



# Decoding Crimes Against Children In India: Evidence From State-Level Data

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## Abstract

Children represent one of the most vulnerable sections of society, and increasing crimes against them pose serious social and developmental challenges in India. This study explores trends and regional differences in crimes against children across 28 Indian states from 2013 to 2023. Crimes against children are divided into three major categories: violent crimes, sexual exploitation and trafficking, and other indirect or socially embedded crimes. The analysis uses Year-to-Year (Y-O-Y) growth rates and Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) to examine short-term variations and long-term trends. The results reveal that the pattern of crimes against children has changed considerably over the years, with trafficking and sexual exploitation showing a sharp increase in several states. At the same time, indirect forms of abuse, including neglect and cyber-related victimization, have also grown steadily. Significant interstate disparities are observed, indicating that socio-economic inequality, poverty, migration, lack of awareness, and weak institutional mechanisms continue to influence child vulnerability. While some states performed relatively better in controlling these crimes, others experienced persistent increases throughout the study period. The study stresses the importance of strengthening child protection policies, improving awareness, and adopting state-specific strategies to reduce crimes against children in India.

**Keywords:** Crimes Against Children, State Disparities, Child Safety, Sexual Offenses, Trafficking, Regional Analysis

**JEL Classification:** I18, K14, J18, R10

## Introduction

India, with nearly 444 million children, has one of the largest child populations globally, with roughly one in every four individuals aged 1–14 years. The well-being of children reflects the overall health of society, making a safe and supportive environment essential for their growth and development. Children are inherently vulnerable and require protection from violence, exploitation, abuse, and neglect across homes, schools, workplaces, and public spaces (UNICEF, 2021; WHO, 2020; UNICEF, 2024a). Despite global and national efforts, crimes against children remain a serious concern, affecting not only individual lives but also hindering broader social and economic progress (UNESCO, 2022; World Bank, 2021; UNICEF, 2025). Such crimes include both general offenses like assault and kidnapping, as well as child-specific violations such as trafficking, sexual abuse, child marriage, and neglect, largely driven by age-related vulnerability (NCRB, 2023; Government of India, 2015). These experiences often result in long-term psychological trauma, poor educational outcomes, and reduced economic potential (WHO,

2023). In the Indian context, factors such as poverty, migration, urbanization, changing family structures, and digital risks have increased children's exposure to crime (Dutta & Husain, 2009; Kumar, 2013; Malik, 2016). Additionally, inequality, weak institutional support, and limited awareness further heighten vulnerability (Mukherjee et al., 2001; UNICEF, 2024b). Recent crime statistics from the National Crime Records Bureau indicate a steady rise in reported cases of kidnapping, sexual offenses, trafficking, and cyber-related crimes against children, reflecting both improved reporting and persistent structural challenges (NCRB, 2021–2024; Iyer & Topalova, 2014; Satija & Dutta, 2015). The Government of India has introduced several legal and institutional measures to strengthen child protection, including the Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses Act, 2012, the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 (Government of India, 2006; 2012; 2015). In addition, various public welfare programmes and civil society initiatives work toward safeguarding child rights and supporting rescue and rehabilitation efforts (UNICEF, 2021; Save the Children, 2022; UNICEF, 2024c). Despite these efforts, many children—especially in economically and socially disadvantaged regions—remain outside the reach of effective protection systems (Shaban, 2008; Wani, 2014; World Bank, 2023). Wide inter-state disparities in economic development, education, governance, and awareness contribute to differing patterns of crimes against children (Nagarajan & Sheriff, 2012; Kaur & Singh, 2017). Regions with weaker institutions and limited social and digital safeguards tend to exhibit higher vulnerability (Chaudhary, 2013; Bharadwaj, 2014; UNICEF, 2024b). Therefore, a state-level perspective is crucial for understanding these variations and for designing targeted, evidence-based interventions to improve child safety and welfare (NCRB, 2024; UNICEF, 2025; World Bank, 2023).

