Awareness on the Problems and Issues of Children in Difficult Circumstances among Women in SHGs

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Abstract: There are situations where children are in difficult circumstances due to they are vulnerable, powerless, helpless and they are exposed to different types of abuse. Such children sufferings have been neglected and there is very little awareness on the problems and issues of children among public in general and SHG women's group in particular. Hence the present study aimed at understanding the SHG women's awareness on the problems and issues of children in difficult circumstances such as abused children, children on the street, child trafficking, juvenile in conflict with law, child labours, destitute, orphans, neglected, institutionalized children, female infanticide, child marriage. A total of 100 respondents from ten SHG, constituting 10 respondents from each were selected through convenient sampling at Kiriya Pushpa Family Project (NGO), Mysore. Individual interviews were conducted for all the SHG members to collect their opinion and focus group discussion was done after the individual interviews to collect the group opinion on the problems and issues of children in difficult circumstances. The result revealed that majority of the women SHG members were aware of the problems, issues of children and very few respondents were aware of the services which are available for the children in difficult circumstances.

Keywords: Children, Difficult circumstances, SHG Women, Neglect, Awareness.

I. Introduction

India is home to almost 19% of the world's children. More than one third of the country's population, around 44 million, is below 18yrs old. Children are the future of the country, and the strength of the nation lies in a healthy, protected, educated and well developed child population that will grow up to be productive citizens. In India it is estimated that around 170 million or 40 percent children are either vulnerable or experiencing difficult circumstances. Therefore there is an urgent need for increasing expenditure on child protection so that the rights of the children are protected. The neglect of child protection issue results in outright violation of the rights of the children and increases their vulnerability to abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Children from all societies in the process of normal upbringing have been neglected, ill-treated, abused. The reason may be continues socio-economic stress in the families may induce the children to be under such circumstances. Physical abuse is one such abuse among children which involves inflicting bodily injuries or forcing them to engage in physical harmful activities (Wissow, 1995). Sexual abuse is defined as any sexual conduct or contact of an adult or significantly older child with or upon a child for the purposes of the sexual gratification of the perpetrator. Recent Indian studies on abuse of children reveal that the problem of child abuse is more prevalent in metropolitan cities and urban sectors than in rural areas. Such incidence and nature of such physical/ sexual abuse are largely unrecognised and are unreported in general.

There are circumstances where a large number of children are deprived of basic minimal facilities and are forced to work as child labours. Giri (1995) has delineated two different senses of child labour, firstly, it includes an economic practice and secondly, as a social evil. In the first context it signifies employment of children in gainful occupation with a view to add to the income of the family. In the second context, in assessing the nature and extent of social evil it is necessary to take into account the character of the jobs in which they are engaged, the dangers to which they are exposed and the opportunity to which they have been denied.

There are children who are deprived of parental care and are in need of care and protection like orphans, destitute, single parenthood, runaways, street children, abused, juvenile in conflict with law etc. According to Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000, Amended in 2006 defined, a child or juvenile is a person who has not completed his/her 18th year of age. This Act protects not only the rights of children, but a person's rights when he/she was a child. The purpose of the Act is to provide for the care, treatment, protection, rehabilitation and development of the child and in doing so uphold the rights of the child. The child may be brought in front of the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) by a police officer, public servant, social worker, CHILDLINE, the child or anyone public citizen. The committee may commit a child to the

children's home or a shelter home whenever the child does not have an immediate availability of family or support system.

The amendment brought to section 2 (1) of the Act in 2006, states that a 'juvenile in conflict with law' means a juvenile alleged to have committed an offence and has not completed eighteenth year of age as on the date of commission of such offence. The Juvenile Justice Boards have constituted under the law (Section 4) for exercising the power and discharging the duties in relation to juveniles in conflict with law under the Act. The Juvenile Justice Boards function in accordance with the philosophy of Juvenile Justice. The Juvenile Justice Philosophy is based on the principle that 'the child should be protected; not to be punished, to be reformed; not to be rebuked, to be rehabilitated and not be punished.

Karnataka State constitutes 30 districts. At present there are eight Juvenile Justice Boards dealing with the children in conflict with law and 28 Child Welfare Committee (CWC) to deal with the child in need of care and protection in the State. Few more Juvenile Justice Boards have been approved and they are yet to start functioning.

Child Welfare Committee (CWC): The CWCs operate from the children's homes, and the sittings of the JJBs are held within the court premises. Out of 140 members appointed to the 28 CWCs in this State, 47 are women. There are eight JJBs in the State, of these 16 members are professional social work background.

