

# Snippets from Girl Offender's Experience under Institutional Care within West Bengal

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## **Abstract:**

The present study proposes to focus on girls who have come in conflict with law and have been placed under correctional facilities or special homes. It discusses the nature of experience girl offenders have under institutional care in West Bengal.

## **Introduction**

The present study proposes to focus on girls who have come in conflict with law and have been placed under correctional facilities or special homes. Juveniles' as those who are yet complete eighteen years of age and are alleged to have committed an offence punishable under the Indian Penal Code and Special Laws are also considered. The proposed area of research is in the state of West Bengal.

A review of the existing literature on female offenders with special reference to girl delinquency is undertaken. After reviewing some of the available literature, certain issue or themes have surfaced. Firstly, there is an obvious disparity in the number of recorded crimes for boys and girls, this prompts a lot of theorists to question the reasons for it, and do boys commit more crimes than girls? Explanations on delinquency has been primarily from the boy perspective, so questions arise as to whether these explanations can be used to understand delinquency among girls. Secondly, when girls come within the domain of the juvenile justice system, what is the nature of this interaction? Thinkers opine that though girls commit less serious offences than boys, when they do commit serious offences, especially sexual offences, they are treated more harshly than boys. This is because the social control over girls is more severe than boys. For offenders are seen not only transgressing societal norms but also gender norms that have been fixed for them. This is even more evident for girls who are seen as violating their image of relative helplessness and vulnerability by committing offences punishable by law. Thirdly, the Juvenile justice System is seen as a predominantly male domain. From the police to officials who deal with juveniles. Stereotypes about appropriate feminine conduct could influence judgements about the girl. It has to be kept in mind that the juvenile justice system does not function in vacuum, it is an extension of the society itself. How law is interpreted and used to provide judgements would be subjected to the pre-existing belief system or ideologies inherent in society. The important question to be asked is whether the justice process is gendered or not.

Heidensohn<sup>1</sup> addresses the issue of gender gap in crimes that are recorded. Women account for a very low fraction of the total offending as a result, very little attention is paid to it. Moreover, all previous understanding of delinquency has been based on boy delinquency and an 'add girls and stir' approach has

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<sup>1</sup>Heidensohn F, Silvestri, M, (2012), Gender and Crime: Oxford handbook of Criminology, pp 37 – 369.

been undertaken. Even when the reasons for girl delinquency have been taken up, the focus has been on their biological and psychological dispositions.

Zahn, Agnew, Browne <sup>2</sup> are of the opinion that though girls have been involved in delinquent acts like boys, studies on them have been neglected until recently. Agnew discusses how the mainstream theories of delinquency like Strain, Control, Social learning and integrated theories, were developed having the male delinquent in mind. So there has been a need to develop theories that explain female delinquency and for doing so one needs to understand the social positions that men and women occupy in society. There has been a recent trend of an increase in arrests of female offenders, the question asked here is why? Is this indicative of the fact that girls underlying behaviour is changing or has there been a need to control and regulate girls' behaviour.

Moving onto the reasons for girl delinquency, they consider a range of family factors, the effect of family structure, family processes and criminal behaviour on the part of the parent. Apart from this, areas of physical and sexual abuse have also been considered. Any previous experience of abuse often lead girls into the path of delinquency.

Scherer <sup>3</sup> adds that the impact of peers and romantic partners are known to influence girls more than boys. Cross gender relationships fosters the female delinquency. The importance of school cannot be negated for it is within school that a lot of these peer relations develop. Along with this, academic achievement in school also needs to be taken into account.

