, reintegration, and age-appropriate treatment rather than punishment. A well-functioning juvenile justice system consists of three key pillars, which are law enforcement (police), adjudication (courts), and rehabilitation (correctional institutions). Nazim et al. (2024) observe that while police systems are intended to ensure fair and lawful arrest procedures, courts are expected to deliver non-adversarial and timely justice, and correctional centers should offer vocational, psychological, and educational support. However, globally, these pillars often fail in execution. The International Centre for Prison Studies (ICPS) estimates that more than one million children are detained globally each year, many in overcrowded, violent, and under-resourced institutions. Ehrhard-Dietzel et al. (2017) further highlight the global prevalence of arbitrary detention and inadequate legal aid for youth offenders. In Asia, these issues are compounded by stigma, legal ambiguity, and weak infrastructure, as highlighted by Kim, Lin, and Lambert (2015), who document systemic failures in police handling, court processes, and correctional reintegration in Asia. Bangladesh, as a signatory to the CRC, is no exception to these challenges. Even though the Children Act 2013 was introduced to create a more child-friendly justice system in Bangladesh, putting this law into action has been very difficult. The child-friendly justice system in Bangladesh remains largely theoretical due to widespread ignorance of legal provisions. Despite being intended for behavioral correction, Child Development Centres (CDCs) in Bangladesh lack proactive rehabilitation efforts, as evidenced by the tragic incident on August 13, when three children were killed and 15 injured due to torture by officials at the Jessore CDC (Hossain, 2020). Research and media reports show that the rights of children in the justice system are regularly ignored. Many children say they were verbally and physically abused while in police custody and did not get access to legal help (Sultana & Dey, 2020). While many researchers have looked at juvenile justice in Bangladesh, most of their work focuses on legislative frameworks, comparative legal analyses, or the broader structure of the system (Ullah, 2024) rather than the real-life experiences of the children. These studies point out problems like a lack of child-friendly police stations and courts or poor correctional facilities. Because of this, there is still a massive gap in field-based research that focuses on the personal challenges children face in the justice system every day.

Challenges Faced by Juveniles in The Juvenile Justice System of Bangladesh: An Empirical Study

As stated in Section 4 of the Children Act, 2013, a child is anyone under the age of 18. This definition aligns with international views, such as Siegel and Tracy (2006), who describe juveniles as minors not yet fully mature in judgment or responsibility, and who should be treated through a justice system focused on rehabilitation rather than punishment. However, Shoemaker and Wolfe (2016) argue that in many places, juveniles are often treated like adults during arrest, which can harm their rights and mental health. In Bangladesh, Kabir (2023) points out that many juvenile cases are still handled in regular courts without proper training or facilities. Studies highlight the severe lack of proper programs and psychological support in Child Development Centres (CDCs). Children in both developed and developing countries face multiple barriers in the justice process, including procedural delays, emotional stress, and social stigma. Arbitrary detention and abuse in custody are also common problems. Ghosh (2018) notes that children labeled as offenders face discrimination even after their release, making reintegration difficult. In Bangladesh, only three CDCs—located in Tongi, Jessore, and Konabari—exist nationwide, and they are overcrowded and underfunded. Girls face even greater risks due to the lack of gender-sensitive services, which increases their chances of facing abuse and trauma (Ferdousi, 2014). This study addresses that gap by exploring the institutional challenges faced by juveniles in the juvenile justice system of Bangladesh. Through qualitative inquiry, it examines how police, court systems, and correctional institutions impact juvenile rights and outcomes. The research is guided by the question: What are the key challenges faced by juveniles in the juvenile justice system of Bangladesh? It aims to: (1) identify the challenges juveniles face during their interactions with the police, (2) understand the challenges encountered in court proceedings, and (3) investigate the conditions and treatment of juveniles in correctional facilities. The significance of this study lies in its attempt to bridge the gap between legal policy and practical implementation. By capturing firsthand accounts from juveniles and probation officers, the study offers grounded insights into how institutional weaknesses compromise justice for children. As highlighted by Tanvir and Nipa (2021), achieving a truly child-sensitive justice system in Bangladesh requires more than legal reform—it demands an honest engagement with on-the-ground realities. This research contributes to that goal by providing evidence that can inform policy, training, and institutional change toward a more humane and effective juvenile justice system.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts a tri-theoretical framework integrating Labeling Theory, Victimization Theory, and Institutional Theory to explore the challenges juveniles face within Bangladesh's juvenile justice system. Labeling Theory, developed by Becker (1963), is used to examine the initial contact between juveniles and law enforcement. This theory explains how being labeled as "delinquent" or "criminal" by police or the justice system can negatively shape a juvenile's self-concept and lead to future deviance. In Bangladesh, juveniles are often arrested without explanation, denied legal support, and referred to as criminals before trial. Such early labeling, combined with harsh police treatment, reinforces the idea that they are inherently deviant. Ferdousi (2020) and Paternoster and Iovanni (1989) note that these negative societal reactions can result in stigma, exclusion, and increased chances of reoffending. Labeling Theory helps explain how these initial interactions begin a cycle of marginalization.