The Child:

The term 'child' has been defined differently in different places, mainly on the basis of the chronological age. The term child is misleading as it conveys meanings, which cannot be generalized. Even in different legislations the term is defined from different viewpoints. The mental age of the child and the adaptability are often ignored in the operational definitions. The definition or explanations for the term child as given in different legislations are mentioned hereunder.

Child means 'the young human being'. From infancy to adolescence, physical growth is the most obvious change undergone by the child. Not only does he/she grow larger in most dimensions but his/her body proportions (Girling, 1983).

According to the Convention of the Rights of the Child, drafted by the UN Commission on Human Rights, and adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20 November 1989, ratified by India in December, 1992

".................a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier". However, the legal conception of a child varies depending upon the purpose: whether it is for imposing legal disabilities (e.g., in the political rights sphere), for spelling out duties and obligations (e.g., in juvenile justice systems), for affording protection (E.g., from exploitative or hazardous employment), or for establishing eligibility to receive benefits or special services (e.g., health, education and maintenance benefits) (Government of India 2001-2002)

According to The Children Act, 1960, for union territories in India and The Karnataka Children Act, 1964, a child is defined as "a boy who has not attained the age of sixteen years or a girl who has not attained the age of eighteen years". The Act is not in vogue now. It is replaced and The Juvenile Justice Act, 1986, and reenacted Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000 has now come into force.

Self Help Group: The concept of SHG is voluntarily formed group, the member size being 10-20. The group is basically homogenous in nature. They come together for addressing their common problems. They are encouraged to save on a regular basis (Das, 2004). SHG as a homogenous group of poor, voluntarily formed to save whatever amount they can conveniently save out of their earnings and mutually agree to contribute to a common fund of the group to be lent to the members for meeting their production and credit needs (Tripathy, 2003).

Problems and Issues of Children:

Children In Difficult Circumstances: the term 'children in difficult circumstances are an umbrella term which refers to many groups of children in need of care and protection they are as follows.

Female Foeticide: is the deliberate killing of newborn or the termination of a female foetus through selective abortion.

Child Marriage: UNICEF defines child marriage as a formal marriage or union before 18yrs of age. UN Women defines child marriage as a forced marriage before 18yrs of age because they believe children under age 18 are incapable of giving their consent. According to UNICEF, 47% of girls are married by 18yrs of age, and 18% are married by 15 years of age (UNICEF, 2010). Approximately, twenty three million girls in India face this reality and child marriage is decreasing at less than one percentage point a year (UNICEF, 2012).

Child Labour: The Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act (1986): defines 'Child means a person who has not completed his fourteen year of age'. Child labour is defined as any form of economic activity for at least 1 hour per week and /or domestic chores for at least 7 hours per week and /or school labour for at least 5 hours per week (ILO, 2000). According to estimates, in developing countries alone there are 250 million children in the age group of 5-17yrs who are toiling in economic activity – i.e., one out of every six children in the world today. In absolute terms, it is Asia (excluding Japan) that has the most child workers (approximately 61% of the world's total) (ILO, 1996).

Child Abuse: ill-treatment of children is an age old phenomena. Over the generations children from all societies, in the process of normal upbringing, have been neglected, ill-treated, abused, intentionally or otherwise by their parents. The different types of abuses are physical abuse, sexual, emotional and others. Physical abuse of children involves inflicting bodily injuries or forcing them to engage in physically harmful activities. Physical abuse in Indian situation includes torture, cruel abuse, excessive punishment and restraint that create substantial risk of physical harm to the child. Child abuse also poses substantial risk to the child's mental health and development, even causing death. Sexual abuse is defined as any sexual conduct or contact of an adult or significantly older child with or upon a child for the purposes of the sexual gratification of the perpetrator. Sexual abuse involves both touching and non-touching behaviours. The behaviours include fondling of breasts, genitalia, or buttocks under or on top of clothing, exposure to pornography or adults engaging in sexual activity, or even oral, anal, or vaginal penetration.

Juvenile Delinquency: According to Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000, Amended in 2006 defined, a child or juvenile is a person who has not completed his/her 18th year of age. Delinquency, a legal term for criminal behavior carried out by a juvenile, is often the result of escalating problematic behavior. The term 'juvenile delinquency' is to describe children who take to crime.

Children Under Institutional Care: According to Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000, Amended in 2006 defined, a child or juvenile is a person who has not completed his/her 18th year of age. This Act protects not only the rights of children, but a person's rights when he/she was a child. The purpose of the Act is to provide for the care, treatment, protection, rehabilitation and development of the child and in doing so uphold the rights of the child may be brought in front of the Child Welfare Committee by a police officer, public servant, social worker, CHILDLINE, the child or anyone public citizen. The committee may commit a child to the children's home or a shelter home if the child has no immediately available family or support system.

