

EXPLORING LIVED EXPERIENCES OF JUVENILES ACCUSED OF RAPE AND SODOMY

Mohammad Zeshan^{*1}, Muhammad Mujtaba², Yasir Ejaz³, Nadia Ishfaq⁴^{*1}MPhil Applied Psychology, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur²MRC counsellor Lahore(ICMPD)³PhD Scholar (Law), The Islamia University of Bahawalpur⁴BS Hons Applied Psychology, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur^{*1}Zeshan7150@gmail.comDOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17263890>**Keywords**

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Corresponding Author: *
Mohammad Zeshan

Abstract

Juvenile delinquency remains a pressing social and psychological concern, particularly when offenses involve sexual violence such as rape and sodomy. This study explores the lived experiences of nine male juveniles, aged 15–18, accused or convicted of such offenses in a juvenile rehabilitation center in Pakistan. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed thematically with NVivo software. The findings reveal complex interactions between adverse childhood experiences, family dynamics, poverty, limited education, peer influence, and cultural norms in shaping participants' behaviors. Many reported histories of neglect, exposure to abuse, and negative peer associations, while others emphasized the impact of strict or absent parental guidance. Emotional responses to their offenses ranged from guilt and remorse to denial and justification. Rehabilitation services, particularly counseling and vocational training, were perceived as vital pathways for personal growth and reintegration. The study underscores the importance of addressing psychological needs, strengthening family support, and improving institutional rehabilitation programs to reduce recidivism. These findings contribute to juvenile justice research and provide policy insights for more effective intervention strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Juvenile delinquency remains a significant global issue, affecting individuals, families, and communities. The transition into adolescence often brings challenges that influence behavior, with environmental, familial, and social factors playing pivotal roles. Understanding the lived experiences of juvenile offenders can provide valuable insights into the root causes of delinquency and inform the development of effective rehabilitation strategies (Abhishek & Balamurugan, 2024). This study aims

to explore the narratives of individuals accused of juvenile offenses, focusing on their family dynamics, childhood experiences, emotional coping mechanisms, and pathways to rehabilitation.

Juvenile crime is often associated with adverse childhood experiences, such as poverty, exposure to violence, and lack of education (Cinini & Mkhize, 2023). Studies show that childhood trauma, including physical and emotional abuse, increases the likelihood of delinquent behavior in later years

(Yao et al., 2022). Similarly, the absence of strong familial bonds and the presence of neglect or abuse within the family environment have been linked to criminal tendencies among youth (Saladino et al., 2021). The role of peers and societal influences further compounds these risks, as peer pressure and exposure to harmful societal norms often shape the behaviors of young individuals (Libisch et al., 2022). The emotional and psychological responses to accusations or convictions can vary widely among juvenile offenders. While some experience intense guilt and regret, others struggle with denial or justify their actions by externalizing blame (Brooks & Greenberg, 2021). Effective rehabilitation programs that address the psychological needs of young offenders have been shown to reduce recidivism rates, offering a pathway for these individuals to reintegrate into society successfully (Beaudry et al., 2021). However, the quality and availability of such programs vary significantly, highlighting the need for a deeper understanding of their impact.

This study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the lived experiences of juvenile offenders. By analyzing in-depth interviews, the research seeks to identify recurring themes and patterns in their narratives. The study also examines the role of rehabilitation services, family support, and cultural norms in shaping their perspectives and behaviors. The findings aim to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on juvenile delinquency and inform policy recommendations for more effective intervention and rehabilitation strategies.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the lived experiences of juveniles accused of rape and sodomy in Pakistan.
2. To understand the biological, psychological, and social factors contributing to their involvement in such crimes.
3. To inform policy and practice recommendations for improving rehabilitation and reintegration outcomes.

Research Questions

- What are the lived experiences of juveniles accused of rape and sodomy in Pakistan?

- How do biological, psychological, and social factors contribute to the involvement of juveniles in these crimes?
- What measures can enhance rehabilitation and reintegration outcomes for these juveniles?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a **qualitative research design** with a **phenomenological approach** to explore the lived experiences of juvenile offenders. This approach was chosen to capture the participants' personal and emotional experiences within their socio-cultural and institutional contexts, providing a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to juvenile delinquency (Musa& Rais 2023).