Research on crime in India addresses a variety of issues, including economic crime, violent offenses, crimes against women, cybercrime, and failures in governance. Early studies, such as those by Braithwaite (1975), identified connections between population growth, urban expansion, and increasing crime rates. Dreze and Khera (2000) highlighted the crucial connections between education, population balance, and lower violent crime rates. Dutta and Husain (2009) found that social and economic conditions, as well as proactive measures such as effective policing and higher conviction rates, significantly influence crime across states. Numerous studies have shed light on vulnerable populations. Mukherjee et al. (2001), Chaudhary (2013), and Satija & Dutta (2015) addressed violence against women and children, bringing attention to challenges such as under-reporting and weak institutions. Tyagi (2016) established clear links between juvenile crime, poverty, school dropouts, and lack of family support. Wani (2014) emphasized the urgent need for child-friendly justice systems, particularly in conflict-affected regions, paving the way for positive change. Recent studies, Bhatt & Pant (2011), Kumar & Kumar (2015), and Kaur & Singh (2017), examined cybercrime and data-driven policing, showing that technological progress brings both opportunities and new risks. At the macro level, Kumar (2013) and Bharadwaj (2014) found that higher crime rates hinder economic growth, while better education and stronger institutions reduce criminal behaviour. Studies by Srinivas et al. (2024), Patil et al. (2023), Dubey et al. (2023), and Sharma et al. (2023) show that crimes against children in India are increasing, largely due to socio-economic vulnerabilities, underreporting, and gaps in institutional response. These studies emphasize that violence experienced during childhood results in enduring psychological, educational, and economic harm. While the existing literature is extensive, most studies are national or issue-specific. Comparative state-level evidence on crimes against children in India remains limited. This study addresses that gap by analyzing interstate disparities, trends, and state performance in crimes against children, providing new evidence for targeted policy design.

## Data & Methods

The study uses secondary data to examine the determinants and trends of crimes against children across Indian states. All 28 states are included in the analysis from 2013 to 2023. The 28 states considered are Andhra Pradesh (AP), Arunachal Pradesh (ARP), Assam (AS), Bihar (BI), Chhattisgarh (CH), Goa (GO), Gujarat (GU), Haryana (HA), Himachal Pradesh (HP), Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), Jharkhand (JH), Karnataka (KA), Kerala (KE), Madhya Pradesh (MP), Maharashtra (MA), Manipur (MN), Meghalaya (MG), Mizoram (MZ), Nagaland (NAG), Odisha (OD), Punjab (PU), Rajasthan (RA), Sikkim (SIK), Tamil Nadu (TN), Tripura (TRI), Uttar Pradesh (UP), Uttarakhand (UTT), and West Bengal (WB). The data are sourced from official publications, including the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Ministry of Home Affairs, the Crime in India reports, and publications of the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO).

Crimes against children are classified into three groups: violent Crimes (such as murder, rape, kidnapping, and infanticide), Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking (including procurement, trafficking, and prostitution-related crimes), and Other / Indirect & Social Crimes (such as child marriage, abandonment, and abetment to suicide).