Victimization Theory, particularly Secondary Victimization Theory (Herman, 1992), is applied to understand the custody and court stages. It focuses on how juveniles, already vulnerable due to social or personal trauma, experience further harm within the justice system. Instead of receiving support, they endure delays, verbal abuse, coercion, and poor detention conditions, all of which deepen their emotional distress. Sayed (2024) emphasizes that this institutional mistreatment can cause long-term psychological damage and disrupt rehabilitation. Victimization Theory helps reveal how systemic neglect transforms state institutions into sources of ongoing harm, rather than protection. Institutional Theory, introduced by Meyer and Rowan (1977) and expanded by Scott (2008), addresses the structural shortcomings of justice institutions. While Bangladesh's Children Act 2013 legally mandates child-sensitive justice, in practice, implementation is weak. Institutional Theory explains this gap as a product of symbolic compliance: while institutions may formally adopt reforms, actual practices remain unchanged due to limited capacity, resistance to change, and bureaucratic inertia. For instance, courts may be designated for juveniles but lack trained staff, appropriate infrastructure, or specialized procedures. This theory shifts focus from individual behavior to systemic dysfunction, helping us understand why reforms fail to produce meaningful change.

While each theory offers unique insights, they converge on a central theme: systemic failure to recognize and uphold the evolving capacities and rights of juveniles. Labeling Theory highlights how harmful identities are imposed early; Victimization Theory shows how state processes intensify trauma; and Institutional Theory explains why these failures persist despite legal mandates.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive research design to explore the challenges faced by juveniles in Bangladesh's justice system. A qualitative approach is appropriate given the aim to capture in-depth, lived experiences of juveniles in custodial settings. Data was collected from two of the three operational Child Development Centres (CDCs) in Bangladesh: CDC Tongi (Boys), the largest correctional center for boys, and CDC Konabari (Girls), the primary facility for female juveniles. Because of their administrative prominence, high juvenile populations, and their ability to provide geographic and gender coverage, these two areas were selected for this study. Although Jessore CDC also exists, access constraints prevented its inclusion in the study, which is

Challenges Faced by Juveniles in The Juvenile Justice System of Bangladesh: An Empirical Study

acknowledged as a limitation. The population includes approximately 579 juveniles (489 boys and 90 girls) residing across the Tongi and Konabari CDCs, as well as 14 Probation officers as of April 21, 2025, according to institutional records. The data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews from 4 Probation officers (2 from each center), 12 male juveniles from CDC Tongi, and 7 female juveniles from CDC Konabari. After this number of samples were interviewed, the information was repeated, and for this reason, 23 was the total sample size for this study. Along with juveniles, probation officers are also interviewed as they assist juveniles in the three prime institutions Police, court, and the correctional center, they also know what problems juveniles are facing in these three stages. Additionally, secondary sources like previous academic literature, law books, government policies, and newspapers were reviewed to support and contextualize the primary findings. After the data collection, all interviews were transcribed from Bengali to English and systematically coded using thematic analysis to identify patterns, themes, and subthemes that emerged from the participants' narratives. Ethical approval for this research was obtained from the relevant authorities. Written permission was collected from the Department of Social Services (DSS), and assent from juveniles was obtained alongside institutional guardian approval. All participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Socio-demographic Information of the Juveniles

This study involved 19 juveniles to understand the background and factors linked to juvenile delinquency in Bangladesh. The participants came from different areas and faced various social and economic challenges that may have influenced their involvement in criminal activities.

