

Violence as a Gruesome Reality of Marginalized Children: An Overview

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ABSTRACT

India has the largest number of children the world with 40 percent of population below 18 years of age. It is estimated that nineteen percent of world's children live in India. Most children are blessed to derive love, shelter, adequate nourishment and a sense of identity through their family. Unfortunately, many children are experiencing vulnerable conditions and they lack substantial protection in their formative years of life which is extremely required for their development and welfare. A child who is marginalized is often exposed to constant social exclusion, neglectful environment, and multiple stigmas of being different. They have poor access to resources like education and other social resources resulting into poor mental health. The present paper attempts to deliberate on the issue of violence in the lives of marginalized children presenting great challenges to sustain.

Key Word: Violence, Marginalization, Social exclusion and Marginalized children

Children: The Potential Future

Children and childhood across the world, have broadly been construed in terms of a 'golden age' that is synonymous with innocence, freedom, joy and play. Childhood, in its broadest description spans merely ten to twelve years of an individual's entire life span. . The period following birth until the child grows up into an independent, mature adult, has been recognized as the most crucial in the entire life span. It serves as the foundation, on which builds an individual's entire life. It is the time when, spared the rigours of adult life, one hardly shoulders any kind of responsibility or obligations. Children are the most valuable asset of a nation because they represent the present as well as create the future of the nation. Investment in children leads to the potential production in terms of development of the country. Perhaps, this is why children are synonyms of growth and sustainability. The strong and positive foundation that they lay in the present time determines the productive future hence they actively contribute to the growth of nation.

As per **Census (2011)**, currently India stands with 1.21 billion people, constituting the second most populous country in the world, while Uttar Pradesh is the state with the highest child population in the country (19.27%). Children are the most valuable asset of a nation as they create the future of the nation.

All children desire to be loved, cared, protected, prevented and nurtured. Likewise, it is the fundamental right of the child to have an environment that ensures their proper care, nourishment, protection and to give them a fruitful life ahead. *Article 21 of Indian Constitution provides that every person has a right to live which includes right to live with dignity.* According to Justice P. N. Bhagwati, this right to live with dignity is elaborated as, "The fundamental right to life which is the most precious human right and which forms the arc of all other rights must therefore be interpreted in a broad and expansive spirit so as to invest it with significance and vitality which may endure for years to come and enhance the dignity of the individual and the worth of the human person. We think that the right to life includes right to live with human dignity and all that goes along

with it, namely, the bare necessities of life such as adequate nutrition, clothing and shelter and facilities for reading, writing and expressing oneself in diverse forms, freely moving about, and mixing and commingling with fellow human beings". Also, the Constitution of India provides that the State shall direct its policy towards ensuring "that 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" (Constitution of India; Article 39). This directive clearly positions children as deserving the highest priority in national realisation of the Fundamental Rights and the special provisions for those most vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion. Therefore, if a child enjoys a fundamental right to life, by the same token he/she enjoys the right to all that makes a life *with dignity* possible, such as assured access to nutritious food with dignity, education and healthcare of a certain basic quality, decent work, decent shelter and social protection. Children are dependent over others in order to get their basic needs and emotional needs fulfilled. Apparently, children are vulnerable because they are innocent, tender and easy to exploit, are easy to intimidate, easy to hush up, and thus they become unfortunate victims of Crime.

Marginalized Children: The Unheard Voices

Marginalization is a slippery concept where different context define it in different manner. However, the common concept of marginalization among all definition is exclusion and deprivation resulting into an inability to access resources. This exclusion is defined as the processes by which individuals and population groups face barriers in relation to their access to public goods, resulting in inequitable social attainments, capabilities, and development, justice and dignity outcomes.

Marginalized children are children who live in difficult circumstances for no fault of theirs. Their circumstances are not easy and its a great challenge for them to sustain every day. The term "Children in Difficult Circumstances" is an umbrella term, which refers to many groups of children in situations of need. They are often referred to as children living in difficult circumstances. The concept of children in difficult circumstances was initially introduced by World Summit for Children (WSC) in 1990 as one of the goals to provide improved protection of children in especially difficult circumstances.

Children in difficult circumstances are those children whose basic needs for food, shelter, education, protection, health care and security are not met. Such children face greater risk of suffering malnutrition, poor physical and mental health, disease and possibly death. The term "Children in Difficult Circumstances" is an umbrella term, which refers to many groups of children in situations of need. According to **UNESCAP (2008)**, children in difficult circumstances include:

- Children living in severe poverty (Destitute Children)
- Children affected by HIV/AIDS, including orphaned children
- Children with disabilities and chronic illnesses
- Child labourers
- Children living or working on the streets
- Sexually exploited children and
- Child refugees and undocumented immigrant children and Trafficked Children
- Children of Prostitutes
- Juvenile offenders
- Physically or mentally challenged Children
- Victims of War, Conflict and Natural Calamities
- According to UNESCAP (2008), children in difficult circumstances include:
- Children living in slum

- Migrant Children
- Children of nomads
- Street children
- Abandoned and homeless children
- Child beggar
- Child labor
- Children in severe poverty
- Children affected by natural disaster or war
- Children affected by violence
- Victim of child marriage
- Trafficked children.
- Children of prostitutes
- Sexually abused children
- Missing and trafficked children
- Children of prisoners
- Children affected by conflict, disaster
- Disabled children
- Children born as eunuchs
- Orphans
- Children in conflict with law
- Children affected by substance abuse and HIV/AIDS and other terminal diseases

These children are exposed to intense, multiple risks to their physical and mental health either for shorter or longer periods in their lives. A common characteristic of these children is that they lack adequate care and protection, and are forced to lead their lives away from the mainstream. They undergo various forms of deprivation, abuse or exploitation, and unfortunately, these categories of children are on the increase in every part of the world.

