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Child protection threats in India: Role of integrated child protection scheme

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Abstract

Child protection is a primary and challenging issue for every country in the world. Instead of being educated at school, many children in India are involved in various activities such as working in hotels as servants, paperboys and doing the work of a salesperson due to various reasons like poverty, inequality and social and economic discrimination. There is a need for creating a favourable atmosphere and safe space for the overall development of the children. It is the responsibility of every individual, society, and government to protect children from various exploitative threats, abuse and violence that prevail in the societal structure. Parental care increases the strength and develops positive integration towards the community and society. Hence, the role of a family is very crucial in the overall development of the children. The present paper deals with a theoretical explanation of child protection and discusses the prevailing conditions of child protection in society.

Keywords: Child protection; parental care; society; ICPS

Child care and employment of the parents

In contemporary society, people are rushing towards employment and earning spaces to overcome present challenges in the competitive world. Both mother and father are working for the welfare of the family to meet their basic requirements. In this process, parents neglect their children, and it leads to an increase the child maltreatment in society (Chilman 1993). Many children are killed and victimised by the adults in the society. Some are sold for money. Many children are maltreated by those who are supposed to take care of them. Sometimes poverty leads to the neglect and

crimes against children (Chandrashekar 2014). Thus, children become the target of atrocities, sometimes due to their tender age. Many children grow up in large families where their parents are unemployed and illiterate. Most of the time, children of such families are neglected, and they undergo much suffering. Many are raped, and some are even murdered (Sharma 2014). UNCRC, 1989 made it obligatory on the part of the state to protect the children from all kinds of mental and physical violence (Seth 2013). Child care development and parental care are interrelated terms in child development and protection. Full time working parents leave their children outside the home at

child care centres. Child care centres outside the home are not necessarily harmful to child development. High-quality developmental programs will improve the intellectual capacity of the child. It will help in creating positive awareness among children about the society. Psychological development of the child also depends on family situations. Various factors influence the behaviour of the child, such as socio-economic and psychological conditions of the family, parental behaviour towards child and external threats that influence child growth. All these factors will result in lower quality of child care (Hayes and Palmer and Zaslow 1990).

Some parents are changing their timings of work by hours because of heavy child care responsibilities. Some of the parents are doing part-time jobs which are more helpful to most of them. Many women are showing interest in these types of works rather than full-time work. Part-time works will fetch low payments, low status and will influence the career-building plans, though some employees are making this part-time jobs as permanent ones to balance their work and family responsibility such as child care (Zedeck and Kathleen 1990). Therefore, the parental workplace and employment influence their children.

Impact of physical punishment on children

Spanking the children in the name of discipline and parental practices in the name of the developmental process is harmful to children. Hitting the children based on religious beliefs, cultural views, social policies and existing laws, have an enormous negative impact on the physical health of children of different age groups (Krug et al. 2002). Harsh child discipline at home and school are banned by many countries such as Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Israel, Italy, Norway, Latvia, and Sweden to stop the corporal punishment on children as various forms of discipline have turned into physical violence on them (Gershoff 2002).

Various studies exist on the relationship between corporal punishment and compliance of the child. There are many studies on changes in behaviour, criminal aggression, anti-social behaviour and quality of the parent-child relationship. Spanking is an indicator of diminished quality in parent-child relationships. It will result in various anti-social behaviours and psychological imbalances (ibid.). Imposing parental ideology on children in the form of discipline to promote socialisation is more generally done to children. The behaviour of a child could be moulded at home through positive reinforcement methods, without the use of various punishments (Kazdin 2001). Essential goals of parental control are to bring change in the child's behaviour from an unwanted stage.

To make that possible, the majority of the parents use spanking methods. The need for punishment is a questionable one. Parents should think whether hitting has any benefit

in changing the behavioural patterns of the children. To achieve the desired goals, the parents should go with the non-spanking methods with positive reinforcement that would help the children to think positively and help in their personality development (Kazdin and Corina 2003).

Most of the existing research studies proved this fact as the best method for child development. However, there is a need for extensive research on discipline methods employed by the parents a closer understanding of the problem, like identifying the various subgroups with different ages. Youth are more vulnerable to severe disciplinary practices. As an effect of maltreatment, they may be converted into anti-social elements. Psychological imbalances in the brain also may lead to unwanted imbalances in the behaviour (Caspi et al. 2002). Hence, handling children with utmost care at the family level is more critical in children's growth.