Living area

Out of the 19 juveniles, 11 (57.89%) were from urban areas, and 8 (42.11%) were from rural areas. This shows that more than half of the participants lived in cities or towns, where poverty, inequality, and exposure to crime are often higher. Urban areas often have more chances for young people to come into contact with crime due to overcrowding, unemployment, and peer pressure.

Education

A large number of juveniles had left school early. Around 60% of them dropped out by Grade V. This early dropout is often related to poor family support, financial struggles, and lack of interest in school. Without education, many juveniles are left with fewer choices for their future and are more likely to fall into criminal behavior.

Economic status

The economic background of the participants shows that financial hardship is a key factor. Seven juveniles (36.84%) came from poor families, and another seven (36.84%) were from lower-class households; the rest of the juveniles belonged to middle and upper-middle class families. This means that most of them were living in poverty or had very limited financial resources.

Occupation

When looking at work, 13 out of the 19 participants were either unemployed or doing low-paying jobs like construction, farming, or selling goods. These types of jobs offer little job security or future growth, which may leave these juveniles feeling stuck and hopeless.

Type of allegations

The juveniles in the study were mostly accused of serious crimes. Five of them (26.32%) were charged with murder, and another five (26.32%) were involved in cases related to women and child repression. Other charges included theft and kidnapping. This suggests that many of these juveniles were involved in violent or serious offenses.

Juveniles Under Police

Juveniles' Experience During Arrest

Many juveniles were arrested without being informed of the charges or the presence of legal counsel. They described sudden pickups, lack of explanation, and no communication with family for days. This reflects a clear breach of **Section 33 of the Children Act 2013**, which mandates child-friendly arrest procedures.

A 16-year-old female also described her experience. She was taken from her home without knowing the reason, and her family didn't know where she was for two days:

"I was at home when the police suddenly came up to me. They didn't say why they were taking me, and when I asked, they just told me to shut up. They threw me into the back of the car without any explanation. I was left alone at the station for hours, no one telling me anything. My family was not informed about my detention for two days." (Narrative from Bengali)

Mistreatment by police was also described by a 14-year-old male. He was roughly handled and physically abused:

"As I was walking with my friend, two police officers suddenly grabbed me and dragged me into their van. I kept asking why, but they didn't say anything. At the station, they started shouting at me, accusing me of something I didn't do. One of them slapped me when I hesitated to speak." (Narrative from case 13)

Challenges Faced by Juveniles in The Juvenile Justice System of Bangladesh: An Empirical Study

These incidents show serious problems in how the juvenile justice system operates. The system often fails to follow rules meant to protect children, leading to fear and trauma instead of fair treatment. Reforms are urgently needed to ensure that juveniles are treated with respect and dignity during the arrest process.

Treatment of Juveniles in Police Custody

Narratives revealed consistent use of physical abuse, threats, and forced confessions during police custody. Several juveniles reported being tortured even after confessing. These confessions are taken under pressure, sometimes after repeated torture and threats.

One juvenile described being tortured for several days, even after confessing:

“I was arrested by Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and held in their custody for seven days. During those seven days, I was tortured for four days. Although they arrested nine people, they released eight of them, leaving only me in custody. After three days, I confessed to the murder, but even after my confession, they continued to torture me.” (Narrative from Bengali)

A 17-year-old girl in her first year of college also described how police used violence and fear to force a confession:

“They kept me in a room for three days, pressuring me to confess. Every time I denied the allegations, they hit me. They accused me of being part of a group involved in the murder. Eventually, I gave in and said what they wanted me to say. They recorded my confession and told me it would be used in court. Afterward, they threatened me with even worse consequences if I didn’t stick to my confession.” (Narrative from Bengali)

