

Unnatural Deaths Among Children In India: A Critical Analysis Of Child Rights.

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Abstract

Unnatural child mortality in India is a profound threat to the well-being and development of its young population. This research examines the issue within the framework of child rights, revealing significant contributing factors such as inadequate safety measures, socio-economic disparities, and weak enforcement of child protection laws. The study advocates a holistic approach, emphasizing the need to strengthen child protection laws, enhance education and awareness, mobilize local communities, and implement mental health interventions. Child rights, enshrined in the legal framework of India, including constitutional provisions, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and domestic laws, play a pivotal role. However, challenges such as poverty, limited awareness, feeble enforcement, child labor, and gender-based discrimination necessitate systemic reforms. Prioritizing child rights and safety can create a secure environment for India's youngest citizens. The research draws from existing literature, highlighting the importance of community engagement, education, and a robust legal foundation in preventing unnatural child deaths. Collaboration among government, civil society organizations, academia, and international entities is crucial for sustainable change. This research seeks to raise awareness, provoke discourse, and stimulate proactive measures to safeguard India's children. Strengthening child protection and advancing child rights are fundamental imperatives with the potential to shape a fairer society.

Keywords: Child Rights, Child Protection, Unnatural Death, UNCRC.

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I. Introduction

In the intricate tapestry of life, the term 'unnatural death of children' stands as a stark and disheartening thread. These are the untimely departures, the extinguished sparks, that defy the natural rhythm of existence. To borrow the poignant words of Victor Hugo, 'Even the darkest night will end and the sun will rise,' but for these children, that dawn is tragically denied. Their stories are the echoes of extinguished dreams, whispers of futures unfulfilled, and they beckon us to delve into the shadows, to confront the harrowing truth that their lives were cut short by preventable or unforeseen events.

The premature or unexpected loss of children, as we seek to understand it here, is not merely a statistical figure, but a testament to the vulnerabilities that plague the youngest among us. In the words of the great Maya Angelou, 'We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter their color.' In a nation as diverse as India, the thread of 'unnatural child mortality' encompasses various circumstances where young lives are extinguished by accidents, homicides, suicides, and other events that could, and should, be prevented.

This research embarks on a journey into the heart of this complex and sorrowful phenomenon, a journey that, like a phoenix, seeks to rise from the ashes of despair. It is a quest to explore the multifaceted factors, the hidden dangers, and the silent cries that shape this somber narrative. For, as Martin Luther King Jr. once said, 'Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.' The unnatural deaths of these children matter, and this research is our resounding voice, our clarion call to confront the perils, enforce the safeguards, and breathe life into their stolen dreams.

Within the rich mosaic of child protection in India, there exists a resolute commitment — an unyielding vow to safeguard our nation's most vulnerable treasures from harm, neglect, and exploitation. It is an intricate choreography of initiatives, a harmonious ensemble of actions, all meticulously designed to ensure that every child thrives in the sanctuary of safety and well-being. In India, child protection is the guardian of their aspirations, a vigilant shield against adversity, a guiding star that lights the way to their full potential. It is the art of nurturing

their rights to survival, development, protection, and participation, a covenant that each child's journey unfolds in the glow of hope and promise.

Who is a Child? In the vast realm of Indian legislation, the definition of a child is a multifaceted concept, each facet carefully carved to serve a unique purpose. According to the Juvenile Justice Act of 2015, a child is someone who has yet to embrace their 18th year, ushering in a separate realm of justice to protect their innocence. Meanwhile, the Right to Education Act, 2009, paints a vibrant canvas for children between the ages of 6 and 14, ensuring the brilliance of knowledge touches each one. The Child Labour Act of 1986 shields those below the tender age of 14 from perilous toil, nurturing their childhood. And the POCSO Act of 2012 stands guard over those below 18, shielding them from the shadows of sexual offenses. These diverse definitions weave a legal tapestry, safeguarding the unique rights and aspirations of India's children.

Comprehensive Child Protection Framework: In the intricate tapestry of child protection in India, several key facets play a vital role in safeguarding the well-being of its young citizens. First and foremost, prevention efforts take a proactive stance to avert harm and risks to children, with programs promoting positive parenting, family support, and awareness campaigns. A study featured in the *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine* (2019) underscores the success of a positive parenting initiative, enhancing parent-child relationships and mitigating behavioral issues.

Secondly, the identification and reporting of children at risk stand as a critical aspect. Healthcare professionals, teachers, and helpline services are on the frontline, recognizing and reporting child protection concerns. Teachers, as highlighted in the *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care* (2019), play a pivotal role in this process.

A robust legal framework forms the third facet, providing the essential backbone for child protection. These laws address a spectrum of issues, including child abuse, labor, marriage, trafficking, and exploitation. A comprehensive analysis in the *International Journal of Human Rights and Constitutional Studies* (2018) scrutinizes the legal framework and laws in India.

Additionally, the fourth facet encompasses the role of Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) and Child Care Institutions (CCIs). These institutions respond to cases of children in need, with assessments and evaluations featured in the *Indian Journal of Child Health* (2017) and *The International Journal of Indian Psychology* (2019), respectively.

The fifth facet focuses on rehabilitation and support for children who have experienced abuse or exploitation, involving counseling, medical care, and education. Research published in the *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine* (2017) assesses the positive impact of counseling on trauma-affected children in India.

Child-friendly justice systems form the sixth facet, ensuring child-sensitive legal procedures protect children involved in legal processes. The *Indian Journal of Pediatrics* (2016) emphasizes the importance of child-friendly courts in India.

Involving children as active participants constitutes the seventh facet. Programs encourage their engagement in decision-making processes, as highlighted in *Children and Youth Services Review* (2018), recognizing the significance of their voice in shaping policies and programs that affect their lives.

Lastly, the eighth facet recognizes the need for international cooperation in tackling cross-border issues such as child trafficking. Collaboration among South Asian countries is underscored in *The Lancet Global Health* (2018) as a means to prevent and respond effectively to child trafficking. Together, these facets weave a protective cocoon for the children of India, striving to ensure their rights, safety, and well-being.

Progress and Achievements in Child Protection: India has made substantial progress in establishing a robust legal framework for child protection, with key legislation such as the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 (JJ Act) and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012. These laws provide the foundation for addressing issues related to child abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The JJ Act recognizes the unique needs of children between 16 and 18 years who have committed offenses, focusing on rehabilitation and reform rather than punishment. It identifies various vulnerable categories of children and ensures their care, protection, and rehabilitation through Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) and Child Care Institutions (CCIs). This legal framework streamlines adoption processes, promotes foster care, and emphasizes the rehabilitation and social integration of children in need of care and protection.

