
UNIT 17 CHILDREN

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17.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit deals with contemporary dimensions of some problems of children in India. After going through this unit you should be able to:

- describe the demographic composition of children and issues pertaining to their survival;

- discuss the characteristics of street children and orphans and measures undertaken towards the solution of their problem;
- explain the concept of child labour, its typology and the extent of child labour in India;
- analyse the concept of juvenile delinquency, conditions encouraging it and measures undertaken to ameliorate it;
- examine the rights of the children as proclaimed by the international bodies. Present a brief outline of the condition of the girl child in India; and
- describe National Policy on Children adopted in 1974 by the Government of India and provisions made in the Policy.

17.1 INTRODUCTION

It is possible throughout history to trace out a thread of increasing concern for the child. But it is at the turn of the twentieth century, particularly after the first World War that a concerted effort for recognising the rights of the child has been made all over the World. We have started realising that the future of a nation depends on the child. In the words of Abraham Lincoln, “a child is a person who is going to carry on what you have started. He is going to sit where you are sitting, and when you are gone, attend to those things which you think are important... the fate of humanity is in his hand, “Jawaharlal Nehru also reminded us of ‘the supreme importance of the child. He said, “Somehow the fact that ‘ultimately everything depends upon the human factor, gets rather lost in our thinking of plans and schemes. It is very important that we must have them, but ultimately, it is the human being who counts and if the human being counts well, he counts much more as a child than as a grown-up.”

Against this humanitarian backdrop the present unit examines the social problems of children in contemporary India. We begin this unit with a brief discussion on the demographic composition of children in India. It draws attention towards the increasing imbalance between boys and girls. We then, dilate on the orphan and street children and look into the measures taken by government to rehabilitate them.

A large number of children are engaged in various types of work and this hinders their mental and physical growth. We focus on this in the section on child labour. This unit then, goes into the numerous reasons as to why some children lapse into delinquent behaviour. It also looks into the various measures required to prevent delinquency as well as rehabilitate the delinquents.

This unit also gives an idea about the rights of the child proclaimed at different periods of time. It attempts to show how there is a growing concern in the world about the rights of the child. The UN agencies involved in children’s welfare finds mention next.

The girl-child constitutes nearly a half of the child population in India but a large section of them are neglected in every aspect of their life. The prevailing social, cultural and religious practices encourage discrimination against them. We discuss this in the section on International Year of the Girl Child. We conclude this unit by focusing on the national policy on children.

17.2 DEMOGRAPHIC ASPECTS

The word child has a variety of connotations. Sometimes it is used in the sense of physical or mental immaturity. But for all practical purposes, child is defined in terms of chronological age. Any person who is below the age of 15 years is called a child.

The number of children (0-14 years) in India has been increasing over the years. In the year 1971, there were 230.3 million children which had increased to 272 million, in 1981. According to the estimate by the Expert Committee on the population projection, the child population had gone up to 297.7 million in 1991. However, in terms of percentage to the total population, child population had declined over the decades. For example, it had declined from 42.02 in 1971 to 39.7 in 1981. In 1991 they constituted around 37% of the population. According to Planning Commission in 2000, 33.61% population were in the age group of the children.

17.2.1 Sex Ratio

According to the law of human biology, both males and females are born in equal proportion. But the Census reports show that there are more boys than girls in India. In 1981 there were 131.7 million girls as against 140.3 million boys. In other words, there were 938 girls per thousand boys. In 2001 there were 156.6 million boys and 149.6 million girls in India showing a decline in the sex ratio.

The disproportionate distribution between sexes starts right from birth and continues almost throughout life. The proportion of women per thousand men has come down from 946 in 1951 to 933 in 2001. Numerous factors like maternal mortality, immigration of males and high rate infant mortality for girls are given for the sex imbalance. But these factors give a partial explanation of the phenomenon. Major reason lies in culturally sanctioned negligence and apathy towards the girl. She is discriminated against even before birth in the form of foeticide. She is compelled to live a life of deprivation, ill-health and exploitation.

**Table 1: Percentage of population in the age group 0-14 years
By sex and residence, India and major states 1994**

	Total			Rural			Urban		
	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
India and major States	36.5	36.8	36.1	37.5	37.9	37.0	33.3	33.3	33.4
Andhra Pradesh	33.8	34.0	33.5	33.6	34.0	33.3	34.1	34.1	34.2
Assam	39.6	39.0	40.4	40.6	40.1	41.1	31.8	30.0	33.8
Bihar	41.2	41.5	40.8	41.6	42.1	41.0	37.9	36.9	39.1
Gujarat	33.8	34.4	33.2	34.1	34.7	33.5	33.2	33.7	32.8
Haryana	37.7	37.9	37.5	38.6	38.7	38.5	35.0	35.6	34.4
Himachal Pradesh	34.6	36.2	33.0	35.1	37.0	33.3	28.8	28.4	29.2
Karnataka	34.0	34.3	33.7	35.1	35.4	34.8	31.7	31.9	31.4
Kerala	28.8	30.3	27.4	29.4	31.0	27.9	27.1	28.3	26.0

Madhya Pradesh	37.9	38.0	37.7	38.4	38.6	38.1	36.0	35.8	36.2
Maharashtra	34.4	34.7	34.1	35.6	36.7	34.6	33.1	32.6	33.6
Orissa	34.2	34.5	34.0	34.4	34.8	34.0	33.1	32.6	33.6
Punjab	33.6	34.1	32.9	33.3	33.8	32.7	34.3	34.9	33.5
Rajasthan	39.1	39.6	38.5	39.6	40.1	39.0	37.0	37.6	36.2
Tamil Nadu	31.0	31.5	30.5	32.2	32.7	31.7	28.8	29.3	28.3
Uttar Pradesh	39.6	39.8	39.4	39.9	40.1	39.7	38.0	38.1	38.0
West Bengal	35.3	34.8	35.7	37.8	37.6	38.0	28.2	27.4	29.2