Daly and Lind <sup>4</sup> discuss some important themes in this respect. They ask if theories used to describe boys' offending can be extended to girls, what could be the real reason for which there is a gender gap in recorded crimes, one has to take the perspective of the people belonging to different ethnicities for they feel that mainstream criminology was essentially the voice of white, economically well off men. Finally, they express the need to look at first-hand accounts of women and their experiences. There is a need to think of crimes committed by women in a more critical manner. Some very important questions are raised in their following discussion, they ask what higher rates of arrests for women mean? Do higher arrests mean a higher number of crimes committed by women? Can this by any means reflect a shift in how the criminal justice system deals with crimes. It would be interesting to see how the justice system treats offenders who are girls or women. Steward's <sup>5</sup> study about remand decisions in 21<sup>st</sup> century London saw that minor girls were more harshly dealt with in cases of minor sexual misconduct on the part of the girl.

Walkate<sup>6</sup> discusses how the juvenile justice process could often be male dominated. This would have an obvious impact on how girl offenders are approached and dealt with. Morris points that men handle the justice system. Even though there has been small changes in pattern of professionals involved, it largely remains male dominated. Men occupy positions of power. The question they ask is – whose interest is best served by the system? And as a consequence, whose interest is served less.

### Methodology

A mixed method approach was undertaken to conduct the present study. It is primarily a qualitative study. While girl children who enter the juvenile justice system are the key respondents, the study also attempts

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<sup>2</sup>Zahn,M, Agnew,R , Browne, A,(1966), The Delinquent Girl.

<sup>3</sup> Hoyt and Scherer. (1998), 'Female Juvenile Delinquency: Misunderstood by the Juvenile Justice System, Neglected by the Social Sciences, Springer, Volume 22(1) pp 81 - 107.

<sup>4</sup>Lind, (1973), Judicial Enforcement of the Female Sex Role: The Family Court and the Female Delinquent, Issues in Criminology, Women, Crime and Criminology, pp 51 – 69.

<sup>5</sup>Steward k, (2006), 'Gender Considerations in Remand Decision-Making', pp 249 – 265.

<sup>6</sup>Walkate, S, (2003), Gender, Crime and Criminal Justice, pp 10 – 11.

to understand how these children tend to interact with the juvenile justice system. As such, different stake holders of the system have also been included in the study. These include, members of Juvenile Justice Boards of different districts, superintendents, probation officers, counsellors and others staffs of government Child care institutions and lawyers who interact with such children on a regular basis. The study has been conducted across different districts of the state of West Bengal. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews with the use of interview schedules. The schedules comprised of closed, open and contingent questions. Since girl children who have a come in conflict with law are at the centre of the study, permission had to be taken to visit different child care institutions where such children are placed.

### Analysis and Discussion

Before moving onto the crux of the discussion an attempt has been made to provide a picture of how gender might play a role in the nature of offences committed by children. For this purpose, the NCRB, Crime in India reports from 2015 to 2022 has been observed. At first the overall rate of crime committed by juveniles during the stipulated period has been considered. In order to study any observable differences in offences committed by girls and boys, the offences have been divided into IPC and SLL crimes. Then a gender and age segregation has been done for these two broad categories of offences. The data is at the national level. The three age categories are below twelve years of age, above twelve to below sixteen years of age and finally, above sixteen and below eighteen years of age. The three gender categories are boys, girls and the newly introduced transgender category. The rate has been consistent over the years with the rate being within 6.7 to 7.8. 2016 recorded the highest rate with 7.8, 2020 the lowest with 6.7. Rate of crime has increased consistently in the post Covid period. The two states with consistently high incidence of offences by juveniles are Chattisgarh (22.4 in 2022) and Madhya Pradesh (24.5 in 2016). The state with the lowest rate of crimes by juveniles is Manipur (0.2 in 2019) IPC and SLL offences in India from 2015 to 2022 has been considered. These offences are divided across gender and age categories

The below 12 years of age category contributes the least in terms of offences reported against the other two age categories. Across gender, numbers skew towards boys than girls. For example, in the year 2019 and 2021, 23 boys were reported for murder whereas for the same offence only 1 case was reported against a girl in 2021. The maximum theft cases reported against boys is in the year 2016 (207), for the same year, the number of theft cases reported against girls is only 15. Offences like murder and theft have seen a decrease over the year 2015 to 2022.

