

CHALLENGES, ACCESSIBILITY & SAFETY FOR CHILDREN IN CPO's: PARENTAL VERSIONS – A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

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Abstract

Child Protection Organizations (CPOs) safe guard the children who are in need of care and protection and the prime stakeholders are children. With an intension to understand the field realities the parents of such children are approached through Focused Group Discussion (FGD) to get their expressions in order to have an observation on challenges, accessibility and safety in such organizations. Access to the services for welfare, safety and protection are done in a satisfactory way. The parents also expressed that there are certain challenging areas require immediate attention. Among them is lack of scope for higher education and bullying by inmates of the organization. Another sensitive challenging area is that parents expressed fear that the girl inmates may be susceptible to be abused. More over there is an amount of discrimination exist among the inmates in terms of caste, skin colour, region, sex, background which need to be curtailed through intervention programmes.

Key words: Challenges, safety, abuse, neglect, accessibility

Introduction

It is evident that both government and non-governmental organizations nowadays venturing into promoting child welfare and also engaged in prevention of child rights violations; but hitherto there exist violation and exploitation of child rights in various forms and changing patterns, which could not be denied. Non-governmental organizations working in the fields to protect the children are the major key stakeholders in organizing other stakeholders and taking up immediate measures in rescuing and protecting the vulnerable and distressed children. The discontentment that erupted was how the effectively function in addressing to protect the children at risk and vulnerability. The purpose of this study is to understand the opinion of the parents' of the children who reside in the non-governmental organizations, termed as Child Protection Organizations (CPOs) in terms of its strength as the protective systems on how far these children have the

accessibility, benefits, safety, preventing from abuse and neglect as observed by the parents.

Reviewing existing studies

In India malnutrition among children is alarming as PTI expresses notifying the Global Nutrition report of 2017 (Nov 6, 2018). It has been reported that 23% of the children in India go without food for three times per day and 53% suffer from chronic malnutrition. It is alarming to observe that 85 million do not get immunized, 27 million are severely underweight and 33 million have never been to school (UNICEF, 2005). Ultimately Indian children are depressed of their rights to survival (Khalakdina, 2006), health, nutrition, education and safe drinking water. More over; India has also played a key role in increasing the vulnerability of children to various and newer forms of abuse ((Kacker, Varadan, & Kumar, 2007).

Child rights violation is a worldwide problem having multidimensional nature with serious socio-economic and psychological implications. Despite the concerted efforts of the governments and non-governmental organizations at the national and international level to protect children from abuse and neglect the challenges still continue to exist even today worldwide (Dutta Devaraj, 2020) is an undeniable fact.

In addition to that over one billion children have been denied their childhood. The statistics goes still alarming that nearly 640 million children lack adequate shelter; 400 million children have no access to safe drinking water; 270 million lack health care amenities and 140 million especially girls have remained outside the ambit of formal schooling. More than 150 million children are malnourished worldwide (UNICEF, 2005)

In India there is every reason to focus the thrust towards children as Ministry of Women and Child Development evidently reported that 42% of India's total population is below the age of eighteen years (WCD Report, 2007) oblige the efforts and resources towards children and their development. According to the report by Save the Children (2018), poverty, conflict and discrimination against girls are putting more than 1.2 billion children-over half of children worldwide-at risk.

When analysed the causes for these deplorable conditions prevailing it is observed that the factors responsible are extreme poverty, family breakdowns, health issues and disasters, and deep rooted cultural practices that lead to gender biases, biased

attitudes and discrimination of certain groups appear to force children as child labour (Bhargava, 2003; Pawar, 2007). On the gloomy side; these children are vulnerable to various forms of desert (India has twenty-one million 'unwanted girls' as observed by Economic Survey 2018; as reported in Indian Express on Sep 20, 2018)

Nowadays NGOs have also been facing a number of challenges in their service deliveries while providing welfare and other services to children and among them the crucial one is the lack of financial resources. (Dutta Devaraj, 2020). Now the role of the family, government and policy makers are crucial and significant in promoting and safeguarding the children who are weak, vulnerable and marginalized. Hence one of the important players – the Child Protection Organisations (CPO's) are focused for this study in order to analyze and observe their activities and achievements.

The prime stakeholders are weak and marginalized children. In order to observe and understand the field realities in providing services by the child protection organizations parents of these children was intended to focus through a qualitative methodology and hence this efforts. Parents should be given priority by the child protecting organization particularly from the poor socio-economic background. Special programmes of orientation to the illiterate parents may also be undertaken by the NGOs (Dutta Devaraj, 2020).