* Excludes Jammu & Kashmir and Mizoram

Source: Sample Registration System, 1995, Office of Registrar General, India

Table 2: Projected child population by age group In India 1996-2016

Sl. No.	Year	0-4 Yrs	5- 9 Yrs	10-14 Yrs	0-14 Yrs
1	1996	119546	123686	109545	352777
2	2001	108494	116145	122905	347544
3	2006	113534	105744	115488	334766
4	2011	119530	110968	105206	335704
5	2016	122837	117099	110461	350397

Sources : Census of India 1991, population projections for India and States 1996-2016

17.2.2 Infant Mortality

Infant mortality rate is considered an important indicator of child health and development. By infant mortality rate is meant the number of deaths of infants under one year of age in a given year per 1,000 live births in that year. In 1947 out of 1000 live births in India, 160 died before the age of one year. It had come down to 96.4 in 1986. In 2000 the infant mortality rate of India was 69. Though the infant mortality rate has decreased, it is till far higher than that of the developed countries of the world (for details see Human Development Report 2003).

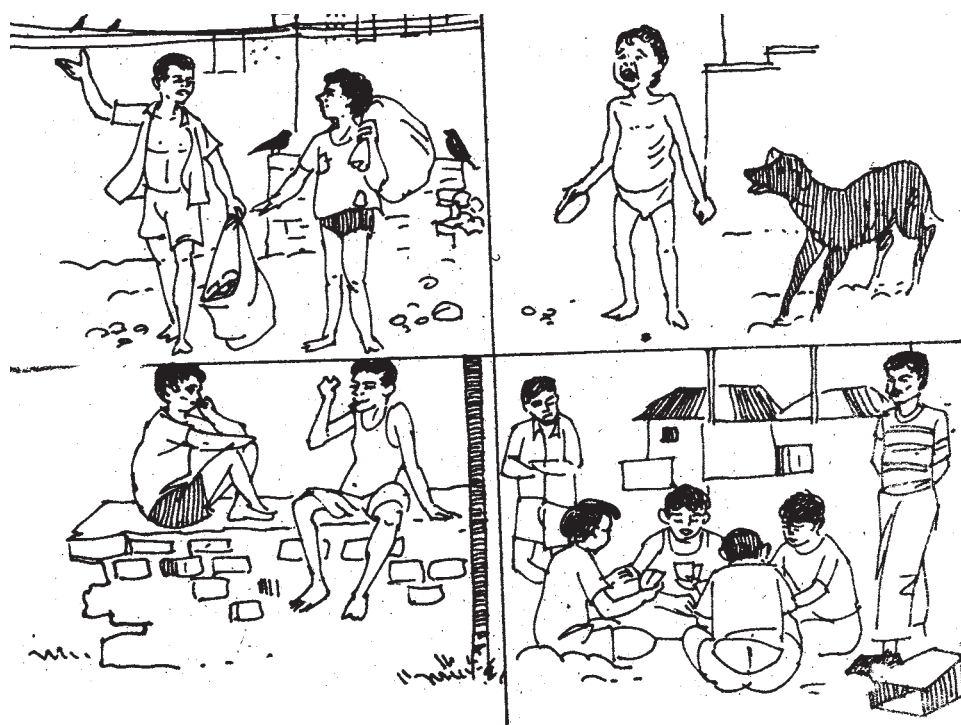
The major causes of infant deaths are found to be the diseases peculiar to infancy which include premature births, respiratory infection, diarrhoea etc. The diseases such as cough, fever and digestive disorder are also important child killers.

The six most common causes for child morbidity and mortality are tuberculosis, tetanus, pertusis (whooping cough), diphtheria, poliomyelitis and measles. These are preventable through immunisation. The Government of India has launched Universal Immunisation Programme. (in short UIP) and it was expected that by 2000 A.D. all children would be “fully” immunised.

The gradual decline in infant mortality rate and in birth rate has pushed up life expectancy at birth. According to the estimate, life expectancy at birth during 1986-91 is .58.1 years for males and 59.1 years for females. By the year 2000 the average life expectancy at birth Indian has gone up to 63.3 years. For the male it is 59.9 years while for the female it was 64.7 years (UNOU 2003).

17.3 STREET CHILDREN AND ORPHANS

Considerable number of children in India are the victims of poverty, erosion of social values, unsatisfactory home environment and lack of social security measures to take care of the exigencies which lead to destitution. Street children and orphans are the by-product of these factors. Orphans are those children who are bereft of either parent or both parents and those who have been deserted or abandoned. They are also called destitute children. Street children are those who are homeless. These children come from different vulnerable groups. However, these groups are not always mutually exclusive. Some of these groups may be mentioned here.



17.3.1 Major Groups

Here we may group these children under the following broad headings.

- i) children who do not get even minimal care in terms of food, clothing, shelter, education, medical aid, etc.
- ii) children who are in a sense “exploited” or “neglected” in their families,
- iii) children who are without any means of subsistence and shelter or in a virtual state of destitution,
- iv) children who are orphaned, abandoned or deserted,
- v) children who run away from their homes and cannot be restored to their parents as they are untraceable,
- vi) children who are vagrant, delinquent or uncontrollable,
- vii) children who suffer from ill-treatment, neglected or unsatisfactory home environment and are subjected to mental and physical suffering,
- viii) children whose parents do not provide or are unable to provide proper home life to them on account of their immoral activities like alcoholism, gambling, drug addiction, crime, prostitution etc., and

- ix) children who are found begging with or without connivance of touts or anti-social elements.

