
**THE DUAL MANDATE OF JUVENILE JUSTICE: BALANCING
VICTIM RIGHTS AND CHILD REHABILITATION**

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The juvenile justice system operates under a fundamental tension: it must simultaneously address the harm caused to victims while prioritizing the rehabilitation of young offenders. This dual mandate holding children accountable for their actions while recognizing their capacity for change represents one of the most complex challenges in modern jurisprudence. This paper examines the philosophical foundations, legal frameworks, and practical implementations of balanced juvenile justice across multiple jurisdictions. Through analysis of international standards, national legislation, and innovative practices such as the Dual Balance Model and "one family, one judge" approaches, this research argues that effective juvenile justice requires moving beyond zero-sum thinking toward integrated models that serve both victims and offenders. The paper explores the particular challenges posed by "crossover youth" children who traverse both child protection and juvenile justice systems and examines how trauma-informed, restorative approaches can fulfill the dual mandate more effectively than punitive alternatives. It concludes with recommendations for policy reforms that recognize the interconnected fates of victims, offenders, and communities in the pursuit of justice for children.

KEYWORDS: juvenile justice, victim rights, child rehabilitation, restorative justice, dual mandate, crossover youth, children in conflict with the law

1. INTRODUCTION

The administration of justice for children who commit offenses presents a profound philosophical dilemma. When a young person causes harm, society faces competing

imperatives: the need to acknowledge and address the suffering of victims, and the obligation to respond to the offender in ways that recognize their developmental capacity for change and rehabilitation. This tension the dual mandate of juvenile justice lies at the heart of contemporary debates about how legal systems should treat children in conflict with the law.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), ratified by virtually every nation, establishes that juvenile justice systems should prioritize the best interests of the child and promote the child's reintegration into society. Article 40 explicitly recognizes the right of every child alleged to have infringed penal law to be treated "in a manner consistent with the promotion of the child's sense of dignity and worth, which reinforces the child's respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of others." This formulation acknowledges that rehabilitation and accountability are not mutually exclusive but mutually reinforcing objectives.

Yet the practical implementation of this dual mandate remains deeply contested. In recent decades, high-profile juvenile offenses have fueled public demands for more punitive responses, including calls to lower the minimum age of criminal responsibility and treat young offenders more like adults. These demands collide with mounting evidence that punitive approaches neither serve victims' long-term interests nor reduce recidivism. Meanwhile, victims of juvenile crime often find themselves marginalized in systems designed primarily around offenders' needs, their voices unheard and their suffering unaddressed.

This paper argues that the apparent conflict between victim rights and child rehabilitation is resolvable through frameworks that recognize their fundamental interdependence. Drawing on comparative analysis of juvenile justice systems in Indonesia, the Philippines, India, Australia, and the United States, it examines how different jurisdictions navigate this tension. It explores innovative models including Indonesia's proposed Dual Balance Model, Texas's "one family, one judge" approach for crossover youth, and the Philippines' restorative justice framework that offer pathways toward integrated rather than adversarial responses.

The analysis proceeds in six parts. Following this introduction, Part Two examines the philosophical foundations of the dual mandate, tracing its evolution from the origins of separate juvenile courts to contemporary international standards. Part Three analyzes the rights and needs of victims within juvenile justice, including the crucial role of mechanisms like Victim Impact Statements. Part Four explores the rehabilitation imperative, examining the developmental science that underpins child-centric approaches and the particular vulnerabilities of justice-involved youth. Part Five addresses the challenge of "crossover youth" children who move from victimization to offending as a lens through which the

interdependence of victim and offender identities becomes visible. Part Six examines innovative models and practices that seek to balance the dual mandate, and Part Seven concludes with recommendations for policy and practice.

2. The Philosophical Foundations of Juvenile Justice

2.1 The Origins of Separate Treatment

The concept of a separate justice system for children emerged from recognition that young people differ fundamentally from adults in their cognitive development, moral reasoning, and capacity for change. The first juvenile court, established in Illinois in 1899, embodied the doctrine of *parens patriae* the state's role as ultimate guardian of children. This philosophy held that the state should intervene not to punish but to protect and rehabilitate, acting in the child's best interests.