Purposes

- To view the opinion of parents on the Programmes for development and protection by CPOs
- To understand the observations of parents on the effective functioning of child protection organizations (CPOs) on Children accessibility and safety
- To realize the functioning of CPOs on the benefits received by the children for safeguarding Child Right and preventing child abuse and neglect

FGD Method

A focused group discussion was conducted among the selected parents of the children who are housed in child protection organizations (CPO's). These CPO's are selected purposively based on their involvement in child welfare services in southern districts (totally 8) of Tamilnadu State. Then the CPO's are geographically classified into four zones. From each zone one FGD was conducted. The venue for the discussion was one CPO; which was selected in

conformity with the accessibility of the parents and permission in this regard is sought from the CPO's and it is also ensured that no staff of the organization is present during the discussion. While parents are given introduction, an assurance on confidentiality of their observations and ethical consideration in the form consent is obtained. A favorable environment was thus created before starting a group discussion. The major areas covered are:

- Accessibility of the CPOs to the Targeted Children
- Children's Protection and Development
- Benefits received by the children
- Children's Safety from Exploitation and Abuse
- Prevailing Child Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation
- Challenges for Protection of the Vulnerable & Marginalized Children

Results and Discussions

Focused group discussion was conducted with the parents of the children in each zone. The analysed qualitative results are present in this part.

a. Accessibility of CPO's to the Targeted Children

The parents were interviewed on how the CPO has reached their children for protection and development. In all the districts, the parents disclosed the primary agent for identification of their children was staff. In some places, the volunteers and local people have helped in the identification of the children at-risk.

Staff made to door to door survey to identify child laborers and school dropouts. At that time only they identified our children. (FGD, Parents of Non-Formal Education Centre, Zone I)

Staff with the support of local people came to our house and asked whether our children are interested in joining evening centres. (FGD, Parents of Evening Centre, Zone II)

The volunteers of the organization facilitated our children to join the Children Parliaments. (FGD, Parents of Children Parliament, Zone III).

This illustration evidently reveals that the staff and volunteers have played key role in reaching out to the children. The staff have availed the support of the key informants and volunteers in the identification of the vulnerable and marginalized children.

b. Children's Protection and Development

The parents were asked about the programmes the child protection organization promoting for children's development and protection. Many parents were more familiar with the programmes through which their children were benefited. Even some of the parents are not fathomable about the programme through which their children were benefited. Some of the parents expressed the women development programmes carried out by the CPOs.

The organization runs evening centres for educating the children. But we are not familiar with other programmes of the organization. (FGD, Parents of Evening Centres, Zone I)

Mahalir thittam (women development programme) is carried out the programmes apart from children parliaments and evening centres (FGD, Parents of Children Parliaments, Zone III).

We are not very much familiar with the programmes carried out by the organisation. (X, Zone II).

Few parents in the focus group discussions have revealed various programmes implemented by the organizations. Especially the parents of the children who were abused and got justice with the support of the CPOs, had an understanding of the child rights programmes of the CPOs.

The organization engages in identifying the victimized children, rehabilitate them and support the victimized children for conducting legal proceedings. (FGD, Parents of the victimized children, Zone II)

c. Benefits received by the children

The parents were interviewed on the benefits received by their children through the programmes of the CPOs. Prominent benefits provided by the CPOs projected by the parents are the educational supports, nutritional supports and awareness programmes on legal rights.

The evening centre is more useful and it is happy to see our children have space to learn in the evening hours. (FGD, Parents, Zone IV)

When the children are in the group they have high aspiration towards education. (FGD, Parents, Zone I)

There is no school dropout among both boys and girls after the installation of the centre in the Arunthathiar packet. (FGD, Parents, Zone II)

Our children were facilitated to avail vocational education with residential facilities. (FGD, Parents, Zone I)

My son dropped education at eighth standard due to poverty, and the organisation facilitated my son to get non-formal education. Now, he is interested to continue his school education. (Y, Parent, Zone IV)

But there were mixed responses from the interviewed parents from the four zones. Some parents felt hesitant to disclose certain aspects of the programs, then they were given separate space to express their views.

My daughter (aged 16 years) was trapped in sumangali thittam scheme (Marriage Plan scheme) in a mill industry. She was ill-treated in the industry. No one came to support us for rescuing my daughter then the organization which helped us to rescue my daughter. Now she continues her school education. (Z, parent, Zone III)

I am a construction worker in Zone II, my daughter was studying in high school. She was abused by the school teacher. This incidence was reported to the staff of the organization. They helped my daughter to get justice. (X, parent, Zone II)

d. Children's Safety from Exploitation and Abuse

In the present context, in what ways the children are safe from exploitation and abuse was questioned to the parents. Many parents expressed that their children are safe against exploitation and abuse due to the awareness raised on child rights. Some parents opined that the organizations working for the development and protection of poor children promptly respond to any violence.

Children in groups share their views and even expose the violations happening against them. When they are in a group they are not exposed to exploitation. (Y, Parent, Zone I)

Children are more aware of their rights than us. A child even warns her parents, "if you beat me then I will complain to police." This awareness has become an asset for their protection. (Z, Parent, Zone IV)

Existing legislation and government programmes are perceived as important safety measures by few parents.