Another child, a Hafez from a madrasa in Chattogram, was accused of killing his classmate. He claimed innocence and described the abuse he suffered:

“There is no evidence that I committed the crime. They punched me and threatened me, forcing me to confess. I didn’t do anything, but I have been here for almost three years. They didn’t ask me any questions directly; instead, they just said that my friends had told them I was with them. But I wasn’t. They told me not to try to act ‘too smart,’ and then punched me on my head, demanding that I admit I was with my friends during the murder.” (Narrative from Bengali)

These stories show that law enforcement often fails to treat juveniles as children. Instead of protecting them, they are abused and pressured into confessions, leading to serious injustice.

Corruption and Bribery in the Juvenile Justice System

Corruption and bribery are serious problems in the juvenile justice system of Bangladesh. Police officers sometimes demand money from families in exchange for helping with the legal process. When families cannot pay, juveniles often suffer longer detention and unfair treatment.

One juvenile shared how his family was asked to pay a bribe in order to secure a charge sheet. Because his family could not afford it, he remained detained:

“When I was in police custody, the officers demanded 15,000 Taka from my family, telling them they would provide me with a charge sheet if the money was given. My family was unable to raise this amount, and perhaps the plaintiff paid the officers more money, which is why I was eventually sent to the Child Development Center.” (Narrative from Bengali)

Another juvenile, a mechanic accused in a women and child repression case, described how the plaintiff gave money to the police to keep him locked up:

“The plaintiff gave money to the police officer to make my case stronger, ensuring that I couldn’t get out. Because of this, I have been here for 2 years and 10 months.” (Narrative from Bengali)

These stories show how bribery allows some people to influence the legal process while others, especially poor families, suffer. Corruption reinforces systemic inequality, as justice becomes contingent on financial ability. This violates the principle of fair and equal protection under the law.

JUVENILES FACED THE CHALLENGES IN THE COURT

Lack of Legal Representation

Out of the 19 juveniles in the study, 11 reported not receiving legal help on time. This delay affected their cases and left many feeling ignored and unaware of their rights. Without a lawyer, they faced longer stays in detention and did not know how to defend themselves.

An 18-year-old male explained how his family’s financial situation kept him from getting legal support. He has been in detention for almost three years without a lawyer:

“My family was unable to arrange a lawyer for my case because my father is a mango seller and my mother is a housewife, and they couldn’t afford the lawyer’s fee. Because of this, I still don’t have a lawyer, and I’ve been in the Child Development Center for 2 years and 10 months. Many children in the center received their charge sheets after a few months, but I am still here, and I don’t know when I will be freed.” (Narrative from Bengali)

An 18-year-old female also described being without legal representation. Her case hardly moved forward during her time in detention:

Challenges Faced by Juveniles in The Juvenile Justice System of Bangladesh: An Empirical Study

“My family did not provide a lawyer for me. During my 7 months in the Child Development Center, I only went for a hearing one time.” (Narrative from Bengali)

These stories show that many juveniles do not get timely legal aid, mainly because of financial problems. This lack of support leads to longer detention, delays in court hearings, and leaves juveniles uncertain about their future.

Court Delays and Treatment

The court process for juveniles in Bangladesh is often slow and poorly managed. Many juveniles face long waits for hearings and receive little attention during court proceedings. These delays and lack of engagement make them feel forgotten and ignored by the justice system.

One juvenile explained how, even after being called for several hearings, he was barely involved in the process:

“I received 4 calls for hearings (on Dec 1, 2024; Jan 10, 2025; Feb 12, 2025; and March 10, 2025). However, I only attended two of these hearings. When I went to the court, I wasn’t asked anything. I was just there to sign papers, with no real discussion or any opportunity to speak. I didn’t feel like my side was being heard at all.”