This benevolent origin story, however, obscures a fundamental bifurcation that would shape juvenile justice for more than a century. As Baidawi and Sheehan observe, "the juvenile court system was bifurcated into two systems: one for child victims and one for child offenders or 'villains.' Over time, this bifurcation was entrenched in separate philosophies and practices across systems." This separation created institutional silos that treated children as either victims deserving protection or offenders deserving correction, rarely recognizing that these categories could and frequently did overlap.

The consequences of this bifurcation have been profound. Children who enter the child protection system as victims of abuse or neglect face dramatically elevated risks of later entering the juvenile justice system as offenders. Yet the systems designed to serve them operate with different mandates, different professional cultures, and different conceptions of the child. When children traverse both systems, they often "fall into the abyss that separates them."

2.2 International Legal Framework

The UNCRC represents the most comprehensive articulation of children's rights in the justice system. Four core principles animate its approach: non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to life and development, and the right to be heard. These principles apply equally to children who commit offenses and those who are victimized.

Article 40 of the UNCRC establishes specific protections for children in conflict with the law, including the presumption of innocence, the right to legal assistance, and the right to have decisions reviewed by a higher authority. Crucially, it requires states to establish "a

minimum age below which children shall be presumed not to have the capacity to infringe the penal law" the minimum age of criminal responsibility (MACR). The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has consistently recommended that this age be set at least 14, yet many countries maintain lower thresholds. India's MACR of 7, for example, falls dramatically below international standards.

The UNCRC also emphasizes that responses to juvenile offending should be "proportionate both to their circumstances and the offence." This proportionality principle requires consideration not only of the harm caused but also of the child's age, developmental stage, family situation, and prospects for rehabilitation. It rejects purely retributive approaches in favor of responses tailored to individual circumstances.

2.3 Restorative Justice as a Bridging Framework

Restorative justice has emerged as a framework capable of bridging the apparent divide between victim rights and offender rehabilitation. Unlike retributive justice, which focuses on punishment proportional to harm, or rehabilitative justice, which focuses on transforming offenders, restorative justice centers on repairing harm and restoring relationships.

The Philippines' Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act (JJWA) explicitly adopts restorative justice as its guiding philosophy. The law defines restorative justice as "a principle which requires a process of resolving conflicts with the maximum involvement of the victim, the offender and the community." This approach recognizes that crime creates obligations not only to the state but primarily to those harmed, and that meaningful accountability involves acknowledging and addressing that harm.

For victims, restorative processes offer opportunities to express the impact of the offense, receive answers to questions, and participate in determining appropriate responses. For offenders, they provide direct awareness of the human consequences of their actions and opportunities to make amends. For communities, they build capacity to address conflict and support both victims and offenders in healing.

The restorative framework thus transforms the dual mandate from a zero-sum trade-off into an integrated approach. Rather than pitting victims against offenders, it recognizes their interconnected fates: victims' healing is supported by offenders' accountability and transformation, while offenders' rehabilitation is deepened by genuine engagement with the harm they have caused.

3. Victim Rights and Participation in Juvenile Justice

3.1 The Marginalization of Victims

Despite the rhetorical commitment to restorative principles, victims of juvenile crime remain marginalized in many justice systems. As Professor Nurini of Universitas Brawijaya observes, "in practice, there is an imbalance in the distribution of protection, with greater focus on child perpetrators than on the protection and participation of child victims. This creates a structural and normative imbalance in the juvenile criminal justice system."

This imbalance reflects the historical orientation of juvenile courts toward offenders' needs and rehabilitation. While this orientation is appropriate given the developmental vulnerabilities of young people, it has often resulted in victims' interests being treated as secondary or irrelevant. Child victims, in particular, face additional barriers: they may lack knowledge of their rights, depend on adults to pursue legal remedies, and find court processes intimidating and retraumatizing.