The government is providing apt measures to respond to child rights violation. (Y, Parent, Zone I)

In the focus group discussions the influence of mass media in projecting child rights in the recent period was exposed by the parents.

Now many television channels have emerged off. The channels present news on various child rights violations. People are getting aware about the rights of the children. (A, Parents, Zone II)

Television highlights important child rights issues. (B, Parents, Zone III)

e. Prevailing Child Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation

The parents were interrogated whether their children face any abuse, neglect and exploitation. The more responses from the parents were on how the school treats their children. Some parents stated that their children were not exposed to any kind of abuse and exploitation. Some of the parents disclosed the facts that the other children bully their children based on caste, skin, height, disability and poor educational performance.

The school teachers ill-treat the children for not performing well in school subjects. (X, Parents, Zone IV)

My child is often ill-treated by a school teacher. This is nothing but based on caste. We belong to scheduled caste family. So the teacher ill-treats my child. (Y, Parents, Zone II)

Arunthathiyar children are unequally treated by school teachers belonging to upper castes because they belong to a lowered caste. The children at young ages develop a feeling of inferiority and insecurity. (FGD, Parents of Children Parliament, Zone IV)

My son once cried to me that his classmates ill-treat him based on caste. He question me, "why I have born in this lowered caste." (A, Parent, Zone III)

My son is fat, so he is ill-treated by other children as fat boy. This affects my son psychologically. (B, Parent, Zone I)

Parents having female children revealed their fear that their daughters are in a state of sexual vulnerability. Mainly, girls who attain puberty are exposed to sexual abuse.

Whatever, modernization emerges the mindset of malevolent is not changed. Girls when on the road are susceptible to sexual abuse. (C, Parent, Zone III)

The migration of the parents due to occupation has also in one way created threat for the children.

The girls at the hands of the relatives are more susceptible to sexual harassment and there are girls who have suffered mental agony which were not brought to the forefront. (X, Parents, Zone IV)

f. Challenges for Protection of Vulnerable & Marginalized Children

The parents were questioned about various challenges for the protection of the vulnerable and marginalized children. There were multiple responses about the challenges for enhanced protection of the children. Some parents expressed caste discrimination and poverty as major challenges in the retardation of children's development.

Caste discrimination still prevails in many villages. This discrimination affects younger children belonging to the scheduled castes. (C, Parent, Zone II)

In some schools the dominant caste students call the scheduled caste students by caste name. Caste enters into the mindset of the children. Psychological attack is a strategy of oppression. (D, Parent, Zone I)

Some parents expressed that no proper guidance and direction for the children to pursue higher education.

There is no direction for higher education and higher employment. (FGD, Parents, Zone IV)

Opportunities are highly available to economically better off children but poor children are inaccessible to avail better quality education. (FGD, Parents, Zone III)

Many parents exposed that many government schools lack facilities. They observe lack of resources and facilities that deteriorates the quality of the education.

There is poor structure in government schools. (FGD, Parents, Zone I V)

Some parents felt the migration of the parents for occupation disturbs the educational development of the children.

Due to migration the children's education is largely affected. The children migrated to other areas along with their parents fail to continue their education. (Z, Parents, Zone IV)

Some parents leave their children in the native place under the care of their relatives. But without proper care the children become weak in health and often fail to go school. (FGD, Parents, Zone IV)

Children who have migrated with their parents have become labourers. (FGD, Parents, Zone II)

Some parents viewed that cultural adulteration also spoils the development of the children.

Influence of technologies such as mass media, mobile, etc., spoils the life styles of the school going children. (X, Parents, Zone I)

Children in the middle and high school now started consuming liquor. At a young age the children are turning into drunkards, this primarily due to the increasing outlets of Government authorised wine shops and bars. (Y, Parents, Zone III)

Conclusion

The focus group discussion was conducted in a democratic atmosphere which has helped the parents to vent their feelings and opinion about the organization with the good intention that it could be helpful in better their service deliveries to the children who are in need. It was felt by many parents this is the first of kind of experience and feel elevated as their voices are heard. The staff have availed the support of the key informants and volunteers in the identification of the vulnerable and marginalized children. Parents are appreciative of the actions against child abuse and neglect. Many benefits are received by the children for their development.

It is interesting that many parents were more familiar with the programmes through which their children were benefited. The parents felt that the influence of mass media in projecting child rights in the recent period which need to be properly tackled for beneficial end.

Parents having female children revealed their fear that their daughters are in a state of sexual vulnerability. It is disclosed that the other children bully their children based on caste, skin, height, disability and poor educational performance. It is also expressed that caste discrimination and poverty as major challenges in the retardation of children's development. It is a dire need that proper guidance and direction for the children to pursue higher education is to be mooted as it is observed as the darker side. Hence there is a grave need to improvise the resources and facilities so that the quality of services for the children shall be improved.

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