**Table 1: Descriptions of the Four Components of Crime against Children**

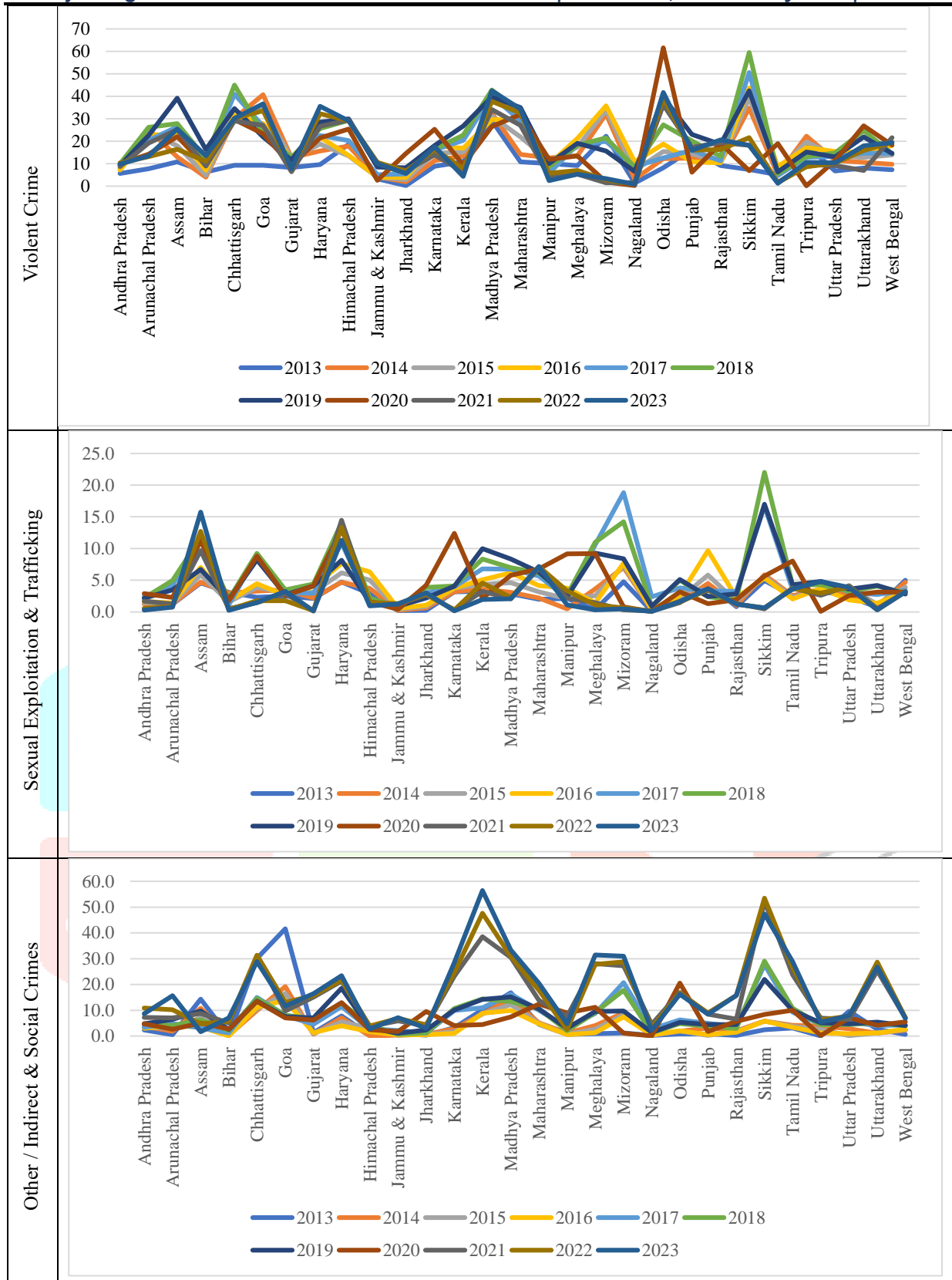
| Crime Type                        | Descriptions   |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Violent Crimes                    | Infanticide, Foeticide, Murder, Rape, and Kidnapping & Abduction   |
| Sexual Exploitation & Trafficking | Procurement of Minor Girl, Buying of Girls for Prostitution, Selling of Girls for Prostitution, trafficking of minors, sexual assault, and offences under relevant child protection laws |
| Other / Indirect & Social Crimes  | Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, Exposure and Abandonment, Abetment to Suicide and Other Crimes against Children   |

To assess the trends in these three categories of crimes against women, both the year-to-year growth rate (Y-o-Y) and the compound annual growth rate (CAGR) have been used. The year-to-year growth rate (Y-o-Y) is calculated as  $(Y_t - Y_{t-1})/Y_{t-1}$ , where  $Y_t$  and  $Y_{t-1}$  represent the value of the variable in the current and previous periods, respectively. The compound annual growth rate (CAGR) is computed as  $(Y_t/Y_0)^{1/t} - 1$ , where  $Y_t$  and  $Y_0$  denote the values in the final and initial periods, and  $t$  represents the number of periods.

## Results

Figure 1 demonstrates that the growth trajectory of crimes against children varies significantly across categories. Violent crimes exhibit moderate fluctuations throughout the study period, while sexual exploitation and trafficking display pronounced increases in specific years. Other, indirect, and social crimes show a consistent upward trend, highlighting the increasing significance of concealed and socially embedded forms of crimes against children. These divergent patterns indicate that crimes against children are becoming increasingly multidimensional and necessitate tailored policy interventions.