Child marriage and violation of child rights

Child marriage is one of the burning issues in Indian society. The legal age for marriage is 18 for females, but most of the children are forced into marriage within the age of 15 years. Most of the women who get married at a younger age are facing domestic violence. Niger stands top among all the countries with 74.5 per cent child marriages whereas India's percentage is 45. The existing research studies reveal that child marriages are happening because of the discrimination shown between boys and girls (Lal 2015). There are several reasons for child marriages such as poverty, social insecurity, less expenditure on education, single-parent families and non-share of ancestral property. All these lead women to face many problems such as early pregnancy, desire for a male child, the vast age difference between wife and husband, and fall in high fertility age. Proper community networks and a robust judicial system would address these challenges. However, the government should provide sufficient scholarships to keep the girl child in schools as part of the direct precaution (ibid.).

In feudal societies, child marriages took place because parents believed that a child should be married before puberty as Indian tradition places enormous importance on virginity before the marriage. However, many social, health and economic problems are faced as a consequence of child marriages (Saraswat 2006). The early marriages led to early childbirths which created health problems for women as they were not ready to bear a child at the age of 16 or below. Maternal and infant mortalities are seen as significant health problems (Miller and Lester 2003). Married girls were not able to continue education after marriage in the areas of media such as electronic, radio and newspaper. (Haberland and Erica and Hillary 2004). In the earlier days, child marriages took place when both the children were in sleep or else through the promise of parents even before they were born,

especially in the rural areas (Srivastava 1983). These kinds of traditional marriage practices damage the growth of children.

Child marriage is deeply rooted in religious and socio-cultural practices in many communities, but the faith and child marriage relationship concepts are more complex and change according to the community beliefs (Gemignani and Wodon 2002). Most of the early married women face domestic violence due to suspicion, son-preference and not being good at performing household chores. One of the main reasons for domestic violence is the rejection of intercourse by the girl child during the very first day of marriage and consequently beaten up and are abused and scolded alleging sexual incompatibility with the husband (Bott and Morrison and Ellsberg 2005). Women face discrimination in all possible ways due to early child marriage. Child marriage is the fundamental violation of their human rights as it affects their physical, mental, intellectual, psychological and emotional aspects of life as well as their freedom and growth. The policies and programmes for the prevention of child marriages under the age of 18 play a vital role. There is also a need to form new policies to ensure the safety of married women in various aspects such as sexual, marital and reproductive transitions (Lal 2016).

Discrimination towards girl children

The Indian census data shows that there is a gap between the birth rate of boys and girls in the country for several decades. Decisions are made and effected at the family level. Sons are begotten for profit and prosperity in Indian society. Based on religious traditions, economic, social, and emotional reasons, males are more desirable, and females are not desirable. Moreover, the traditional statistics shows that daughters will drain their parent's property in the form of dowry, whereas the sons will enhance the property levels (Pande and Anju 2006). After the marriage, the son will stay back with the parents. Nevertheless, in the case of daughters, they have to leave the parents' home after marriage, and there is no attachment to the parent's family. These are some reasons established under various religious rules and traditions followed in India. Furthermore, the census data also show that the number of boys is more than the number of girl children in India (ibid.). Such kind of macro-level data is essential for the public policy formulation for more significant results in the child's overall development as a precautionary measure.

One of the biggest concerns in India over the decades is, introducing many policies in favour of a female child. However, the situation of the girl child has deteriorated over some time. Most of the Indian women prefer not to have a girl child because of existing religious traditions and norms. However, a highly educated woman prefers to have girl children in many cases. In most of the rural areas, women have completed only primary level of school education, which resulted in less exposure towards society and lack of

independence. In villages, also educated woman prefer to have a girl child rather than a boy child as compared with the uneducated woman in the villages. Education of women influences the birth rate of the girl child, at the grass-root level. Many existing research studies proved the fact that education of women will enhance the opportunity, capacity of living and exposure towards society (Pande and Aan Marie 2007). Therefore, more number of educational programmes and policies needed to enhance the female education in traditional societies in general and in India in particular.