The POCSO Act contributes to child protection by establishing child-friendly special courts designed for swift justice while minimizing trauma for child victims. This legislation allows for the recording of the victim's statement through video conferencing and with the presence of a support person. It also prescribes stringent punishment for sexual offenses on children, acting as a deterrent. The Act empowers CWCs to oversee the rehabilitation and support of child victims during trials.

Another significant achievement is the establishment of Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) and Juvenile Justice Boards (JJBs) at the district level. These bodies make decisions in the best interests of children, ensuring their protection and rehabilitation. CWCs, composed of experts in child psychology, social work, and law, provide care and protection to children in need. JJBs handle cases involving children in conflict with the law.

India's national child helpline (1098) and state-level helplines play a crucial role in child protection, offering a platform for children to report abuse and seek assistance. Managed by trained counselors and social workers, these helplines operate 24/7 and serve as immediate sources of support for children in distress.

Furthermore, child adoption reforms under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, have prioritized the best interests of the child. The reforms streamline adoption procedures, establish the Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) as the nodal agency, and ensure transparency and timeliness throughout the adoption process. This focus on domestic adoption and safeguarding the child's rights enhances the prospects of children finding permanent, nurturing homes through legal adoption.

II. Challenges To Child Protection In India

Child Labor

India confronts a deeply troubling predicament as it wrestles with the pervasive problem of child labor. Countless children find themselves ensnared in hazardous labor conditions, a stark deprivation of their fundamental rights to education and a secure childhood. The statistics, sourced from the Ministry of Labour and Employment, are disquieting: the 2011 Census reveals a staggering 43,53,247 children, aged 5-14, embroiled in child labor across the nation. The state of Karnataka, in particular, bears the weight of this crisis, with an alarming count of 2,49,432 child laborers. This unsettling reality underscores the urgent need for comprehensive action and change to safeguard the well-being and future of India's children.

(<https://labour.gov.in/childlabour/census-data-child-labour>)

The Census data for the years 2001 and 2011 provides state-wise information on the number of working children between the ages of 5 and 14 years.

S. No	No. of working children in the age group of 5-14 years		
	Name of State/UT	Census 2001	Census 2011
1	Andaman & Nicobar Island	1960	999
2	Andhra Pradesh	1363339	404851
3	Arunachal Pradesh	18482	5766
4	Assam	351416	99512
5	Bihar	1117500	451590
6	Chandigarh U.T.	3779	3135
7	Chhattisgarh	364572	63884
8	Dadra & Nagar H.	4274	1054
9	Daman & Diu U.T.	729	774
10	Delhi U.T.	41899	26473
11	Goa	4138	6920
12	Gujarat	485530	250318
13	Haryana	253491	53492
14	Himachal Pradesh	107774	15001
15	Jammu & Kashmir	175630	25528
16	Jharkhand	407200	90996
17	Karnataka	822615	249432
18	Kerala	26156	21757
19	Lakshadweep UT	27	28
20	Madhya Pradesh	1065259	286310
21	Maharashtra	764075	496916
22	Manipur	28836	11805
23	Meghalaya	53940	18839
24	Mizoram	26265	2793
25	Nagaland	45874	11062
26	Odisha	377594	92087

27	Pondicherry U.T.	1904	1421
28	Punjab	177268	90353
29	Rajasthan	1262570	252338
30	Sikkim	16457	2704
31	Tamil Nadu	418801	151437
32	Tripura	21756	4998
33	Uttar Pradesh	1927997	896301
34	Uttarakhand	70183	28098
35	West Bengal	857087	234275
	Total	12666377	4353247

Table 1.0 (Source: <https://labour.gov.in>)

No. of working children in the age group of 5-14 year.

Top 10 States according to 2011 Census

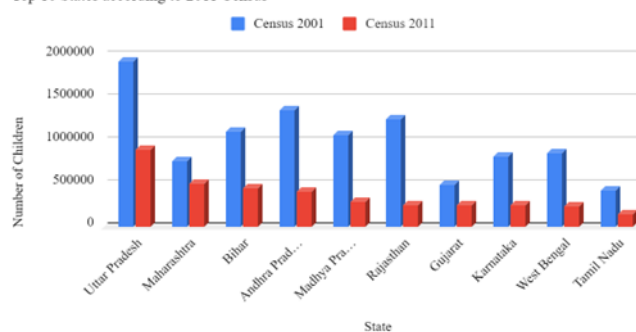


Chart 1.0 (Source: <https://labour.gov.in>)

Child Trafficking

Child trafficking in India represents a grave violation of fundamental human rights, preying upon the vulnerabilities of individuals by offering deceptive promises of improved livelihoods, better living conditions, and support for their families. These assurances, though seemingly legitimate, render men, women, and children susceptible to exploitation, perpetuating a cycle of abuse and suffering. To combat this heinous crime, the Ministry of Home Affairs has taken resolute measures to fortify law enforcement responses. They have allocated substantial funding to state governments to establish Anti Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs) across all districts. These units play a pivotal role in investigating trafficking cases and curating a comprehensive database, shedding light on the extent of the issue and the individuals involved. Notably, an allocation of Rs. 100 crore from the Nirbhaya fund has been dedicated to establishing new AHTUs and reinforcing existing ones. The remarkable result is the operation of 768 AHTUs and 20 states and union territories achieving their objective of implementing AHTUs in all districts. A significant step in comprehending the extent of this crisis was initiated in 2016 when the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) began amassing data on human trafficking cases. This data is systematically published in a dedicated chapter titled "Human Trafficking." These distressing statistics bring to light the alarming reality that India faces, with 3,390 reported cases of child trafficking in 2019 alone. This includes 2,016 cases of forced labor, 912 cases of sexual exploitation, and 234 cases of other forms of exploitation.