17.3.2 Measures for Rehabilitation

Both street children and orphans need food, clothing, shelter, love, affection and protection. They need opportunities for physical and mental development. The Government has already launched a scheme for children in need of care and protection. The main features of the scheme are as follows:

- i) it provides institutional care by establishing orphanages or children's homes,
- ii) it provides foster care by keeping a child for a certain period in a family which agrees to give him a substitute home,
- iii) it is implemented through voluntary organisations which are given a grant-in-aid to the extent of 90 per cent of the expenditure on approved items (the grant-in-aid is shared on an equal basis by the Central Government and the State Government),
- iv) children up to 18 years are covered in Children's homes, and
- v) foster care is given to children up to 6 years which is extendable to 14 years in exceptional cases.

However, for providing care and protection to street children, the Government is contemplating to undertake certain schemes in near future.

Activity 1

It may be possible for you to recall the population composition of 20 households of your relatives, friends and neighbours. If not, collect statistics of 20 households on population by sex. Now try to find out the sex-ratio of the child population of these households. Write a note on the cause of the variation in the sex-ratio in these households. If possible, exchange your note with other students of the Study Centre.

17.4 CHILD LABOUR

The term "child labour" is often used interchangeably with "working child" or "employed child". While all these terms are defined on the basis of age of the person working, the latter terms denote that the working persons get wages or income. According to the Constitution of India, child labourer may be defined as a person who is below the age of 14 years and is working for an earning. However, child labour denies children the opportunities for mental and physical development and consequently their life chances are marred. Children engaged in domestic work or helping their parents in agricultural or household pursuits do not get income but their work interferes with their childhood activities like education and recreation. Hence child labour needs to be defined in a manner which will include both paid and unpaid work. The Operation Research Group of Boards has defined a child labourer as a person who is in the age group of 5 to 15 years and who is at paid or unpaid work and remains busy for any hour of the day within or outside the family. The Concerned for Working Children

(CWC) of Bangalore defines a child labourer as “a person who has not completed his/her fifteenth year of age and is working with or without wages/ income on a part-time or full-time basis”.

17.4.1 Types of Child Labour

The ILO has given a typology of child work which is applicable across the countries. The categories are as follows:

i) Domestic Non-monetary Work

Children in both rural and urban areas undertake unpaid work within the family for maintenance of the household. It is self-employed and is generally “time-intensive” The activities included in the category are: caring for younger siblings, cooking, cleaning, washing, fetching water etc. Such work in India is done mainly by girls.

ii) Non-domestic and Non-monetary Work

This type of work is usually done by children in rural areas. It includes activities like tending of livestock, protecting crops from birds and animals, hunting, weeding etc. This work is also time-intensive and is often intermixed with domestic work.

iii) Wage Labour

Children work as wage labourers in organised and unorganised sectors in rural and urban areas. They work in artisan production, small scale production, in trade, manufacturing and service occupations. They work in restaurants, as ragpickers, hawkers, newspaper vendors etc. They are preferred to adults because they can be paid low wage for the same quantum of work that an adult does.

iv) Bonded Labour

Children work as bonded labourers. They are pledged by the parents against a debt or loan till the loan with interest is repaid. They work in exchange of food or nominal wage. Sometimes, an agreement is made between the parents of the child and the employer to work for a specific period of time. The bonded labour system is found both in rural and urban unorganised sector. Although bonded labour is abolished by law, it is practised in many parts of India even today.

17.4.2 Child Labour in India

India has a large number of working children. According to unofficial figures there are child labour in the range of .44 to 100 million. In the 1981 Census work has been defined as “participation in any economically productive activity”. A distinction between ‘main workers’ and ‘marginal workers’ has also been made. Main workers are those who have worked for the major part of the year (183 days or more) preceding the date of enumeration. Marginal workers are those who have done some work but cannot be classified as main workers.

Children in the age group of 0-14 years constituted 4.18% of male main workers and 8.35% of female main workers. Similarly children as marginal workers

constituted 10.32% of male marginal workers and 9.38% of female marginal workers. As many as 78.68% of the main child workers were engaged as cultivators and agricultural labourers. According to 1991 census there were 11.28 million working children in our country of which 85% are in the rural areas working in agriculture, live stock reining and fisheries.

According to a recent report in 2000 14% of the children of India belonging to the age group of 10-15 years are in the labour force.

Human Development in South Asia, quoting the UNICEF report of 1995, estimates the child labour force in the region as 134 million. About 100 million are in India. A very high proportion of children aged 10 to 14 work for a livelihood. In Bhutan it is 55 per cent in Nepal 44 per cent, in Bangladesh 29 per cent and in Pakistan 17 per cent.

Although poverty and adult unemployment are the main reasons for the existence of child labour, vested interests of employers also encourage its perpetuation. The employers pay low wage to child labour for the same quantum of work that adults can do.

17.4.3 Banning of Child Labour

There are two opinions on the question of continuance or banning of child labour in India. One group of people think that child labour should be banned since it is detrimental to physical and mental health of the child and is against the Directive Principles of the Constitution of India. The other group considers abolition of poverty as a pre-condition for abolition of child labour. They pled that child labour should be regulated so that children are not employed in hazardous work. The Government of India is taking steps to constitute a Technical Committee for identifying occupations which are hazardous for children.

Box 1

Child Labour in South Asia: Issues and Prostitution and AIDS

According to the report: "Child prostitution is widely known to exist in South Aisa but is rarely...discussed. Widespread poverty and in adequate social safety net have left many children with no choices but to sell their bodies simply, the number must be higher.

