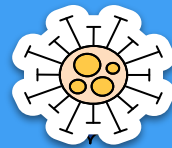


A photograph of a group of children in a slum. In the foreground, a young boy with dark hair and a blue surgical mask looks directly at the camera. Behind him, several other children are visible, some also wearing masks. The background shows a narrow, unpaved street with simple, makeshift buildings. The overall scene suggests a vulnerable community during the COVID-19 pandemic.

CHILD CARE INSTITUTIONS AND ORPHANED CHILDREN DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC



GROUP MEMBERS



GROUP:2

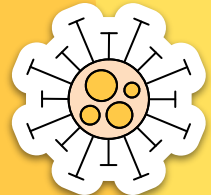
DATE: April 29, 2022

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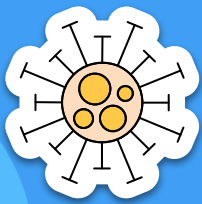


INTRODUCTION

- ❖ The 21st century is marked by the growing interconnectedness of the world. An event occurring in a specific part of the world may affect the rest of the world. Similar instances were seen during the covid-19 pandemic. Not only the health of the people were at risk, but rather the whole economy of India as well as other nations was at stake.
- ❖ People across the globe suffered not only physically but also socially, economically, and mentally. Among all, this one specific strata of Orphans suffered extensively throughout the world.
- ❖ In our Research we will analyze the different problems faced by this particular section and the institutional and structural changes it called for, in the Indian context.



- ❖ We will analyze how the Pandemic not only affected the analytical composition of the orphanages and child care Institutions in particular, but also their Rights and Entitlements described in The Indian Constitution, The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child but also their endowments to different opportunities and possibilities.
- ❖ It calls for a detailed intellectual investigation in the Existing Child Care Institutions and Prerogatives as initiated by the Government Authorities at National level and the aftermaths both during the pandemic and post-pandemic.



OBJECTIVES

- ❖ To understand the challenges Child Care Institutions and Orphans & vulnerable children faced during the COVID pandemic.
- ❖ To know about the various legal provisions, schemes and precedents.
- ❖ To understand about the benefits availed to the children affected during the pandemic.
- ❖ To provide recommendations so as to solve the highlighted problems.

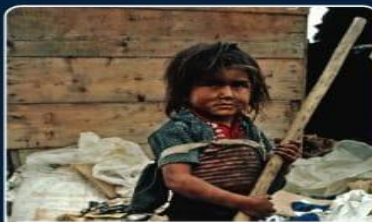


✧ ✧ **HYPOTHESIS:**

An effective framework is needed to tackle the problem at ground level.

METHODOLOGY:

✧ All the data has been collected from various secondary sources such as articles, newspapers, organizational websites and journals etc. The data has been analyzed properly and segregated to fit the purpose of our study.



WHO AM I..?



**Who are my
PARENTS..?**



**What is my
DOB..?**



**What is my
RELIGION..?**

“ORPHAN RIGHTS 2020”



**What is my
CASTE..?**



**What is my
IDENTITY..?**



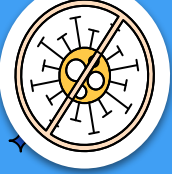
**What is my
ADDRESS PROOF..?**

**Is There Any Definition For Orphan
As Per our Constitution In India..?**

LEGAL PROVISIONS

- ❖ Article 21 of the Constitution, which essentially talks about right to life and personal liberty, it also includes right to health and it can be interpreted as every orphan child has the right to good physical and mental health which must be taken care by the State.
- ❖ Article 21A deals with the right to free and compulsory elementary education for all children in the 6-14 year age group. Even orphaned children have the right to gain education as the State acts as their guardian.
- ❖ Article 24 of the Indian Constitution talks about the right to be protected from any hazardous employment till the age of 14 years.





- ❖ Article 39(e) of the Constitution, the citizens and the "tender age of children" have the right to be protected from being abused and forced by economic necessity to enter into occupations that are unsuited for their age.
- ❖ Article 39(f) of the Constitution says that the "children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and that childhood and youth are protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment".
- ❖ Article 45 of the Constitution deals with Right to early childhood care and education to all children until they complete the age of 14 years.

IMPACT ON ORPHANS



- ❖ The National Commission for the Protection of Children's Rights (NCPCR) in their recent report to the Supreme Court has said that because of the pandemic, 6,855 children were orphaned, 274 were found abandoned and 68,218 lost a parent between April 1, 2020, and July 23, 2021.

- ❖ Counselors and psychologists believe that children with physical, emotional and mental health issues require counseling. However, when it comes to the grassroots level, child activists are concerned about the serious issue regarding lack of professionals.



- ❖ Due to covid, a large number of children who lost their parents became prone to trafficking. With no one to guide them and provide them with the basic facilities, innocent children too found it easy to make money and survive.
- ❖ Girls have also become vulnerable to sexual abuse and harassment. There were instances where, after the death of the mother, fathers pushed their children into manual labor work.

CASE STUDIES

- ❖ Anurag Kundu, Chairperson of the Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights, said, “over 35 million children need protection and 20 million children are without parents or any legal guardians.
- ❖ “A six-month-old was nudged inappropriately by her father while they were stuck at home during the Covid-19 lockdown.”
- ❖ A 14-year-old who might not be able to go back to school as his father, the family’s only earning member, has died from the disease.

❖ A 14-year-old pushed into labor. This is the toll Covid-19 is grueling on children

❖ The above statements represent the brutalities that children had to go through during the pandemic. The home portrays a source of security and safety. But for a minority, the opposite is, unfortunately, the case. Violence by caregivers and people who adopt children is the most common and unnoticed form of violence experienced by children.

STRUCTURAL
CHALLENGES

The infographic features a central light pink oval containing the text 'MAJOR PROBLEM FACED BY CCI'. Surrounding this central oval are five dark red circles, each containing a specific problem. The background is a warm, yellow-toned photograph of a group of children, with several white starburst graphics scattered across the image.

SHORTAGE
OF FUNDS

INADEQUATE
AFTERCARE
INFRASTRUCTURE

**MAJOR
PROBLEM
FACED BY CCI**

OVERCROWDING

POOR
HEALTH CARE

LACK OF
TECHNOLOGY

STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES:

COVID-19 has had an impact on CCI management's ability to comply with subsequent regulatory forms and has put a halt to their normal operation. As supply chains were disrupted, obtaining vital goods, feminine hygiene products, medicines, and teaching materials became difficult, having an impact on the well-being of children.

SHORTAGE OF FUNDS:

Due to a lack of funds and reliance on local donations, insufficient staff for daily management, and physical separation standards, it became difficult to manage these institutions.

OVERCROWDING:

The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD, 2018) identified over 3,70,000 children living in over 9,500 Child Care Institutions in India in a pre-Covid-19 survey.

According to the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), in India, at least 1,50,000 children have been orphaned and have lost one parent between April 2020 to 5th June 2021.

POOR HEALTHCARE:

The situation for Covid orphans is made worse by India's broken healthcare system. Furthermore, health facilities treating children lacked child-friendly medical services that are sensitive to children's developmental and psychosocial needs. Hence, with Covid-19 the institutions were also under pressure to tackle the mental health problems with the ongoing crisis in the country creating pressure on their infrastructure.