The overall offences reported against children in the second category (above 12 to below 16 years of age) are significantly higher than the first. However girls make little contribution to this increase. In 2022, certain offences like murder, attempt to murder, grievous hurt, causing death by negligence has risen whereas an offence like theft has witnessed a decrease. Here too, the gender disparity is quite evident. 296 cases of murder registered against boys in 2022, this against only 3 cases registered against girls. 405 cases of attempt to murder reported against boys while only one case reported against a girl.

The final age category accounts for the maximum number of cases reported against children. Murder cases reported against boys in the year 2016 was 873 while for the same offence; only 28 cases were reported against girls. Offences like murder, attempt to murder, attempt to commit culpable homicide, rape, kidnapping and abduction, theft, riot, causing death by negligence, causing injury by rash driving has been on the rise. The offences committed by girls in age category higher than the two but no match for those committed by boys. Only 5 cases of kidnapping and abduction reported against girls compared to 874 in case of boys. 967 cases of murder against boys were reported in 2022, compared to 17 against girls.

It has been observed that there has been a significant increase in certain SLL crimes over the years. However the increase is due to the fact that the involvement of male children has been significantly more compared to female children. For example, if the number of POCSO cases are to be considered, in 2015. Number of POCSO cases reported against boy under the age of twelve years has been 5; this number has gone up significantly in 2022 with 41 such cases reported against boys. In general, this category of children tend to commit more offences than the below twelve years of age category. Some offences for this age category have only gone up. However the boy's contribution here has been significantly higher than girls. In 2015, 31 cases were reported against boys under the Arms Act, this number has gone up to 49 in 2022. The most significant increase in offences committed by boys under this age category is observed under POCSO Act. The number was 150 in 2015; this number has increased to 648 in 2022. The number of cases registered under girls was 1 in 2015 and 1 in 2022. This age category has the maximum number of cases reported under it. Offences reported under Prohibition Act, POCSO Act and Information and Technology Act has been significant. However, here too it is more a male phenomenon. 99 cases under Prohibition Act was reported against boys in 2015, this went up to 271 in 2022. Under POCSO, 337 cases were reported for boys and in 2022 this number went up to 1878.

Girl children interviewed came from small family units comprising of parents, siblings and in some cases grandparents. Joint or extended families are rare and even when children are a part of such families; they live in the same house but do not share the same kitchen. While half reported good relations with parents and siblings, the other half reported being exposed to some form of abuse or another. This abuse can range from emotional neglect to physical and even sexual abuse. If the girl has not experienced abuse herself, she has definitely been witnessed to it within the family. Girls have reported discord among parents and siblings within the family set up. Lack of familial support plays a crucial role. For example Rita (name changed) has been placed under institutional care after she was held responsible for the murder of her own mother. She mentioned how her dynamics changed the day her little brother died. Her mother considered her responsible for her brother's death for she was not willing to share love and affection with anyone else. Her brother had died of suffocation while sleeping but her mother never really got out of the trauma. There would be regular conflicts between the girl and her mother. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of April, 2022, in the midst of a heated argument, she pushed her mother, who hit her head and died of internal bleeding. She was brought to the Howrah home on the 28<sup>th</sup> of April, 2022.

Sunita is a sixteen year old girl who has been placed under the Howrah CCI. She has been accused to be an accomplice in the murder of her mother's friend. Sunita during her interview revealed how her father would physically abuse her on several occasions. Initially her mother would not believe it but one day she saw her husband molesting their daughter. Sunita informed me that her mother had asked her father to leave their home and he did. However, he frequently visited them and asked for money.