Another juvenile, in Case 6, shared how little progress was made in his case even after months of detention:

“I have been in the Child Development Center for 7 months, and during this time, I have only been to court once. After that, I’ve just been staying here, with no updates on my case. I don’t know what is happening with my case or when I will be released.” (Narrative from Bengali)

A third juvenile described how court delays and irregular police attendance severely impacted his case:

“I was arrested, and it took about 6 months before my first court hearing. In 2 years and 10 months, I only appeared in court 3 times. For the other hearings, the police didn’t show up, so I couldn’t attend. I didn’t understand much of what was happening in the courtroom. There were so many delays, and I felt like just another case to them, not a child who needed help.” (Narrative from Bengali)

Juveniles described missed hearings, long gaps between court dates, and passive participation when they did attend. Police often failed to escort them to court.

CHALLENGES FACED BY JUVENILES IN THE CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Living Conditions and Medical Facilities

Overcrowding in juvenile detention centers is a major issue in Bangladesh. The Child Development Center (Boys) in Tongi, for example, was designed to house 300 juveniles but held 489 (Institutional Record, CDC Tongi, 2025).. This extreme overcrowding causes a shortage of space, beds, and basic facilities, making daily life very difficult. The building itself is old and poorly maintained, which adds to the discomfort. One juvenile from Case 19 described, “There were too many children in the center. I was assigned a spot in a room with 10 others.” Such crowded conditions take a serious toll on the juveniles’ physical and emotional well-being, making it harder for them to feel safe or focus on rehabilitation.

Access to medical care in these centers is also a serious concern. Juveniles often face long delays before receiving any treatment, even when they are clearly unwell. This neglect puts their health at risk and adds to their stress. A 12-year-old female shared her experience, saying, “I started feeling sick, but it took a month for the staff to take me to see a doctor. I was worried, but when I finally saw a doctor, I was given medicine, and they took care of me. It felt like it shouldn’t have taken so long, though.” This example shows how basic healthcare is not provided in a timely manner, leaving juveniles to suffer longer than necessary. The lack of proper medical support is another sign of the system’s failure to protect and care for children in custody.

Education and Vocational Training

The lack of proper education in juvenile detention centers creates serious problems for young people who want to continue learning. Many juveniles bring their school materials with them, hoping to study, but they are often left without teachers or guidance. This leads to frustration and a fear of falling behind in their studies. A 17-year-old female shared, “Before coming here, I was in college, and I am from a science background. I brought my books here, but I cannot read them because I don’t have any instructor or teacher to guide me. I feel like I am forgetting everything I studied before.” This shows how the absence of structured education prevents motivated juveniles from progressing, weakening their chances of rebuilding their lives after release.

Vocational training in these centers also falls short. While some juveniles are offered basic skill training, it often lacks quality and real-life usefulness. In Case 18, an 18-year-old male explained, “I have been learning electrical work here for the last 6 months, but I’m not confident that I will be able to use this skill outside. Since I worked in construction before, I would say that this skill is just basic.” His words highlight how the training provided is often too limited to help juveniles find stable jobs later. Without strong, practical education and job skills, many young people leave detention centers unprepared for the challenges of life outside, making reintegration difficult.

Challenges Faced by Juveniles in The Juvenile Justice System of Bangladesh: An Empirical Study

Mistreatment or Violence

Mistreatment and violence inside juvenile detention centers remain serious concerns, often taking the form of physical punishment, verbal abuse, and exposure to peer violence. Many juveniles report being humiliated and called names, which deepens their sense of frustration and isolation. These abusive behaviors are especially harmful when children are placed with others based on the severity of their charges, which can create a hostile and unsafe environment. In Case 1, a juvenile described being repeatedly called a "kidnapper" by others, which eventually led to a physical altercation where two girls were injured. Instead of addressing the root causes of the conflict, the response from the center was harsh and punitive—the counselor tied the juvenile's hands and legs for three days. "It was so painful that I couldn't move, and no one came to help," the juvenile said (Narrative from Bengali). This example reflects how mistreatment by both staff and peers can lead to further trauma, showing the urgent need for reforms that prioritize the dignity, safety, and mental health of children in detention.

Challenges Faced by Juveniles in the Justice System (According to probation officers)

Juveniles in Bangladesh face multiple challenges during their journey through the justice system. According to interviews with four probation officers—two from the Child Development Center (Boys), Tongi, and two from the Child Development Center (Girls), Konabari—these difficulties arise both in court processes and while staying in correctional facilities. Additionally, two Child Rights Police Officers highlighted further obstacles encountered by juveniles during police custody and interrogation.