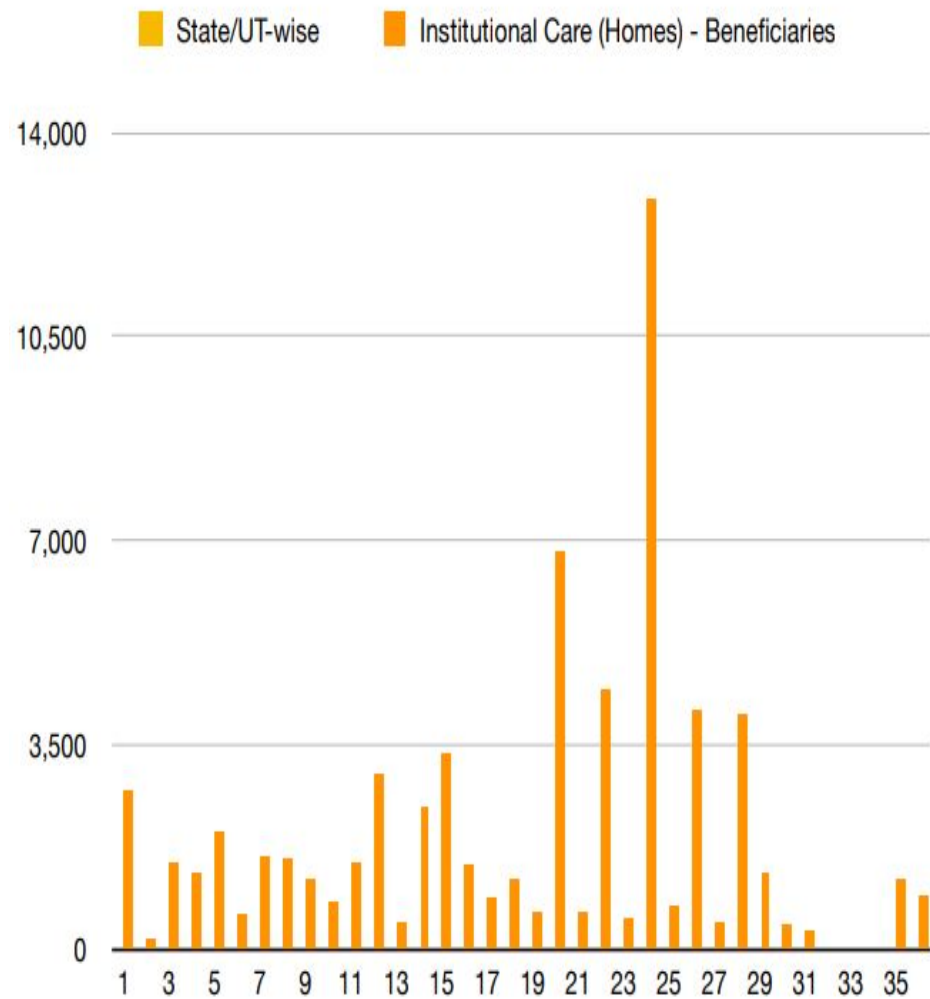
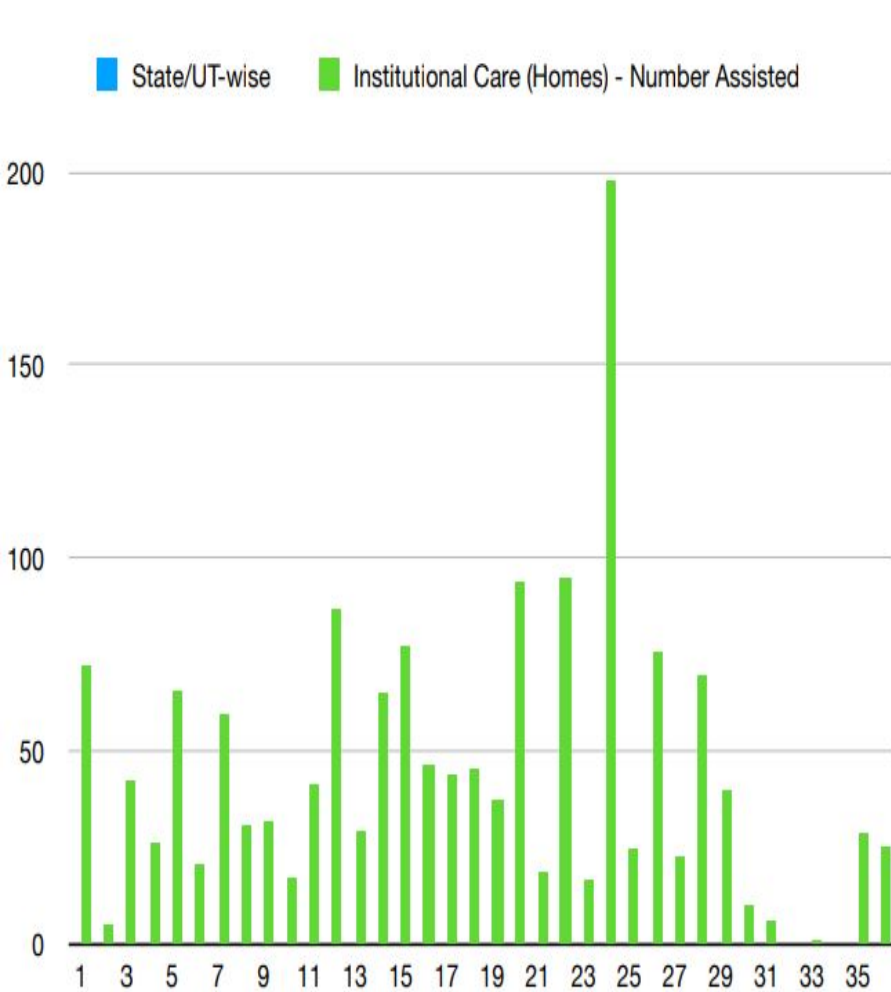
TECHNOLOGICAL LACK:

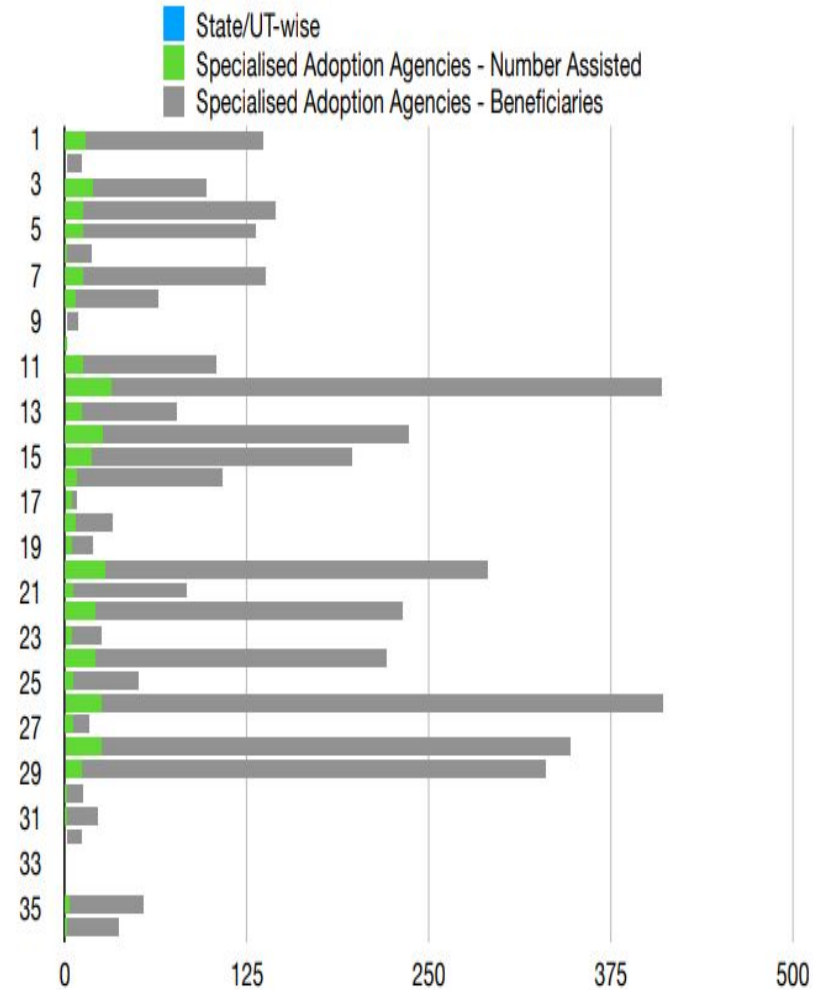
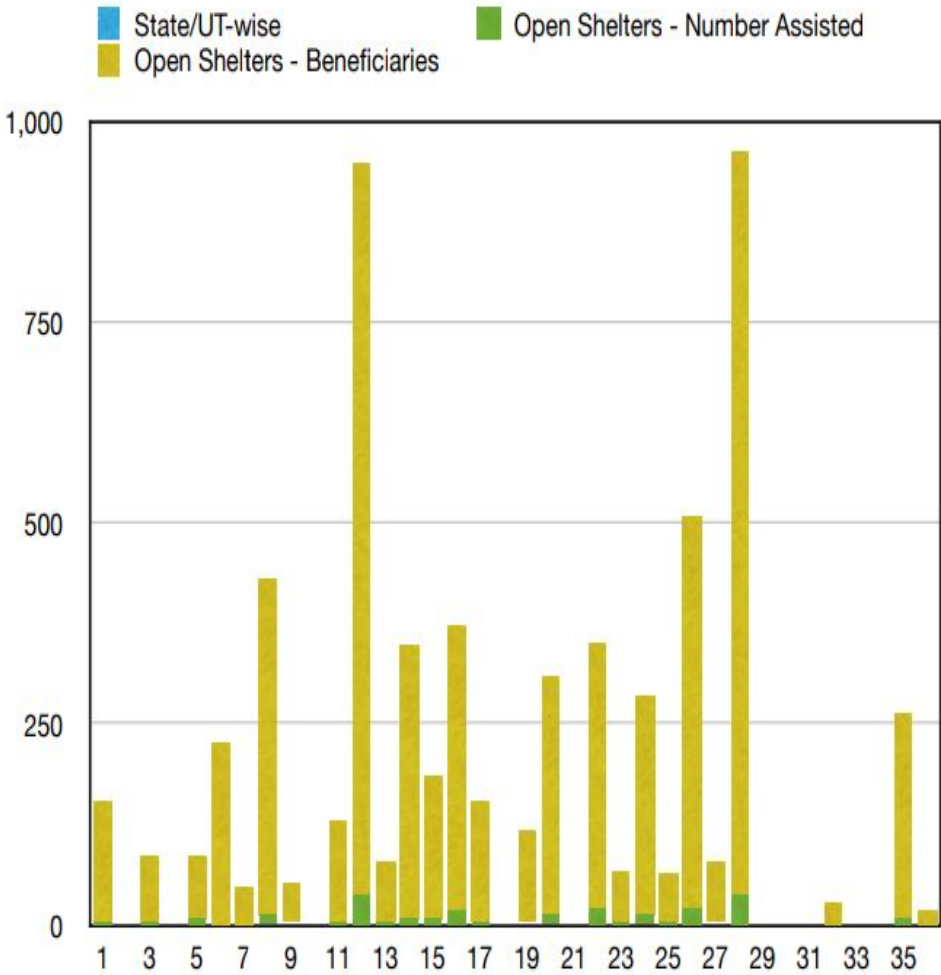
Due to the inaccessibility of digital gadgets, inadequate internet connectivity, budgetary limits for scaling up, and a lack of technical maneuvering capacity of educators for delivering online services, not all CCIs were equipped with the desired technical gadgets leading to a drop in learning of the children. The gap in educational attainment widened disproportionately as a result of this.