Most girls interviewed reported good relations with peers. However, when social workers, counsellors and probation officers were asked, they mentioned how most of these girl children came into conflict with law because of bad peer influence. Crimes of heinous nature are committed in groups and peer influence plays a significant role. On the other hand, if children are unable to socialize well with individuals of their age, their always remains a possibility that they are emotional in capable or have some form of psychological short coming. How peer influence plays a significant role can be explained through this example. Pinki and Rina (both names changed) are currently under Cooch Behar CCI. They are both originally from Delhi who came to Kolkata with three boys they had befriended. All three of them are from the same neighbourhood. The prime accused is an adult and is in a correctional facility. The two girls were

accomplices in the murder of the adult boy's maternal uncle while grievously injuring his wife. The act was committed in a group and the boys had convinced these girls to come to Kolkata.

It has been observed from the field that girl children who came in conflict with law and are placed under institutional care are within thirteen to eighteen years of age. Most went to conventional schools barring 2 who attended Madrasa. There are cases of children who had to drop out of school because parents did not support education in conventional schools. There is also a case where the child herself has dropped out of school because of lack of interest in studies. Most children who went to school were under performers with one or two exceptions. When asked the reason for under performance in academics, children noted lack of guidance and unfavourable conditions at home as major factors. Most girls wished to continue with their education.

The present study has girl children coming from different economic background engaging in non-conforming behaviour. Girl children from affluent families to those who live below in poverty have been found to come in conflict with law. So idea that children coming from a particular economic stature engage in un-lawful activities is not acceptable at least in the present study. Children coming from economically sound families often lack in care and subject the child to neglect. This results in adjustment issue for the child. The child then turns to comfort outside home and end up engaging in non-conforming behaviour. Children coming from economically disadvantaged backgrounds do not have a safe environment growing up and their deprivation and vulnerability make them fall in wrong company or seek money through easy but unfair means.

In order to understand the generic pattern of interaction children had with the juvenile justice system within West Bengal, the NCRB, Crime in India Report (2015 to 2022) was taken up. This discussion then gave way to the more specific concern of the present study, how girl offenders or those who came in conflict with law interacted the juvenile justice system. It has been observed that total number of children apprehended has seen a steady increase from 2015 to 2023 with minor fluctuations during the Covid period (2020 to 2022). Though the data for the number of children apprehended is available, no aggregation is made based on gender, nature of offence or apprehensions at the district level.

The number of children sent to detention has also increased considerably, for example if one looks at the data available on the number of children sent to special home, it was 15 in 2015 and the number stands at 135 in 2022. Another major limitation of the state level data is the lack of consistency in the type of data provided across the years. It thus becomes difficult to draw a comparable picture of all the categories.

One of the major areas of concern according to the juvenile justice indicator is that the more children are placed under detention, the more likely that they will be deprived of liberty. The number furnished for the year 2023 is least encouraging considering that the total number of children placed under institutional care and special home is as high as 1109. Institutionalization should be seen as the last resort and for the minimum amount of time.

The number of acquittals has gone up from 70 in 2015 to 126 in 2022. This is a good indication even though the numbers are dependent on the total number children who are apprehended. However, what is concerning is the fact that the percentage of children found guilty has also increased. The number of cases pending disposal has been consistent over the years (2015 to 2022), this number however has gone up in 2023 to 13088.

It has also been observed that the number of children who are imprisoned from 2015 to 2022. There is inconsistency in the data provided, however it may be observed that the number as increased considerably in 2022. This could be due to several factors, the most important being the nature of offence that children

are now engaging in that requires imprisonment, the fact that the juvenile justice system is treating certain offences with severity etc. Increase in the number of imprisonment over of the years is an important indicator of juvenile justice in the state and country.

Another observation made is that the number of cases that the Juvenile Justice Boards of different districts of West Bengal have quashed over the years. The numbers have been dwindling over the years which may be indicative of why cases remain pending with them and reveal certain areas of inefficacy on the part of the JJBs.