**Figure 1: Year-to-Year (Y-O-Y) Growth Rate of three components of Crime against Children from 2013 to 2023**



Sources: Author’s calculations from the data of Crime in India (The National Crime Bureau Record (NCRB))

**Table 2 Performance of the major Indian states with respect to All India in terms of YOY**

| Variables                         | Good Performing states   | Bad-Performing States  |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| Violent Crimes                    | AP, AS, BI, GU, HA, HP, J&K, KA, KE, MP, MA, OD, PU, RA, TN, UP, WB, MN, MG, MZ, NAG             | ARP, CH, GO, JH, SIK, TRI, UTT                                     |
| Sexual Exploitation & Trafficking | AP, AS, BI, HA, HP, J&K, KA, MA, WB, JH, MN, UTT   | GU, KE, MP, OD, PU, RA, TN, UP, ARP, CH, GO, MG, MZ, NAG, SIK, TRI |
| Other / Indirect & Social Crimes  | AS, BI, GU, HA, J&K, KA, KE, MP, MA, OD, PU, RA, TN, WB, ARP, CH, JH, MN, MG, NAG, SIK, TRI, UTT | AP, HP, UP, GO, MZ   |

Sources: Author's calculations from the data of Crime in India (The National Crime Bureau Record (NCRB))

States are classified into two categories: good-performing and bad-performing, based on the following criteria related to the year-on-year (Y-O-Y) growth rate. (a) Good Performing States: AM-low; SD and CV-high/low and (b) Bad Performing States: AM-high; SD and CV-high/low.

For violent crimes, 21 states are classified as good-performing, indicating comparatively lower annual growth rates. States such as Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Tamil Nadu perform better than the national average. Conversely, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Sikkim, Tripura, and Uttarakhand are identified as bad-performing states. In the category of sexual exploitation and trafficking, the performance is relatively weaker, with only 12 states in the good-performing category. States including Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh are categorized as bad-performing. This suggests that crimes related to sexual exploitation and trafficking have expanded more rapidly across many Indian states compared to violent crimes. The category of other, indirect, and social crimes demonstrates comparatively better performance for most states, with 23 states remaining in the good-performing category. However, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Goa, and Mizoram are among the worst performers in this category (table 2).

**Table 3 Results of CAGR of the Three Components of Crime against Children**

|                   | Violent Crimes | Sexual Exploitation & Trafficking | Other / Indirect & Social Crimes |
|-------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Andhra Pradesh    | 0.004          | 0.060                             | 0.055                            |
| Arunachal Pradesh | 0.067          | 0.035                             | 0.264                            |
| Assam             | 0.083          | 0.076                             | 0.190                            |
| Bihar             | 0.058          | -0.137                            | 0.146                            |
| Chhattisgarh      | 0.117          | -0.036                            | 0.099                            |
| Goa               | 0.078          | -0.028                            | -0.036                           |
| Gujarat           | -0.020         | -0.237                            | 0.169                            |
| Haryana           | 0.116          | 0.107                             | 0.086                            |
| Himachal Pradesh  | 0.043          | -0.085                            | -0.012                           |
| Jammu & Kashmir   | 0.130          | 0.201                             | 0.279                            |
| Jharkhand         | 0.334          | 0.265                             | 0.248                            |
| Karnataka         | 0.060          | -0.179                            | 0.088                            |
| Kerala            | -0.031         | -0.001                            | 0.118                            |
| Madhya Pradesh    | 0.023          | -0.029                            | 0.069                            |
| Maharashtra       | 0.102          | 0.117                             | 0.196                            |
| Manipur           | -0.028         | 0.025                             | 0.192                            |
| Meghalaya         | 0.007          | -0.036                            | 0.271                            |
| Mizoram           | -0.156         | -0.202                            | 0.191                            |

|               |        |        |       |
|---------------|--------|--------|-------|
| Nagaland      | -0.055 | 0.470  | 0.305 |
| Odisha        | 0.141  | 0.021  | 0.230 |
| Punjab        | -0.002 | -0.021 | 0.156 |
| Rajasthan     | 0.056  | 0.047  | 0.124 |
| Sikkim        | -0.009 | -0.189 | 0.257 |
| Tamil Nadu    | -0.090 | 0.045  | 0.160 |
| Tripura       | -0.064 | -0.019 | 0.134 |
| Uttar Pradesh | 0.039  | 0.052  | 0.018 |
| Uttarakhand   | 0.039  | -0.027 | 0.450 |
| West Bengal   | 0.098  | -0.036 | 0.147 |