INFRASTRUCTURE FOR AFTERCARE IS INADEQUATE:

Children aged 18 are not well educated enough to fend for themselves, and no proper plan for aftercare leaves them with no place to go.

There is a scarcity of 'transitional planning because functionaries and young adult beneficiaries are being uninformed of the legal obligations to provide aftercare services under the JJ Act, 2015.





RELIEF SCHEMES BY THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

PM CARE

- ❖ To ensure rehabilitation by convergent approach and gap funding.
- ❖ To support in terms of education and health.
- ❖ Launched on 29.05.2021 and extended till 28.02.2022.
- ❖ The eligible children will receive a monthly stipend from the age of 18 and also receive an amount of Rupees 10,00,000 at the age of 23.

BAL SWARAJ

- ❖ In pursuance of its responsibility as a monitoring body under section 109 of the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR).
- ❖ Its goal is to follow COVID-19-affected children from the time they are brought before the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) until the time they are returned to their parent/guardian/relative.
- ❖ The Commission will learn if the child has been brought before the CWC and whether or not orders have been issued for him or her.

SAMVEDNA

- ❖ It is a toll-free helpline that provides psychosocial and mental assistance to children who have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ❖ Tele counselling is offered to children in three categories:
 - ❖ Children in quarantined/isolated/COVID care facilities
 - ❖ Children who have lost both parents due to pandemic.
 - ❖ Children who have COVID-positive parents, family members, or close relatives.

PM CARES FOR CHILDREN

Launched for support & empowerment of COVID-19 affected children



To CARE for the children who lost their parents due to Covid



Monthly stipend once they turn 18



Free education to be ensured for children



Rs. 10 lakh from PM CARES, when they turn 23



Children will get free health insurance of Rs 5 lakh under Ayushman Bharat till 18 years & premium will be paid by PM CARES



Education loan for higher education & interest will be paid from PM CARES



NCPCR
Devises

'Baal Swaraj'

for Children Affected Due to
COVID-19



The image shows a young boy with dark hair and glasses, wearing a light blue t-shirt, sitting and looking down at a smartphone he is holding with both hands. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees.

SAMVEDNA

Tele-Counselling
Support to Children
Affected During COVID-19



Tele-counseling service for psychological support to children to address their stress, anxiety, fear & other issues during these testing times



These children can be going through COVID treatment, have COVID positive parents or have lost someone close to them due to the pandemic

Dial Toll Free Tele-Counseling No. 18001212830
from Monday to Saturday
10:00 AM - 1:00 PM and 3:00 PM - 8:00 PM

ANALYSIS:

- ❖ The Ministry of Women and Child Development told parliament on December 24th, 2021. They have received a total of 6098 applications out of which 3481 have been identified and approved. Post office accounts were opened for 3275 beneficiaries under PM Care scheme.
- ❖ According to Women and Child Development Ministry officials, Samvedna Redressal of 1,009 complaints have been done between September, 2020 to May 7, 2021. Over 1000 children and parents have reached out to this helpline seeking help.
- ❖ Despite all this the lack in structural management and exploitative behavior hold back the expected outcomes. Continuous spike in infant trafficking, lack of proper implementation was recorded for different parts of the country throughout the pandemic. Many prospective beneficiaries remained unregistered..

RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Proper Implementation

3

Community Awareness Camp

5

Reservation for Orphans

7

Finding Prospective Parents

2

Bridge the Technology Gap

4

Registering the Unregistering

6

Extensions of ICPS

8

Implementation of Foster Care Home and
Alternative care.

✧ REFERENCES ✧

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- ❖ Censusindia.gov.in
- ❖ ✧ NCPCR

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Our Whole team would like to offer gratitude to our Research consultant and guide Ms. Riya Mehra for all the guidance and encouragement throughout the Project.

We sincerely thank the authorities of the National Human Rights Commission, India specially Mukesh Kulshreshtha sir for providing us with this opportunity. And a very special thanks to each & every member of the team for their hard-work and insights.

THANK YOU!

CHILD CARE INSTITUTIONS AND ORPHANED CHILDREN DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

ABSTRACT

The research paper tries to shed light on the Child Care Institutions(CCI's) and whether these institutions were capable of providing sufficient care and support to the children who have lost their parents during the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper deals with various provisions encapsulated in the Constitution of India and The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015. It also deals with the various challenges Child Care Institutions faced during the pandemic along with the impact COVID-19 had on orphaned children. A case study on "*In Re: Contagion of COVID 19 Virus in Children Protection Homes, 2020*", a suo motu writ petition by the Supreme Court has also been explained in the paper. This research paper follows a doctrinal research method. All the data collected is from secondary sources. The data given in the paper are thoroughly interpreted and finally the paper discusses various recommendations that can be implemented, which has the ability to increase the effectiveness of these institutions.

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is marked by the growing interconnectedness of the world. An event occurring in a specific part of the world may affect the rest of the world. Similar instances were seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only the health of the people, but India as well as other nations' economies was at stake. Not only the health of the people, but India as well as other nations' economies was at stake. People across the globe suffered not only physically but also socially, economically, and mentally. Among all, this one specific strata of orphans suffered extensively throughout the world. In this Paper we will analyze the different problems faced by this particular section and the institutional and structural changes it called for, in the Indian context. Further, we will analyze how the pandemic not only affected the analytical composition of the Orphanages and Child Care Institutions in particular, but also their rights and entitlements described in The Indian Constitution, The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) but also there endowments to different opportunities and possibilities which calls for a detailed intellectual investigation in the existing Child Care Institutions and prerogatives as initiated by the Government Authorities at National level and the aftermaths both during the pandemic and post-pandemic. The data is extracted from THE JUVENILE JUSTICE (CARE AND PROTECTION OF CHILDREN) AMENDMENT ACT, 2021, CONSTITUTION OF INDIA, INDIAN GOVERNMENT WEBSITES.

KEYWORDS

Child Care Institutions, orphaned children, Juvenile Justice Act, 2015, Constitution of India, COVID-19 pandemic, challenges, union and state government, government schemes, Supreme Court Guidelines.

OBJECTIVES

- To understand the challenges faced by the Child Care Institutions and orphans & vulnerable children during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To know about the various legal provisions, schemes and precedents.
- To understand the benefits availed to the children affected during the pandemic.
- To provide recommendations and to solve the highlighted problems.

METHODOLOGY

All the data has been collected from various secondary sources such as articles, newspapers, organizational websites, government websites and journals, etc. The data has been analyzed properly and segregated to fit the purpose of our study.