Reason for Child Trafficking: 2019

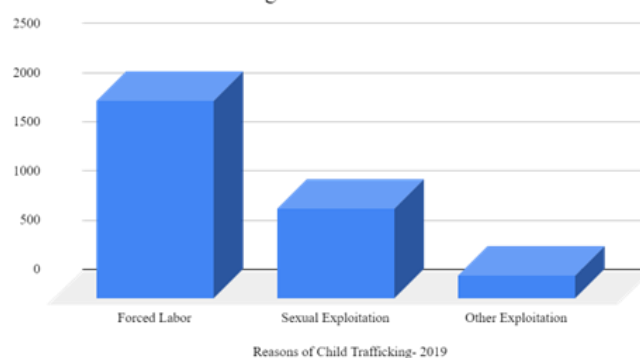


Chart 2.0 (Source: NCRB)

Despite these challenges, organizations like Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA) continue to serve as beacons of hope. BBA, a prominent advocate for child rights in India, relentlessly combats child trafficking. Their dedicated efforts are a testament to the gravity of the problem, with numerous trafficked children rescued from various corners of the country. These tireless endeavors underscore the critical importance of addressing child trafficking, a menacing issue that continues to afflict India.

Victims Trafficked - 2021 (Below 18 Years)			
State/UT	Male	Female	Total
Assam	64	151	215
Bihar	233	78	311
Jharkhand	58	88	146
Kerala	17	202	219
Odisha	206	291	497
Rajasthan	395	22	417
Telangana	137	85	222
Other State(s)	121	288	409
Total State(s)	1231	1205	2436
Chandigarh	1	1	2
Delhi UT	337	100	437
Jammu & Kashmir	1	1	2
Total UT(s)	339	102	441
Total (All India)	1570	1307	2877

Table 2.0 (Source: NCRB)

Victims Rescued - 2021 (Below 18 Years)			
State/UT	Male	Female	Total
Assam	62	126	188
Bihar	233	78	311
Jharkhand	57	88	145
Kerala	13	156	169
Odisha	162	237	399
Rajasthan	395	22	417
Telangana	137	85	222
Other State(s)	88	311	399
Total State(s)	1147	1103	2250
Chandigarh	1	1	2
Delhi UT	337	100	437
Jammu & Kashmir	1	1	2
Total UT(s)	339	102	441
Total (All India)	1486	1205	2691

Table 3.0 (Source: NCRB)

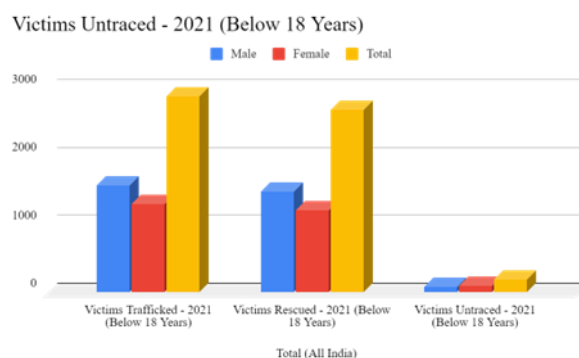


Chart 3.0 (Source: NCRB)

Child Marriage

Child marriage stands as a deeply entrenched social issue in India, casting a shadow over the lives of countless children, especially young girls, who find themselves wedded before reaching the legal age of matrimony. This harmful practice strips children of their fundamental rights and compromises their well-being, denying them access to education, health, and a childhood free from premature adult responsibilities.

The Rajasthan Child Marriage Case of 2019 starkly brought to light the persistent prevalence of child marriage practices in specific regions of India. Media attention focused on a distressing incident where a 15-year-old girl was married off to a man four times her age, underscoring the urgency of addressing this social menace. (Source: India Today)

Responding to the surge in child marriage cases during the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, the Telangana government initiated a dedicated campaign to prevent such unions. Economic hardships faced by families contributed to a concerning rise in child marriages, prompting the government's efforts to raise awareness and discourage this detrimental practice. (Source: The Hindu)

The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) for the year 2019-20 paints a disheartening picture, revealing that approximately 26.8% of women aged between 20 and 24 years in India were married before turning 18. This alarming statistic underscores the persistent prevalence of child marriage, affecting a significant number of girls across the country. (Source: National Family Health Survey, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India)

Girls Not Brides, a global partnership dedicated to ending child marriage, highlights India's grim reality. Their data suggests that India boasts one of the highest absolute numbers of child brides globally, estimating that around 15 million girls in the country are forced into marriage before reaching the age of 18. (Source: Girls Not Brides)

Child Abuse and Exploitation

Unveiling the Shadows: The Persistent Menace of Child Abuse. Despite strides with the POCSO Act, the chilling truth persists—silenced by stigma and hampered justice. In 2018, the Kathua horror echoed a sinister narrative, unraveling the grim challenges in protecting our children. Shockingly, a 2007 study by the Ministry of Women and Child Development unveiled a haunting reality: over 53% of India's children bore the scars of sexual abuse. A call to action reverberates—time to break the silence, shatter the stigma, and safeguard innocence.

Other Challenges

In the realm of child protection, the implementation of robust legal frameworks faces disparities in resource allocation, awareness, and socio-cultural practices. The ballet of governance, coordination, and data collection waltzes amid geographical disparities, hindered by corruption's dark undercurrent.

Institutional care, meant to be sanctuaries for vulnerable lives, unveils concerns of abuse, overcrowding, and neglect within Child Care Institutions (CCIs). Childhood's essence is jeopardized, urging collective responsibility for a haven where each child can thrive.

Child mental health emerges as a critical hue requiring urgent attention, with statistics revealing significant challenges. According to the National Mental Health Survey of India (2015-16) reported that approximately 7.3% of children aged 13-17 years experience significant mental health challenges. The urgency lies in providing adequate support, accessible mental health services, and awareness campaigns to ensure a mentally healthy future generation.

Children with disabilities face socio-economic disparities, hindering access to basic services. Drawing from authoritative government sources, according to the Census of India 2011, approximately 2.21% of the total population in the country falls under the category of "disabled." Among these, children constitute a significant

proportion. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, is a legislative stride towards recognizing and safeguarding the rights of children with disabilities.

Child online safety in the digital age unveils risks of cyberbullying and exploitation. Bridging the digital divide and regulating online content are essential for shielding children's rights, necessitating a multifaceted approach.

Children in conflict areas grapple with violence, displacement, and compromised education and mental health. Tribal and indigenous communities, integral to India's cultural diversity, face socio-economic gaps, land rights struggles, and child labor challenges.

Collaborative efforts, respecting their unique identity, legal protections, and psychosocial support are crucial for rebuilding their lives.

Gender equality is foundational for child rights, addressing discrimination, child marriage, gender-based violence, and educational barriers. Comprehensive education, legal reforms, and societal transformation are essential for upholding every child's rights, transcending gender constraints.

Child rights in education, a cornerstone for development, grapple with access, quality, and gender gaps. The Right to Education Act and innovative initiatives offer promise, yet challenges persist, demanding collaborative efforts for an inclusive, high-quality education system.