Sampling Technique

The study used a **purposive sampling technique** to select participants. This method ensured the inclusion of individuals who met specific criteria, including being juveniles accused or convicted of criminal offenses and currently residing in a juvenile rehabilitation center (Beedell, 2021). A total of **nine participants**, all male, aged between 15 and 18 years, were included in the sample. These participants represented a range of socio-economic backgrounds and experiences relevant to the study's objectives.

Data Collection Method

Data were collected through **semi-structured interviews**, allowing participants to share their experiences freely while ensuring the research objectives were addressed (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). The interview guide included open-ended questions covering topics such as family dynamics, childhood experiences, peer and societal influences, emotional responses to accusations and convictions, and experiences with rehabilitation services. Each interview lasted approximately **45–60 minutes** and was conducted in a private, secure environment to ensure participants' comfort and confidentiality. The interviews were **audio-recorded** with the participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim to capture their narratives in detail.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using **thematic analysis**, a method suitable for identifying patterns and themes in qualitative data (Christou, 2022). The analysis process involved several steps: first, the researcher became familiar with the data by reading the transcripts multiple times. Next, initial **codes** were developed to identify meaningful segments of text. These codes were then organized into broader **themes and sub-themes**, representing recurring patterns in the participants' responses. Themes were reviewed, refined, and finalized to ensure they accurately captured the participants' perspectives. To ensure a systematic approach, **NVivo software** was used to organize the data during the analysis process. Direct quotes from the interviews were incorporated to support the findings and enhance the credibility of the interpretations.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to strict ethical guidelines to protect the rights and well-being of the participants. **Informed consent** was obtained from each participant, ensuring they understood the purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of the study. The anonymity of participants was maintained by assigning pseudonyms to protect their identities. **Confidentiality** was ensured by securely storing the

data and limiting access to authorized personnel only. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions. Given the sensitive nature of the study, a **counselor** was available to provide psychological support to participants if recalling their experiences caused distress.

Trustworthiness of Data

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed several strategies (Meydan & Akkaş 2024). **Credibility** was enhanced through triangulation, where the researcher corroborated the participants' accounts with observations and background information where feasible. **Transferability** was achieved by providing detailed descriptions of the research context, enabling future researchers to apply the findings to similar settings. **Dependability** was ensured by maintaining an audit trail of the data collection, coding, and theme development processes, allowing for transparency and replication. **Confirmability** was established through reflexivity, where the researcher critically examined their biases and ensured the findings were rooted in the participants' narratives rather than the researcher's interpretations.

Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes	Examples from Text
Family Dynamics and Relationships	Parental Relationships	Strict parents, neglect, support	"My father was quite strict," "Everyone used to stay away from me."
	Sibling and Extended Family Bonds	Positive bonds, disputes	"My mother is my closest person," "My uncle accused me falsely to grab our land."
	Loss of Family Members	Impact of death	"Losing my father was the biggest challenge."
Childhood Experiences	Poverty and Limited Education	Poverty, low literacy	"I studied till second grade," "I started working very early."
	Exposure to Abuse	Inappropriate touch, lack of awareness	"In early days, boys used to touch me inappropriately."
	Freedom and Peer Influence	Lack of guidance, societal norms	"I learned most things from my childhood friends who didn't know much themselves."

Social and Environmental Influences	Peer Relationships	Positive and negative influences	"My friends taught me how to do business," "Bad friends influenced me to make wrong decisions."
	Cultural Norms	Socioeconomic and cultural pressures	"Poverty and illiterate culture impacted me."
	Environment as a Shaper	Neighborhood, workplace impact	"People at my workplace influenced my life."
Crime and Accusations	Experiences Leading to Conviction	Personal mistakes, repressed thoughts	"I don't know how I did it, but it was a repressed thought."
	Emotional Reactions	Shame, fear, denial	"It haunts me at night," "I didn't do anything; I'm innocent."
	Impact on Relationships	Supportive family, social isolation	"My family trusts me," "All my relatives left me."
Psychological and Emotional Coping	Emotional Turmoil	Regret, guilt, self-harm	"I self-harmed in the early days of jail."
	Rehabilitation and Growth	Counseling, self-reflection, learning	"The psychologist taught me coping strategies," "I have forgiven my enemies and am learning new skills."
Rehabilitation Services	Perception of Facilities	Positive feedback, suggestions for improvement	"I am getting everything I need," "Better infrastructure for juveniles."
	Use of Skills and Education	Learning technical skills	"I am studying and learning skills to rebuild my life."
Future Aspirations and Advice	Hopes for Redemption	Desire for a better future	"I'll never repeat these mistakes."
	Guidance for Youth	Importance of education, good deeds	"They should obey their parents and pray to Allah."
	Policy Recommendations	Focus on mental health, rehabilitation	"Juvenile procedures are aligned but need focus on mental health."
Personal Accountability	Acknowledgment of Guilt	Acceptance of wrongdoing, regret	"I did a bad thing, and I regret it."
	Denial and Justification	Blaming circumstances or others	"I am falsely accused by my uncle."