LEGAL PROVISIONS REGARDING CHILD CARE INSTITUTIONS AND ORPHANS IN INDIA

THE JUVENILE JUSTICE (CARE AND PROTECTION OF CHILDREN) ACT, 2015

The Act was enacted to safeguard the interests of the child. The JJ Act, 2015, defines a Child Care Institution (CCI) as Children Home, open shelter, observation home, special home, place of safety, Specialized Adoption Agency and a fit facility recognised under this Act for providing care and protection to children, who are in need of such services.¹

CONSTITUTIONAL ASPECTS

Many suffered during the pandemic and many are still suffering in its aftermath. It is safe to say that life can never be the same for many, especially for the vulnerable section of society. This research paper focuses on one such section and they are orphaned children. COVID-19 pandemic claimed many lives and left-behind children to fend for themselves. These children have no one who would look after them, no one to fulfill their fundamental needs and this is where Child Care Institutions play a major role in providing basic care to these children. The Constitution of India provides these vulnerable children with certain fundamental rights and also makes it the duty of the State to look after the children. Hence, the Child Care Institutions were established. The Constitution of India guarantees all children certain rights, which have been specially provided for them apart from fundamental rights. These include:

- Article 21 of the Constitution of India also includes the Right to Health and it can be interpreted as every orphan child having the right to good physical and mental health which must

¹ The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 No. 2 of 2016, s. 2(21).

be taken care of by the State as mentioned in *Consumer Education and Research Center v. Union of India, 1995*, the court explicitly held that the Right to Health is an important facet under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution.²

- Article 21A deals with the Right to Free and Compulsory Elementary Education for all children in the 6-14 year age group. Even orphaned children have the right to gain education as the State acts as their guardian. The Supreme Court in the case of *Mohini Jain & Unnikrishnan v. The State of Andhra Pradesh, 1993*, ruled that the Right to Education is a fundamental right that flows through the Right to Life under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. Later in 1997, the Constitutional Amendment was introduced that made education a fundamental right.

- Article 24 of the Indian Constitution talks about the right to be protected from any hazardous employment till the age of 14 years. It was observed in the case of *People's Union for Democratic Rights v. Union of India, 1982*, that children under the age of fourteen had been employed in various Asian projects and it was contended that such employment was not against the Employment of Children Act, 1938 since the Act did not list the construction industry under hazardous industry. The court held that construction work falls under the ambit of hazardous employment. Thus, children under the age of fourteen should not be employed in those construction work. The court also advised the state government to amend the schedule to include the construction industry in the list of hazardous industries.³

- Article 39(e) of the Constitution of India, the citizens and the "tender age of children" have the right to be protected from being abused and forced by economic necessity to enter into occupations that are unsuited for their age.⁴

- Article 39(f) of the Constitution of India states that "children are provided opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and conditions of freedom and dignity and that childhood and youth are safeguarded against exploitation and moral and material abandonment".⁵

- Article 45 of the Constitution of India deals with the Right to Early Childhood Care and Education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years.⁶

² Consumer Education & Research ... vs Union Of India & Others on 27 January, 1995, AIR 922, 1995 SCC (3) 42

³ People'S Union For Democratic ... vs Union Of India & Others on 18 September, 1982 AIR 1473, 1983 SCR (1)456.

⁴ The Constitution of India, 26 January 1950.

⁵ The Constitution of India, 26 January 1950.

⁶ The Constitution of India, 26 January 1950.

HOW THE CCIs WERE AFFECTED DUE TO COVID-19

CCIs provide a safe environment for children while also meeting their fundamental needs. However, institutional children are frequently subjected to neglect, mistreatment, assault, and "severe disciplinary methods" because of a lack of individual attention or parental care. Which are further substandarded by the COVID-19 pandemic, due to the restrained fundings and subsequent advancement in the orphan/abandoned population.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD, 2018) identified over 3,70,000 children living in over 9,500 Child Care Institutions in India in a pre-Covid-19 survey. According to the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), in India, at least 3,621 children have been orphaned and have lost one parent between April 2020 to 5th June 2021.⁷

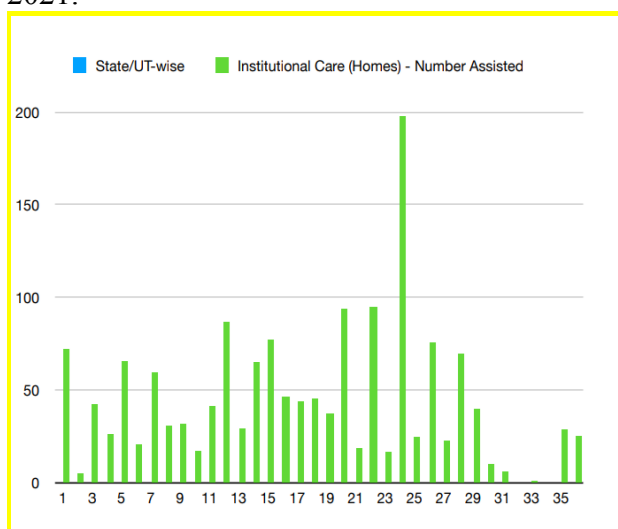


Fig1: Depicts the number of CCIs in India.

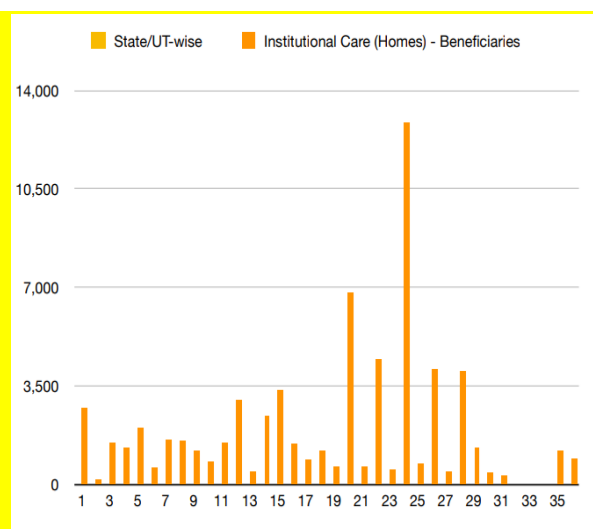


Fig.2: Depicts the number of Beneficiaries.

⁷ Sushri Sangtia Puhan, "Children, Covid and a broken Child Welfare system in India", (2021)

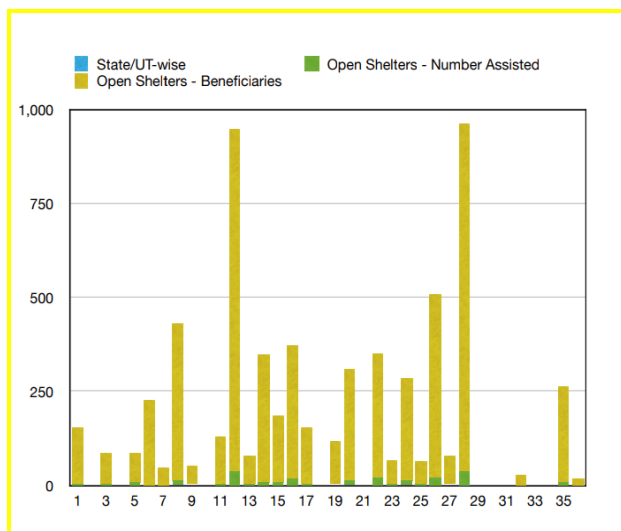


Fig.3: Number of Open Shelter Homes.