Services for the children in difficult circumstances: Child Help Line:

Child help line is a tele help line model a phone number that spells hope for millions of children across India. Child line is India's first 24 hour, free emergency phone service for children in need of aid and assistance. A child or an adult can dial 1098, the toll free number to access the service. By dialling the child line not only respond to the emergency needs of children but also link them to services for their long term care and rehabilitation. The child line works for the vulnerable children 24x7 and 365 days of the year. From 291 cities, 27 million calls were received as of March 2013, from 3million children. Child line works for the protection of the rights of all children in general.

The Juvenile Home or Balamandira:

The Juvenile home is an institution established and maintained by the State Government in association with voluntary organization which gives reception for the juvenile/children are the individuals who have not completed eighteen years of age in need of care and protection during the tendency of any inquiry and subsequently care, treatment, education training and rehabilitation is given for the children.

There are three such homes in the Karnataka State namely, Balakara Bala Mandira (boys), Balakiyara Bala Mandira (girls) and Veekshanalaya/Observation home in which children in conflict with law are kept for observation. The management of these homes shall be looked after by an officer - in - charge who will be specifically appointed to hold office as superintendent of the institution and will be under the control of the Department of Women and Child Development.

The main aim of this institution is to give education and shelter to those children in need of care and protection. Admission is given without any caste and creed barrier and they prefer school going children and guarantee their stay at the institution up to 18 years.

The Juvenile homes are managed or looked after by two Probation officers who maintain the case files, 1 house mother who looks after the daily needs of the children and overall management is looked after by Deputy Superintendent and Superintendent.

The service rendered by this home is widened in different ways. The aim of this home is to shower love and provide shelter to those children who are really in need of care and protection.

Observation Homes:

The Act provides for establishment of Observation Homes by the State Government for temporary reception of the juveniles in conflict with law during the pendency of any enquiry.

Child Welfare Committee (CWC):

The State Government will establish CWCs to handle the child in need of care and protection, which was earlier known as the Juvenile Welfare Board. A Committee shall consist of a Chair and four other members, of whom not less than one shall be a woman and another, an expert on matters concerning children. A Member shall be vested with the powers of a Magistrate under the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973. The Committees shall function as a Bench of magistrates. The Committee should complete the enquiry within a time limit of four months. A child in need of care and protection may be placed under the care of his/her parent or guardian; or in addition under the supervision of a Probation Officer; or with a fit person or may be sent to a Children's Home or Shelter Home. The Shelter Home shall function as drop - in - centre for the children in need or urgent support. The committee shall have the powers to restore any child in need of care and protection to his/her parents.

Juvenile Justice Board (JJB):

The State Government will constitute JJBs to handle juveniles in conflict with law. A JJB consists of a Magistrate and two Social Workers of whom at least one should be a woman (Section 4 [2]). Further, the Magistrate should have special knowledge or training in child psychology or child welfare (Section 4 [3]). The Social Workers should have been involved in health, education or welfare activities pertaining to children for at least seven years (Section 4 [3]). The Board is empowered to obtain the social investigation report on a juvenile even through a recognized voluntary organization (Section 15 [2]).

Need for the Study:

II. Research Methodology

Women's self help groups have been empowered economically and socially. The social empowerment among SHG women have enabled them to visualise the problems existing within their community. Every community will come across with various problems related to children, women, people living with HIV/AIDS, disability, problems of elderly etc. Among these, understanding the problems of children in particular is important and is a prime concern for the development of any society or community. As children are the future of the country, many of these problems could be dealt in order to overcome problems faced by the children. Hence problems of the children have to be explored, through understanding the issues related to them by SHG women's group. There are very limited research studies on SHG women's awareness on the problems and issues of children in difficult circumstances.

Aim of the study:

The aim is to study the SHG Women's awareness on the problems and issues of children in difficult circumstances.

Objective Of The Study:

- 1. To know the socio demographic profile of the SHG women
- 2. To find out the knowledge existing about child related problems among SHG women.
- 3. To study the extent of awareness on the child related issues among SHG women
- 4. To suggest measures to increase awareness on the child related issues among SHG women

Universe and Sampling:

A total number of 2,050 members constitute 160 SHGs formed by Kiriya Pushpa Family Project Mysore constitutes the Universe of the study. All the SHG members gather in the NGO premises once in a month for the meeting according to the rules stipulated by their own SHG group. In the present study researcher had collected data from a total of 100 respondents from Ten SHG, constitutes 10 respondents from each were

selected through convenient sampling. Individual interviews were conducted to know the awareness on the issues and problems of children through self structured interview schedule.