A detailed interaction with different JJBs brings certain grey areas to light. When certain offences involve a long list of witnesses, the examination of such witnesses take a long time. When witnesses appear before them, lawyers are not ready to cross-examine them. Witnesses get discouraged and do not appear. The police take time to prepare and submit reports. Private lawyers take time with the cases because they see their clients as a source of income. Families of offenders have a general disbelief towards the lawyers government provide them. They feel that only spending money assures their child is taken care of. Lack of legal knowledge only makes things worse. When members of the Board try to educate them, a different picture is presented to them by lawyers. Only a very small proportion of parents resort to government lawyers only because they cannot afford a private one. After receiving bails, children and their care givers seldom follow up the cases. When lawyers are asked about the reasons for cases lingering, they blame the strict bureaucratic structure that the members of the JJB follow. The fact that each case is unique and that some cases can be settled much faster is rarely followed. The same long procedure is followed for petty, serious and heinous crimes.

Certain important areas of interaction between girl offenders and stake holders of the juvenile justice system were taken into consideration. These were, awareness about legal provisions, extent of participation in the process of justice, duration of stay, frequency of communication with members of the family or guardians, basic amenities provided, quality of infrastructure at their disposal, meals , quality of health care provided, education , extra-curricular activities, recreation, skill development, access to complaint mechanism and independent inspections.

Girl children are asked about whether they are informed about the reason for their involvement with the JJ system. Most girls mentioned that they were informed by the police, members of JJBs or lawyers. But they were only mentioned why they were brought there and nothing more. None had a clear idea about the law and the legal provisions. None knew about their rights. This unknown created a sense of uncertainty and fear and there have been instances of girls trying to flee institutions because other girls there had convinced them that they would remain there for the rest of their lives. Girls have informed that they are allowed to take an active part in the proceedings of the Board or court. In fact their opinions are taken when deciding meals and activities within the institution. They are made members of the Home Management Committee. The duration of stay for girl children interviewed range from a month to three years. Prolonged stay within the Institution could be due to several factors. For example , failure to find a suitable guardian under whose care the girl may be placed, several incidents of parents remaining in correctional facility, children who crossed Bangladesh could not be returned unless their country send valid proof of citizenship ( this takes time) and many more. Children are allowed to communicate with parents or other members of the family. They can come and meet them physically or speak to them via phone. This is only possible if families are willing to keep ties with the children. There are instances where families have severed ties with the child. All basic amenities are provided in all three CCI visited. The quality is also taken care of. Clothes, basic sanitary requirements are taken care of. Efforts are made to

improve infrastructural facilities, and to maintain health and hygiene. Washrooms are cleaned everyday by people allotted these jobs, premises are kept clean. On an average 10 to 12 girls are placed in a single large room and 30 girls in a dormitory. One CCI has recently renovated and extended their building, increased the number of their toilets and introduced toilets for children with special needs. Kitchen and dining spaces are cleaned regularly. Separate rooms for studying and recreational activities. Diet is fixed based on nutritional needs of girls after consultation with doctors. These are regularly revised. They are served food four times a day. Special meals arranged for special occasions. Meals are of sufficient quantity but mediocre in quality. Assigned doctors make regular visits to the institutions, access to nearby government hospital and psychiatric treatment facility. Round the clock para-medical staff is available. Height and weight measured once a month. Sick rooms used when children do not keep well. Change in diet for certain children when they suffer from nutritional deficiency.

Teachers are under staffed, positions lying vacant, one teacher teaching several subjects at the primary level. One institution has a primary school within its premise; others send their children to nearby government school. This facility is made available to CNCP children, CLL children are not sent anywhere. May be sent only after special permission granted to them by the Board. No facility for children above primary to high school. The teachers are not competent enough to teach specialised subjects. Most books are in Bengali and a few in English, making it difficult for those who are from Hindi medium schools. NIOS has been approach but is not functional till date. Non-governmental organizations recruit teachers who teach basics. Computer and English classes arranged in all institutions. There is a long list of extra-curricular activities arranged for girls in all the institutions. This involves making jewellery from beads to cooking, dance, drama, recitation among others.