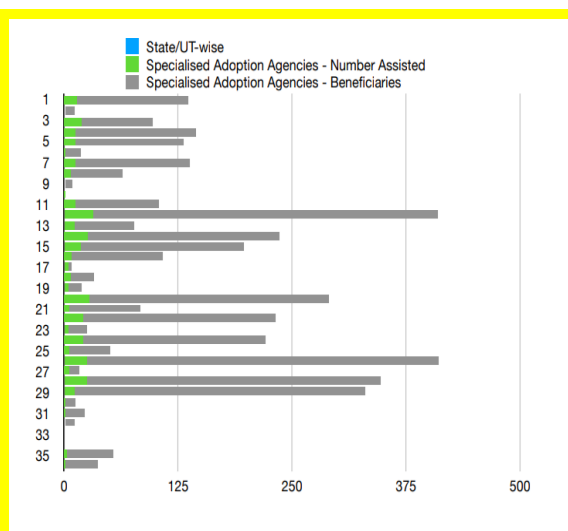
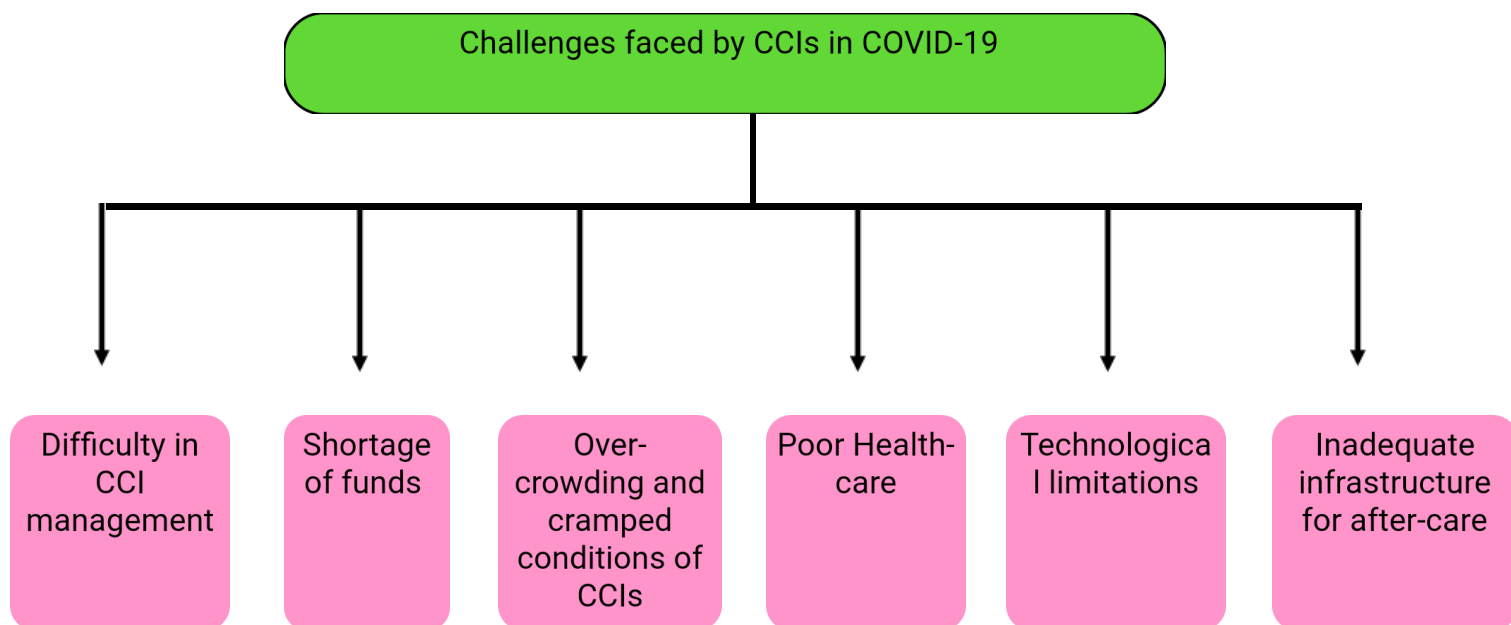


Fig.4: States with specialized Agency.

The sad truth is that the real picture is quite different and more drastic. The reality for most children whose parents die is that they were placed in state-run institutions. Which drastically failed to build an on-ground working-mechanism amidst the calamity. And resulted in rampant child-rights crisis, infrastructure facilities and funding drainage, etc.

MAJOR PROBLEMS FACED BY THE CCIs



1. Structural Challenges:

Difficulty in Child Care Institution Management- COVID-19 has had an impact on CCI management's ability to comply with subsequent regulatory forms and has put a halt to their normal operation. As supply chains were disrupted, obtaining vital goods, feminine hygiene products, medicines, and teaching materials became difficult, having an impact on the well-being of children. Non-resident CCI workers had to be kept off premises after social distancing regulations were imposed, suspending or reducing welfare activities. Due to the space constraint, arranging additional quarantine rooms for infected CCI residents was difficult. As a result, the burden of care has been exacerbated by the supervision of children under physical distance rules with inadequate staff.

2. Shortage of Funds:

When it comes to government funding and development activities, children in Child Care Institutions in India are frequently overlooked. As resources were redirected to more essential needs, funding was reduced. Due to a lack of funds and reliance on local donations, insufficient staff for daily management, and physical separation standards, it became difficult to manage these institutions. CCIs in India can only receive finance after applying for it. They must submit a specific budget proposal that is subject to rigorous and extensive vetting. The lengthy grant approval procedure frequently fails to deliver cash at critical moments when CCIs need it the most. This process limits the ability of CCIs in times of pandemics. CCIs rely significantly on local contributors for their daily needs; only 42% of all CCIs receive funding from the government, in turn increasing the need for more help from the public and donors.

3. Overcrowding and cramped conditions of CCIs:

A lot of children who lost their parents due to COVID-19, it resulted in a significant increase in the number of admittance of children to CCIs, making CCI management more difficult and also negatively affecting the power of CCIs to take care of the youngsters already there. More youngsters fell into the COVID-19 induced socio-economic trap due to the closure of schools and unaffordability resulting in massive school dropouts, child labor, forced child marriages, child trafficking, and child violence, resulting in a massive increase in rescue and rehabilitation requirements. Furthermore, due to a drop in family income, the restoration of children into foster care was hampered. With the process of adoption being so technical, COVID-19 made the challenges more difficult, causing hindrances in the process.

4. Poor Healthcare:

The situation for Covid orphans is made worse by India's broken healthcare system. Measures were taken to prevent and control the spread of infectious diseases that had put children's safety in jeopardy. Isolating children as a means of preventing or treating COVID-19 intensified anxiety, fear, trauma and insecurity, resulting in worsening mental health and the potential for violence. Panic and psychosocial distress resulting from disease prevention initiatives particularly affected children with disabilities. Furthermore, health facilities treating children lacked child-friendly medical services that are sensitive to children's developmental and psychosocial needs. Loneliness, earlier negative memories of abandonment, and other psychosomatic symptoms increased as a result of the lack of group interactions and recreational sessions. Hence, with COVID-19 the

institutions were also under pressure to tackle the mental health problems with the ongoing crisis in the country creating pressure on their infrastructure.

5. Lack of technology:

Due to the inaccessibility of digital gadgets, inadequate internet connectivity, budgetary limits for scaling up, and a lack of technical maneuvering capacity of educators for delivering online services, not all CCIs were equipped with the desired technical gadgets leading to a drop in learning of the children. The gap in educational attainment widened disproportionately as a result of this. Furthermore, increased digital dependence exposed children to mental tiredness, the dangers of cyber abuse and misuse.

6. Infrastructure for Aftercare is inadequate:

The need for aftercare homes to be strengthened is obvious, as integrating child care-leavers into mainstream life once they turn 18 is difficult, especially in post-COVID-19 times. Children aged 18 are not well educated enough to fend for themselves, and no proper plan for aftercare leaves them with no place to go. Functionaries and young adult beneficiaries are being uninformed of the legal obligations to provide aftercare services under the JJ Act, 2015, children are exposed to difficulties, marginalization, and social exclusion. There is a scarcity of 'transitional planning'. After the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, people complained about a lack of social networking and a low resource base, which made it difficult to find suitable work in the formal sector. This proves that the children having nobody to look up to were left homeless and on their own.

IMPACT ON ORPHAN CHILDREN DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The emergence of the Coronavirus disease had a huge impact on every individual's well-being and orphans were no exception. An orphan is a child whose one or both parents have become a departed soul. A single orphan is a child who has lost one of their parents, either their mother or father, while a double orphan has lost both parents. A paternal orphan is a child who has lost his or her father, while a maternal orphan has lost his or her mother.⁸ The pandemic has severely affected the mental and physical health of the orphans. Due to the lack of funds and poor administration of the Child Care Institutions, the children suffered from anxiety, depression and mood disorders. There are various levels on which the overall holistic development of the orphans has been disturbed.

1. Mental health challenges

- In India, 41% of the population is under the age of 18 and their mental health needs cannot be ignored during and after the Pandemic. The National Commission for the Protection of Children's Rights (NCPCR) in their recent report to the Supreme Court has

⁸ UNICEF, 2017

said that because of the pandemic, 6,855 children were orphaned, 274 were found abandoned and 68,218 lost a parent between April 1, 2020, and July 23, 2021.⁹

- NCPCR, in its report said that the number of children affected between the age group of 0-3 years is 7,999, 4-7 years group are 13,254 and 14-15 years are 11,799. It also said that 12,382 children between the 16 and 18 year age group were affected. These consequences are not limited to health and wellbeing issues but they affect a wide range of aspects of children's lives, including their schooling, protection, and poverty.¹⁰
- Children who have lost their parents are extremely vulnerable in society. Children are emotionally worried about their guardian's health and financial stability. Stress, depression, insomnia, and anorexia are recurrent in such children. Post-traumatic stress disorders may also be caused by quarantine, loneliness, and traumatic bereavement. Furthermore, AIDS orphans deal with generalized anxiety, conduct and peer relationship problems that were significantly related to other Orphans.
- In this nerve-racking pandemic situation, children with subsisting psychiatric disorders such as ADHD, anxiety, depression, mood disorders, and behavioral disorders may be unfavorably affected. These orphaned children not only have to cope with the emotional trauma of losing both their parents but there are physical hazards too like violence, child labour, trafficking, child marriage, sexual exploitation. Orphaned children are placed at an amplified risk of neglect and exploitation.
- Counselors and psychologists believe that children with physical, emotional and mental health issues require counseling. However, when it comes to the grassroot level, child activists are concerned about the serious issue regarding lack of professionals.