The report estimates that around 100,000 children are involved in prostitution. But according to the facts given in the report itself, the number must be higher.

According to the report, every year about 7,000 children are brought into India for prostitution. Quoting a Nepalese non-government organisation, the report says 100000 to 200000 Nepalese girls are working as prostitutes in India. Severe poverty in Nepal, dowry and other social problems facing teenage girls and a high school drop out rate have combined to condemn many girls to prostitution. Bangladeshi girls are also brought into India and Pakistan, while Indian girls are transported to other countries of the region to be sold for prostitution. 30,000 Sri Lankan children are being used as sex workers for foreign tourists. Children caught in the civil war in northern Sri

Lanka. When breadwinners are slaughtered, orphans are compelled to sell their bodies to corrupt businessmen who exploit their desire to escape from the war zone. These children are regularly gang-raped, harassed and forced to perform dangerous sexual acts. They are also exposed to AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. The report goes on: “According to a recent survey of Nepalese sex workers who return from India each year, nearly 65 per cent are HIV positive. Their own communities often reject those who manage to escape and return their homes” (World Socialist Website).

In 1992 India has ratified the convention on the Rights of the Child which implies that India will ensure wide awareness on the issues of the children among the various governmental and the non-governmental agencies. India has also signed the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of the Children and thereafter the Department of Women and Child Development under the Ministry of Human Resource Development has formatted a National Plan and Action for children. As against this backdrop India’s policy on child labour has tried to strike a balance the international standard and obligation on the one hand and that of the grass root reality of India. Hence there are several legislation and the policies.

The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986 prohibits the employment of child labour below age of 14 in factories, mines and in other firms of hazardous employment and regulates the working conditions of the children in other employment. Following another notification in 1993 under their law the government has prohibited employment of children in the slaughterhouses, printing, cashew de-scaling and processing, and soldering. In 1994 a National Authority for the elimination of Child Labour was set up under the chairmanship of the Labour Minister to co-ordinate the efforts of different arms of the government for the progressive elimination of child labour.

The Government of India has also adopted a National Labour Policy in 1987 in accordance with the constitutional mandate and the prevailing legislation on child labour. This policy consists of three complementary measures:

- Legal Action Plan to reinforce very strictly, the various provisions of the child labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act.
- Focus on general development programmes benefiting children wherever possible. It envisages the development of an exclusive system of non-formal education for working children withdrawn from work and increasing the provision for employment and income generation schemes meant for their parents. A special Child Labour cell was constituted to encourage voluntary organisations to take up activities like non-formal education, vocational training provision of health care, nutrition, and education for working children.
- Area specific projects: To focus on areas known to have high concentration of child labour and to adopt a project approach for identification, withdrawal and rehabilitation of working children. (<http://www.indianembassy.org>).

Check Your Progress 1

i) What are the major causes of infant and child mortality in India. Answer in about seven lines

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ii) Point out the measures taken for rehabilitating orphan children in India. Answer in about 10 lines

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iii) Answer each of the following in one line:

a) Who has given a typology of child labour?

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b) What is the population of children in India today?

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17.5 JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

Juvenile Delinquency has been defined as “some form of antisocial behaviour involving personal and social disorganisation”. It is a form of conduct that goes against the norms and laws of society and that tends to affect people adversely. Some think that delinquency is any act, course of conduct or situation which might be brought before a court and adjudicated”. Therefore, delinquency involves a pattern of behaviour which deviates from the normal and is forbidden

by the laws and sanctions of society. Hence juvenile delinquency is both a social and a legal concept.

17.5.1 Factors Promoting Juvenile Delinquency

Juvenile delinquency may arise out of numerous conditions or situations. The conditions or factors may be categorised into the following groups:

- i) Broken home, where children do not get love, warmth, affection and security,
- ii) Bad housing and lack of space for recreation in homes and in neighbourhood,
- iii) Poverty and neglect by parents,
- iv) Child working in vocations and places which are congenial to delinquency,
- v) Undesirable companionship in school, work place and neighbourhood, and
- vi) Undesirable influence of cinema and literature and other mass media.

The causes mentioned here are not exhaustive but only illustrative. It does not follow that the presence of anyone or more of the factors will definitely lead to delinquency. These factors singly or jointly may promote delinquent behaviour.

17.5.2 Corrective Measures against Delinquency

In the discussion of juvenile delinquency, age is an important factor. The legal age for maturity, according to the Indian Maturity Act, has been fixed as 18 years. According to the Indian Penal Code, no act committed by a child under 7 years of age is an offence. However, there is a general tendency to regard all children between the age of 7 to 21 years as juveniles. But according to the Juvenile Justice Act 1986, a boy who has not attained the age of 16 or a girl who has not attained the age of 18 years is considered a juvenile in India. However, earlier according to Children Act this age was different in different states.

It is felt that juvenile delinquents need to be treated in a manner different from that of adult offenders. If a juvenile is punished and imprisoned in the same manner as the adult, he or she might come out of the prison as a confirmed criminal, whereas if we help him/her to live in different environment it is possible to change and save him/her from becoming a criminal. In view of this, laws have been enacted for taking up preventive and corrective measures. The Provisions made under these Acts are described below.

Juvenile courts have been formed to treat juvenile cases in very informal and simple atmosphere. These courts are headed by full time special magistrates, preferably women. The juvenile is brought before the court not in chains or handcuffs. Their cases are not pleaded by lawyers, but by special officers known as Probation Officers.