In navigating this intricate landscape, India's journey towards safeguarding child rights requires a harmonious ensemble of legal, societal, and institutional measures, ensuring every child's holistic development and a dignified future.

Unnatural Death

In the intricate tapestry of life, the term "unnatural death of children" paints a poignant portrait, where the laughter of innocence is silenced prematurely by circumstances that defy the natural course of existence. As Ernest Hemingway once mused, "Every man's life ends the same way. It is only the details of how he lived and how he died that distinguish one man from another." In the realm of childhood, where dreams are meant to flourish, the specter of unnatural death casts a haunting shadow, robbing the world of potential and promise.

This narrative extends beyond the ordinary cadence of life's cycle, encompassing the unforeseen tragedies that steal the laughter from playgrounds and dim the sparkle in curious eyes. From preventable accidents to heart-wrenching homicides and the silent whispers of juvenile suicides, the canvas of unnatural deaths among children is painted with hues of grief and questions that echo through the corridors of time.

As John F. Kennedy once remarked, "Children are the world's most valuable resource and its best hope for the future." Yet, within the realms of these unnatural demises, that hope is truncated, and the future left yearning for the potential that could have been. This exploration delves into the heart of this somber reality, unraveling the threads that weave a narrative of loss, seeking to illuminate the shadows and provoke a collective reflection on how we can safeguard the laughter, dreams, and futures of our most precious resource – the children.

Different types of Unnatural Deaths

Accidental Deaths: In the intricate dance of life, some tragedies unfold unwittingly – accidental deaths, silent specters claiming the lives of children through the cruel hand of fate. Whether it's the perilous roads, treacherous waters, towering falls, poisonous shadows, scalding flames, or the grip of choking, these inadvertent losses leave indelible marks on young souls. Unsafe environments, lack of supervision, negligence, and insufficient safety measures often pave the way for these heart-wrenching occurrences.

In the labyrinth of statistics, a chilling revelation surfaces from the annual report on Road Accident Deaths in India by the Transport Research Wing of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways. The year 2019 saw a haunting 12% surge in child road-crash fatalities, claiming the lives of 11,168 children – a stark average of 31 young lives extinguished daily. The total road crash deaths, although witnessing a marginal decline of 0.2%, reached a staggering 1,51,113 fatalities. Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh echoed with the echoes of grief, recording the highest numbers.

Within this tapestry of tragedy, the age group most profoundly affected was 18-35 years, constituting 48% of total deaths. Piyush Tewari, the visionary leader of SaveLIFE Foundation, underscores the pressing need for the unwavering enforcement of road safety provisions and child safety measures mandated by the Motor Vehicle (Amendment) Act 2019. As we grapple with these heart-wrenching statistics, each number not just a figure but a precious life lost, the call for comprehensive action resounds. (Source: The Hindu, October 22, 2020)

Delhi Crash Victims Killed (Below 18 Years)		
Year	Male	Female
2017	91	38
2018	88	29
2019	67	22
2020	40	21
2021	48	12

Table 4.0 (Source: Delhi Traffic Police)

Delhi Crash Victims Injured (Below 18 Years)		
Year	Male	Female
2017	514	141
2018	418	142
2019	307	89
2020	187	51
2021	221	75

Table 5.0 (Source: Delhi Traffic Police)

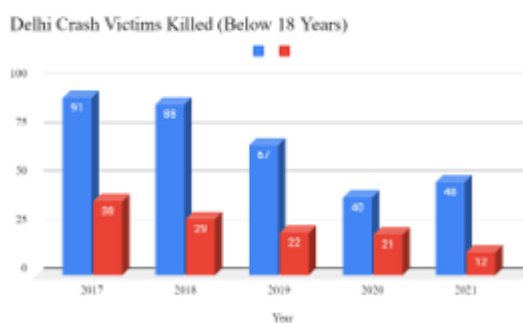


Chart 4.0 (Source: Delhi Traffic Police, Delhi road crash report 2021)

The lack of adequate foot over bridges, pedestrian crossings, and ignorance of road safety regulations are potential factors contributing to such accidents in the capital city.

In 2021, Delhi, India, witnessed 60 young individuals falling victim to fatal road accidents, with 48 of them being male. The total number of fatal road accident victims in the city reached approximately 1,239 during the same year. Notably, pedestrians accounted for the highest number of casualties, comprising over 40% of the total victims.

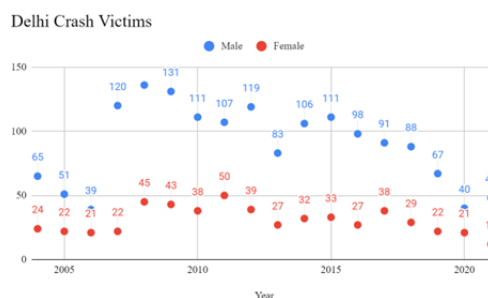


Chart 6.0 (Source: Delhi Traffic Police, Survey by: Delhi Traffic Police, Published by: Delhi Traffic Police, Source link: Delhi road crash report 2021, page 28, Release date: September 2022)

Homicides: In the chilling realm of crime, the term "homicide" takes a sinister turn when it claims the lives of the most vulnerable – children. Their innocence, a beacon in a world fraught with darkness, becomes the tragic target of intentional acts of violence. This unnatural death, a haunting consequence of domestic violence, child abuse, gang-related brutality, or the turmoil of community conflicts, paints a grim portrait of our society.

The heartbreaking reality unfolds as our children, meant to be shielded by the embrace of safety, fall victim to these heinous acts. Each intentional killing echoes not just as a crime statistic but as a profound failure in safeguarding those who should be cherished and protected. It unveils a pressing need for more than just sorrowful reflections; it demands resolute action and unwavering commitment.

In this somber narrative, the urgency for effective law enforcement and comprehensive safeguarding measures emerges as a beacon of hope. It is a call to arms against the shadows that threaten to engulf the purity of childhood. The devastating truth of child homicides demands not just empathy but a collective resolve to shield our children from the horrors that linger in the dark corners of our society.

In the chilling tapestry of our society, the threads of domestic violence, child abuse, gang-related brutality, and community conflicts weave a haunting narrative, often claiming the lives of the most innocent – our children.

A poignant tale unfolded in the heart of Mumbai, where a familial storm of discord and financial strain led a desperate man to snuff out the lives of his wife and two children before succumbing to the abyss himself. A brutal echo reverberated in Bangalore, as a 12-year-old girl fell victim to the merciless hands of her mother's partner, sparking a cry for improved child protection.

