

Chapter V

REHABILITATION OF THE STREET CHILDREN: PROSPECTS AND PROBLEMS

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Street children phenomenon is not new or confined in a particular region in the world. Many countries throughout the world have faced this problem and responded this problem in their own ways. While at some places the problem is being tackled in a systematic manner, in many other situations the responses have been just ad hoc (Agrawal, 2003: 163). India is not free from this problem and the rehabilitation of street children is a matter of great concern of the Indian government. UNICEF makes an influence throughout the world in almost all the governments to set up a separate legislation to rehabilitate the children in difficult circumstances. As a result of it, many governments have started schemes or programmes to rehabilitate this children.

Street children who are found in the Howrah station area are orphan, parentless, semi orphan or destitute. For such children Government of India has passed a law 'Juvenile Justice Care and Protection of Children Act' in 2000. As per this act, children who stay in the station premises or on the street with or without parents may be shifted to Children's Home(Section 34), Observation Home(Section 8), Special Home(Section 9) and Shelter Home (Section 37) by the law implementing agencies. This law has sufficient provisions for institutional care of the children in difficult circumstances. Through this institutional care the children may get their education and other basic needs like food, clothes and shelter etc. But now the amendment of Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000 focuses on the non institutional care system for the rehabilitation of street children. In most countries the institutional approach has been replaced by non

institutional services. It basically gives a logical shifting from dependency model to empowerment model.

The Chapter IV of this Act describes about the rehabilitation and social reintegration of child. The rehabilitation and social reintegration of a child begin during the stay of the child in a Children's Home or Special Home. It may be carried out alternatively by adoption, foster care, sponsorship and sending the child to an after care organization. The main purpose of this rehabilitation programme is to ensure linkage between various governmental, nongovernmental, corporate and other community agencies for facilitating rehabilitation of the child (J.J. Act 2000).

Present status

A review (2011) of child protection system for the period 2007 to 2012 by Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), identified key concerns such as the major gaps in the qualitative and quantitative data on children in need of care and protection, absence of standards for care, poor institutional infrastructure under the juvenile justice system and the near complete absence of non-institutional and family-based care systems for children (Harper and Iyer, 2013 : 178-179).

In 2009-2010 the same ministry launched a programme for the children in need of care and protection. The name of the programme was Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS). The great achievement of this scheme was all state governments had initiated this programme and as a result of it 548 CWCs, 561 JJBs, 23 State Child Protection Societies (SCPS), 18 State Adoption Resource Agencies, 438 District Child Protection Societies (DCPS) in 16 states established under this scheme (Harper and Iyer, 2013: 179).

The present strategic plan of ministry encourages non-institutional care method instead of institutional care method. It is globally accepted that family is the best place for the children but it is true that institutional care is still the only option for many disadvantaged children in India. So family may be strengthened to provide better service for the children and institutional care may be accepted as the last resort. However there are many evidences when children are abused and exploited in these institutional care systems. In Howrah station a majority of children (55%) stay alone and law implementing agency like the police may wean them from the street. Police can make an attempt to trace their family and restore them to their family. Efforts may be made to strengthen families' capabilities to care and protect their children. Families may be linked and coordinated with the various existing welfare schemes of government to strengthen their capacities.

There are other schemes like National Urban Health Mission, Mid-day meals provisions for street children, bridge schools etc. , which are also available for street children. National Urban Health Mission provides health check up facilities for street children. Government has taken decision that they will provide Mid-day meal at railway station and bus stands for the street children. The children who are not in formal school system may get vocational training and education through this bridge schools.

Rehabilitation of Street Children: Some Field Experiences

In Howrah there are two NGO run Children's Homes for boys, one NGO run Children's Home for girls, one government home for girls, one NGO run Observation Home for boys, one NGO run After Care Home for boys, two Specialized Adoption Agencies(SAA). In addition to those there are two NGO run

open shelters (as per ICPS Programme) operates in this district. These residential programmes are mainly meant for children in need of care and protection.