Persons who have had training in social work and correctional administration are appointed Probation Officers. Every Probation Officer is entrusted with a few juvenile delinquents. He/She investigates their cases by visiting their homes, schools, parents, friends and neighbours. He/She collects informations for

understanding their environment. He/She plans for corrective measures and rehabilitation of the children.

There are Remand Homes where juvenile delinquents are kept till the cases are decided, by the court. During their stay they remain under close supervision and adequate measures are taken to keep up their mental, physical and moral conditions. There are separate Remand Homes for boys and girls.

After the decision by the court Children with minor offence are handed over to parents and those who need constant supervision, are kept in approved schools or institutions for care, treatment, education and training. It is expected that by the time they would come out of the schools, their criminal tendencies would disappear and they would have inculcated the qualities of good citizenship.

17.6 RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

The child by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care before as well as afterbirth. The need for such special safeguards found its first expression as early as 1924 in the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child. It was drawn up by the then “Save the Children Fund International Unit”. It was a five-point text which was taken on board by the League of Nations. It was expanded in succeeding years into what was to become the Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1959.

17.6.1 UN Declaration of 1959

The Declaration of the Rights of the Child adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20th November 1959 proclaims to provide to the child “the best that mankind has to give”. It reaffirms that the child should enjoy the rights for his own good and for the good of society. It calls upon parents, men and women and upon voluntary organisations, local authorities and national governments to recognise these rights and strive for their observance by legislative and other measures.

The principles or the rights set forth in the Declaration are as follows:

- i) All children, without any exception whatsoever, shall be entitled to the rights set forth in this Declaration, without distinction or discrimination on account of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status whether of himself/herself or of his/her family.
- ii) The child shall enjoy special protection, opportunities, and facilities by law and by the other means, to enable him/her to develop physically, mentally, spiritually and socially in a healthy and normal manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity.
- iii) The child shall be entitled from his/her birth to a name and a nationality.
- iv) The child shall enjoy the benefits of social security and shall be entitled to grow and develop in health. To this end, he/she and his/her mother shall be provided special care and protection including pre-natal and post-natal care. He/She shall be entitled to enjoy the right to adequate nutrition, housing, recreation and medical services.

- v) The child who is physically, mentally or socially handicapped shall be given the special treatment, education and care required by the particular condition.
- vi) The child, for the full and harmonious development of his/her personality, needs love and understanding. He/She shall wherever possible, grow up in the care and under the responsibility of his/her parents and in any case in an atmosphere of affection and of moral and material security. A child of tender years shall not, save in exceptional circumstances, be separated from his/her mother. Society and the public authorities shall have the duty to extend particular care to children without a family and to those without adequate means of support.
- vii) The child is entitled to receive free and compulsory education at least in the elementary stages. He/She shall be given an education which will promote his/her general culture and enable him/her on a basis of equal opportunity to develop his/her abilities, his individual judgement and his/her sense of moral and social responsibilities and to become a useful member of society. The child shall have full opportunity for play and recreation which should be directed to the same purpose as education.
- viii) The child shall in all circumstances be among the first to receive protection and relief.
- ix) The child shall be protected against all forms of neglect, cruelty, and exploitation. He/She shall not be subject to traffic in any form. He/She shall not be admitted to employment before an appropriate minimum age. He/She shall not be caused or permitted to engage in any occupation or employment which would prejudice his/her health or education or interfere with his/her physical, mental or moral development.
- x) The child shall be protected from practices which may foster racial, religious and any other form of discrimination. He/She shall be brought up in a spirit of understanding, tolerance, friendship, peace and universal brotherhood and in full consciousness so that his/her energy and talents could be devoted to the service of his/her fellow men/women.

To be precise, the child has been granted the following rights by the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1959, the right of affection, love and understanding, the right to adequate nutrition and medical care, the right to free and compulsory education, the Right to full opportunity for play and recreation, the right of a name and nationality, the right to special care if handicapped, the right to be among the first to receive relief at the time of disaster, the right to learn to be a useful member of society and to develop individual abilities, the right to be brought up in a spirit of peace and universal brotherhood, and the right to enjoy these rights regardless of race, colour, sex, religion, national or social origin.

17.6.2 International Year of the Child

The United Nations General Assembly declared 1979 as the International Year of the Child. It provided an occasion to every country to review the condition of its children and to renew and intensify its programmes for developing the full potentiality of the children. It aimed at stimulating each government to

expand activities which would overcome adverse conditions affecting many children.

The year of the child had encouraged government, private organisations and individuals to do much more for the children who needed special help. Thus the year of the child provided an occasion for practical activities for making the rights of the child a living reality.

17.6.3 UN Convention of 1989

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted on 20th November, 1989 is the most comprehensive and greatest treaty of twentieth century on children's rights. It sets universally, agreed standards for protection of children and provides a valuable framework for the development of programmes and policies that will ensure a realistic and safer future for children in every country. In the Convention, a child is defined as a person below the age of 18 years, unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

The Convention includes all the rights set out in the declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1959. It also includes a number of rights which have not been incorporated in the earlier Declaration. Some of these new rights are noted below:

- i) The right to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views, to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child. The views of the child will be given due weight in accordance with age and maturity of the child. He or she will be provided opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child.
- ii) The right to freedom of expression, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds.
- iii) The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
- iv) The right to freedom of association and of peaceful assembly
- v) The right to seek protection against illicit transfer to and non-return from abroad.
- vi) The right to protection against arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home and against unlawful attacks on his or her honour and reputation.
- vii) The right to protection against all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation.
- viii) The right to protection against all forms of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation.

The rights set out in the Convention can be broadly grouped under the headings of survival, protection and development. The survival rights imply that children should be saved from preventable diseases. Protection connotes that every child should be shielded against physical, mental or sexual abuse. Development implies the rights to adequate nutrition, primary health care and basic education.