The shadows of gang-related violence cast a sinister pall over Mumbai's streets, claiming the life of a 17-year-old boy caught in the crossfire of criminal rivalry. Meanwhile, in the quietude of a Karnataka village, a 7-year-old's life was abruptly ended by the explosion of a country-made bomb, a tragic consequence of local conflicts.

These heart-wrenching episodes lay bare the urgent need for a united front against the specter of child homicides. The call resounds not just for mourning but for resolute action. It demands more than sympathy; it demands a collective outcry against the factors breeding such atrocities. From fortifying child protection laws to ensuring their vigilant enforcement, from fostering community awareness to providing robust support services – the battle against child violence requires a comprehensive arsenal.

Yet, the roots of this menace delve deep into the soils of poverty, ignorance, and inequality. To truly protect our children, we must dig out these roots, planting seeds of education, eradicating poverty, and fostering an environment where every child can flourish without fear. The canvas of tragedy can be rewritten, but it demands the ink of change and the brush of collective responsibility.

Suicides: In the somber realm of child well-being, a disheartening truth surfaces – some children, overwhelmed by a myriad of challenges, succumb to the darkness of self-inflicted harm. Mental health struggles, bullying, social isolation, familial discord, and the weight of various stressors weave a tragic tapestry that, for some, culminates in unnatural deaths. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), the staggering toll reveals a harsh reality: over 24,000 children aged 14-18 in India faced the unfathomable from 2017 to 2019, with 4,046 cases linked to exam failures and 639 to marriage issues. Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu echo with the silent cries of the highest numbers of child suicides.

As the COVID-19 pandemic casts a long shadow, child rights activists raise poignant concerns about its impact on children's mental health. Puja Marwaha, CEO of CRY-Child Rights and You, underscores the urgency of prioritizing mental health for children and adolescents. Akhila Sivadas, executive director of the Centre for Advocacy and Research, amplifies the challenges faced by young minds, emphasizing the need for professional support. In this digital age, where adolescents grapple with unseen pressures, the clarion call for life skill training in schools and mainstreaming mental health in healthcare agendas becomes ever more crucial.

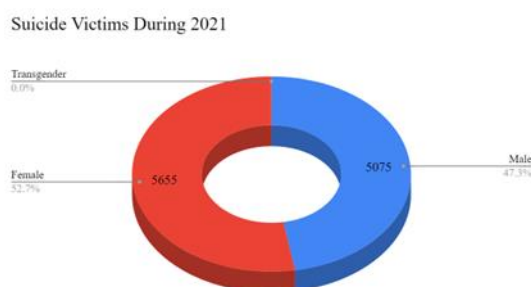


Chart 7.0 (Source:<https://ncrb.gov.in/uploads/nationalcrimerecordsbureau/post/169599016203ADSI-2021Chapter-2Suicides-ExcludingFarmerCauses.pdf>)

The profound message resonates: children's mental well-being is not just a priority but a collective responsibility. As we navigate this complex landscape, the need for robust mechanisms to prevent, treat, and rehabilitate children facing mental health challenges becomes imperative. The echoes of these concerns, rooted in data from NCRB and highlighted by The Indian Express on August 1, 2021, beckon us to forge a path toward a future where the silent struggles of our children find solace and support.

Other unnatural causes: In the delicate tapestry of childhood, some threads unravel tragically, leading to the unnatural demise of innocent lives. Beyond the realm of typical accidents and natural causes, these heart-wrenching incidents encompass medical malpractice, drug-related mishaps, adverse reactions to medication, intentional poisoning, and unforeseen events that cruelly deviate from the expected course of a child's life.

Medical malpractice, a haunting specter, emerges when caregivers falter, failing to provide the standard of care, resulting in dire consequences or, devastatingly, the loss of a child. Drug overdoses, whether accidental or intentional, cast a shadow, especially when prescription medications or illicit drugs are involved. Adverse reactions to medication, spawned by allergies or incorrect dosages, echo the fragility of young lives.

Tragedies etched into the annals of India and Karnataka state stand as poignant reminders. In Delhi, 2019 witnessed the heartbreak of three siblings succumbing to poisonous berries, mistakenly identified as edible fruits—an alarming illustration of accidental poisoning risks. Another heart-wrenching incident unfolded as a 6-year-old boy in Delhi lost his life due to alleged medical negligence, igniting public outcry over healthcare quality.

Karnataka bears witness to its own somber tales. In 2018, a 14-year-old boy met his end through an overdose of prescription medication, administered in error by his parents. A 10-year-old girl's demise in Karnataka traced back to an adverse reaction to medication prescribed for a common infection—unaware allergies sealing her tragic fate. The toll continued in 2020, with a child's death in Bangalore attributed to alleged medical malpractice during surgery, underscoring healthcare and patient safety concerns.

In Bengaluru, 2020 documented the loss of a 12-year-old boy, victim to a medication mix-up—a poignant reminder of the need for meticulous safety protocols. A chilling incident in Hubli, 2018, where a father allegedly poisoned his children, plunged into the depths of family conflicts, laying bare their tragic impact on innocent lives.

These narratives, echoing from Karnataka and beyond, unravel the unforeseen complexities that lead to unnatural child deaths. They sound a clarion call for stringent safety measures, heightened medical supervision, and pervasive public awareness to avert such heart-wrenching tragedies. Proper medication management, child-proofing homes, and educating parents and caregivers about potential dangers emerge as beacons to reduce the likelihood of such unfortunate events.

The untimely departure of young souls, laden with potential, echoes far beyond individual tragedies, leaving an indelible mark on families, communities, and society. Addressing the roots of these agonies becomes paramount—through stringent safety regulations, fortified child protection policies, robust mental health support, and comprehensive education on accident prevention. (Sources: The Times of India, The Hindu, The New Indian Express)

Child rights and the legal framework in India

In the intricate tapestry of India's legal landscape, the protection and advancement of child rights stand as keystones, woven into the very fabric of the nation's commitment to the well-being, development, and active participation of its youngest citizens. At the heart of this endeavor lies a comprehensive framework, with the Constitution of India acting as a stalwart guardian.

Under the constitutional canopy, Article 15(3) casts a protective shield, staunchly forbidding discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. It carves a special niche for the safeguarding and upliftment of children, recognizing them as the bearers of the nation's future.