Probation officers reported that most juveniles come from low-income families and lack the financial capacity to hire lawyers. As a result, many remain in child development centers for long periods—often 2 to 3 years—without their trials being concluded. The lack of timely court hearings is a major issue. Police officers frequently fail to transport juveniles to court on scheduled dates, causing missed hearings and further delays. The probation officer at the boys' center explained that this problem is particularly severe for male juveniles. Meanwhile, a probation officer at the girls' center emphasized that court delays are also the most pressing concern for female juveniles. Probation Officers also added that juveniles often face mistreatment during arrest. Many are not informed of the reasons for their detention and sometimes experience verbal or physical abuse during interrogation. Within the correctional centers, male juveniles face overcrowding as a serious challenge. Although the Tongi center was built to house 300 children, it currently holds around 500, which strains resources and creates stressful conditions for both staff and residents. For female juveniles, space is not the main issue, but other concerns persist. Approximately 80% of the girls are victims of sexual violence and require urgent medical and psychological support. However, due to delays in legal procedures, they often wait a long time for necessary treatment. Safety concerns also exist, as some girls report feeling insecure due to the open space behind the center and occasional threats from other inmates. Education is another area of concern. Both male and female juveniles struggle to focus on learning due to their stressful surroundings and emotional distress. Juvenile violence within the centers is also common, and limited rehabilitation programs make reintegration into society difficult.

DISCUSSIONS

This study highlights several critical challenges faced by juveniles within the justice system of Bangladesh. Overcrowding in detention centers, particularly in facilities like the Child Development Center (Boys), Tongi, severely affects the physical and mental well-being of children. Staying in cramped, poorly maintained spaces without adequate resources increases stress, discomfort, and feelings of neglect among juveniles. Additionally, the lack of proper medical care delays treatment for even basic health problems, further endangering the well-being of detained children. Beyond poor living conditions, many juveniles reported being mistreated by both peers and staff. Incidents of verbal abuse, punishments such as physical restraint, and exposure to violence inside the centers create an environment of fear and insecurity. These conditions clearly violate the principle of rehabilitation and raise serious concerns about the psychological harm inflicted on children in state custody (Hossain, 2020).

Another major issue revealed in this study is the lack of access to timely legal support and fair court proceedings. Many juveniles come from low-income families and are unable to hire lawyers, resulting in extended detention periods while their trials are delayed. Some children remain in custody for over a year without a final verdict, which reflects systemic inefficiencies and a lack of accountability. Police misconduct during arrest and interrogation—such as physical abuse, intimidation, and failure to inform juveniles of their rights—adds another layer of injustice. Moreover, education and vocational training inside the centers are often inadequate, leaving juveniles without the skills or confidence needed for reintegration. These findings suggest that despite laws aimed at child-friendly justice, actual practices fall short, and reforms are urgently needed to align the system with international standards that prioritize children's rights, dignity, and rehabilitation (Abrams, Jordan & Montero, 2018).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study highlights several serious problems in Bangladesh's juvenile justice system, based on the real experiences of detained children and probation officers. Although laws like the Children Act 2013 were designed to protect children and create a more child-friendly justice process, they are not being applied properly in practice. As a result, many juveniles suffer from mistreatment during arrest, long delays in court proceedings, a lack of legal help, and poor living and rehabilitation conditions in correctional centers.