Society and child protection

Society gives a larger space for opportunities; it plays a crucial role in the child development process. Many times, a child is exposed to different types of maltreatment such as violence, exploitation and abuses. On the other hand, society can train the child towards positive development under the guidance of parents and caregivers. Whatever may be the circumstances, society orientation is always provided positive and negative ways of training and exposure. Nevertheless, moulding towards positivity helps to end child maltreatment and enable a protective environment for the child developmental process. Society and child protection are interrelated terms. However, society provides positive as well as negative forms of treatment.

Child labour and poverty

The issue of child labour is not confined to a single state or community. It is an issue in the country which is increasing at an alarming stage. It is a harsh reality that most of the developing countries in the world have the highest number of child labourers as compared to the developed countries in the world. The primary factor that causes child labour in the state is chronic poverty. Poverty pushes children to become labourers. As long as there is poverty, the problem of child labour will remain as a never-ending process (Antony and Gayathri 2002). Child labourers can be defined as children who work outside the home in the hazardous industries for paid wages and are in between the age of 5–14 years. Child labour is one of the most urgent issues to be reconsidered and to be abolished to enable protective atmosphere to the children in the society (Lieten 2002). A child engaged in different levels of work, whether they are paid or unpaid at home or outside, which affects his or her growth and development process is considered as a child labourer (Chaudhri and Wilson 2002). There needs awareness on the general public on such kind of precise definitions for the child labour in order to bring down the child labour activities.



Child rights and development

Discussion on child rights in the society should be considered with the highest priority to construct childhood with positivity and protection. In western countries, most of the child rights-based approach is on development. In most of the American and European countries, the child grows in the formal education system and with the protection of state and family. Moreover, in most of the developed countries, child rights are articulated based on various protective mechanisms according to childhood demand—systematic articulation of child rights helpful for the overall development of the children. Thus, the same type of policymaking is being reflected globally in different international policy frameworks (Gayathri and Chaudhri 2002). These global policy formulations would undoubtedly help the child growth.

In the context of India, various constitutional safeguards were presented for the protection of children. A group of children who work and are below 14 years are constituted as a benchmark of child labour in India. Children who have completed the age of 14 are considered as adults, and they are not considered as child labourers according to the Indian Factory Act 1948. It is visible that the definition of childhood is different in different Acts of the government, including that is related to child labour. The Indian constitution clearly defined the proper concept of childhood, schooling and education. However, there is discrimination towards children through its policies while they seek access to education (Weiner 1991). It happens due to lack of sensitiveness among the public and families towards children and their development.

Child protection and internet

In the contemporary world, globalisation and liberalisation policies and the usage of technology are changing the living conditions of the people. Nowadays, technology is playing a crucial role in day to day life of the people. Whatever may be the developments and advancement that take place in the economy, there are also negative vibes towards its technological evolution. Hence, there is a need to protect children from exposure to harmful material over the internet.

Since 1996, the government enacted several protective measures in favour of children from exposure to harmful material over internet and taking the measures to punish the culprits who are making available harmful materials to children on the internet. To protect minors from external threats such as the internet, the government made certain amendments in the right to express their views on information. This type of decisions protects children. In the year of 2004, the Supreme Court of India emphasised the protection of children from online threats, and accordingly, the government enacted an Act known as the Act of Child Online Protection Act 2004 (McCarthy 2005).

Children Internet Protection Act 2000, was enacted to focus on the receipts of internet content rather than on the senders of the harmful material on the internet. However, in various places like public libraries, schools, and other public places, the government has initiated safety policies that include various filtering methods to protect children from harmful material that are available on the internet (Berry 2003). Child Online Protection Act 2004 was enacted in favour of the protection of minors from harmful content on the internet. However, some individuals engage in the business of making such materials. Whatever may be the information, accessible to all groups of people irrespective of their age and other credentials. Criminal and civil penalties are imposed on those people who are intentionally uploading harmful materials on the internet platform.

Child protection and legal reforms

Legal reforms should be carried out for the adequate protection of the children. Physical abuse, sexual abuse, child labour, forced marriages are the reasons behind child exploitation. Government laws should function more powerfully. Children have their right to protection. The responsibility to protect the child is entrusted with the family, community and the government. Many children are exploited by the family members (William 2008). Millions of children run away from their families due to various kinds of abuses and seek asylum on the streets. Children are facing physical punishment in the educational institutions where they are enrolled for learning. Many children are facing harassment even in child rehabilitation centres; young children are forced to join war fronts risking their lives. Girl-children are kidnapped into prostitution in different parts of the country. Trafficking of young girl-children is reported by various agencies every day. The adults who are responsible for protecting the rights of the children are violating them. Though there are various provisions in the constitution of India to protect the rights of the children, they are not being implemented effectively.