2. Trafficking of children

- Due to COVID-19, a large number of children who lost their parents became prone to trafficking. Social media platforms that shared the news of orphaned children started indulging in illegal activities like human trafficking and selling of children. Since no one was there to take care of orphans, smugglers found it a perfect opportunity to make use of their vulnerabilities. They shared their pictures along with the price of each child. Buying and selling children not only impacts them physically and mentally but also emotionally. With no one to guide them and provide them with the basic facilities, innocent children too found it easy to make money and survive. Girls have also become vulnerable to sexual abuse and harassment. There were instances where, after the death of the mother, fathers pushed their children into manual labor work.
- Anurag Kundu, Chairperson of the Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights, said, "over 35 million children need protection and 20 million children are without parents or any legal guardians."
- The future of young children is uncertain. The pandemic has thrown them into such circumstances where some newborn children after growing up won't even know who their parents were. With no education and illegal child labour, their human rights are also being violated. Not just the government and the non-governmental organizations but it also becomes the duty of the society to protect our future by standing up for the rights of children's safety.

⁹ NCPCR, 2020

¹⁰ NCPCR, 2020

- Few instances, which depicts how the children suffered in the pandemic:
 - a) “A six-month-old was nudged inappropriately by her father while they were stuck at home during the Covid-19 lockdown.”
 - b) “A 14-year-old who might not be able to go back to school as his father, the family’s only earning member, has died from the disease.”
 - c) “A 14-year-old pushed into labor. This is the toll Covid-19 is grueling on children.”
- The above statements represent the brutalities that children had to go through during the pandemic. The home portrays a source of security and safety. But for a minority, the opposite is unfortunately the case. Violence by caregivers and people who adopt children is the most common and unnoticed form of violence experienced by children.
- Such acts of violence are more likely to occur when families are confined to the home and experiencing intense stress and anxiety. The pandemic has pushed orphans in this direction and made them prone to domestic violence.

CASE STUDY:

In Re: Contagion of COVID 19 Virus in Children Protection Homes, 2020¹¹

This case is a suo motu writ petition taken up by the Supreme Court of India in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the pandemic spread, the court found that it is important to take measures to prevent the spread of the virus to Child Care Institutions. This writ petition protects the interest of the children who fall under the ambit of the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015. The Court gave the following measures to be followed by the different institutions:-

Measures to be taken by Child Welfare Committees:

- To take proactive and preventive steps and conduct inquiry and inspection considering the best interests, health and safety concerns.
- Special Online or Video Conferences may be called to prevent any harm to children residing in Children's Homes, Open Shelter, etc from COVID-19 pandemic.
- CWCs monitor cases telephonically for children who have been sent back to their families and coordinate through the District Child Protection Committees and Foster Care and Adoption Committees.
- The states were to develop a virtual support system for resolving the issues.
- If staff or children are symptomatic, the Institutions must call the helplines which are ‘1075’ and ‘1800112545’ or contact a local doctor only if the doctor advises them to do so.
- The Staff having any COVID-19 symptoms must not be permitted to enter into the CCIs.
- Institutions to promote social distancing and enforce safe handwashing with sanitizers, soaps or disinfectants.
- CCIs must clean and disinfect the place regularly with utmost care.

¹¹ In Re Contagion of COVID 19 Virus in Children, Protection Homes, 2020 or In Re Contagion Of Covid 19 Virus In ... vs Unknown on 11 June, 2020

- CCIs must inspect and quarantine the patients who are affected and should be isolated from the general population.

Rights of Children during the pandemic- A Policy Brief:

Through a Rapid Needs Assessment, “Save the Children” took forward the task to understand, as a consequence of COVID-19, the foremost challenges at the household level, various distress measures for meeting the families’ need, effects on children's education, key concerns about children, and other needs of the population. The results of the assessment are intended to help “Save the Children” in India develop, review, and align its COVID-19 response strategy and programming to respond to and support children with their specific needs.

- Alliance for Rights to ECD, COVID Response Alliance of India on Child Protection (CRAICP), India Alternative Care Network (IACN), ProChild Coalition, Right to Education Forum, Right to Food Campaign, Working Group on Human Rights in India and the UN (WGHR), 2020 are few of the institutions working for the rights of the children.
- Childhood stands threatened by the unprecedented social and economic disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Among those who were severely impacted are the children of the migrant workers, children of daily wage earners, child laborers, children in street situations, child care institutions or conflict zones, children in need of care and protection, children in dispute with law, pregnant girls, children with disabilities, transgender children, children living with HIV/AIDS, children in poverty, children in abusive, violent or exploitative situations, children of sex workers and prisoners, refugee children, foreign children residing in child care institutions, children affected or likely to be affected by other natural disasters, such as 'Aman', floods in Assam, etc. The lockdown period will also forever be labeled by millions of people who, in a bid to survive, undertook mass distress migration back to their native villages. The policy brief holds recommendations for action for practitioners and policymakers to uphold the rights of all the children during COVID-19.

Rapid Needs Assessment of support for Youth Care Leavers in the Context of COVID-19 pandemic in Maharashtra:

- The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on people across the country leading to difficulties in accessing basic necessities and continues to threaten the survival of a large number of people in the country. Youth Care Leavers (YCL) are individuals who have concluded their stay in CCIs and aftercare hostels and are now trying to make a transition into mainstream society. At this juncture, it is crucial to take into account the needs and challenges faced by YCL to enforce mechanisms that would provide them adequate support during their stay and coordinate with them upon their departure to ensure that they can settle down. In this frame of reference, a study was carried out through telephonic interviews with YCL spread across Maharashtra. An entirety of 442 respondents concurred to participate in the survey and this report is based on data analysis of their responses to the structured interview schedule that was used to get responses from them.

- There is a need for addressing and gearing the overall child protection system along with the education system of India thereby providing recommendations and highlighting the importance of training and sensitizing teachers and carer staff in schools in handling children without parental care. The paper highlights the existing gaps in the rights to education of children in the vulnerable groups and the challenges faced by them concerning mental health issues, emotional distress and trauma which consequently impacted their academic performance. It also highlights the importance of widening our understanding of childhood trauma and developing a clear policy to guide and safeguard children at large, particularly children coming from the institutions.

Psychological support for children during COVID-19- A manual for parents and caregivers:

- The purpose of this Manual is to provide parents, caregivers, support persons, and children and adolescents themselves, with a tool that will enable them to understand what is COVID-19 and how it can be prevented and also help them to manage issues related to stress, fear and anxiety, and recognize the increased risk of violence, which can help to them to stay safe.
- The Manual, which is designed for two different age cohorts: 6 years to 10 years, and 11 years to 19 years, contains activities and play methods to keep children occupied positively and provide them platforms to express their emotions.

The expedited case management process for permanent placement in families after COVID-19 lockdown:

As part of the preventive and containment measures for COVID-19, many children from childcare institutions have been sent home since the onset of the pandemic. This guidance by the Miracle Foundation will leverage their case management processes and tools to ensure that the children are safe and identify areas of need and put together an intervention plan to ensure permanency and a safe return to other alternative family placements or CCI.

Tips and techniques for virtual counseling:

Counsel for Secure Justice is re-imagining its course of intervention and building its capacity to maneuver challenges with respect to virtual counseling to respond to the psychosocial and emotional needs of children. This document is a collection of counsel to Secure Justice's learning and sights to assist professionals working with children.