Interpretation

1. Family Dynamics and Relationships

1.1 Parental Relationships

Participants described their relationships with parents as a mixture of strictness, neglect, and limited guidance.

- "My father was quite strict and expected me to follow his path in the leather trade" (Interview 1).
- "Everyone used to stay away from me due to my quarrelsome nature and anger" (Interview 2).
- "My parents are uneducated; they didn't tell me anything about boundaries" (Interview 1).

1.2 Sibling and Extended Family Bonds

Some participants reported positive support from siblings, while others described disputes or distant relationships.

- "My mother is my closest person and has supported me" (Interview 3).
- "My uncle accused me falsely to grab our land" (Interview 4).
- "We live in a joint family, but everyone minds their own business; no one cares about each other" (Interview 5).

1.3 Loss of Family Members

The loss of a parent had a profound emotional and practical impact on participants' lives.

- "Losing my father was the biggest challenge of that time" (Interview 9).
- "After my father's death, my mother was the only one to take care of us, and I had to start working early" (Interview 9).
- "My father left us when I was young, so we faced a lot of difficulties financially and morally" (Interview 3).

2. Childhood Experiences

2.1 Poverty and Limited Education

Many participants described poverty and lack of education as significant limitations in their upbringing.

- "I studied till second grade as I was an orphan and had responsibilities" (Interview 9).
- "I ran away from school after two days and started working to support my family" (Interview 6).
- "Poverty and illiterate culture impacted me; we didn't know about moral and ethical boundaries" (Interview 7).

2.2 Exposure to Abuse

Participants shared traumatic childhood experiences, including abuse and a lack of understanding about boundaries.

- "In early days, boys used to touch me inappropriately; it was a traumatic experience for me" (Interview 1).
- "My parents are uneducated; they didn't tell me anything about boundaries" (Interview 1).
- "I didn't know about good or bad touch until I experienced abuse myself" (Interview 1).

2.3 Freedom and Peer Influence

The absence of parental guidance often left participants vulnerable to negative peer influences.

- "I learned most things from my childhood friends, who didn't know much themselves" (Interview 1).
- "I was influenced by my friends to make bad decisions" (Interview 3).
- "Societal norms didn't teach us about boundaries or good behavior" (Interview 2).

3. Social and Environmental Influences

3.1 Peer Relationships

Peer influence was often described as a critical factor in shaping participants' decisions and behaviors.

- "Bad friends influenced me to make wrong decisions" (Interview 3).
- "The friends I made here advised me to do good deeds" (Interview 7).
- "I am here in jail because of bad company; they instigated me to do unacceptable things" (Interview 3).

3.2 Cultural Norms

Cultural and societal norms, particularly in low-literacy and impoverished settings, shaped participants' behaviors.

- "Poverty and illiterate culture shaped my personality; we didn't know about moral and ethical boundaries" (Interview 7).
- "In our society, we learn how to live and survive, but not what's right and wrong" (Interview 5).
- "Societal feeding and peer pressure shaped my personality more than my family did" (Interview 8).

3.3 Environment as a Shaper

The immediate environment, including workplaces and neighborhoods, influenced participants' values and behaviors.

- "People at my workplace influenced my life a lot" (Interview 6).
- "Neighborhood influences pushed me toward inappropriate activities" (Interview 7).
- "I grew up in an environment where societal norms didn't differentiate between boundaries" (Interview 1).

