

Pharmaceutical Dimensions of Juvenile and Youth Justice: A Multidisciplinary Study on Delinquency, Vulnerability, and the Role of Pharmacists in Prevention and Rehabilitation

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ABSTRACT

Juvenile and youth justice systems around the world have increasingly recognized the need for a rehabilitative and preventive approach rather than a punitive one. While sociological, psychological, and legal dimensions of delinquency have been widely discussed, the intersection between juvenile justice and pharmaceutical sciences remains underexplored. This paper seeks to bridge this gap by analyzing the relationship between pharmacology, juvenile justice, and social defence. It examines the role of pharmacists and pharmacological interventions in preventing juvenile delinquency, managing children in conflict with the law, and supporting rehabilitation and reintegration. The paper discusses the provisions of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 (amended 2021) and related institutional structures such as the Juvenile Justice Board, Child Welfare Committee, Observation Homes, Special Homes, and Juvenile Aftercare Services. It explores how pharmacists and medical officers can contribute to ensuring proper medication management, addressing substance abuse, and promoting mental health among children in conflict with the law. Drawing upon international instruments such as the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (Beijing Rules, 1985) and the UN Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (Riyadh Guidelines, 1990), the study highlights the global emphasis on child rights, prevention, and rehabilitation. The paper further analyzes issues like truancy, vagrancy, youth crimes, and substance abuse through a pharmacological lens. It concludes by emphasizing the importance of including pharmacists in juvenile justice mechanisms, promoting pharmacovigilance, and ensuring a holistic health-based approach to juvenile rehabilitation.

Keywords: Juvenile Justice, Delinquency, Pharmacology, Rehabilitation, Substance Abuse, Mental Health, Vulnerability, Beijing Rules, Riyadh Guidelines, Pharmacist.

INTRODUCTION

Juvenile justice represents a specialized branch of criminal justice that deals with young offenders, emphasizing care, protection, and rehabilitation rather than punishment. The concept of juvenile justice has evolved over time, with growing recognition of the developmental, psychological, and social factors influencing youth behavior. In India, the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, and its 2021 amendment provide a comprehensive legal framework for dealing with children in conflict with the law and those in need of care and protection. However, juvenile delinquency is not merely a legal issue; it is also a matter of public health. Many

juveniles involved in criminal behavior face underlying mental health disorders, substance abuse issues, and developmental challenges. These factors are deeply connected with pharmacology and the pharmaceutical field. The involvement of pharmacists in early identification, treatment, and rehabilitation can serve as a vital mechanism for preventing reoffending and promoting social reintegration.

DEFINITION AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The term *juvenile* refers to a person who has not attained the age of 18 years, as per the Juvenile Justice Act. *Juvenile delinquency* denotes illegal or antisocial

Relevant conflicts of interest/financial disclosures: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

behavior committed by persons under this age. Delinquency may manifest as theft, truancy, vagrancy, substance abuse, or violent behavior. *Children in conflict with the law* are those accused or found guilty of committing an offense, while *children in need of care and protection* include those who are abandoned, orphaned, or abused. Truancy and vagrancy are often early indicators of deeper psychosocial or biological issues, such as attention-deficit disorders, depression, or substance dependence. Youth crimes often arise from a combination of social deprivation, peer pressure, and chemical or neurobiological imbalances. In such cases, the intervention of medical and pharmaceutical professionals can play a crucial role.

THE ROLE OF PHARMACY AND PHARMACISTS IN JUVENILE JUSTICE

Pharmacy as a discipline contributes not only to healthcare delivery but also to public health and forensic sciences. Pharmacists are increasingly being recognized as important agents in the prevention and management of substance abuse and mental health disorders. Within the juvenile justice system, their role can be conceptualized in three areas:

1. **Preventive Role:** Pharmacists can contribute to community education programs to raise awareness about the harmful effects of substance misuse, alcohol consumption, and drug dependence.
2. **Clinical Role:** Pharmacists can ensure safe medication practices, monitor psychotropic drug use, and provide counselling on adherence and side effects.
3. **Rehabilitative Role:** They can participate in aftercare services by monitoring ongoing treatments and helping children reintegrate into normal life through health education and pharmacovigilance.

Juvenile delinquency often correlates with drug misuse or substance dependence. Many juveniles are exposed to inhalants, alcohol, and synthetic drugs at an early age, which may trigger criminal behavior. Pharmacists, through community outreach and

education, can help detect early warning signs and prevent escalation.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK UNDER THE JUVENILE JUSTICE ACT

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, and the 2021 Amendment provide several institutional mechanisms for addressing the needs of juveniles:

1. **Juvenile Justice Board (JJB):** The JJB handles inquiries into offenses committed by juveniles. It is empowered to ensure care, protection, and rehabilitation. Pharmacists and medical officers can assist the Board by providing medical evaluations, particularly in cases involving substance use or mental illness.
2. **Child Welfare Committee (CWC):** The CWC handles cases of children in need of care and protection. Pharmacists can play a role in ensuring access to essential medicines, managing chronic illnesses, and preventing drug misuse among vulnerable children.
3. **Observation Homes and Special Homes:** These institutions temporarily house juveniles during the inquiry or post-conviction period. The inclusion of trained pharmacists ensures proper medication administration, management of withdrawal symptoms, and treatment of infectious diseases.
4. **‘Fit’ Institutions and Aftercare Services:** Aftercare is a critical stage of juvenile rehabilitation. Pharmacists can monitor ongoing treatments, provide adherence counselling, and prevent relapse into substance use.