There is significant legislation to safeguard the rights of the children. There are also various Acts prohibiting immoral traffic, child labour, child marriage and sexual offenses against children (Baruah 2002). An Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) was introduced in 2009 for coordinating the activities of various agencies and ministries for the adequate protection of children in India. The implementation of the scheme is affected due to lack of funding by the concerned governments. The National Plan of Action for Children came into existence on 24 January 2017 to concentrate on the survival, health, nutrition, education, development, protection and participation of children at various levels. Track the Child Portal, Khoya-Paya Interaction System, Child Line Services, and Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme were introduced by the government of India to deal with the policy issues of child protection. However, the ineffective



strategies used for the implementation of the policies and lack of funding have adversely affected the prohibition of child abuse in India (Chidambaranathan and Jenitta and Allenselvakumar 2013).

Child trafficking and child protection

Child trafficking in India is one of the serious crimes and expanding rapidly with different types of exploitative practices. India is placed highest in the area of child trafficking among all the South Asian countries. Amongst the total trafficked persons, 90 per cent of them are children and woman taken for prostitution within the boundaries of the state. In India, the highest number of children were trafficked not only for sex but also for various forms of humiliation. They are namely, agricultural activities, domestic service, forced and compulsory labour, organ trading, debt bondage (exchanging child for a debt where the child has to work for the repayment of debt), begging and false marriages (Rashi 2018). In this commercialised world of traffickers, there is no space for dignity and respect woman and children. Every child needs protection from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation, which affects its development. These aspects can affect the development of the child and its integration into society. The child who sells items in traffic is not only sale persons but the one who is derived from the family, health and education. The gender-based violation was seen more in a country like India. Girl children were aborted or else thrown away from the family and violated in various forms, including girl- child marriages. Child marriages also stop children from going to school. UNICEF also addressed some of the key elements to avoid violence towards the children. Promotion of positive, social and cultural norms, health and education, are some of them. Children who got already affected due to violence and abuses need more protection (Giusti and Aneerudh 2012). The suggested policy protection measures or various programmes designed for the children's protection is the responsibility of society as a whole.

Role of various schemes in child protection

The MWCD is to monitor and supervise the implementation of the ICPS at the national level by holding an annual review meeting of state secretaries and by closely monitoring the level of implementation in the states by holding quarterly review

meetings in the states. It should also provide technical support for effective implementation of the scheme while instituting national-level awards to encourage excellence in service delivery. MWCD may depute experts or external agencies in the area of child protection to visit the States or Union Territories (UT) periodically to oversee the implementation of ICPS. These experts will also visit various types of child care institutions and non-institutional care programmes being implemented under the scheme in that State or UT as prescribed under the Juvenile Justice Act (GoI 2009).

The monitoring and supervision of the implementation of the ICPS are taken up at various levels. At the state level, the State Child Protection Unit (SCPU) and State Adoption Cell (SAC) would carry out supervision and monitoring of all the District Child Protection Units (DCPU) and all other child protection schemes, and programmes run in the State or UT. At the district level, the DCPU shall monitor and supervise all the child protection programmes. The reporting authority at the state level would be the state secretary heading the SCPU and at district level the District Magistrate. At local and grass-root levels, local bodies, panchayats and voluntary organisations including CHILDLINE involved in planning, monitoring and supervision of child protection programmes under the overall ambit of public-private partnership.

Through ICPS, the MWCD envisaged to carve out a broad and comprehensive framework for child protection in the XI plan and set the foundation for creating and strengthening a robust protective environment for children. Children have a right to be prevented from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. However, if they become victims, the state must address the impact of a violation of their rights through appropriate law, policy and action. It carries out with strong advocacy and a detailed implementation strategy for enhancing the infrastructure for protection services, increasing the access and range of services and increasing the investment for the protection of children. The ICPS needs to focus on mapping of needs and services for children and families at risk and preparation of child protection plans at district and state levels, strengthening the service delivery mechanisms and programmes including capacity development of service providers, counselling and family support, strengthening knowledge base, awareness and advocacy. ICPS aims at greater outreach by bringing the existing programmes under one umbrella and initiating new interventions for the protection of the rights of children (ibid.).

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