The Convention is a special one because for the first time in international law, children's rights are set out in a treaty which will be binding on those nations that ratify them. It is also special in the sense that there shall be an elected committee to examine the progress made by the nations in achieving the obligations undertaken in the Convention.

Activity 2

Read again the sub-sections 17.6.1, 17.6.2 and 17.6.3 very carefully. Based on your daily experience you have like to examine how far the rights of the children are implementation of these rights. Develop a note on these in about two pages and discuss it with the counsellor and other students at the Study Centre.

17.7 UN AGENCIES INVOLVED IN CHILDREN'S WELFARE

There are several UN agencies which have been working towards the cause and development of children in the developing countries of the world. The biggest of these organisations directly dealing with the problems of children are the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

17.7.1 WHO

The World Health Organisation was established and as specialised agency by the United Nations Economic and Social Council on 7th April, 1948. Its objective is the attainment of the highest possible level of health by all the peoples of the world. WHO assists the governments to strengthen their health services, to stimulate and advance work to eradicate diseases, to promote maternal and child health, mental health, medical research and the prevention of accidents, to improve standard of teaching and training in the health professions and of nutrition, housing, sanitation, working conditions and other aspects of environmental health.

17.7.2 UNICEF

The United Nations Children's Fund was established by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1946 to give aid to child victims of war and for improving child health in war affected countries. It was an emergency measure and hence was called the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund.

In 1950, the programme was extended to children in underdeveloped countries. In 1953 it became a permanent organisation. It concentrates its assistance on development activities aimed at improving the quality of life for children and mothers in developing countries. The UNICEF has focused on popularising four primary health care techniques which are low in cost and produce result in a relatively short time. These include: oral rehydration therapy to fight the effects of diarrhoeal infection, expanded immunisation against six most common childhood diseases, child growth monitoring and promotion of breast-feeding. The UNICEF works in close collaboration with the WHO. The

UNICEF is the world’s largest supplier of vaccine and “cold chain” equipment needed to deliver them, as well as, oral re-hydration salts.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Point out the major factors promoting delinquency. Answer in about eight lines.

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- ii) Point out the corrective measures taken against delinquency. Answer around in ten lines.

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- iii) Fill in the blanks with appropriate answers:
 - a) The declaration of the Rights of the child was made for the first time in the year
a) 1926 b) 1924 c) 1925 d) 1935
 - b) The yearwas observed as the International Year of the Child.
a) 1976 b) 1989 c) 1990 d) 1979
 - c) The World Health Organisation was established on.....
a) 7th April 1948, b) 7th April 1946, c) 6th May 1952, d) 9th June 1942.

17.8 YEAR AND DECADE OF THE GIRL CHILD AND INDIAN SCENARIO

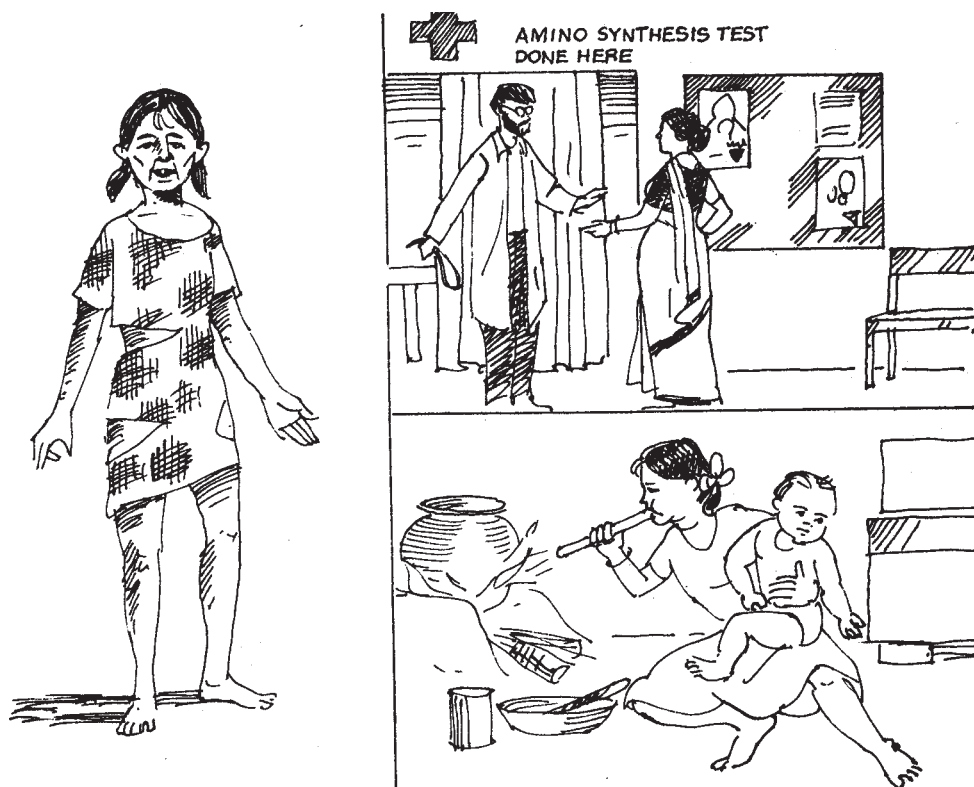
The gender discrimination or injustice against the girl child has not received pointed attention in the UN Declaration of the Right of the Child of 1959 and in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989. Initially the SAARC Technical Committee on Women and Child Development did not focus on the girl child. It was only in its 1986 conference on children that the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) decided to examine the specific problems of children in every technical committee.