IMPORTANT RELIEF INITIATIVES BY THE GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES /JUDICIARY/NGOs

COVID-19 pandemic has had multifaceted influence on Children's mental, physical, intellectual, cultural, and social aspects. The national lockdown has introduced all kinds of despair, pressure, and anxiety. Which is not only in direct violation of their rights and entitlements under various provisions but also hinder their endowments to different opportunities and possibilities and called for urgent prerogatives in regard to Child Care Institutions, Orphan vulnerable and abandoned children's by various state authorities. Such as;

1. **THE APEX COURT** has issued several SOPs for child care establishments at a country-wide level around April 2020 to cope with children in CCIs and installed locations, to prevent the hazard of COVID-19. These institutional level approaches are laid down at children-centric and workforce-centric tiers and consist of strategies unique to utility and services, scientific help, health and well-being, and capacity building of personnel.¹² Suggestions on handwashing/sanitation practices, social distancing, cleanliness, scientific consultation, and recognition are mandatory for all care homes. The apex court of India had advised on providing an audio-visible approach to hold a connection with the outdoor world and continuity of psycho-social guidance and learning. India's Ministry of Women and Child had issued improvement tips declaring that the caregivers must make themselves available to children and guarantee them their wellness if they're ill or careworn out.¹³ Separate tips for disinfecting public places, including obligatory posters, also are issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
2. **THE HEALTH MINISTRY** set up a national emergency helpline (1075) and nation/union territory helpline numbers. ChildLine intervened in more than thirty-five thousand cases of infant marriage and received 4.3 million calls till September 2020 (ChildLine, India). Moreover, The Indian infant Welfare association has cited various origins in giving foster children and their caregivers correct data about COVID. Many establishments in India have responded quickly to the immediate needs of affected populations via running in collaboration with several nearby corporations to offer various kinds of assistance in foster care homes. State governments' safety of child rights services has stated that staff and officials in childcare institutions ought to take extensive precautionary measures for COVID-19. Several NGOs and NGOs have performed a crucial position in ensuring that these hints are accurately accompanied, hence safeguarding children's and care team's well-being. The guidance for men and women by CCIs under the JJ (Juvenile Justice) Act, 2015 has been used to prevent and control the spread of COVID-19 in CCIs.¹⁴
3. **CARA**¹⁵ has issued advisories on strategies for adoption and foster care to be followed for shielding children in the course of the pandemic. Constrained virtual interactions,

¹² WCD, 2020

¹³ Ministry of Women and Child Development, "Coping strategy for Children and Caregivers", 2020

¹⁴ New idea & UNICEF, 2020

¹⁵ Central Adoption Resources Authority.

predominant co-ordination through mails and calls, virtual conferences with CCIs, and online counseling classes and remarks and measures were taken post June 2020.

4. PM CARES FUND¹⁶

a) Overview:

- PM CARES fund is an emergency fund to tackle various emergency and distress situations that arise in the COVID-19 pandemic. It is basically a charitable trust which was registered under the name of PM. Due to the pandemic many children lost their parents therefore to protect and support them the PM CARES for Children Scheme was launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Welfare.
- The Ministry of Women and Child Development told parliament on December 24th, 2021. They have received a total of 6098 applications out of which 3481 have been identified and approved. Post office accounts were opened for 3275 beneficiaries under this scheme¹⁷.

b) Key features:

- To ensure rehabilitation by convergent approach and gap funding.
- To support in terms of education and health.

c) Implementation:

- This scheme was launched on 29.05.2021 and extended till 28.02.2022.
- All the eligible children can be registered under this scheme via the PM CARES for Children website.
- Every citizen can inform about the child in the portal for the support.
- The eligible children will receive a monthly stipend from the age of 18 and also receive an amount of Rupees 10,00,000 at the age of 23.
- Efforts were also taken to rehabilitate the child with relatives and extended family members. If the extended family members are not willing or available the child will be placed in foster care. If the foster care is not willing or available the child will be placed in age and gender appropriate Child Care Institutions.
- Assistance will also be provided from pre-school to higher education. Children education loans will also be covered in this scheme.
- All children under this scheme will also be covered under Ayushman Bharath Health Insurance Scheme (PM-JAY) of Rs. 5 lakh.
- Nodal agency- The Ministry of Women and Child Development (Central level), Department of Women Development or Department of Social Justice in the State or Union Territories (State level) and the District magistrate (District level) for the smooth execution of the scheme.

¹⁶ PM Care for Children, available at: <https://pmcaresforchildren.in/aboutus> (last visited on April 22, 2022).

¹⁷ PM Care for Children, available at: <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1785589> (last visited on April 22, 2022).

5. **BAL SWARAJ SCHEME**¹⁸

a) **Overview:**

Bal Swaraj is a union government programme that assists children who have been orphaned as a result of COVID-19. In order to fulfill its role as a monitoring authority under section 109 of the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015, and in light of the growing problem of children infected with COVID-19, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has created an online tracking portal called "Bal Swaraj (COVID-Care link)" for children in need of care and protection. This Commission site was built with the goal of providing an online tracking and digital real-time monitoring system for children in need of care and protection.

b) **Key Features:**

- In pursuance of its responsibility as a monitoring body under section 109 of the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR).
- In response to the rising problem of children infected with COVID-19, the government has created an online monitoring site called "Bal Swaraj (COVID-Care link)" for children in need of care and protection.
- During COVID-19, the Commission has expanded the use of this site to follow children who have lost one or both parents.
- Its goal is to follow COVID-19 affected children from the time they are brought before the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) until the time they are returned to their parent/guardian/relative.
- In light of the rising problem of children infected with COVID-19, it is being introduced for children in need of care and protection.
- The Commission will learn if the child has been brought before the CWC and whether or not orders have been issued for him or her.
- The Commission will be able to learn if the child is receiving his or her entitlements, benefits, and monetary gains to which he or she is entitled.
- The Commission can determine whether the State needs financial assistance in order to get more funding for providing benefits to children under existing programmes.

c) **Implementation:**

- The Commission will be able to determine whether a child is receiving the rights, benefits, and monetary gains to which he or she is entitled based on the data entered into the site by District officers and State officials for each child.
- The NCPCR is a statutory organization that operates under the Ministry of Women and Child Development of the Indian government.
- It has created a link called "COVID-Care" that allows the responsible officer/department to upload the data of such children to the portal.
- The Supreme Court has ordered all district officers in the Union Territory/States to enter data on the Commission's Bal Swaraj site under the COVID-Care link.

¹⁸ Bal Swaraj Scheme, available at: <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1722677> (last visited on April 22, 2022).

6. SAMVEDNA¹⁹

a) Overview:

- The National Commission to Protect Child Rights is providing Tele-Counseling to children through SAMVEDNA (Sensitizing Action on Mental Health Vulnerability through Emotional Development and Necessary Acceptance), a toll-free helpline, with the goal of providing psychological first aid to children affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic. A network of trained experts/counselors/psychologists provides tele-counseling services. Tele counseling service is only for children.
- According to Women and Child Development Ministry officials, Samvedna Redressal of 1,009 complaints have been done between September, 2020 to May 7, 2021. Over 1000 children and parents have reached out to this helpline seeking help²⁰

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b) Key Features:

- It is a toll-free helpline that provides psychosocial and mental assistance to children who have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Telecounseling is offered to children in three categories:
 - Children in quarantined/isolated/COVID care facilities
 - Children who have lost both parents due to pandemic.
 - Children who have COVID-positive parents, family members, or close relatives.
- Toll-free Tele Counseling serves children from all across India in a variety of regional languages such as Tamil, Odia, Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali, and others.
- Tele-counseling is provided by a network of qualified experts/psychologists/counselors who have been trained on various psychological issues in relation to COVID-19 by Dr. Shekar Seshadri, Professor, Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and his team from NIMHANS, using various Tele-counseling strategies.

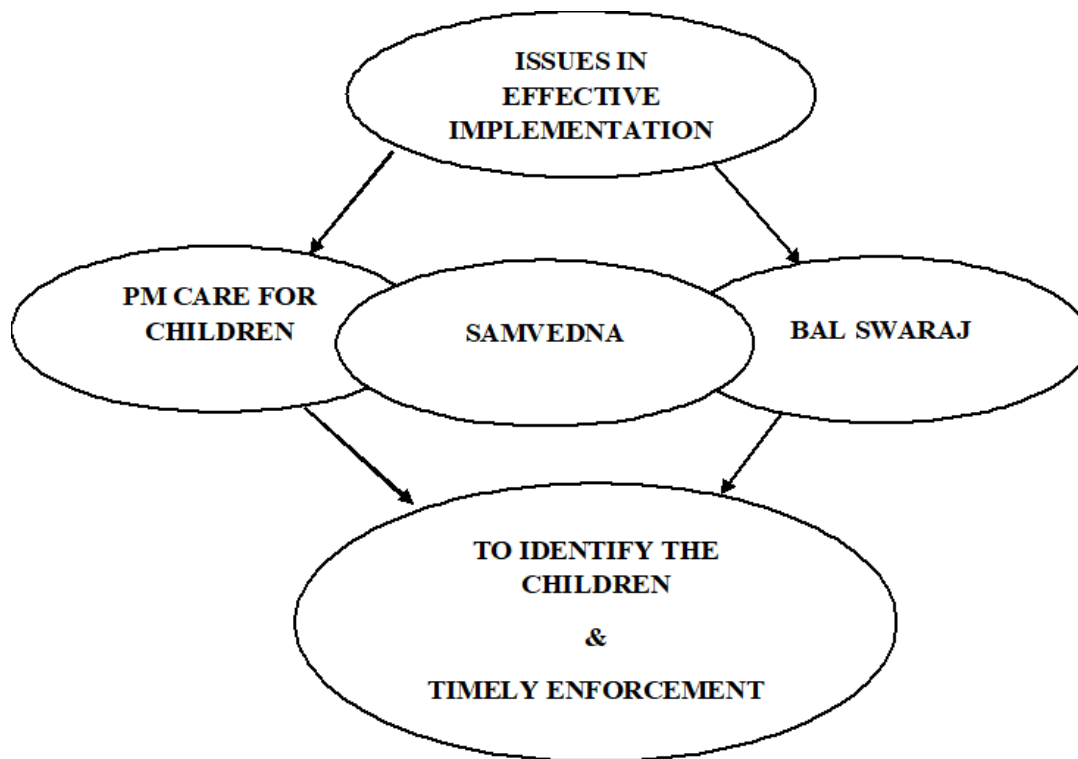
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c) Implementation:

- The programme was introduced in September 2020 and continues to assist children in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. to 8 p.m., at a toll-free number: 1800-121-2830.
- The service is only available to children who are willing to communicate and in need of counseling.