Rehabilitation of Street Children: A Preventive Approach

Children who leave their home first time keep lot of anger and hurt. Other than compulsion sometimes they leave their home out of curiosity and adventure. The children who are new to the street often face the harsh realities and unconducive atmosphere of the city life. Sometimes they like to go back to their native place. In these circumstances, adults' presence and counselling to the street children may help them wean from street habitat and go back to their family.

The children who are staying on the street for more than two weeks by overcoming the initial fears and crisis got adjusted with the social process prevail there. They try to be friendly with the other street operators and seek their support to settle down. They tell lies effortlessly and keep them busy with other street children. A constant keep in touch mechanism is required for them for guidance and counselling to make them understand the disadvantages and danger of street life. First of all they may be shifted to the Children's Home for shelter so that they can be weaned from the street life. Along with that life-skill education may be provided to them for their rehabilitation.

The children who are platform veterans are very difficult to rehabilitate. They feel comfortable on the platform and test drugs, sniffing and alcohol. Here they enjoy absolute freedom and hardly thought of returning at home. A constant street presence is required for them to build some level of trust and after that they may be invited to join in the camp on life skill activities. A separate camp for them may be arranged and attended by a group of experts consisting of psychiatrist, doctor,

social worker. After wards they may be shifted to the rehabilitation centre with the help of district child welfare committee.

Majority (59 %) of male street children liked to go to rehabilitation centre. They may be weaned from the street and put to the rehabilitation centres. About 50 per cent girl street children want to go to the rehabilitation centres because they feel that street is not safe place for them. These female street children may be isolated immediately and may be put to the rehabilitation centre with the help of present juvenile justice mechanism. A constant outreach process requires to protect other 50 per cent female street children who have refused to go to the rehabilitation centre (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1

Distribution of respondents by length of stay on the street and desired to be rehabilitated

Period of stay on the street	Like to go to rehabilitation centre		
	Yes	No	Total
6 months to 12 months	2 (20.00)	8(80.00)	10(100.00)
< 12 months to 18 months	0(0.00)	1(100.00)	1(100.00)
< 18 months to 24 months	42 (65.62)	22(34.37)	64(100.00)
Total	44(58.66)	31(41.33)	75(100.00)

Figures in parenthesis are percentages

Though they were suffering from lack of food, lack of cloth, lack of shelter, lack of education and others but majority (56%) of the street children had expectation to get permanent employment somewhere. Another (41%) asked for multiple help like food, employment, shelter, education, health services and even repatriation to Bangladesh from the government, N.G.Os or other agencies(See Table 5.2).

Table 5.2

Distribution of respondents by nature of help expected from Govt/ NGO/any other

Nature help expected	No.
Shelter	1(1.33)
Education	1(1.33)
Employment	42(56.00)
Combined (food, employment, shelter,education,health, wanted to go back Bangladesh)	31(41.33)
Total	75(100.00)

Figures in parenthesis are percentages

There were few children of senior age who were searching for Jobs so that they could help their family or run a peaceful life. About 41 per cent of street children did not want to go to the rehabilitation centre (See Table 5.3). They liked to stay on the street or platform which is their place of income. So they thought that if they go to the rehabilitation centre they will lose their income.

Table 5.3

Distribution of respondents by interest to go to rehabilitation centre

Nature of interest	No.
Yes	44(58.67)
No	31(41.33)
Total	75(100.00)

Figures in parenthesis are percentages

Prospects

Majority (67%) of the street children had no experience with vocational training or skill training in Howrah station. So there is a scope to involve these street children in vocational training or skill training. That may help them for their rehabilitation in future. Only 33 per cent of street children had some kind of vocational or skill training. They somehow came in contact with some NGOs and from where they got some vocational or skill training (See Table 5.4).