Research design:

The present study has adopted descriptive research design. The study describes the problems, issues and services which are available for the children in difficult circumstances.

Tools of data collection:

A self structured interview schedule was prepared to collect the data from the respondents. A prior permission obtained by the organization to collect the data from respondents. The primary data was collected from the respondents by meeting them directly in the vicinity of the organization. Secondary sources were collected through books, journals, internet and website.

Focus Group Discussion:

Focus group discussion was conducted for the women who participated in the individual interviews pertaining to child related issues such as awareness on child marriage, child labour, infant mortality, malnutrition among children, were the some of the issues focused in the discussion. In this discussion it was revealed that majority of the SHG women members were aware of problems and issues of children. The reason for their awareness being in urban area and they are exposed to mass media.

Table No 1. Socio – demographic prome					
Sl. No.	Socio - De	N = 100 (Percent)			
1	Age (In yrs)	21-30	31 (31)		
		31-40	45 (45)		
		41-50	18 (18)		
		51-60	04 (4)		
		61-70	02 (2)		
	Educational Status	Illiterate	29 (29)		
2		Primary	10 (10)		
		Secondary	47 (47)		
		PUC	14 (14)		
3	Type of Family	Nuclear	64 (64)		
		Extended Family	36 (36)		
4	Marital Status	Married	99 (99)		
		Unmarried	01 (1)		
5	Employment	Employed	73 (73)		
		Unemployed	27 (27)		
6	Income (Monthly)	< 7,000/-	05 (7)		
		7,000-10,000/-	56 (77)		
		10,000 & above	12 (16)		

III. Results Table No 1. Socio – demographic profile

The above table reveals the socio-demographic details of the respondents. It is seen that majority of 45 respondents belonged to the age group of 31yrs to 40yrs and in contrary to this only two respondents lies in the age group of 61yrs to 70yrs. Overall 71 respondents were literates and the remaining 29 respondents were illiterates. Nearly 64 respondents were hailed from nuclear family and the remaining i.e., 36 respondents from extended family. As many as 99 respondents were employed and 27 respondents were unemployed. Among employed respondents nearly 12 respondents were earning 10,000/- and above and 56 respondents were earning a monthly income of 7,000/- to 10,000/- per month and five respondents were earning Rs. 7,000/- per month.

Table 10. 2 Response related to remare infantience					
Response on Female infanticio	N = 100 (Percent)				
Aware of Female infanticide	YES	89 (89)			
	NO	11 (11)			
Encourage female infanticide	YES	12 (12)			
-	NO	88 (88)			
Aware of Female Infanticide	YES	60 (60)			
Act	NO	40 (40)			
Tried to stop female	YES	54 (54)			
infanticide	NO	46 (46)			

 Table No. 2 Response related to Female Infanticide

Female infanticide is a heinous crime which has spread in all parts of country. Brutally killing of infants in the womb is against the civilization. The table shows the awareness of female infanticide among the respondents and the result represents that 89 respondents were aware of female infanticide, and the remaining 11 respondents were not aware of it. A majority of 88 respondents did not encourage female infanticide. As many as 60 respondents were aware of Act against female infanticide and nearly 54 respondents had tried to stop female infanticide in their respective community.

Child Marriage	N = 100 (Percent)	
Awareness on Child Marriage	YES	100 (100)
	NO	00
Support Child Marriage	YES	05 (5)
	NO	95 (95)
Tried to stop Child marriage	YES	73 (73)
	NO	27 (27)
Awareness on Acts and Punishment	YES	93 (93)
related to Child Marriage	NO	07 (7)

Table	No.	3	Response	e related	to	Child	marriage
		•			•••		

The above table represents the response related to child marriage. All the respondents were aware of child marriage. A majority of 95 respondents did not encourage/support child marriage. Nearly 73 respondents had made an attempt to stop child marriage which had occurred in their community. As many as 93 respondents were aware of Acts and Punishment related to child marriage.

Table 100. 4 Awareness on Chilu Labour					
Child Labour	N = 100 (Percent)				
Awareness of Child Labour YES		92 (92)			
	NO	08 (8)			
Have you identified Child Labour?	YES	59 (59)			
	NO	41 (41)			
Awareness of the Child Labour	YES	35 (35)			
Court	NO	65 (65)			
Awareness of Right to Compulsory	YES	95 (95)			
& Free Education	NO	05 (5)			

Table No. 4 Awareness on Child Labour

The table enumerates the awareness on the child labour among SHG women. Nearly 92 respondents were aware of child labour. As many as 59 respondents had identified child labours at hotels, factories etc. A majority of 65 respondents were not aware of Child Labour Court established specially for children. As much as 95 respondents were aware of Right to Free and Compulsory Education to Children between the age group of 6yrs to 14yrs.