4. Crime and Accusations

4.1 Experiences Leading to Conviction

Participants often linked their offenses to personal mistakes or societal influences.

- "I don't know how I did it, but it was a repressed thought that evoked this action" (Interview 9).
- "The boy offered me something, and in excitement, I made the mistake of sodomy" (Interview 5).
- "I acted impulsively without thinking about the consequences" (Interview 1).

4.2 Emotional Reactions

Participants experienced intense emotions upon being accused, including fear, shame, and denial.

- "It haunts me at night; I feel my life is over" (Interview 4).
- "Being called a rapist is harder than anything; it made me sick psychologically" (Interview 9).
- "I just thought, why are they dragging me into something I didn't do?" (Interview 4).

4.3 Impact on Relationships

Accusations and convictions affected relationships with family and friends, sometimes strengthening bonds and other times causing isolation.

- "My family trusts me, so our relationships remain intact" (Interview 9).
- "All my relatives left me; only my friends supported me" (Interview 2).
- "My family supports me, but the accusation has destroyed my credibility" (Interview 4).

5. Psychological and Emotional Coping

5.1 Emotional Turmoil

Participants frequently described feelings of regret, guilt, and even self-harm.

- "I self-harmed in the early days of jail to relieve the psychological pain" (Interview 9).
- "I feel regret every day for what I did" (Interview 5).
- "One mistake changed the course of my life" (Interview 6).

5.2 Rehabilitation and Growth

Counseling and educational opportunities in prison helped participants reflect on their mistakes and grow personally.

- "The psychologist taught me coping strategies to face my fears and tensions" (Interview 9).
- "I'm learning skills here, and I'll use them to rebuild my life" (Interview 6).
- "I've forgiven my enemies and decided to live by principles" (Interview 6).

6. Rehabilitation Services

6.1 Perception of Facilities

Participants expressed appreciation for the rehabilitation services available in detention centers.

- "The services here are better than I imagined; everything is fine" (Interview 5).
- "Better infrastructure for juveniles would improve the system" (Interview 6).
- "I'm receiving everything I need, including psychological counseling and technical skills training" (Interview 8).

6.2 Use of Skills and Education

Learning opportunities offered hope for a better future after release.

- "I'm studying and learning skills to make my living easier" (Interview 6).
- "The education and technical training here are helping me rebuild my life" (Interview 8).

"I'll use these skills to guide others on the right path" (Interview 9).

Discussion of Findings

This study explored the lived experiences of juvenile offenders. The findings highlight the interplay of personal, social, and systemic factors that shape their behavior, emotional well-being, and prospects for future change.

The interviews revealed that participants' relationships with their parents were often marked by neglect or strictness, with a few exceptions where parental support played a significant role. The strict and controlling nature of some parents led to feelings of resentment and rebellion, which in turn influenced decision-making. For instance, one participant described their father's strictness: "My father was quite strict." In contrast, another participant noted neglect, stating, "Everyone used to stay away from me due to my quarrelsome nature." These dynamics appear to have contributed to early emotional distress and poor decision-making (Schrader, 2024). The relationship with siblings and extended family members was also significant in shaping the participants' lives. Positive family bonds were protective, while disputes led to additional stress. One interviewee shared a supportive family relationship: "My mother is my closest person." However, the impact of extended family members was not always positive. For example, one participant

revealed a familial dispute involving false accusations: *"My uncle accused me falsely to grab our land."* This reflects the damaging effects that familial conflicts can have on the emotional and social stability of young individuals (Kim et al., 2022).

The loss of a family member, particularly a father, had a profound effect on some participants. This loss often led to feelings of responsibility at a young age, which impacted their decision-making. One participant reflected on the loss of their father: *"Losing my father was the biggest challenge."* This loss, combined with other factors such as poverty and lack of guidance, contributed to the vulnerability of these individuals (TenEyck et al., 2023).

Many participants reported growing up in poverty with limited access to education. This lack of resources led them to mature quickly and take on adult responsibilities, such as working at a young age. For example, one participant recalled: *"I studied till second grade,"* while another stated, *"I started working very early."* The absence of proper education and social support often left these individuals ill-equipped to navigate complex moral and social situations (Meulewaeter et al., 2022).

