

# Child Friendly School Initiative at Karkala Taluk, Karnataka

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## ABSTRACT

*We conducted a cross-sectional study in 40 schools in Karkala Taluk, Karnataka to evaluate whether they met the 10 criteria of Child Friendly School Initiative as recommended by Indian Academy of Pediatrics. Data were collected using a predesigned proforma by talking to the headmaster and school teachers and inspection of the premises for various facilities. We found that none of the schools met all the criteria; 90% of the schools did not have adequate toilet facilities, 90% did not have safe transportation for the students, children in 82% schools had excess baggage, 72% did not have access to safe drinking water, 57% did not have properly ventilated and illuminated classrooms, and physical punishment was being administered in 45% of schools. 72% of schools did have periodic health checkup, 60% of schools had clean kitchen/ dining room, 60% had adequate facilities for games, and 57% had facilities for first aid facility at school.*

**Key words:** *Child Friendly School Initiative, Indian Academy of Pediatrics, Karkala Taluk*

## INTRODUCTION

The extent to which a nation's schools provide a safe and supportive environment for all children will play a significant role in determining whether the next generation is educated and healthy in body, mind and spirit. The World Health Organization (WHO), through its Global School Health Initiative, promotes the concept of a Health-Promoting School(1). To make the future a better place for children, UNICEF too has emphasized many initiatives aimed at protecting children's rights, improving their conditions and providing good education. Child friendly school initiative defines core components that characterize a child friendly school; each component incorporating factors concerning education, health and human rights(2). However they are not easily quantifiable and cannot be applied to our local schools without modification. We looked at an alternative set of criteria that are more suitable to assess quality of school environment in the Indian scenario. We chose the Ten Commandments of a Child Friendly School Initiative(3). We conducted a study among schools, both Private and Government, in Karkala Taluk of

Udupi district to find out how many schools met these 10 criteria of Child Friendly School Initiative.

## METHODS

This cross-sectional study was conducted at Karkala Taluk of Udupi district in Karnataka. There are 159 schools in the taluk and we decided to include 40 (25%) of the school, 20 each from the government and private sector, based on proximity to our hospital. A proforma was designed based on the criteria recommended by the IAP. A team of six interns posted to work at Dr TMA Pai Rotary Hospital, a rural training centre attached to the Community Medicine department of Kasturba Medical College, Manipal, carried out this project, under the supervision of two faculty members (AH, AS). All the schools selected were visited by the same team and necessary data related to the 10 selected criteria were collected using the pre-tested proforma by actual inspection of the school premises and interviewing the Head teacher. All information collected was analyzed and expressed as proportions. Chi square test and Fisher test was

applied to compare the data obtained from the Government and private schools.

The school was considered to have met each criterion if majority of the guidelines mentioned in that particular criterion were fulfilled. All schools were assessed with respect to all the ten criteria.

## RESULTS

**Table I** details the proportion of private and Government schools adhering to each of the 10 criteria proposed by the IAP. Physical punishment was present mainly in the form of caning, although it is against the law(4). Though most of the Headmasters denied the use of the cane as punishment, the cane was very much visible in the school premises. In most schools weight of the school bag exceeded 10% of the child's weight. Only 2 schools had a duplicate set of books at school. Regarding safe drinking water, the headmaster was asked about the source of the drinking water, periodicity of testing and the method of decontamination of the water. Many of the private schools did not conduct surveillance nor was there any disinfection of the water. A few had no knowledge of the source of water. We noticed a large number of students were carrying water bottles from home. Many of the government schools met the kitchen criterion, perhaps due to the presence of the government sponsored mid-day meal program at

these schools. The private schools did not come under this program and lacked a separate kitchen for food preparation and eating. Half of the private schools met the classroom criterion. Most of the government schools had one large room divided into smaller classes by dividers. The whole room was lit by 2-3 light bulbs which were quite a distance away from the desks and quite inadequate. Also the students worked on the floor since they did not have desks. However, the space was adequate since there were few students per class. The opposite was true in private schools. Majority of the schools did have desks, but the number of students was more compared to the space provided. Knowledge of first aid was assessed by asking the headmaster as to the training of teachers in first aid, as well as the presence of a well equipped first aid box. Although 57% of all schools claimed they had trained teachers, there was no additional program to train new teachers. We considered a ratio of one latrine per 100 students and one urinal per 60 students as adequate. We also looked at presence of running or stored water. Most of the schools [90%] had no latrines and few urinals and none had wash basins. The results were the same in government and private schools.

## DISCUSSION

The Child Friendly School Initiative (CFSI) is operating in other countries too and is geared to meet local needs. In Nigeria the CFSI is a vibrant

**TABLE I** COMPARISON BETWEEN PRIVATE AND GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS WITH RESPECT TO EACH OF THE 10 CRITERIA PROPOSED BY IAP

Criteria	Private (n=20)	Govt (n=20)	Total (n=40)	P value
1. No physical punishment practiced in school	45%	65%	55%	0.20
2. No excess baggage carried by students	25%	10%	18%	0.41
3. Availability of safe and proper transportation	20%	0%	10%	0.11
4. Availability of hygienic drinking water	20%	35%	28%	0.29
5. Availability of a clean place where children can eat mid day meal	50%	70%	60%	0.20
6. Minimum four games period in one week	55%	65%	60%	0.52
7. Properly ventilated and illuminated class rooms	50%	35%	43%	0.34
8. Periodic health check-ups and health related lectures conducted	60%	85%	72%	0.08
9. Availability of facility for first aid in emergency	60%	55%	57%	0.75
10. Availability of adequate number of toilets	10%	10%	10%	1.00

### WHAT THIS STUDY ADDS?

- None of the schools in the Karkala Taluk, Karnataka met all of IAP's criteria of child friendly school.

partnership between MTN Foundation and the state government and aims to improve the quality of basic education by raising the standard of the learning environment in Nigerian Schools(5).

The Child Friendly School Initiative proposed by IAP offers benefits for child and adolescent health in the Indian scenario and represents an important component of IAP's endeavors for childhood prevention of adult diseases. Ideally all schools should meet all the criteria to be stated as being 100% child friendly, but we found in our study that only few criteria were met. None of the schools in our study population met all the 10 criteria, although about 50% of schools met 4 to 5 criteria.

When compared to schools in Madhya Pradesh(3) our results were comparable with respect to games criteria, classroom criteria and health checkup. Physical punishment was more in our schools compared to Madhya Pradesh schools. With respect to safe drinking water and clean kitchen facilities, our findings were similar to those in Madhya Pradesh where private schools are concerned, but government schools in Karkala had more facilities compared to those in Madhya Pradesh. Some other criteria could not be compared as the method of data interpretation was different. However we did find that basic facilities like safe drinking water and adequate number of toilets were lacking in a majority of the schools, both government and private. Statistically there was no major difference between government and private schools with reference to any of the criteria.

This study is designed to help school personnel assess qualities of the school environment that

support social and emotional well-being as well as provide guidelines to the government to format standard guidelines for schools for certification as being child friendly schools. This study also serves as an eye opener, serving as a Status Report that provides factual data on current scenario in rural schools in coastal Karnataka.

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*Competing interests:* None stated.

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