Sources: Author's calculations from the data of Crime in India (The National Crime Bureau Record (NCRB))

The compound annual growth rate (CAGR) analysis presented in Table 3 enhances the understanding of long-term trends in crimes against children. Jharkhand records the highest CAGR in violent crimes (0.334), followed by Odisha and Jammu & Kashmir, indicating a rapid long-term increase in these offenses. In contrast, states such as Mizoram, Tamil Nadu, and Tripura exhibit negative CAGR values, reflecting a decline in violent crimes during the study period. Within the category of sexual exploitation and trafficking, Nagaland registers the highest CAGR (0.470), followed by Jharkhand and Jammu & Kashmir. These elevated growth rates indicate the increasing severity of trafficking-related crimes in several border and tribal regions. Conversely, states such as Gujarat, Mizoram, Sikkim, and Karnataka record negative CAGR values, suggesting some improvement or enhanced control over these crimes. The CAGR results for other, indirect, and social crimes reveal concerning trends in Uttarakhand, Nagaland, Jammu & Kashmir, and Meghalaya, where long-term growth rates are substantially high. These patterns indicate the increasing prevalence of hidden or socially embedded crimes affecting children. In contrast, Goa and Himachal Pradesh exhibit negative CAGR values, reflecting relatively better long-term performance in controlling such crimes.

**Table 4 Performance of major Indian states with respect to All India in terms of CAGR**

| Variables                         | Good Performing States   | Bad-Performing States                                 |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| Violent Crimes                    | AP, BI, GU, HP, KA, KE, MP, MN, MG, MZ, NAG, PU, RA, SIK, TN, TRI, UP, UTT | ARP, AS, CH, GO, HA, J&K, JH, MA, OD, WB              |
| Sexual Exploitation & Trafficking | BI, CH, GO, GU, HP, KA, KE, MP, MG, MZ, PU, SIK, TRI, UTT, WB              | AP, ARP, AS, HA, J&K, JH, MA, MN, NAG, OD, RA, TN, UP |
| Other / Indirect & Social Crimes  | AP, BI, CH, GO, GU, HA, HP, KA, KE, MP, PU, RA, TN, TRI, UP, WB            | ARP, AS, J&K, JH, MA, MN, MG, MZ, NAG, OD, SIK, UTT   |

Sources: Author's calculations from the data of Crime in India (The National Crime Bureau Record (NCRB))

Again, the states are categorized as good- or bad-performing based on the criterion discussed earlier. In the case of violent crimes, 18 states (64.3 percent) are identified as good performers, while the remaining 10 states (35.7 percent) are classified as bad performers. With regard to sexual exploitation and trafficking, 15 states (53.6 percent) are classified as good performers and 13 states (46.4 percent) as bad performers. In the other/indirect and social crime category, 16 states (57.1 percent) are good performers, whereas 12 states (42.9 percent) are bad performers. Overall, the comparative analysis reveals that sexual exploitation and trafficking constitute one of the most prominent and rapidly increasing forms of crimes against children in India during the study period.

## A Comparison Between the Results of Y-O-Y and CAGR

The Y-O-Y analysis shows that a larger number of states performed better in violent crimes and other/indirect crimes, whereas sexual exploitation and trafficking recorded relatively poorer performance across many states. The CAGR results further reveal that some states experienced sustained long-term increases in crimes despite moderate annual fluctuations. High CAGR values in states such as Jharkhand, Nagaland, Odisha, and Jammu & Kashmir indicate persistent growth in different categories of crimes against children. Both Y-O-Y and CAGR analyses indicate that sexual exploitation and trafficking remain the most rapidly growing components of crimes against children in India.

