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Children with Special Needs in India

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According to UN Enable, around 10% of the world's populations, 650 million people, live with disabilities. Women and girls with disabilities are particularly at a risk of abuse. According to a UNICEF survey, 30% of street youth are disabled. Some countries where IMR rates are high, mortality rates for children with disabilities is as high as 80%. Some suspect that children with disabilities are being purposely weeded out. 90% of children with disabilities worldwide do not attend school. Conflict areas find that for every one child that is killed, three are injured and permanently disabled. Children with disabilities are at a 1.7 times greater risk of being subjected to some form of violence.

According to CRIN over 150 million children worldwide have a disability. 50% of children with a hearing impairment and 60% of those with an intellectual impairment are sexually abused. There are many medical professionals who kill children with disabilities and right them of as mercy killings. 90% of the children with disabilities will not survive pass twenty years of age. Children with disabilities face discrimination not only in services but also in the justice system as they are often not considered credible witnesses.

In India children with disabilities mainly comes under the purview of the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment. Some of the issues are dealt with by the health ministry. But no single ministry has been assigned the protection of these children, which leads to varying data about occurrence of disability amongst children. In India 1.67% of the 0-19 population has a disability. 35.29% of all people living with disabilities are children.

Other estimates say that India has 12 million children living with disabilities. Only 1% of children with disabilities have access to school and one third of most disabilities are preventable. Under-nutrition is a severe problem with children who suffer from cerebral palsy. In India 80% of children with disabilities will not survive past age forty.

Many of the causes of disability are preventable by providing expecting mothers will better prenatal and post natal care as well as proper nutrition for infants and mothers.

The main causes of disability in children are

- Communicable disease
- Infection in early childhood
- Early motherhood
- Nutritional deficiencies
- Insufficient or inaccessible health care services
- Inadequate sanitation
- Inter-family marriages

There are many protection issues that also lead to disability, especially mental disabilities. Children who are trafficked, abused and sexually exploited are at risk for psychological effects as well as physical retardation. Other forms of violence against children can also lead to a disability such as corporal punishment in schools, children living on the streets, and purposefully created disabilities for begging. Children from poor families face a double disability.

Disability in India is still functioning in the realm of social welfare instead of a rights

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perspective. Teachers are not trained and schools don't have the infrastructure to deal with children with disabilities. Neither are paediatric wards of hospitals equipped to deal with them. There is not enough data on the number of children living with disabilities to allow the government to provide the necessary services. Mental health disorders account for one sixth of all health disorders yet India spends 0.83% of its health budget on mental health. Child labourers are also at a higher risk of becoming disabled especially in hazardous industries.

In 2008, CHILDLINE India Foundation published a study on Mentally Challenged Children in Sholapur District, Maharashtra. The study looks at information at all three levels: village, taluka and district. Key findings of the study were that in 24% of the mentally challenged children, one of the parents were mentally retarded. 11% of mothers of mentally challenged children were below eighteen years. 36% of mothers reported complications during pregnancy while 41.2% reported stress. Only 8% of mentally challenged children attended school past II grade or up to VII grade in normal schools. 33% of parent didn't allow their children to interact with other children due to fear of them being teased, accidents, aggressive behaviour, etc.

Children with disabilities are covered under the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act 1995.

End of Report.

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