UNICEF emphasizes that "child victims and witnesses of crime are often re-victimized by justice systems that are not adapted to their rights and needs. Professionals including the police, prosecutors and judges often lack specialized training in dealing with child victims and witnesses. Related procedures are rarely child-sensitive."

3.2 The Role of Victim Impact Statements

One mechanism for addressing this imbalance is the Victim Impact Statement (VIS), which allows victims to express the physical, emotional, and financial consequences of crime in formal proceedings. According to Nurini, "the absence of formal mechanisms, such as the Victim Impact Statement (VIS), which allow victims to legitimately express their voices and psychological experiences in the legal process... results in the interests of child victims not being fairly accommodated in decisions, resulting in suboptimal recovery."¹⁸

The VIS serves multiple functions. For victims, it provides catharsis and validation, acknowledging their suffering as relevant to the legal process. For courts, it supplies information essential to crafting proportionate responses that address actual harm. For offenders, it offers direct testimony about the consequences of their actions, potentially deepening empathy and motivation for change.

However, VIS mechanisms must be carefully designed for juvenile contexts. Child victims require support in preparing statements, protections against cross-examination that could compound trauma, and assurances that their participation is voluntary. When properly

implemented, VIS can help balance the dual mandate by ensuring victims' voices are heard without compromising offenders' rights or rehabilitation.

3.3 Victim Participation in Diversion

Diversion the redirection of children from formal court processing to community-based programs represents a key opportunity for victim involvement. The Philippines' JJWA establishes diversion at multiple levels (community, law enforcement, prosecutor, and court) and explicitly contemplates victim participation in diversion agreements.

Diversion contracts may include restitution, community service, written or oral apologies, and other measures that directly address victim harm. These provisions serve dual purposes: they hold offenders accountable in tangible ways while providing victims with concrete recognition of their suffering. When successful, diversion can resolve cases more quickly, with less trauma to both parties, and at lower cost than formal proceedings.

The Council for the Welfare of Children in the Philippines notes, however, that "restorative options are often underused, leading to unnecessary detention and added trauma for children." This underutilization reflects persistent gaps between legislative frameworks and implementation practices, including inadequate training, resource constraints, and cultural resistance to alternatives.

3.4 The Right to Compensation

Beyond participation, victims possess rights to compensation for harm suffered. Under the Philippines' JJWA, children found guilty remain "liable for civil damages," ensuring that accountability includes material reparation where appropriate. This provision recognizes that meaningful justice for victims often requires tangible redress, not merely symbolic acknowledgment.

Compensation mechanisms must be sensitive to offenders' capacity to pay, particularly given that many children in conflict with the law come from impoverished backgrounds. Restitution obligations that exceed realistic capacity may set children up for failure and additional system involvement. Effective programs therefore assess ability to pay, provide opportunities for community service as an alternative, and connect restitution to broader rehabilitative goals.

4. The Rehabilitation Imperative

4.1 Developmental Foundations

The case for prioritizing rehabilitation in juvenile justice rests on robust developmental science. Adolescence is characterized by ongoing brain development, particularly in regions

governing impulse control, risk assessment, and future orientation. Young people's decision-making capacity differs qualitatively from adults', and their behaviors are more susceptible to environmental influences including peers, family, and community context.

These developmental realities support the principle that children should not be treated as fully responsible moral agents in the same manner as adults. As the Philippines' JJWA articulates, children in conflict with the law should be viewed not as "criminals but as victims of circumstances, often stemming from poverty, family dysfunction, or societal neglect." This perspective does not excuse harmful behavior but contextualizes it within developmental and environmental factors that influence children's choices.

The Council for the Welfare of Children emphasizes that "children are not born criminals. Their actions are often shaped by poverty, parental neglect, violence, lack of education and livelihood opportunities, and peer pressure and unsafe environments." Addressing offending therefore requires addressing these underlying causes, not merely punishing their manifestations.