Recreational activities included in- door and out- door games, watching movies, storytelling, reading books etc. Skill development included certificate course in cosmetics (hair and make-up), printing press, computer application, spoken English, tailoring and mehendi art. 'Moner Kotha Baksho', placed at a location where girls have access to it. They have used it time to time; sometimes they have directly communicated with the Super or counsellor at the Home any grievances they have had. Their grievances have been addressed and resolved. Regular inspections conducted by different governmental agencies in charge of child protection.

Interaction is essentially a two way process. So it becomes equally important to understand the problems that other stake holders may face while interacting with children within the system.

Members of the juvenile justice boards (JJB).

Lack of legal knowledge on the part of parents and guardians about their rights. Negative perception about the legal system. Lack of trust by parents and care givers on members of JJB. Private lawyers treating the Juvenile justice system in the same way as in case of adults. They need to be trained in sensitization programs and provided a clear understanding about the rationale of the JJ Act. Lack of agreement and coordination between the Principal Magistrate and Chairperson of CWC because of their different perception about juvenile jurisprudence. This makes inter-departmental coordination difficult. Most JJBs have made efforts to make the procedure as child friendly as possible. Special care needs to be taken in case of girl offenders especially when they are sent back home.

Superintendents of CCIs

No separate training to deal with children before joining office. One training provided under Vatsalya Mission. One needs to learn about the role as one performs it. Issues pertaining to children need to be dealt with care. No training about the JJ Act, 2015. However, ICPS staff provided with regular training. Being

understaffed was a major drawback. Staffs lack empathy. The nature of job is such that it cannot be treated in a mechanical manner. Staffs needs to be sensitized about children's needs and issues. Regular appraisal of their performance need to be initiated. Better disbursement of funds will ensure more facility. Limited funds require fund management and thus need to be channelized accordingly. Girl children come with emotional distress and nutritional deficiencies, so their well-being becomes most important. Cases of MTP are many in number with complications so one needs to be exceedingly careful. Safety is a major concern, especially when hiring trainers and staff. In all the CCI visited, every corner of the vicinity has been brought under surveillance and interaction of children with staff is monitored.

The girls who come in contact with the juvenile justice system and are placed under institutional care may come from different backgrounds but share a similar space in terms of their shared lived experiences. Though the law states different housing arrangements for CNCP (Child in Need of Care and Protection) and CCL (Children in Conflict with Law) children, CCI provide separate living space but all other activities are performed in a common space shared by both categories of children. The CCIs then provides a solid ground for discrimination among children. Placing CNCP and CCL together put both categories of children at risk which may be detrimental for their development. There are instances where CNCP children label CCL as offenders, the labelling is worse if one comes from another country. There are instances where CCL have threatened and invoked fear among CNCP children if they do not abide by their rules. CNCP children are given access to education and extracurricular activities outside the boundaries of the institutions while no such provisions are made for CCL (granted only special permissions). CCL children feel they are meted a differential treatment by the juvenile justice system itself. The law also states that different types of CCL should be segregated based on their offences and age. This is rarely practiced. If children committing serious offences are placed with those who have committed heinous offences, there is a sense of insecurity in both the categories. Labelling and discrimination is prevalent not just among children but also among staff. The staff label and call names which only encourage bullies within the Homes to do the same to other children. Most girl children lack motivation of studying. Education is rarely their top priority. This could be due to several factors. Firstly, most children before they enter the system are already under performers in school so they fail to see the importance of studying. Moreover, the institution fails to provide them with the basic infrastructure or access to formal education. Teachers who come to institutions to teach only provide basics which become redundant and boring for those who are either in middle school or high secondary level. Books are not sufficient. In order to rehabilitate and reintegrate them back to society, the system grossly overlooks the important role education plays in it. Education should not be an option but mandatory. Especially as the Right to Education Act is in place. NIOS has been approached but the classes are yet to begin. Only three successful cases of reintegration and one foster care success has been reported. Children who come in conflict with law are seldom accepted under foster care which poses are serious limitation. Lack of positive role models, family environment encouraging conventional roles keep these girls unmotivated and without inspiration. Girls generally have a detached temperament when they enter the system. It takes a lot to gain their trust and have them open up to others. This is why the emphasis on the part of the stake holders is empathy and compassion.