It is estimated that around 170 million of India's children are vulnerable to or experiencing difficult circumstances. Around 172 million children in India are vulnerable to experience difficult circumstances with poor mental health. **UNICEF (1994)** estimated that around 11 million children live in streets in India. Marginalized children and adolescents are less likely to access quality life, good mental and physical health status, quality education and opportunities to participate and contribute. Besides that, it is more likely that they will experience abuse, violence and exploitation. Since they are an integral and important part of our population, it is their right to access full care and protection, essential commodities and services and support and opportunities.

Violence against Marginalized Children: A Major Concern

Children being innocent and tender, having less control over their lives and dependency over others for the fulfilment of their basic needs makes them vulnerable, especially when they very young. The fact that children are vulnerable, they need to be cared for and protected from 'the harshness of the world outside' and around.

Marginalized children who constantly experience violence in any form are more likely to have poor mental health. Children exposed to violence are more likely to develop mental health issues. Emotionally regressive environment at home, aversive life situations and parental deprivation were significant impact on their mental issues (**Spitz, 1945**).

Violence against children is a public health, human rights, and social problem, with potentially devastating and costly consequences. Violence against children includes all forms of violence against people under 18 years old whether perpetrated by parents or other caregivers, peers, partners, or strangers. This wide definition of violence includes not only the more obvious violent acts of commission: at least one of six main types of interpersonal violence that tend to occur at different stages in a child's development.

1. Maltreatment (including violent punishment): physical, sexual and psychological/emotional violence.
2. Bullying (including cyber-bullying).
3. Youth violence: concentrated among children and young adults aged 10–29 years, occurs most often in community settings between acquaintances and strangers.
4. Intimate partner violence (or domestic violence): physical, sexual and emotional violence by an intimate partner or ex-partner.
5. Sexual violence: non-consensual completed or attempted sexual contact and acts of a sexual nature not involving contact.
6. Emotional or psychological violence: restricting a child's movements, denigration, ridicule, threats and intimidation, discrimination, rejection and other non-physical forms of hostile treatment.

Violence against children is widespread and must be addressed to improve children's health and well-being. It is gut wrenching to see that Violence against children are frightfully high. It is estimated that up to 1 billion children aged 2–17 years, have experienced a type of violence. Violence is not solely relegated to the external slum environment, but also to within households.

Violence experienced in childhood pose great challenges to the overall development of such children mental health experienced children are exposed to bleak and harsh realities of life which impact their mental health..

World Health Organization (2020) has highlighted the consequences of child maltreatment that include impaired lifelong physical and mental health, and the social and occupational outcomes can ultimately slow a country's economic and social development. At large, it is the lack of safe environment and education often leads to poor self-esteem and future related anxiety (**Das, 2019**). Homeless children, adolescents and even women living in unprotected environment on streets make easy prey for sexual abuse (**Shanthi, 2014**).

Exposure to violence results in short-term emotional harm, manifested by such behaviours as bed-wetting, nightmares and social withdrawal. It has also implications in terms of mental health issues such as psychiatric disorders, depression and anxiety, sleep disorder, substance abuse, poor self other relatedness and suicidal ideations and suicidal tendencies.

Numerous studies document that the tenuous conditions of informal settlements negatively affect children's relationships with their family and peers, slows their growth and cognitive abilities, and worsens self-esteem. The constant fear of eviction and abuse make these children vulnerable to behavioural and emotional problems compared with children living in rural areas or non-slum locales witnessing and being victims to a child and spousal abuse is highly correlated with negative physical and mental health outcomes in children (**Bhatia, 2007 and Patel, Flisher, Nikapota, & Malhotra, 2008**). **Srivastava & Shareef (2016)** studied street children aged 10-15 years and reported that younger children are more vulnerable to abuse. All forms of abuse were common, but physical abuse (74%) was highest and the police (25.5%) was an important perpetrator. National Institute of Urban Affairs (2019) in its report on Violence and Crime against Children in India highlighted that Girls are major victims (87%) as compared to boys (13%). Four in every five girl child victim encounter sexual abuse. Violence may take place in homes, orphanages, residential care facilities, on the streets, in the workplace, in prisons and other place of detention and lastly at schools. Marginalized children are more likely to develop depression, substance use behaviour, anti social and violent behaviour and severe physical and mental health issues (**WHO, 2005**).

Marginalized children especially who work as a street child are especially vulnerable to mental disorders and disease because life on the streets is unprotected and involves greater exposure to impairment of attachment,

unsanitary living and working environments, drug abuse, prostitution (with high exposure to sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS), infectious diseases, malnutrition, accidents and, more recently, violence. They have limited access to health care services than other urban dwellers and their diseases go untended until they become severe. Consequently, mortality is high among them. **Patil et. al (2013)** found general children and under privileged children, found 14.8 % prevalence of psychiatric morbidity among 5 to 14 years old 257 children of urban slums.

Conclusion:

Each and every child has this basic right to survive, to grow and to develop and to be entitled to protection from all forms of violence. Despite various government initiatives, under the umbrella of legal provisions, marginalized children are still forced to lead a life of constant social exclusion, discrimination, and deprivation. Early experiences of any form of violence leaves an indelible mark on the overall healthy development of children. Marginalized children are usually left unattended and unheard. These children need to be protected from violence which is making them vulnerable to develop psychiatric disorders and hampering their well being. In order to ensure their adequate safety and to promote their holistic development in most possible way, an integrated multi stake holder approach is urgently required and this issue of violence needs to be addressed urgently. The policy makers, government and researchers need to focus upon this issue immediately and make sure to make this children empowered and to provide effective measures to mainstream them into society.

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