Table 5.4

Distribution of respondents having vocational / skill training

Response	No.
No	50(66.67)
Yes	25(33.33)
Total	75(100.00)

Figures in parenthesis are percentages

About 52 per cent of street children got training in envelop making, card painting and paper cutting, 32 per cent received training on motor cycle repairing, bag making, candle making and jewellery polishing and another 12 per cent in tailoring, embroidery etc. (See Table 5.5). They got those training while they were with the NGOs. But later they forgot those training as they dissociate themselves with the NGOs and returned again to the street life. However possibilities are there to further get them involved in the vocational or skill training which may ultimately help them for their rehabilitation.

Table 5.5

Distribution of respondents by types of vocational/ skill training received

Type of Skill	N=25
Envelop making, Card painting, Paper cutting	13(52.00%)
Tailoring, Embrodary,	3(12.00%)
Motor cycle repairing, Ladies bag making, candel making, jewellery polishing	8(32.00%)
Other(magic show)	1(4.00%)
Total	25(100.00)

Figures in parenthesis are percentages

Problems of rehabilitation

Police on the Question of Street Children

The views of the police officers about the street children were it is the parents who sent their children to Howrah station to beg money and it is part of their income. Some parents also stay with their children on the platform. These children are mostly from the adjacent areas like Tikiapara, Martin bridge, Pilkhana etc. Some of them are parentless. The families who are staying on the platforms often got involved in criminal activities and keep engage their children in different activities. So on the part of the police there is a need to keep an watch on them, drive them out from the station premises and do not allow them to stay here for longer time. On the question of rehabilitation of the street children, though it was not their immediate concern, but if situation demands they can call some enlisted NGOs and handover these children to them.

The general attitude and perception of the police personnel about the street children and their rehabilitation may be noted below.

1. They always thought these children as a outsider, criminals etc.
2. Sometimes they use them as spy or informer to identify other criminal.
3. Police even collect money from them.
4. They do not have any clear idea of these children's rehabilitation and think that it is other's responsibility.
5. They think that rehabilitation of street children is not their primary concern.

6. As per the Juvenile Justice Act, Second officer in each police station is the child welfare officer but in reality the role of child welfare officer is less specified for their rehabilitation. Most of the police personnel are found to keep them busy to maintain law and order of the area. They are least bothered about the rehabilitation of the street children. Ideally police is the main stakeholder for the rehabilitation and reintegration of the children to their family or any institutional care with the help of Child Welfare Committee (C.W.C) of the district. A Special Juvenile Police Unit (SJPU) is there in the district for proper execution of the law. But at present there are two SJPU units in the district. One is for city police and another is for rural police. One Anti Human Trafficking Unit (AHTU) is there in the city police commissionerate. But it is less concerned with the problems of street children.

Child Welfare Committee on the Question of Street Children

The chairman of Child Welfare Committee (C.W.C) was somewhat critical about the street children. He opined that these children have created criminal gang in the station area and involved in organized crime. He branded these children as delinquent.

Data indicate that 49 per cent of children are staying for long time on the street. It is really difficult to rehabilitate them immediately. Particularly, about 41 per cent male street children denied to go to any rehabilitation centre. They are mostly senior by age and some of them have past experience of rehabilitation. They have their gangs in the station and its adjacent areas. These gangs are named as Raju's Gang, Haddi's Gang, Bapi's Gang, Sonia's Gang etc. They are engaged in activities like pick pocketing, snatching, stealing etc.

These children were weaned from the street by the NGO workers or police many times. CWC sent them for rehabilitation but they either escaped from there or their parents made them get released from these rehabilitation centres. They again reached to the street and got involved in different criminal activities. They help their families financially. So their families were interested to get them back to the streets not in the rehabilitation centres. The quality of services provided by these rehabilitation centres were not all that satisfactory and there is considerable need to improve them. In this matter the CWC may ask for a periodic report from the officer in charge of the rehabilitation centres. There was also a recommendation that children who were from other states or districts would be sent to their native states or district with proper recommendation from CWC at the time of their restoration , reintegration and rehabilitation.