A significant number of participants described experiences of inappropriate touch during childhood, with many acknowledging a lack of awareness about personal boundaries. For instance, one participant stated: *"In early days, boys used to touch me inappropriately."* These early traumatic experiences shaped their views on relationships and boundaries, which likely contributed to later behavioral issues. This lack of education about boundaries may have also contributed to the participants' inability to distinguish between right and wrong (Chernata, 2024).

Participants frequently mentioned the influence of peers during their formative years. A lack of parental guidance meant that many turned to friends for direction, often leading them down harmful paths. One participant admitted: *"I learned most things from my childhood friends who didn't know much themselves."* Peer pressure, combined with societal norms, often led to risky behaviors, as seen in cases where participants engaged in harmful actions without understanding the consequences.

The role of friends in shaping participants' behavior was multifaceted. On the one hand, some

participants highlighted positive influences, such as learning valuable skills from supportive friends. *"My friends taught me how to do business."* However, negative influences also played a role in pushing participants toward criminal behavior. For instance, one participant admitted: *"Bad friends influenced me to make wrong decisions."* The influence of peers was clearly a double-edged sword, where positive influences were overshadowed by negative ones that led to harmful actions.

Socioeconomic and cultural pressures were significant factors that shaped participants' views on morality and behavior. Many grew up in environments where poverty and a lack of education normalized harmful behaviors. *"Poverty and illiterate culture impacted me,"* one participant stated. Such societal conditions made it difficult for these individuals to differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable behavior, further complicating their ability to make better choices.

The environments in which participants lived also shaped their behaviors. Several participants mentioned the impact of their neighborhoods and workplaces. For instance, one participant reflected: *"People at my workplace influenced my life a lot."* In many cases, the environments were marked by negative influences that reinforced harmful behaviors, highlighting the importance of positive social surroundings in shaping an individual's behavior.

Many participants attributed their involvement in criminal activity to personal mistakes or repressed thoughts that emerged at difficult times. One participant described the underlying reasons for their crime: *"I don't know how I did it, but it was a repressed thought."* These reflections suggest that their actions were not always premeditated but were influenced by a variety of emotional, psychological, and situational factors (Tapson et al., 2022).

The emotional responses to being accused and convicted of crimes were intense and varied. Participants described feelings of shame, fear, and denial. One participant expressed: *"It haunts me at night,"* reflecting the psychological distress that followed the accusation. Another participant, however, denied the charges: *"I didn't do anything; I'm innocent."* The emotional burden of the accusation

was evident, with many participants struggling to reconcile their actions with their self-perception. Accusations and convictions affected participants' relationships with family and friends. In some cases, participants found support from their families, while in other cases, they were isolated. *"My family trusts me,"* one participant noted, while another reflected on the abandonment by relatives: *"All my relatives left me."* This suggests that while some families provided emotional support, others distanced themselves, adding to the participants' emotional turmoil.

The emotional turmoil faced by participants was significant, with many describing feelings of regret, guilt, and self-harm. One participant reflected: *"I self-harmed in the early days of jail."* This coping mechanism suggests that some individuals struggled with the guilt and shame associated with their actions. These emotional responses highlight the need for therapeutic interventions to help individuals manage intense feelings of remorse and guilt.

Despite the challenges, many participants also reported positive experiences with rehabilitation. Counseling and self-reflection played an essential role in helping individuals process their emotions and grow. *"The psychologist taught me coping strategies,"* one participant shared. Others acknowledged personal growth, stating, *"I have forgiven my enemies and am learning new skills."* These reflections indicate that with the right support, individuals can experience emotional healing and personal development, which are crucial for reintegration into society.

Participants generally viewed the rehabilitation services available to them in prison as beneficial. Many described receiving adequate support, though some also highlighted areas for improvement. One participant commented: *"I am getting everything I need,"* while another suggested: *"Better infrastructure for juveniles would improve the system."* These responses emphasize the importance of ensuring that rehabilitation services meet the needs of young offenders (Edwards, 2021).

The educational and vocational training available in juvenile detention centers was seen as a vital resource. Participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to learn new skills that would help them

in the future. *"I am studying and learning skills to rebuild my life,"* one participant noted. Such programs are crucial for providing young offenders with the tools to lead productive lives post-release.