Further enriching this legal mosaic is Article 21A, a beacon illuminating the path to education for every child aged 6 to 14. This constitutional commitment solidifies the right to free and compulsory education, nurturing the seeds of knowledge and empowerment.

On the global stage, India's pledge to uphold child rights echoes through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), a pact embraced in 1992. Rooted in the principles of survival, development, protection, and participation, the UNCRC envisions a world where children's voices are not just heard but celebrated.

The legal fortifications extend with the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, crafting a robust framework for the care and rehabilitation of children in conflict with the law or in need of care and protection. Juvenile Justice Boards, Child Welfare Committees, and Special Juvenile Police Units stand sentinel to ensure justice tempered with compassion.

The Right to Education Act, 2009, emerges as a cornerstone, mandating an education oasis for every child. It transcends discrimination, nurturing inclusivity through neighborhood schools and prioritizing the marginalized and disadvantaged.

In the realm of labor, the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, unfurls its protective wings, prohibiting hazardous employment and regulating working conditions. Its aim is clear—to shield children from exploitation, ensuring their right to education and wholesome development.

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, stands as a sentinel against heinous crimes. With defined offenses, stringent punishments, and a child-centric legal process, it aims to provide a sanctuary from the dark shadows of sexual exploitation.

Beyond the statutes, national and state policies add nuanced strokes to this legal canvas. The National Policy for Children, 2013, is a testament to the government's unwavering commitment across sectors. State-specific programs delve into child health, nutrition, education, protection, and welfare, echoing the nuanced approach needed to address the diverse needs of children.

Yet, within this grand legal edifice, echoes of concern persist. The effectiveness of these measures hinges on implementation, monitoring, and continual adaptation to evolving challenges. It is a clarion call to not merely uphold these laws on paper but to breathe life into them, ensuring that the rights of every child are not just protected but celebrated. The journey to fortify these protective measures remains a collective responsibility—one that demands vigilance, innovation, and an unyielding dedication to securing the future of India's children.

III. Literature Review

The profound issue of unnatural child deaths in India has spurred extensive research, delving into the intricate tapestry of child rights and protection. Scholars like Mathur and Rai (2019) underscored the pivotal role of a robust legal framework, advocating for improved coordination among government bodies and civil society to ensure effective child protection. In a unique exploration, Lilly Pushpam S and Dr. M. Daniel Solomon investigated caregivers' perceptions of child rights in Udupi District, Karnataka. While the study's small sample size poses limitations, it sheds light on the critical need for targeted interventions to enhance caregivers' attitudes, emphasizing the essence of positive attitudes for effective child rights implementation.

Dinesh Prasad Gajurel's work on "Child Rights in Nepal" critically evaluates the Nepalese legal framework, exposing a stark reality – a legal foundation alone is insufficient without a supportive socio-economic structure. Despite Nepal's ratification of international conventions, children grapple with challenges like poverty and discrimination. Gajurel urges collective efforts from government, parents, and NGOs, emphasizing the imperative role of society in bridging the gap between legal provisions and the harsh realities faced by Nepalese children. This review captures the pulse of these studies, echoing the call for a holistic approach to child protection and rights, where legal frameworks are not just on paper but actively safeguard the well-being of every child.

Delving into the intricate tapestry of unnatural child deaths in India, researchers like Gupta and Kumar (2020) unveil a stark reality where accidents, homicides, and suicides stand as leading causes, fueled by inadequate safety measures and social inequalities. "Unraveling the Complexities of Unnatural Child Deaths in India" by Sharma, Gupta, and Singh conducts a multi-factorial analysis, exposing medical malpractice, drug overdoses, and domestic violence as contributors. The literature underscores the imperative for tailored interventions to shield children from these intricate challenges.

In "Addressing the Silent Epidemic," Kapoor, Sharma, and Desai spotlight the urgent need to combat the silent epidemic of unnatural child deaths, emphasizing the devastating impact of abuse, violence, and poverty. Verma, Mehta, and Patel, in "Unnatural Child Deaths in India: A Call for Immediate Action," advocate for prompt measures, analyzing factors like child labor and trafficking, stressing the necessity of implementing international conventions domestically.

Child poverty emerges as a critical factor, echoing in studies by Reddy and Rao (2018). "Child Poverty and Vulnerability in India" by Gupta, Singh, and Sharma explores the profound impact of child poverty, calling for targeted interventions to alleviate it. Verma, Kapoor, and Patel, in "Unmasking the Linkages," and Sharma, Kumar, and Desai, in "Tackling Child Poverty," unravel the intricate linkages between child poverty, vulnerability, and unnatural deaths, proposing holistic approaches encompassing social welfare policies and educational reforms.

In a harmonious symphony, this literature review underscores the urgent need for multifaceted solutions, weaving together legal frameworks, targeted interventions, and socioeconomic reforms to create a protective haven for vulnerable children in India.

In the symphony of understanding mental health and its impact on children, Singh et al. (2017) illuminate the dark corners where academic pressure, family conflicts, and social isolation converge, fostering suicidal tendencies. Their study advocates for the pivotal role of mental health support services in thwarting these silent cries for help. Conversely, the scrutiny of DOVVSU's efficacy in "Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit" by unnamed authors underscores the need for fortified resources to combat prevalent child rights abuses. Collaborative efforts with stakeholders are championed for frequent advocacy, education programs, and the apprehension of violators, propelling child rights protection into the limelight.

In the realm of community engagement, Desai and Mehta (2019) compose a harmonious ode to the positive impact of involving local communities in child protection initiatives. Meanwhile, Onuora-Oguno Azubike et al.'s exploration of international human rights treaties in Nigeria highlights the gap between legal provisions and practical realities, urging for legal reforms to ensure effective protection. The critical literature reviews on child rights education by Joshi et al., Sharma et al., and Kumar et al. paint a canvas where schools, parents, and communities play pivotal roles. Their analyses call for holistic approaches, community involvement, and targeted parental education programs to fortify child protection efforts in India. The exploration concludes with the transformative potential of relational child rights education, urging a shift from procedural approaches to meaningful engagement, emphasizing the integration of rights into everyday life for a brighter future.

Kaur and Dhillon (2016) spotlight the dance between laws and their implementation, revealing gaps in the safeguarding of children's rights. Das et al.'s symphony of critical analysis scrutinizes the legal framework, uncovering challenges like resource scarcity and inconsistent enforcement. Sharma et al.'s exploration navigates the legal maze, unraveling complexities that hinder coherent implementation. Kapoor et al.'s critical appraisal assesses the legal shield for children, exposing hurdles like inadequate resources and socio-cultural barriers. Together, these reviews echo a harmonious call for reform—a transformative cadence—to fortify the legal fortress for India's vulnerable children.