## Discussion

The evolving pattern of crimes against children indicates that these offenses are no longer confined to physical violence. Increasingly, they encompass psychological, social, digital, and organized forms of exploitation. Recent studies have also argued that the nature of crimes against children in India is becoming more complex as a result of rapid urbanization, digital expansion, migration, and shifting social structures (UNICEF, 2023; NCRB, 2022). Year-to-year (Y-O-Y) analysis reveals significant regional disparities in state performance regarding crimes against children. A greater number of states demonstrated relatively better outcomes in violent crime categories. For example, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Tamil Nadu exhibited stable trends. Conversely, Arunachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Sikkim, Tripura, and Uttarakhand experienced higher annual increases. These differences may be attributed to variations in socio-economic conditions, literacy rates, institutional capacity, policing systems, and reporting mechanisms. Previous research has indicated that socially and economically vulnerable regions are more likely to experience elevated rates of child-related crimes due to weak protective institutions and limited awareness of child rights (Kumar and Pradhan, 2021; Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2022). The findings indicate that sexual exploitation and trafficking constitute the most concerning category among the three components of crimes against children. Both year-to-year and compound annual growth rate (CAGR) analyses demonstrate relatively poor outcomes for several states in this area. States such as Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Nagaland exhibited higher growth rates over time. Notably, Nagaland, Jharkhand, and Jammu & Kashmir reported particularly high CAGR values, suggesting a steady expansion of trafficking-related crimes during the study period. Recent national and international studies have reported similar trends, identifying trafficking, online exploitation, and sexual abuse as rapidly escalating threats to child safety in South Asia (UNODC, 2023; ECPAT International, 2022). Researchers have further emphasized that border regions, migration-prone areas, and economically marginalized communities are especially vulnerable to trafficking networks and organized exploitation (Bhattacharya, 2020). The analysis of indirect and social crimes provides additional important insights. While many states remained below the national average growth rate, states such as Uttarakhand, Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Jammu & Kashmir exhibited persistently high long-term growth. This trend indicates that indirect forms of crimes against children, including emotional abuse, cyber harassment, neglect, social discrimination, and online exploitation, are becoming increasingly prevalent. Recent literature has noted that these crimes often remain concealed and underreported because they occur within domestic, social, or digital contexts (Singh and Choudhary, 2023). The rapid increase in internet access and social media use among children has further heightened their vulnerability to cyber-enabled exploitation and abuse (UNICEF, 2023). Recent criminological studies have made similar observations, arguing that persistent social inequalities, institutional weaknesses, and demographic pressures continue to influence patterns of child-related crime in India (Sharma & Sharma, 2022).

## Conclusion

This study examines changing trends in crimes against children across major Indian states from 2013 to 2023, utilizing both Year-to-Year (Y-O-Y) growth rates and Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR). The analysis demonstrates that the nature and intensity of these crimes vary significantly across states

and crime categories. Findings reveal that crimes against children extend beyond physical violence to include trafficking, exploitation, and other concealed forms of abuse closely linked to social and institutional vulnerabilities. Among the three categories, sexual exploitation and trafficking have emerged as the most severe and rapidly increasing forms of crime in several states. The results indicate that these offenses have grown steadily over time, becoming a major concern in multiple regions. States such as Nagaland, Jharkhand, Jammu & Kashmir, Odisha, and Uttar Pradesh reported relatively high growth rates, reflecting the escalating severity of trafficking-related offenses during the study period. While violent crimes exhibited moderate growth, they remain significant in numerous states. Concurrently, the increase in other and indirect social crimes highlights the rising prevalence of less visible victimization, including emotional abuse, neglect, cyber-related offenses, and socially embedded exploitation. The study also identifies substantial regional disparities in state performance. Some states maintained lower growth rates across various categories, whereas others experienced consistently high annual and long-term increases. Notably, Karnataka, Kerala, Punjab, Gujarat, Bihar, and Himachal Pradesh recorded comparatively lower growth rates in several crime categories, suggesting more effective control mechanisms and institutional responses. Nevertheless, the persistence of high crime growth in many economically and socially vulnerable states underscores the ongoing influence of regional inequalities, migration, weak institutional support, poverty, and limited awareness of child rights on crimes against children in India. Consequently, a region-specific policy approach, particularly targeting socially and economically vulnerable states, is essential to reduce crimes against children and ensure a safer environment for children in India.

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