Girl's who were placed under institutional care during the pandemic mentioned the following provisions

1. Social distancing was exercised, so the number of girls in a single room was reduced.
2. Vaccinations were provided.
3. Nutrition was taken care of. Immunity boosting items were included in diet.
4. All lessons were delivered in the online mode.



5. Staff worked in 15 days rotational shift. Super remained within the premise of the Home.
6. JJB sessions happened in online mode. Social workers came physically on a rotational basis.

## Conclusion

There has been a steady increase in offences committed by children. The above sixteen to below eighteen years of age category accounts for the most number of offences across the three age categories. The increase in offences committed by children is primarily contributed by boys over girls. There is a definite increase in offences committed by boys, whereas the offences committed by girls have remained consistent. There is a substantial increase in POCSO cases among boys below twelve years of age. The NCRB data has limited state and district level data in terms of age and gender segregation. Reasons for offences among girls are not one but a multitude of factors whose complex interplay results in offences. There are individual, social, economic and situational factors that play important roles in girl offences. The Juvenile Justice Indicators have been used to gauge the nature of interaction girls have with the juvenile justice system. It has been observed that in respect of indicators like separation from adults and contact with parents and family, independent inspection mechanism and internal complaint committee, the system performs fairly well. However, state level data pertaining to pendency of cases, number of children sent to CCIs, number of cases quashed by Board, juveniles imprisoned, the system does not perform that well. The basic amenities and infrastructure are in place, though some JJBs and institutions would perform better with staff and financial support, girls are provided with basic amenities though food quality could improve. Special emphasis is laid on health, hygiene and sanitation. Despite a wide of extracurricular activities, skill development programmes, education needs a serious consideration. Career counselling, future prospects, systematic rehabilitation and re-integration plan needs to be in place. There is a need to boost their moral and instil confidence in them if we want them to successfully return back to mainstream society.

JJB and CCIs have taken considerable steps to make the process as child friendly as possible but girl children have to be treated with caution. Their gender puts them in a vulnerable position as such returning them to their families can only be undertaken once a thorough investigation of their social conditions are done. The JJBs have added that the return girl children to their place only after a responsible women care giver are willing to take the responsibility. In the absence of such a care giver, alternative options are looked at. The staffs dealing with CCL children specifically girl children mention how certain issues become important like those pertaining to their health and security. Stake holders of the juvenile justice system do make conscious efforts to remain as gender neutral as possible. However, in the absence of formal training that sensitize them towards girl children along with lack of requisite aptitude in child psychology to deal with such children personal biases and prejudices do creep in. These tend to manifest in their differential treatment to different children within the same system.

Discriminatory practices are prevalent within the CCI where girl children are exposed to differential treatment based on the category they belong. Discriminatory practices prevail among girl children of the same category. Careful efforts need to be made to ensure the labelling and stigmatization do not defeat the very reason for which these children are placed under care. Different stake holders of the JJS have faced considerable challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic. Efforts put in by Supervisors of each CCI are worth mentioning. They remained within the premise and were catering to needs of all girls. This was because the staff was working in rotational shifts. A roster was made for the same. They were under staffed and extra effort had to be taken to ensure safety of children. The members of the JJB worked online and

visited Boards on a rotational basis. The girls received all amenities during this time. Their lessons were delivered via online mode.

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