17.8.1 Initiatives of the SAARC Countries

The SAARC countries have agreed on a plan of action to create awareness about the low status of the girl and to initiate corrective measures to end discrimination against them. The SAARC workshop held in New Delhi in September 1989 decided to declare 1990 as “the year of the Girl Child” in the seven SAARC countries—India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Maldives—in a bid to give a decisive thrust to the campaign against discrimination of the girl child. The decade of 90s was declared as “the Decade of the Girl Child”.

17.8.2 Girl Child: The Indian Scenario

Notwithstanding the Decade of the Girl Child, the girl child in India have remained subject to low social status. The low status of the girl in India has to be seen in the context of religious, social, cultural and economic situations. These factors together perpetuate discrimination against the girl. The birth of a girl is not cherished it is rather mourned. If a woman gives birth to daughters, she is made to hang her head in shame.



Girl Child in India

A girl is breastfed less frequently and for a shorter duration. Weaning practice starts much earlier for a girl. The parents give her inferior quality of food and do not let her eat to her fill, fearing that she will grow early and too big. Tall and large girls are unfeminine and it is difficult to find grooms for them, the traditional parents think so. Slow growth of girls gives time to the parents to collect dowry for their marriage. Thus the girl starves nutritionally.

The girl is considered a “paraya dhan” (other’s property), hence any investment on her upbringing is considered wasteful. She is not given the opportunity to grow up into full personality. On the other hand, she is engaged in domestic work so that she equips herself to be acceptable to her in-laws. She is taught to cope with all odds that she may come across in the house of her in-laws. She is taught to be subservient and self-sacrificing. She is taught to develop the habit of austerity in thought, speech, dress and food.

Incidence of morbidity is higher among girls but they are given medical treatment less often. They are given lower access to immunisation. Enrolment of girls in schools is much lower. Low status of the girl is culturally designed. Social values and norms give sanctions to the perpetuation of gender inequality. It is hoped that during the decade of the girl child, suitable social and economic programmes would be launched which would minimise discrimination against the girl. In the meantime, voluntary agencies, Mahila Mandals, social workers and mass media have taken programmes for creating awareness among the people about the injustice done to the girl child.

17.9 NATIONAL POLICY OF CHILDREN

The principles set out in the Declaration of Rights of the child by the United Nations General Assembly do not carry any obligation on any country to ensure that they are indeed realised. However, the Government of India started taking steps through action oriented programmes to guarantee these rights consistent with the magnitude of the problem facing the country and the availability of resources. It was only for the first time in the third five-year plan that a programme for child development was introduced under the social welfare schemes.

In the year of 1967 the Government of India appointed a Committee to go into the extent of the problems to meet these needs. The committee identified areas requiring action and suggested appropriate action oriented programmes. It observed the necessity for devising a comprehensive national policy for child development and recommended the constitution of a high level committee on child welfare under the Chairmanship of the Prime Minister to take a unified view of the needs of children.

After the consideration of the recommendations of the Committee, the Government of Children India adopted the Resolution on the National Policy on children on 22 August 1974. According to the Resolution children are a supremely important national asset. Children’s programmes should find a prominent part in our national plans for the development of human resources so that our children grow up to become robust citizens, physically fit, mentally alert and morally healthy, endowed with the skills and motivations needed by society.

17.9.1 Policy and Measures

It has been enjoined upon the state that it shall provide adequate services to children both before and after birth and through the period of growth, to ensure their full physical, mental and social development. The state shall progressively increase the scope of such services so that, within a reasonable time all children in the country enjoy optimum conditions for their balanced growth.

The measures adopted for achieving these objectives are as follows:

- i) All children shall be covered by a comprehensive health programme.
- ii) Programmes shall be implemented to provide nutrition services with the objective of removing deficiencies in the diet of children.
- iii) Programmes will be undertaken for the general improvement of the health nutrition and education of expectant and nursing mothers.
- iv) The state shall take steps to provide free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14 for which a time-bound programme will be drawn up consistent with the availability of resources. Special efforts will be made to reduce the prevailing wastage and stagnation in schools, particularly in the case of girls and children of the weaker sections of society. The programme of informal education for pre-school children from such sections will also be taken up.
- v) Children who are not able to take full advantage of formal school education shall be provided other forms of education suited to their requirements.
- vi) Physical education, games, sports and other types of recreational as well as cultural and scientific activities shall be promoted in schools, community centres and such other institutions
- vii) To ensure equality of opportunity, special assistance shall be provided to all children belonging to the weaker sections of the society, such as children belonging to the economically weaker sections, both in urban and rural areas.
- viii) Children who are socially handicapped, who have become delinquent or have been forced to take to begging or the otherwise in distress, shall be provided facilities for education, training and rehabilitation and will be helped to become useful citizens.
- ix) Children shall be protected against neglect, cruelty and exploitation.
- x) No child under 14 years shall be permitted to be engaged in the hazardous occupation or be made to undertake heavy work.
- xi) Facilities shall be provided for special treatment, education, rehabilitation and care of children who are physically handicapped, emotionally disturbed or mentally retarded.
- xii) Children shall be given priority for protection and relief in times of distress or natural calamity.
- xiii) Special programmes shall be formulated to spot, encourage and assist gifted children, particularly those belonging to the weaker sections of society.

- xiv) Existing laws should be amended so that in all legal disputes, whether between parents or institutions, the interests of children are given paramount consideration.
- xv) In organising services for children, efforts would be directed to strengthen family ties so that full potentialities of growth of children are realised within the normal family, neighbourhood and community environment.