IV. Suggestions

Fortifying the Shield: Crafting a Safer Haven for Little Heroes

In the grand saga of child protection, rewriting the laws is the crucial chapter we cannot afford to overlook. Picture a realm where every child is a cherished protagonist, shielded by robust and dynamic legislation. Here, the script unfolds with innovative measures that not only catch the eye but promise a narrative of safety and resilience.

Whistleblower Mandate: Imagine a world where whispers of suspicion transform into powerful safeguards. Let's decree a legal symphony where teachers, doctors, and child advocates become mandatory guardians of truth. Failing to report? Brace for consequences that echo louder than silence.

Guardians of Light: Envision an elite squad equipped to decipher the intricate tales of unnatural child deaths. Specialized investigation units emerge as the unsung heroes, armed with expertise and compassion, untangling the web of sensitive cases with finesse.

Inquest Architects: Paint a canvas where child fatality review boards stand as meticulous architects of justice. These boards, a league of multidisciplinary experts, pledge to unravel the mysteries surrounding each child's departure – a commitment etched in the fabric of thorough examination.

Swift Justice Maestros: Enthral the audience with a courtroom symphony that beats to the rhythm of urgency. Fast-track courts become the maestros, orchestrating a swift and resolute pursuit of justice in the face of unnatural child deaths.

Punishment's Symphony: Transform the legal landscape into a formidable fortress, where stricter penalties are not just sentences but profound declarations. Let every wrongdoer quake in the face of consequences that mirror society's unyielding stance against crimes that rob children of their futures.

Training Odyssey: Journey through an educational odyssey where every stakeholder in child protection becomes a vigilant guardian. Law enforcers, legal minds, social architects, and healthcare sentinels undergo a transformative training, sculpting a collective consciousness attuned to the nuances of safeguarding the young.

Family Haven: Unveil a sanctuary of support for grieving families, where counseling, financial aid, and legal guidance become the pillars that steady them in the aftermath of tragedy. Let no family stand alone in the face of the unimaginable.

Echoes of Awareness: Launch a vibrant melody resonating across the nation, where public awareness becomes the beacon of protection. Picture a society educated, vigilant, and united in its commitment to report any suspicious shadows cast upon the innocence of its children.

Knowledge Repository: Envision a centralized vault of knowledge, a database pulsating with information on child fatalities. This repository becomes the key to deciphering patterns, unveiling risk factors, and crafting evidence-based tales of prevention.

Global Allies United: In this finale, witness a coalition forming, where India collaborates with NGOs and international guardians in the realm of child protection. Together, they weave a tapestry of expertise, shared resources, and best practices that transcends borders and shields the world's most precious treasures.

As we unveil this narrative of legal empowerment, let each reader become a protagonist in this collective journey toward a safer, brighter haven for our little heroes. Join us in the symphony of change, where the crescendo of protection echoes eternally.

V. Igniting Minds, Shielding Futures: A Symphony Of Child Empowerment

Embarking on a transformative odyssey, let's weave an enchanting tapestry of education and awareness, where every child is not just a student but a bearer of rights and a guardian of their destiny.

Curriculum Chronicles: Imagine a realm where child rights education isn't just a subject but a beacon integrated into the very heartbeat of the school curriculum. Social studies and civics metamorphose into platforms nurturing young minds, cultivating seeds of awareness, protection, and empowerment.

Wonders in Words: Picture a world where education materials become enchanting companions, crafted with the magic of simplicity and tailored to each age's understanding. Books, videos, and interactive workshops take children on a journey where their rights become a story of self-discovery and resilience.

Parental Pilgrimage: Envision workshops transforming parents into guardians of understanding. Programs that empower caregivers with knowledge, equipping them with the tools to be vigilant protectors, standing as pillars of support for their little ones.

Communal Utopia: In the heart of communities, visualize campaigns that spark a collective awakening. Seminars echoing through local halls, workshops in collaboration with schools and religious sanctuaries, each resonating the melody of child protection, uniting neighborhoods in a shield of awareness.

Whispers of Help: Amidst the buzz of awareness, highlight the helplines and reporting mechanisms, where children find solace and concerned souls become ambassadors of protection. A collective pledge echoing through the channels, urging all to be the voice for those who need it most.

Peer-Led Revolutions: Witness the rise of young advocates, children leading the charge in classrooms and communities. Peer education programs become the gateway for children to champion their rights, creating ripples of empowerment that echo through generations.

Media Ballet: Partner with media allies to choreograph campaigns that dance across screens and pages. A symphony of visuals and words, echoing the urgency of child protection, planting seeds of awareness in every corner of society.

School Sanctuaries: Schools transform into sanctuaries of safety. Child protection officers stand as guardians, committees as defenders, and safety drills as rehearsals for a secure haven where children can thrive.

Professional Playbook: Imagine a world where professionals are trained not just in skills but in the art of empathy. Teachers, healthcare workers, and law enforcers become a united front, equipped to recognize signs of distress and respond with compassion.

Cultural Tapestry: In the mosaic of culture and faith, integrate messages of child protection seamlessly. Let every ritual and celebration become a reminder of our collective duty to shield the young ones from harm.

Harmony in Evaluation: Conclude this symphony with a continuous evaluation, a harmonious rhythm ensuring that the echoes of awareness resonate and evolve. A commitment to refining and perfecting the melody of education, making it an anthem for the safeguarding of our nation's treasures.

In this grand symphony, education and awareness emerge not as mere concepts but as the orchestrators of a collective commitment. Let every reader become a participant in this melody, where knowledge transforms into a shield, and awareness into a fortress for the children of our nation. Join the movement, where enlightenment isn't just a virtue but a legacy passed from one generation to the next.

VI. Ripples Of Change: A Symphony Of Community Guardianship

Picture a vibrant tapestry where local communities, NGOs, and social workers converge in a harmonious dance to safeguard the future of India's children. This is not just a call to action; it's an anthem of community engagement and support.

Enlightening Crescendo: Imagine community squares buzzing with energy as awareness programs, orchestrated in tandem with local NGOs and social warriors, cascade knowledge about child protection. Residents become torchbearers, equipped to recognize signs of distress and protect the little ones.

Empowerment Ballet: Envision communities taking center stage, not as spectators but as protagonists. Through community mobilization, workshops, and dialogues, they craft bespoke solutions, turning each challenge into an opportunity for collective strength.