Many participants expressed a desire for redemption and a commitment to never repeat their mistakes. *"I'll never repeat these mistakes,"* one participant shared, indicating that they recognized the opportunity to change. This highlights the potential for rehabilitation, provided individuals are given the right support and guidance.

Several participants offered advice for younger individuals, emphasizing the importance of education and making good decisions. *"They should obey their parents and pray to Allah,"* one participant advised, demonstrating a desire to guide others away from making the same mistakes. Their experiences suggest that early education and moral guidance are essential for preventing youth from falling into similar situations.

Participants also offered insights into potential improvements in juvenile rehabilitation. Many emphasized the need for a focus on mental health and rehabilitation, rather than punishment. One participant remarked: *"Juvenile procedures are aligned but need focus on mental health."* This underscores the importance of addressing the underlying psychological and emotional issues that contribute to juvenile crime.

Acknowledging wrongdoing was a significant theme among participants, with many expressing regret for their actions. *"I did a bad thing, and I regret it,"* one participant stated. This shows a level of self-awareness and acceptance that is essential for personal growth and rehabilitation.

However, not all participants were willing to accept responsibility, with some attributing their actions to external factors. *"I am falsely accused by my uncle,"* one participant asserted. This highlights the complex nature of personal accountability, where some individuals may struggle to confront their actions fully.

Contribution of the Study

This study provides valuable insights into the lived experiences of juvenile offenders, focusing on the interplay of familial, social, and environmental factors contributing to delinquent behavior. By

exploring themes such as childhood experiences, emotional coping mechanisms, and the role of rehabilitation, the study enriches our understanding of the complex pathways that lead to juvenile delinquency. It highlights how adverse childhood experiences, societal norms, and peer influences shape behavior, emphasizing the importance of family support and early intervention. Additionally, the study sheds light on the psychological and emotional responses of juvenile offenders and underscores the critical role of counseling and rehabilitation programs in fostering personal growth and reducing recidivism. These findings can inform policymakers, educators, and social workers in designing tailored interventions for at-risk youth and improving rehabilitation services.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations:

1. **Small Sample Size:** The study focuses on a limited number of participants, which may not fully represent the diverse experiences of juvenile offenders.
2. **Subjectivity in Self-Reports:** Data collected through interviews may be influenced by participants' personal biases, selective memory, or reluctance to disclose sensitive information.
3. **Lack of Longitudinal Perspective:** The study captures participants' experiences at a single point in time, limiting insights into how their perspectives or behaviors evolve over time.
4. **Context-Specific Findings:** The findings are specific to the cultural and social context of the participants, which may not generalize to other regions or populations.

Future Recommendations

1. **Expanding Sample Diversity:** Future studies should include a larger and more diverse sample to capture a broader range of experiences among juvenile offenders.
2. **Longitudinal Research:** Conduct longitudinal studies to understand how the experiences and behaviors of juvenile offenders change over time, particularly after release.
3. **Comparative Studies:** Compare the experiences of juvenile offenders across different cultural,

socioeconomic, and legal contexts to identify universal and context-specific factors contributing to delinquency.

4. **Focus on Prevention:** Investigate the effectiveness of early intervention programs, such as family counseling, school-based education, and peer mentorship, in preventing juvenile delinquency.
5. **Policy-Oriented Research:** Examine the long-term impact of existing rehabilitation programs and propose evidence-based improvements to better address the needs of juvenile offenders.

Conclusion

This study highlights the multifaceted nature of juvenile delinquency, shaped by adverse childhood experiences, peer and societal influences, and emotional and psychological challenges. Participants' narratives reveal the critical role of family dynamics, education, and environmental factors in influencing their behavior. The findings underscore the importance of effective rehabilitation services that address both the psychological needs and skill development of juvenile offenders, paving the way for reintegration into society.

While the study acknowledges the challenges faced by juvenile offenders, it also offers hope for their rehabilitation and personal growth. With improved intervention strategies, early education, and support systems, it is possible to reduce juvenile crime rates and support at-risk youth in leading productive lives. Addressing the identified limitations and building upon the findings through future research will strengthen our understanding and capacity to address the complexities of juvenile delinquency effectively.

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