Box 2

National Child Development Board

It was set up in December 1974 with the Prime Minister of India as its Chairman and the Minister of Human Resource Development as its Vice-Chairman. The main objectives of this board are:

- a) to formulate and review the implementation of the programmes designed for the welfare and development for children
- b) to coordinate efforts made by different government and private agencies in implementing these programmes
- c) to locate gaps in the existing services and suggest measures to eliminate such gaps
- d) to suggest the priority areas of action from time to time; and
- e) to act as a high powered national body to symbolise the commitment of the nation to the welfare and development of children.

17.9.2 Priority Areas

In formulating programmes in different sectors, priority shall be given to programmes relating to:

- i) preventive and promotive aspects of child health,
- ii) nutrition for infants and children in the pre-school age along with nutrition for nursing and expectant mothers,
- iii) maintenance, education and training of orphan and destitute children,
- iv) creche and other facilities for the care of children of working or ailing mothers, and
- v) care, education, training and rehabilitation of handicapped children.

In order to provide a forum for planning, review and proper co-ordination of the multiplicity of services to meet health, nutrition, education and welfare needs of children, the National Policy on Children has made provision for the constitution of a National Children's Board. Similar Boards may also be constituted at the State levels.

17.9.3 Voluntary Efforts

The National Policy on Children emphasis that voluntary organisations engaged in the field of child welfare will continue to have the opportunity to develop either on their own or with state assistance, in the field of education, health, recreation and social welfare services. It has been enjoined upon the state to

encourage and strengthen voluntary action so that state and voluntary organisations, trusts, charities and religious and other endowments would be tapped to the extent possible for promoting and developing child welfare programmes.

In order to achieve the aims mentioned above, the state will provide necessary legislative and administrative support. Facilities for research and training of personnel will be developed to meet the needs of the expanding programmes and to improve the effectiveness of the services.

In pursuance of the National Policy on Children an Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme has been started in the country. The scheme aims at providing a package of six services to children below 6 years and pregnant and nursing mothers. The services are supplementary nutrition, immunisation, health and nutrition education to mothers. These services are provided through Anganwadi Centres located in rural, urban and tribal areas. The scheme was started on an experimental basis in 1974 in 33 Development Blocks and by the year 1989-90 it has been functioning in 2438 blocks in the country.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) What is the basic objective of the National Policy on Children. Answer in about three lines.

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- ii) What are the measures adopted to achieve the objectives of the National Policy on Children? Answer in about ten lines

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- iii) Name the countries where the Year of the Girl Child was Observed? Answer in about three lines.

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17.10 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed the demographic composition of children in India. We have looked into the problems faced by street children and orphans and the measures taken by government to rehabilitate them.

We have, then, concentrated on child labour; from there we shifted our attention to juvenile delinquency. We then, focused on the rights of children adopted by UN agencies involved in children's welfare. Having done this, we moved on to explain the discrimination meted out to the girl child in India. Lastly, we have studied the national policy on children.

17.11 KEY WORDS

- Demography** : It is the science of vital statistics as of births, deaths, marriages, migration etc. of population.
- Juvenile Court** : It is a law court that tries the cases involving children under a fixed age.
- Policy** : A governing principle or a course of action.
- Scheme** : An orderly combination of things on a definite plan.
- Programme** : An outline of work to be done.

17.12 FURTHER READINGS

Mandai, B.B. 1990. *Child and Action Plan for Development*. Uppal Publications: New Delhi

Government of India, 1980. *Profile of the Child in India: Policies and Programmes*. Government of India: New Delhi

17.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) The major causes of infant mortality are pre-mature births, respiratory infection, diarrhoea, cough, fever and digestive disorder. The major causes of child mortality are tuberculosis, tetanus, whooping cough, diphtheria, poliomyelitis and measles.
- ii) In order to rehabilitate the orphan children, the Government has started a programme known as, the Scheme for Children in Need of Care and Protection. Under the scheme, children up to the age of 18 years are given care and protection including general education and vocational training. Besides, the provision for foster care has also been made, according to which, a child is kept for a certain period in a family which agrees to give a child a suitable home.
- iii) a) International Labour Organisation (ILO).
b) The child population in India in 1991 was 11.28 million.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Factors promoting juvenile delinquency are broken homes, lack of privacy in homes, bad housing, absence of space for recreation in homes and neighbourhood, neglect by parents, and poverty of parents. In addition, undesirable companionship in school, work place and neighbourhood, and undesirable influence of cinema and literature and other mass media contribute to juvenile delinquency.
- ii) Laws have been promulgated for taking up preventive as well as corrective measures against delinquency. Under these laws, juvenile courts under the control of full time women magistrates have been formed. The juveniles are brought before the courts without handcuffs or chains. Their cases are pleaded by special officers known as Probation Officers. These officers are trained in social work and correctional administration. Till the cases are decided by the courts, juveniles are kept in Remand Homes. After the decision by the courts, those juveniles who need constant supervision, are kept in approved schools for care, treatment, education and training. It is expected that by the time they would go out of the schools, their mental, moral and physical conditions would have changed and they would have imbibed the qualities of good citizenship.
- iii) a) 1924 b) 1979 c) 7th April 1948.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) The basic objective of the National Policy on Children is to provide full physical, mental and social development to children before and after birth and through the period of their growth.
- ii) The measures adopted for achieving the objectives of the National Policy on Children include a comprehensive health programme, nutrition programme and nutrition education, formal education, and informal education, facilities for sport games, cultural and scientific activities in schools, community centres, special assistance to children belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and special programme for treatment, education, rehabilitation and care of physically handicapped, emotionally disturbed or mentally retarded children.
- iii) The seven SAARC Countries, which observed the year 1990 as the Year of the Girl Child, are Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.