Collaborative Symphony: See partnerships blooming between communities, NGOs, social workers, and government agencies—a united front against child vulnerability. Resources, knowledge, and strategies interweave seamlessly, forming a fabric of protection that transcends boundaries.

Leadership Sonata: In this melody, community leaders emerge as conductors of change. Through tailored training, religious leaders, elders, and influential figures become advocates, guiding their communities toward a safer, more compassionate rhythm.

Guardianship Ensemble: Imagine the rise of community-based child protection committees, a symphony of representation. Comprising diverse voices, these committees become vigilant guardians, addressing child protection concerns within the neighborhood with a shared sense of responsibility.

Family Harmony Waltz: Witness the collaboration between NGOs and social workers in a dance to support vulnerable families. Counseling, parenting guidance, and essential services harmonize to create a supportive environment, reducing the risks of child abuse and unnatural deaths.

Crisis Intervention Ballet: Swift and decisive, crisis intervention teams composed of trained social workers and counselors dance into action. Responding to cases of child abuse or unnatural deaths, they provide immediate support, turning moments of crisis into opportunities for healing.

Heartbeat Home Visits: Feel the rhythm of regular home visits and community outreach programs, orchestrated by social workers and volunteers. This pulsating effort assesses the well-being of children, ensuring that no beat is missed in identifying potential risks.

Advocacy Symphony: Picture communities, NGOs, and social workers engaging in a crescendo of advocacy, influencing policymakers and reforming policies. The harmonious collaboration addresses systemic gaps and fortifies child protection laws, resonating with the collective voice of change.

Data Sonata: Collaborate with NGOs and social workers to compose a symphony of data, collecting and sharing insights on child deaths. This information becomes the score for targeted interventions, identifying patterns and orchestrating a safeguarding masterpiece.

Champion Crescendo: Empower local champions, individuals passionate about child protection. Through training and resources, they become the conductors of community-led initiatives, transforming passion into action and creating a lasting legacy of safety.

This symphony of community guardianship is not just an idea; it's a call to join the ensemble. As readers, envision yourselves as part of this melodic movement, where every note struck is a step toward securing the harmony of our nation's youngest voices. Together, let's orchestrate a future where every child is surrounded by the protective embrace of a united and vigilant community.

VII. Guardians Of Minds: Unleashing The Symphony Of Mental Well-Being

In the grand tapestry of child protection, the spotlight turns to the realm of mental health interventions— an orchestra of strategies conducting a harmonious tune to shield India's youth from the shadows of abuse, neglect, and suicidal tendencies.

Frontline Maestros: Envision a world where frontline professionals are virtuosos of compassion and competence. Through comprehensive training, teachers, healthcare workers, and police officers become adept at recognizing the subtle notes of distress, orchestrating timely responses, and directing cases toward the melody of intervention.

Schools of Harmony: Picture schools transformed into bastions of emotional well-being. Melodic mental health programs resonate within their walls, nurturing resilience and offering a safe haven for children to compose and share their emotional symphonies. School counselors emerge as the unsung heroes, conducting early identification and support.

Helpline Crescendo: Amid crisis, toll-free helplines echo with the soothing tones of understanding. Staffed by trained mental health professionals, these helplines become lifelines, providing immediate assistance and orchestrating a symphony of referrals for those in distress.

Community Serenades: Across communities, mental health outreach programs become serenades of awareness. The stigma surrounding mental health dissipates as information about support services permeates the air, creating a chorus of understanding and acceptance.

Screening Sonatas: Routine mental health screenings become part of the educational crescendo. In schools and healthcare settings, screenings act as the first movement in detecting vulnerabilities, setting the stage for timely interventions and safeguarding against the dissonance of abuse and neglect.

NGO Harmonies: Enter the harmonies of collaboration with NGOs—specialized partners providing resources, expertise, and support. Together, they compose a symphony of care, extending a healing melody to vulnerable children and families.

Parenting Ballads: Parenting support programs become ballads of positive guidance. Stress management and healthy parent-child relationships take center stage, harmonizing to create an environment that nurtures and protects.

Community Cadence: Community members, enlightened through education, become part of the cadence of care. They recognize signs of distress and respond with supportive notes, harmonizing with authorities and support services to protect the vulnerable.

Preventing Crescendos: In the realm of suicide prevention initiatives, awareness campaigns and peer support programs crescendo into a powerful force. School staff, trained in the delicate art of risk assessment and intervention, become guardians of young minds, preventing dissonance from turning into tragedy.

Infrastructure Symphony: The orchestra of mental health infrastructure grows stronger. A surge in trained professionals, expanded services in rural areas, and accessible quality care create a symphony of healing, resonating across the nation.

Data-Driven Overture: The overture of a data-driven approach unfolds. Through meticulous analysis, trends, risk factors, and system gaps become apparent, guiding the composition of evidence-based policies and interventions.

As the baton is passed from one strategy to another, a symphony of mental well-being emerges. India, in collaboration with multiple stakeholders, conducts this grand opus—a commitment to protect and nurture its children, ensuring that every note played is a step toward a safer, more harmonious future.

VIII. Conclusion

In the poignant symphony of child protection, our research crescendos into a call for immediate action. The haunting specter of unnatural child deaths demands a harmonious collaboration, where every note resonates with urgency. Our exploration of this multifaceted issue unveils a canvas painted with inadequate safety measures, social disparities, and the faltering implementation of protective laws. The clarion call rings clear: safeguarding child rights is a fundamental duty that society must embrace.

Within the legal framework's labyrinth – Constitution, UNCRC, and national laws – lies the potential for change. Yet, the barriers, like poverty's relentless grip and the shadows of discrimination, implore us to rewrite this narrative. Our proposed symphony of change orchestrates the fortification of protective laws, a crescendo of education and awareness, a chorus of empowered communities, and a soothing refrain addressing mental health vulnerabilities.

For this symphony to echo far and wide, a collaborative overture is essential. Government, civil society, academia, and global allies must unite their voices. In this collective crescendo, data becomes our compass, guiding us through the intricate notes of progress. Each child, entitled to a life of safety, education, and joy, is a testament to our moral commitment.

As researchers and custodians of society, the baton is in our hands. Together, let's compose a resounding melody where no child succumbs to untimely darkness. Let this symphony of protection, awareness, and empathy illuminate the path towards a radiant future for India's children. Join this collective crescendo, for in the harmony of child rights, we find the promise of a compassionate and inclusive tomorrow.

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