4.2 Trauma and Its Consequences

The prevalence of trauma among justice-involved youth is striking and has profound implications for rehabilitation. Research on crossover youth those involved in both child protection and juvenile justice systems documents "high levels of mental health difficulties, substance abuse, and trauma exposure; and high levels of instability within the family, in living situations and in school engagement."

This trauma is often cumulative, beginning with family histories of violence and continuing through unstable living situations, educational disruption, and system involvement that compounds rather than heals underlying wounds. As Baidawi and Sheehan's research demonstrates, "cumulative adversity that begins with family histories of and exposure to violence, continues into unstable living situations and educational engagement, and is further compounded by differential treatment in and across systems" creates pathways into delinquency.

Trauma-informed practice recognizes that behaviors labeled as "delinquent" running away, fighting, property destruction may represent adaptations to threat, expressions of grief and loss, or attempts to meet basic needs in contexts of profound deprivation. Effective rehabilitation addresses these underlying drivers rather than merely suppressing their behavioral manifestations.

4.3 Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility Debates

The minimum age of criminal responsibility (MACR) represents a flashpoint in debates about rehabilitation versus punishment. Lower MACRs expose younger children to criminal justice processes, potentially compounding trauma and cementing delinquent identities. Higher MACRs channel children toward welfare responses that address underlying needs.³¹

International standards recommend MACRs of at least 14, yet many countries fall short. India's MACR of 7 is among the world's lowest, meaning children as young as seven can be held criminally responsible despite clear developmental evidence that children of this age lack adult-like decision-making capacity.

The Philippines has experienced sustained debate over its MACR of 15, with proposals to lower it to 12 or even 9 in response to public concern about youth involvement in serious crime. The Council for the Welfare of Children opposes such changes, arguing that "lowering the criminal age of responsibility isn't the solution" and that children "need rehabilitation and support, not punishment or incarceration, to overcome their situation."

This debate illustrates the tension animating the dual mandate: public demands for accountability and protection from serious youth crime collide with evidence that punitive responses neither serve public safety nor address underlying causes. The challenge is to craft responses that satisfy legitimate demands for accountability while maintaining commitment to rehabilitation.

4.4 Community-Based Alternatives

International standards emphasize that deprivation of liberty should be "used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time." Community-based alternatives better serve rehabilitation by maintaining children's connections to family, education, and community supports while addressing offending behavior.

UNICEF promotes "alternatives to detention, such as diversion, as well as restorative justice approaches and alternatives to deprivation of liberty that are generally more conducive to the realisation of children's rights. They are also in the interests of public safety and have proven to be more cost-effective."

The Philippines' JJWA establishes a preference for community-based rehabilitation, including "halfway houses or youth homes," with institutional care reserved for serious offenders. Even in institutional settings, the emphasis remains on rehabilitation through "education, vocational training, therapy, and life skills." Aftercare programs supporting reintegration are recognized as essential to preventing recidivism.

5. Crossover Youth: Where Victim and Offender Meet

5.1 The Care-to-Custody Pipeline

No population better illustrates the interdependence of victimization and offending than "crossover youth" children who experience both child welfare and juvenile justice involvement. Research consistently demonstrates that "children entering child protection systems as victims" too often leave "as offenders with worse life outcomes than their counterparts who only experience one system or no system at all."

The statistics are striking. In various studies across jurisdictions, "nearly half or over half of justice-involved populations had some level of involvement with the child welfare system." A Texas study found that "children who experience parental abuse or neglect are at a 47% greater risk of entering the juvenile justice system than their peers in the general population." In Los Angeles, research revealed that "83% of criminally involved youth had prior contact with the child welfare system."

These figures document what researchers term the "care to custody pipeline" pathways through which system involvement intended to protect children from maltreatment instead channels them toward offending and incarceration.

5.2 Mechanisms of Crossover

Multiple mechanisms explain this pipeline. Children in foster care, particularly those in residential group facilities, face heightened risk of arrest for behaviors that in family settings would be handled privately. As one Texas judge observed, "You've got like 100 kids, and they all can't get along, none of them have boundaries." In these high-tension settings, law enforcement becomes the default response to emotional outbursts, with scuffles resulting in assault charges and property destruction in vandalism charges.