Station Manager on the Question of Street Children

The station manager was very much critical about the presence of street children in and around the station premises. He observes:

NGOs are encouraging these children to stay in the station for their business purpose. They are providing food to them within the station premises. So why the children will leave the station premises when they are getting food free of cost, collecting empty bottles from the station premises and selling those to earn money. So they will not leave the Howrah station. Simultaneously these NGOs are getting their clients and sending these lists to their sponsors to get more funds. In this business the interest of the station is ignored.

Focus Group Discussion

Two group discussions were organized during the field work. The first group discussion was held in Howrah station in which eight representatives from porters participated. Four were from red porter (coolee) and four from non red category. The second group discussion was held in goods yard of Howrah station in which there were representatives from hawkers. They were eleven in number. The aim of these group discussions was to record the views of different stakeholders about the street children, more particularly to understand the problem of street children in Howrah station area through the eyes of hawkers and porters. In the perception of Porters the meaning of street children is 'Bad boys/ girls'. They address the street children as Kangali. All they have a kind of negative attitude towards the street children.

Almost all the hawkers described street children as 'Kangali' means hungry Poor. They are mostly Muslims and either from single parent or disorganised families. They viewed the street children as child labour and who mostly work as rag picker.

In general the porters were in view that the street children create lots of problem in Howrah station area. Many passengers and vendors use their service by paying them low wage or simply against food. Passengers often use them as a cheap porter and pay little, sometimes only one third of the amount fixed for an authorized railway coolee. The vendors frequently use them to carry their materials against a minimum payment or some food. All such practices affect the interest and income of regular porters in the station.

The hawkers in the station premises expressed their dissatisfaction over the unauthorized presence of street children in and around the station area. To them, it is very odd looking that the children are begging from their customers. They also disturb the customers and ask money and food from them. The kind hearted customers often give some food to them but the majority do not. They rather scold them. On the question of the street children the hawkers were unhappy and alleged that these children are hampering their business.

These street children according to the hawkers engaged in criminal activities like snatching, stealing etc. in the station area. Despite occasional police action against them, they anyhow manage to get bail from the Jail and appear again on the street. The porters were also in view that the street children also addicted to different kinds of drugs and regularly engaged in consuming dendrite (glue), ganja, charas, heroin, sarab(alcohol), cigarate and biri etc. So they should be driven out from the platform and street. They should not be allowed to sleep here and there in the station premises at night. Further, to slove the problem of street children the police and railway authorities should play active role. The children should be weaned from the street and platforms. The hawkers who pay tax to the railway authority to run the business in the station premises should not feel disturbed by the street children. The police and railway administration should think about this matter. These areas should be kept free from street children and a proper planning should be prepared for the rehabilitation of street children.

Both the porters and hawkers in Howrah station area strongly felt that the presence of street children in the station premises should be prohibited at any cost. They should not be allowed to disturb the free movement of the passengers

and the interest of other stake holders. They demanded a proper planning for the rehabilitation of street children and its immediate implementation.

Development of Areas from where the children migrate to streets

During the course of data analysis, it was found that a large number of children hailed from villages of West Bengal and Bihar where employment opportunities were less. On being asked why they did not stay in their villages, they replied that the earning of the people was much lower in these areas. For example, van puller could earn only Rs.20 per trip in a village of West Bengal where as in Howrah station they can earn Rs 70-100 per trip.

The problem of rehabilitating street children has two dimensions: the rehabilitation of the existing ones and ensuring that fresh entry is checked. The continuing entry of children into the world of work and on the streets is tied up with a number of economic factor (Agarwal, 2003: 164). Though many protective measures have been taken in the constitution and the five year plans but the development of infrastructural facilities specially in the rural sector have been far from satisfactory.

Unless the focus of the development is shifted to these areas, the flow of children to the streets of Howrah will be continued. Even if some children are rehabilitated plenty of them again fall into this vicious circle of exploitation.