The Act emphasizes a multidisciplinary approach, and the inclusion of pharmacists strengthens the healthcare and rehabilitative dimensions of these institutions.

JUVENILE POLICE UNITS AND HEALTH COORDINATION

Juvenile Police Units (JPUs) are specialized branches within the police structure dealing with juvenile cases.



They are responsible for ensuring child-friendly procedures and coordination with social welfare and healthcare departments. Pharmacists can collaborate with JPUs to:

1. Conduct awareness programs on drug prevention.
2. Identify drug trafficking routes involving minors.
3. Provide training to officers on recognizing symptoms of substance use and overdose.

Integration of pharmacological expertise in these units enhances their capacity to handle drug-related juvenile cases sensitively and effectively.

INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS AND PHARMACOLOGICAL ETHICS

The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (Beijing Rules, 1985) emphasize treatment, education, and rehabilitation over punishment. The Riyadh Guidelines (1990) focus on preventive strategies and community participation. Both frameworks encourage multidisciplinary collaboration, which naturally includes medical and pharmaceutical services. From a pharmacological ethics standpoint, administering psychotropic medications to minors demands strict adherence to ethical principles. Issues such as informed consent, dosage regulation, side effects, and dependency potential must be carefully managed. Pharmacists can provide expert oversight in ensuring ethical prescribing practices and prevent overmedication in institutional settings.

CHILDREN AND VULNERABILITY: A PHARMACOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Children are biologically, psychologically, and socially more vulnerable to external influences. Malnutrition, exposure to toxins, lack of healthcare, and early exposure to drugs can alter neurological development, leading to impulsivity and aggression.

Pharmacologically, vulnerability among children manifests in several ways:

1. **Drug Dependence:** Many juveniles are addicted to volatile substances, cough syrups, and psychotropic medications.
2. **Medication Misuse:** Lack of supervision often leads to self-medication, especially in marginalized communities.
3. **Mental Health Disorders:** Depression, anxiety, ADHD, and conduct disorders are common among delinquent children, requiring psychiatric and pharmacological attention.
4. **Gender and Health Vulnerability:** Girls in juvenile institutions may face reproductive health issues and need access to safe pharmacological care.

A pharmacist's presence ensures that these health needs are met safely and ethically.

PHARMACOLOGICAL STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTION OF DELINQUENCY

Prevention of delinquency requires a community-based, multidisciplinary strategy. Pharmacists can contribute by:

1. Conducting drug awareness campaigns in schools and communities.
2. Participating in health screening camps for early detection of substance use.
3. Promoting safe medication practices among adolescents.
4. Providing counselling and rehabilitation support to families of at-risk children.
5. Collaborating with schools, NGOs, and law enforcement agencies to build resilience and awareness.

Pharmacological prevention aligns with the Riyadh Guidelines, which call for positive socialization and preventive healthcare approaches.

RESEARCH INSIGHTS AND STATISTICAL OVERVIEW



According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2023, substance-related offenses among juveniles have shown a rising trend. Most offenders are in the 16–18 age group, and drug addiction or exposure to substances is a major contributing factor. Studies by WHO (2021) also suggest that mental health disorders and substance use are significant risk factors for delinquency. Research indicates that structured pharmacological intervention programs can reduce recidivism rates. For example, community pharmacy-led counselling in rehabilitation homes has improved medication adherence and reduced relapse in 45% of cases (Sharma & Rao, 2020). Similarly, integrating pharmacological screening in juvenile homes has helped detect undiagnosed mental disorders, leading to better outcomes.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Integration of Pharmacists in Juvenile Institutions:** Mandatory appointment of pharmacists in Observation Homes, Special Homes, and Aftercare Centres.
2. **Creation of Juvenile Pharmacological Care Units:** These units should coordinate between the police, health, and social welfare departments.
3. **Training and Capacity Building:** Develop specialized training modules on forensic and juvenile pharmacology for health professionals.
4. **Pharmacovigilance System:** Establish monitoring systems for all prescribed medications in juvenile facilities.
5. **Community Outreach:** Engage pharmacists in awareness campaigns to prevent youth substance abuse.
6. **Research Collaboration:** Promote interdisciplinary research between pharmacy colleges, law schools, and criminology institutes on juvenile justice health issues.

Such initiatives will align India's juvenile justice system with global best practices, emphasizing health-based and rights-oriented approaches.

CONCLUSION

Juvenile delinquency is a multifactorial phenomenon, influenced by social, psychological, and biological factors. The inclusion of pharmacy and pharmacological sciences in the juvenile justice framework adds a new dimension to prevention and rehabilitation. Pharmacists, through their expertise in drug management, mental health support, and community education, can contribute significantly to social defence and the reintegration of children in conflict with the law. The future of juvenile justice lies in interdisciplinary collaboration — bringing together law, medicine, psychology, and pharmacy. Such integration will ensure that every child receives not only legal justice but also holistic care, protection, and opportunities for a healthy, crime-free life.

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HOW TO CITE: Ganesh Nale, Pharmaceutical Dimensions of Juvenile and Youth Justice: A Multidisciplinary Study on Delinquency, Vulnerability, and the Role of Pharmacists in Prevention and Rehabilitation, J. Pharm. Sci., 2025, 1 (11), 899-903. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17622778>