A San Francisco Chronicle investigation documented "dubious arrests in children's shelters in California," including children arrested for "inciting a riot" after a cake fight and a child sent to juvenile hall on battery charges for hitting someone with a bag of hot dog buns. As Brett Merfish of Texas Appleseed observed, "We over-criminalize that behavior instead of treating it as a cry for help or treating it as a sign of a traumatized youth."

Once arrested, crossover youth face additional barriers to release. Foster care placements willing to accept youth with behavioral challenges are scarce, leading to extended detention. As Judge Lisa Jarrett noted, "Kids in CPS care get lost in detention. No one is pushing to get this child released there's nowhere to get him released to."

5.3 Compounded Disadvantage

The consequences of crossover are severe and lasting. Compared to youth involved in only one system, crossover youth experience "longer lengths of stay out of their homes, more frequent placement disruptions and higher chances of being sent to live in congregate care settings."⁴⁸ They exhibit "more complex trauma, which is then compounded by each early brush with the justice system."

Crossover youth face elevated risks of "homelessness and incarceration as adults, poorer mental and physical health, and additional barriers to education and employment." Their offending patterns show "an earlier onset of delinquency and a greater volume of offending compared to their non-crossover counterparts," and they receive "harsher" court outcomes than youth without child welfare involvement.

These outcomes reflect systemic failures as much as individual characteristics. Fragmented systems with conflicting approaches, poor communication between agencies, and duplicative or contradictory court orders compound the adversity these youth face. As Baidawi and Sheehan's research documents, "professional viewpoints confirmed the presence of on-going conflicts and tensions across different agencies caused by fragmented systems, a lack of communication, and a lack of information-sharing. These system failings, they felt, created more adversity for youth and potentially contributed to on-going and escalating offending."

5.4 Implications for the Dual Mandate

Crossover youth reveal the false dichotomy underlying much juvenile justice discourse. These children are not simply victims or offenders but both their offending behavior cannot be understood apart from their experiences of victimization, and their healing requires addressing both dimensions. The dual mandate thus cannot be satisfied by balancing competing claims of separate categories of children; it must recognize that victim and offender can coexist in the same child.

This recognition has profound implications. It suggests that effective juvenile justice must integrate child protection and youth justice frameworks, rather than maintaining artificial boundaries. It implies that rehabilitation must address trauma as a driver of offending, not merely as background context. And it indicates that responses focused solely on accountability, without addressing underlying victimization, will fail both the child and the community.

6. Innovative Models for Balancing the Dual Mandate

6.1 The Dual Balance Model

Responding to the imbalance between perpetrator protection and victim rights, Professor Nurini of Universitas Brawijaya has proposed the "Dual Balance Model" for Indonesia's juvenile justice system. This approach "combines the protection of child perpetrators and the restoration of the rights of child victims" through integration of four pillars: multidisciplinary assessment, Victim Impact Statements, cross-sector services, and meaningful participation.

The model's "trauma-based and relational approach" recognizes that effective responses must address the needs of both parties within their relational and community contexts. Multidisciplinary assessment ensures that decisions are informed by comprehensive understanding of children's circumstances, not merely legal categories. Victim Impact Statements ensure that victims' voices are heard and their suffering acknowledged. Cross-sector services coordinate health, education, social welfare, and justice responses to avoid fragmentation. Meaningful participation ensures that both victims and offenders have genuine involvement in processes affecting them.

Compared to Indonesia's existing system, this model is "more inclusive and responsive to victims' rights" while maintaining commitment to offender rehabilitation. Implementation challenges remain including "limited regulations and institutional readiness" but the model offers "strong potential for judicial and administrative reform" and "a humanistic and civilized juvenile justice system."

6.2 One Family, One Judge

In Texas, the "one family, one judge" model addresses fragmentation by consolidating child welfare and juvenile justice cases before a single judicial officer. Rather than separate proceedings in which "the child is seen as victim, the other as culprit," this approach allows "a more holistic approach to the young person's troubles, risks and needs, and ultimately better serves public safety."