¹⁹ What is SAMVEDNA, *available at*: <https://www.gktoday.in/topic/what-is-samvedna/> (last visited on April 23, 2022).

²⁰ Over 1000 children parents reach out to govt helpline to tackle Covid-19 woes, *available at*: <https://indianexpress.com/article/parenting/family/over-1000-children-parents-reach-out-to-govt-helpline-to-tackle-covid-woes-7320205/> (last visited on April 23, 2022).



ANALYSIS & OBSERVATIONS

The Ministry of Women and Child Development told parliament on December 24th, 2021. They have received a total of 6098 applications out of which 3481 have been identified and approved. Post office accounts were opened for 3275 beneficiaries under the PM Care scheme.

According to Women and Child Development Ministry officials, Samvedna Redressal of 1,009 complaints have been done between September, 2020 to May 7, 2021. Over 1000 children and parents have reached out to this helpline seeking help.

Despite all this the lack in structural management and exploitative behavior hold back the expected outcomes. Continuous spike in infant trafficking, lack of proper implementation was recorded for different parts of the country throughout the pandemic. Many prospective beneficiaries remained unregistered and sometimes faced the brunt of power politics.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **PROPER UTILIZATION OF FUNDS-** Public provisioning for child protection and child welfare services is fraught with challenges of under-allocation, poor planning and budgeting. This has resulted in consistently poor implementation of various government programs and schemes. Improving fund allocation will help build back better and achieve national targets under the National Plan of Action for Children 2016 as well as international commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
2. **INTEGRATED INCLUSIVE APPROACH-** Two major drawbacks in the policy lens for child protection services are: 1) more focus on responsive rather than preventive measures, and 2) lack of convergence among different sectors such as education, health, and nutrition which are basic to child rights. Moreover, the policies/programs are not always inclusive by design as these often fail to cater to children with disability or girls who are frequently subjected to violence.
3. **PROVISIONS FOR ALTERNATIVE CARE** - As seen during the pandemic, there was a need for alternative care options where family-based care was regarded as the best viable option. Therefore, efforts should be made to institutionalize the process of alternative care and detention for children in conflict with the law. Moreover, communication and contact with family and significant people should form an essential part of a child's rehabilitation and preparation for reintegration in the society. Parents know more about their children than anyone else, and thus, are often the key source of invaluable and essential information. All efforts should be made to promote improved relationship between the child and his/her family wherever dysfunctional, unless it is not in the best interests of the child. Parents and families can provide key support when the child is released from CCI.
4. **EXTENSION OF ICPS-** To prevent the shortage of food and essentials, Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) funding by the government should be extended to all registered CCIs, for at least the next two years. Currently, ICPS funding is available to less than half of those affected, given low budgetary allocations towards child protection services and lower disbursement. As per an Accountability Initiative report, in FY 2018-19, only 79 percent of the amount allocated towards ICPS was released, whereas in FY 2019-20 (until December 16th, 2019), only 44 percent of the revised estimates had been released by the government.

Also, the government should consider relaxing eligibility criteria and simplifying the process to avail of ICPS funding. For instance, the process to avail of funding under ICPS requires CCIs to submit a proposal in a specified format along with expense reports and other documents. The plan is subjected to multiple levels of assessment at the local, state, and federal levels. The amount of funding, which is the cost per child, differs by state and is released on a reimbursement basis. CCIs sometimes get reimbursed for a smaller number of children than they provide for. The government should consider relaxing the eligibility criteria and simplifying the process to avail of ICPS funding, especially during

this period. While this would take care of the necessities, healthcare, education, life skills, and livelihood training can be funded through CSR.

5. **CAPACITY BUILDING-** To address the gap between CCIs and the expectations of the government, there's an urgent need to develop the capacities of CCIs by enabling the quality services systems and meeting the basic requirements of food, shelter, clothing, and medical attention, education, etc at real time basis.
6. **REGISTERING THE UNREGISTERED-** Proper emphasis to enroll the unregistered Child care Institutions under THE JUVENILE JUSTICE (CARE AND PROTECTION OF CHILDREN) AMENDMENT ACT 2021 is the need of the hour.
7. **PROPER IMPLEMENTATION-** Any scheme can be effective only if it reaches the beneficiaries. Therefore identifying the beneficiaries should be done in a timely manner. To identify the unidentified beneficiaries (children) paid volunteers should be hired who should be the locals of respective states.
8. **IMPLEMENTATION OF FOSTER CARE HOMES-** It is highly advisable to set up foster care homes not only for orphans but also for the children who are abandoned due to the economic constraints of their parents/guardians and returned to their parents once a minimum level of stability has been achieved. This will also curtail the increasing abandonment rates.
9. **FINDING PROSPECTIVE PARENTS-** The Child Care Institutions in India are still overcrowded even after so many policies and structural changes. A speedy process to find prospective families is required. Along with some principal changes in the Hindu adoption Act, 1956. It is required to add the category of same-Sex couples to adopt children being the most appropriate one.
10. **NEED FOR COLLABORATIVE ACTIONS-** There is an urgent need for collaborative actions by the Government, Child Right activists and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) to develop much better infrastructure, facilities and opportunities for the vulnerable children to make use of the resources at the optimal level. In the same way, the Judiciary in partnership with UNICEF has made strong inroads toward a multi-stakeholder approach from a previously very fragmented response system.
11. **CENTER-STATE FUND-** Recommendation to constitute a central-state government funding system accompanied by private institutions for child care institutions. In some states, this coordination is happening, but we need a more uniform response. For instance, while Odisha has been proactive in releasing funds and supporting CCIs with essentials, no support has been provided to CCIs in Goa. This is likely the result of a lack of coordination between departments and how states have traditionally dealt with CCIs.
12. **RESERVATION FOR ORPHANS-** 3% Reservations for Orphan/abandoned children in educational institutions, as provided in THE ORPHAN CHILD (PROVISION FOR SOCIAL SECURITY)BILL,2016 (Pending)Should be implemented.

13. **BRIDGE THE TECHNOLOGY GAP-** Proper Infrastructure for Identification and Rehabilitation of children without parental Care by the respective departments of WCD, Central and State government. This can be learnt from the ODISHA ORPHAN SURVEY: IDENTIFICATION AND REHABILITATION OF CHILDREN MODEL. Where the Orphan census to be carried out on a regular basis of 10 years, All the states and UTs to be brought under the ambit of technical agency in order to coordinate and assimilate the data and subsequently develop rehabilitation of the children.
14. **CRADLE BABY RECEPTIONS-** Establishment of Cradle baby Reception centers in every constituency to rescue and care for the abandoned children till he/she is reunited to the parent or given up for adoption. As based on the Mission Directorate ICPS, Jammu and Kashmir.
15. **STRENGTHENING OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING PROVISIONS-** As the CCIs have provision for free education of children in the age group of 6-14 years, there may be some who have completed the basic level of education. For them, vocational training can serve to be of utmost significance so that he/she may pick the most suitable and lucrative option, which would help him/her be economically independent, in the long-term.
16. **COMMUNITY AWARENESS CAMPS-** This must be to ensure that the individuals in society know how to deal with these children including professionals like the police, prosecutors and judges who often lack specialized training in dealing with child victims and witnesses.(UNICEF) These camps should help people learn that these children too are part of the same society and therefore, should not be victims of any social stigma.
17. **RECORD KEEPING-** Maintaining a system of observing upon the children who have been reintegrated back into the society. There should be teams looking for and maintaining records of the social, economic and psychological conditions of these children. In case, some of them still face difficulty in any of these aspects, then there can be sessions organized for these children with the counselors to help them in the best way possible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Our Whole team would like to offer gratitude to our Research consultant and guide Ms. Riya Mehra for all the guidance and encouragement throughout the Project. We sincerely thank the authorities of the National Human Rights Commission, India specially Mukesh Kulshreshtha sir for providing us with this opportunity. And a very special thanks to each & every member of the team for their hard-work and insights.

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