

Child Rights and Protection

Every child has the right to health and life free from violence and abuse. Every year, millions of children around the world are the victims and witnesses to physical, sexual and emotional violence. Indian Studies report between 40-60% of children having been subjected to some or the other form of abuse. Child maltreatment is a huge global problem with a serious impact on the victim's physical and mental health, well being and development throughout their lives – and, by extension, on society in general. Whilst we recognize a child as an individual possessing rights, it is imperative to have laws and procedures that operate in the best interest of the child and that protect every child from violation of their rights; thereby helping them become responsible citizens.

Constitutional obligation

The Constitution of India places a primary responsibility on the State to ensure that all needs of Children are met and their human rights are fully protected. The Government of India acceded on 11th December 1992 to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, which has prescribed a set of standards to be adhered to by all State parties in securing the best interests of the child.

Recent legislative initiatives

India has taken a proactive stand on the issue of Child Protection. Recent developments in this direction give clear signals about the government's intention to bring the issue of women and child development to the forefront of all major developmental activities by setting up an independent Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD). The National Study on Child Abuse initiated by MWCD in 2005 is the largest ever study undertaken by any country in the world. The results of the study are under compilation,

and are expected to provide invaluable data on child maltreatment in India.

The National Plan of Action for Children was formulated by the Department of Women and Child Development in 2005. The National Plan affirms the Government's commitment towards ensuring all measures and creating an enabling environment for the survival, growth, development and protection of all children, so that "each child realizes his/her inherent potential".

While we recognize a child as individual possessing rights, it is imperative to emerge with laws and procedures that operate in the best interest of the child and that protect every child from violations of their rights thereby helping them become responsible citizens.

The Offences against Child Bill, 2006 initiated by the Ministry of Women and Child Development is soon to come to Parliament after having comments from all the states, hopefully in the winter session. If cleared and implemented, reporting of child abuse will become mandatory. The Integrated Child Protection Scheme, proposed by MWCD, is a positive step in as much as it is an indication that the Ministry is now seized of the need to respond to Child Protection issues. Also, encouraging is the fact, that it has suggested an infrastructure, which spans from the MWCD to the district level and beyond.

Moreover, the Government of India has enacted the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 to consolidate and amend the law relating to juveniles in conflict with law and children in need of care and protection. The JJ Act 2000 has been amended recently (2006) by the Government of India to bring under its gambit a large number of pressing issues dealing with Child Protection.

The Pediatrician's perspective

Every day as practicing Pediatricians we come

across cases of child abuse or neglect in various forms; often, we fail to even recognize some forms of abuse. Even if we do, there seems to be little that we can do to deal with it. This requires careful understanding, empathy and multi-disciplinary coordination between various agencies that deal with child welfare. Pediatricians, often as the first contact with a child in need of protection, need to be sensitized to recognize abuse or neglect and the need to incorporate knowledge of various aspects and the skills to address this in their activities.

IAP initiative

IAP has launched "Child Rights and Protection Program" under IAP Vision 2007 with help of MWCD and UNICEF India office. Creation of the CANCL (Child Abuse Neglect, Child Labour) group of the IAP was a positive step towards addressing the problems of unfortunate victims of child abuse, neglect and labour. This program aims to take it further. IAP has organized a Training of Trainers (ToT)

workshop during Pedicon 2007 which shall enlist the help of a domestic and foreign faculty. This ToT will be followed by 8 Regional Training Programs on Child Rights and Protection in a systemized fashion with the aim of creating 300 District Resource Persons this year on Child Rights issues. These District Resource Persons will continue to sensitize all Pediatrician colleagues in their area.

This may be a small step, but the intention and more importantly, the outcome, is by no means anything short of a gigantic effort stride taken by from IAP side. Because, this outcome seeks to give every child of our country an opportunity to ensure Protection from abuse and a guarantee to ensure his/her right to a protected and secure childhood. Because, we, as Pediatricians, as the most vocal and the best advocates of children of this country, owe it to them - Our Children!

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