The model recognizes that children who traverse both systems require coordinated responses. As Judge Gary Coley explained, "These are the kids that you've got to pay more attention to. You can't just let the systems play hot potato with these kids and pitch it back and forth that's what has traditionally happened."

Implementation varies across counties. In larger urban areas, cases are fully merged before a single judge. In McLennan County, a smaller-scale approach involves monthly meetings of judges, attorneys, and agency staff to discuss crossover cases and coordinate responses.⁶⁰ In

Taylor County, Judge April Propst has found that the collaborative approach "boils down to simply knowing more about the child at the heart of the case," producing "clearer and easier to comply with" court orders and reducing inefficiency.

Outcomes have been promising. In Bexar County, where the model has operated for over a decade, Judge Lisa Jarrett reports that it has led to "children getting out of detention more quickly, and having greater access to mental and behavioral health services and supports instead of more punitive measures." The approach has also shifted professional mindsets, with "probation staff better recognize the underlying trauma influencing children's delinquent behavior" and showing greater flexibility in opting for diversion.

6.3 The Philippines' Restorative Justice Framework

The Philippines' Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act provides a comprehensive legislative framework for balancing the dual mandate. Its key features include: exclusive original jurisdiction of Family Courts over children in conflict with the law; mandatory diversion for appropriate cases; prohibition of torture and cruel punishment; suspended sentence for convicted children; and emphasis on family and community involvement in rehabilitation.

The law's approach to MACR illustrates its balancing philosophy. Children below 15 are exempt from criminal liability but subject to intervention programs "tailored to their needs, such as counseling, education, or family support." Children 15-18 may also be exempt unless proven to have acted with "discernment" "the child's ability to understand the difference between right and wrong and the moral implications of their actions." This discernment requirement ensures that criminal responsibility attaches only when children possess genuine capacity for moral understanding.

The law also establishes Bahay Pag-asa "intensive juvenile intervention centers" for children requiring institutional care. These facilities provide "education, vocational training, therapy, and life skills," maintaining focus on rehabilitation even in secure settings. Upon reaching 18, the court evaluates each child for full discharge, extended rehabilitation, or transfer to adult facilities ensuring that decisions are individualized and evidence-based.

Implementation challenges persist, including "resource constraints" (many localities lack Bahay Pag-asa centers), "discernment issues" (assessments can be subjective), and public pressure for tougher responses. Nonetheless, the framework demonstrates that legislation can coherently balance the dual mandate when properly designed and resourced.

6.4 Integrated Service Delivery

Beyond judicial coordination, effective balancing requires integrated service delivery across health, education, social welfare, and justice sectors. UNICEF emphasizes "working together to strengthen all parts of child protection systems, including justice mechanisms, to operate in the best interests of the child." This includes training "police, prosecutors, judges, lawyers, social services and health professionals to protect children in contact with the justice system effectively."

In India, UNICEF has supported "a series of state-level consultations to review the status of rehabilitation of children in the justice system, with a special focus on sexual abuse victims and children in conflict with the law, which led to innovations and improvements in oversight and accountability mechanisms." These consultations demonstrate the value of bringing diverse stakeholders together to identify gaps and develop coordinated responses.

Mirian Meade's research on young people who have been dual clients of child protection and youth justice in Australia emphasizes "the integration of attachment theory into relationship-based practice, and ongoing support for the spiritual self-care practices of practitioners." This focus on relationships and practitioner wellbeing recognizes that effective service delivery depends not only on structures but on the quality of human connections between workers and young people.

6.5 Lessons from Innovative Models

Several lessons emerge from these innovative approaches. First, integration beats fragmentation: whether through consolidated judicial oversight, coordinated service delivery, or comprehensive legislative frameworks, responses that bridge traditional silos produce better outcomes than those that maintain artificial boundaries.

Second, trauma-informed practice is essential: effective rehabilitation must address the traumatic experiences that drive much offending, and effective victim support must avoid retraumatization through insensitive processes.