Awareness on Child Related	N = 100 (Percent)	
Aware of Government home for girls	YES	45
_	NO	55
Aware of Government home for boys	YES	26
	NO	74
Aware of Child help line	YES	34
	NO	66
Aware of missing child bureau	YES	25
	NO	75

Table No. 5 Awareness on Child Related Issues

The table explains the awareness of child related issues among SHG women. Majority of the SHG women i.e., 55 and 74 respondents were not aware of the Government home for girls and boys home respectively. Again a majority of 66 respondents were not aware of Child help line and 75 respondents were not aware of missing child bureau.

Table 100: 0 Awareness on China Related Issues					
Awareness on Child Related Issu	N = 100 (Percent)				
Awareness of Special Police force for	YES	33			
children	NO	67			
Awareness of Child Welfare committee	YES	43			
	NO	57			
Awareness of Sexual Abuse	YES	98			
	NO	02			

The table enumerates the awareness on child related issues among SHG women. Majority of the respondents were not aware of child related issues either Special Police force for children or Child Welfare Committee (CWC), only few of the respondents i.e., 33 and 43 respondents were aware of Police unit and CWC respectively. Nearly 98 respondents were also aware of sexual abuse among children.

Major Findings:

- Majority of 45 percent respondents belonged to the age group of 31 yrs to 40 yrs.
- ▶ Nearly 71 percent respondents were literates.
- > As many as 64 percent respondents were belonged to nuclear family.
- Majority of 99 percent respondents were married and only one respondent was unmarried.
- > The percentage of respondents who were employed was 73%.
- As many as 89 percent respondents were aware of female infanticide
- > Majority of 88 percent respondents did not encourage female foeticide.
- ➢ As many as 60 percent of the respondents were aware of female infanticide Act.
- As many as 54 percent respondents had tried to stop female foeticide in their respective community.
- > All the respondents i.e., 100 percent were aware of child marriage.
- Majority of 95 percent respondents did not encourage/support child marriage.
- Nearly 73 percent respondents had made an attempt to stop child marriage which had occurred in their community.
- > As many as 93 percent respondents were aware of Act and Punishment related to child marriage
- > Nearly 92 percent respondents were aware of child labour that is going on.
- As many as 59 percent respondents had identified child labours at hotels, factories etc.
- As many as 95 percent respondents were aware Right to Education (free and compulsory education) to children between the age group of 6yrs to 14yrs.
- Majority of the SHG women i.e., 55 percent respondents were not aware of the Government home for girls/ Institution for the children in need for care and protection.
- 74 percent respondents were not aware of Government home for boys/ Institution for the children in need for care and protection.
- > Majority of 66 percent respondents were not aware of Child help line.
- ▶ Nearly 75 percent respondents were not aware of missing child bureau.
- ➢ 67 percent respondents were not aware of Special Police force for children.
- ➢ 57 percent respondents were not aware of Child Welfare Committee (CWC).

Suggestion:

- Organizing awareness programs on the different issues of children to the SHG members.
- > Organizing special lectures on a particular issue of children can be focussed among SHG members.
- > Group discussion on the social problems of the children can be taken up by the NGOs to its SHG members.
- Life skill education can be imparted to the SHG women to visualise the problems and issues of children at family and community level.
- Community Vigilant Committee can be introduced to SHG women as its members to identify the issues of children at community level.
- > Organizing life skill education the children in the community
- Imparting Social Advocacy to the SHG members.
- Distributing handouts which has Child Help line number 1098 and also information on the services by the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) to the children
- Follow ups to be made by the NGOs to keep track of the issues identified and solutions implemented by the community.
- > Connecting services or inter linkage between NGOs and the community.

IV. Conclusion

From the study it can be concluded that since women self help groups have been empowered hence majority of the respondents were aware of the problems and issues of children. Further the NGOs can take up initiatives to disseminate awareness on the problems and issues related to children to different group in the society such as SHGs, women's group, men's group and adolescent girls and boys group to enhance the knowledge on the problems and issues of children. Further, it is recommended that there is need for future research studies focusing on bringing awareness to public in general and SHG women's group in particular and highlight on the problems, issues and services that are available to the children.

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