Challenges Faced by Juveniles in The Juvenile Justice System of Bangladesh: An Empirical Study

Because this study only includes two Child Development Centres and a small group of participants, the findings should not be seen as representing the entire system—but they do offer important insights. Still, the evidence makes it clear that reforms are urgently required. If these issues remain unaddressed, the justice system will continue to harm the very children it is meant to protect, instead of helping them grow, heal, and reintegrate into society. Legal representation must be improved by establishing district-level legal aid cells specifically for juveniles, staffed by trained public defenders, and by partnering with bar associations and NGOs to ensure immediate legal counsel at the time of arrest. Court efficiency should be prioritized through the introduction of dedicated juvenile benches with time-bound mandates to resolve pending cases and by utilizing virtual court hearings to reduce delays caused by transport or resource gaps. Police handling of juveniles should be reformed by integrating mandatory child protection training for police officers and forming special units assigned to juvenile cases, alongside enforcing compliance with existing detention protocols through randomized third-party audits. Rehabilitation programs need to be strengthened by allocating funds for qualified educators and vocational trainers in CDCs, and by building partnerships with private sector organizations to provide employment-linked skill training. Medical and psychological support must also be enhanced by deploying on-site medical teams and ensuring 24-hour emergency response in CDCs, along with offering trauma-informed counseling, especially for survivors of gender-based violence. So, institutional accountability should be increased by creating an independent oversight body with statutory powers to investigate abuse and monitor conditions, and by introducing whistleblower protections for staff and juveniles so they can report misconduct safely.

REFERENCES

- 1) Abrams, L. S., Jordan, S. P., & Montero, L. A. (2018). What is a juvenile? A cross-national comparison of youth justice systems. *Youth Justice*, 18(2), 111-130.
- 2) Ehrhard-Dietzel, S., Barton, W. H., & Myers, D. L. (2017). Juvenile justice systems and the rights of the child: Trends in international human rights standards and implications for reform. *Child & Youth Services*, 38(2), 99–118.
- 3) Ferdousi, N. (2020). Comparing reforms of juvenile justice in Bangladesh and Malaysia. *Substantive Justice International Journal of Law*, 3(1), 15–35.
- 4) Ferdousi, N. (2020). Justice for children in Bangladesh: Legal and ethical issues. *Bangladesh Journal of Bioethics*, 11(1), 35-39.
- 5) Hossain, A. (2020). Juvenile mistreatment in correctional facilities: A systemic study. *South Asia Legal Journal*, 9(4), 110-127.
- 6) Hossain, M. (2020, August 19). Juvenile development centres or torture cells. *Dhaka Tribune*. Retrieved from:
- 7) Kabir, M. A. (2023). Legal compendium on juvenile justice system in Bangladesh: Pathway for upliftment. *Barishal University Law Journal*, 1, 49–62.
- 8) Kim, B., Lin, W. C. A., & Lambert, E. G. (2015). Comparative/international research on juvenile justice issues: A review of juvenile justice specialty journals. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 26(4), 545–562.
- 9) Nazim, M. F., Amjad, S., & Shahid, A. (2024). Juvenile justice reform: A comparative study of international practices. *Pakistan Islamicus: An International Journal of Islamic & Social Sciences*, 4(1), 42–53.
- 10) Paternoster, R., & Iovanni, L. (1989). The labeling perspective and delinquency: An elaboration of the theory and an assessment of the evidence. *Justice Quarterly*, 6(3), 359-394.
- 11) Sayed, M. (2024). The secondary victimization of juveniles: An examination of juvenile justice systems in South Asia. *International Journal of Child Protection*, 12(2), 118–135.
- 12) Shoemaker, D. J., & Wolfe, T. W. (2016). *Juvenile justice: A reference handbook*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.
- 13) Siegel, L. J., & Tracy, P. E. (2006). *Juvenile delinquency: Theory, practice, and law* (10th ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.
- 14) Sultana, R., & Dey, S. R. (2020). Children of the Tongi Child Development Centre (CDC): Their experiences before detention. *Social Sciences Review*, 37(1), 255–275.
- 15) Tanvir, S., & Nipa, M. (2021). The impact of overcrowding on juvenile rehabilitation in Bangladesh. *International Journal of Youth Studies*, 5(3), 80-97.
- 16) Tanvir, S., & Nipa, S. I. (2021). Juvenile justice system of Bangladesh: A legal analysis of the backdrops of the justice system for children in conflict with the law. SSRN.



There is an Open Access article, distributed under the term of the Creative Commons Attribution – Non Commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits remixing, adapting and building upon the work for non-commercial use, provided the original work is properly cited.