Third, participation matters: both victims and offenders benefit from meaningful involvement in processes affecting them, and decisions informed by their perspectives are more likely to address actual needs and harms.

Fourth, community context counts: responses that engage families, schools, and community organizations are more effective than those limited to formal justice interventions, and building community capacity to address youth behavior reduces reliance on system responses.

Finally, implementation requires resources: innovative models cannot succeed without trained professionals, adequate facilities, and sustained investment in the infrastructure of rehabilitation.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The dual mandate of juvenile justice balancing victim rights with child rehabilitation represents not an irresolvable conflict but an invitation to more sophisticated approaches. When properly understood, accountability and rehabilitation are not opposing poles but complementary dimensions of responses that serve both victims and offenders by addressing harm, acknowledging responsibility, and building capacity for changed behavior.

The bifurcation of child welfare and juvenile justice systems into separate tracks for victims and offenders has obscured fundamental truths: that victimization and offending often coexist in the same children, that addressing one requires addressing the other, and that healing for both parties is interconnected. Crossover youth embody this truth most vividly, but it extends to all children in conflict with the law, whose offending cannot be understood apart from the contexts of adversity, trauma, and deprivation that shape their lives.

International standards, particularly the UNCRC, provide clear guidance: juvenile justice systems must promote children's dignity and worth, reinforce respect for others' rights, and prioritize reintegration. These standards do not ignore victims' legitimate claims but situate them within frameworks that recognize children's developmental capacity for change and the state's obligation to support that change.

Innovative models from multiple jurisdictions demonstrate pathways toward balanced implementation. Indonesia's Dual Balance Model offers a comprehensive framework integrating perpetrator protection and victim restoration. Texas's "one family, one judge" approach shows how judicial coordination can serve crossover youth more effectively. The Philippines' Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act demonstrates legislative commitment to restorative principles. UNICEF's work across South Asia illustrates the importance of training, coordination, and community-based alternatives.

Yet significant gaps remain between aspiration and implementation. Minimum ages of criminal responsibility remain too low in many countries. Diversion and community-based alternatives are underutilized. Victim participation mechanisms are absent or ineffective. Child victims continue to face systems that compound rather than heal trauma. Crossover youth continue to fall through the cracks between fragmented systems.

Addressing these gaps requires sustained commitment across multiple fronts:

First, raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 in accordance with international standards, ensuring that young children receive welfare responses rather than criminal justice interventions.

Second, implement victim participation mechanisms including appropriately designed Victim Impact Statements that give voice to child victims without compromising their wellbeing or offenders' rights.

Third, invest in community-based alternatives to detention, including diversion programs, restorative justice processes, and rehabilitative services that address underlying causes of offending.

Fourth, integrate child protection and juvenile justice systems for crossover youth, whether through consolidated judicial oversight, coordinated case management, or cross-trained professionals who understand both victim and offender perspectives.

Fifth, train all professionals police, prosecutors, judges, social workers, and service providers in child-sensitive, trauma-informed practice that recognizes children's developmental capacities and needs.

Sixth, engage families and communities in prevention, intervention, and reintegration, building capacity to support children outside formal systems.

Seventh, ensure adequate resources for implementation, recognizing that effective juvenile justice requires investment in rehabilitation infrastructure, not merely legislative frameworks. The dual mandate of juvenile justice ultimately reflects a deeper truth about children and communities: that the wellbeing of each is bound up with the wellbeing of all. Victims heal more fully when offenders acknowledge harm and transform behavior. Offenders rehabilitate more successfully when they understand and address the consequences of their actions. Communities become safer when they invest in children's development rather than merely punishing their failures.

Justice for children whether as victims, offenders, or both requires systems that embody this understanding. It requires moving beyond zero-sum thinking toward integrated approaches that serve all children by recognizing their interconnected fates. The models examined in this paper offer hope that such systems are possible. The task ahead is to build them, sustain them, and continuously improve them in service of the children whose futures depend on getting the balance right.

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