

UNDERSTANDING THE PATHWAYS OF RESTORATION OF CHILDREN IN MUMBAI HUB'S CHILD CARE INSTITUTES (CCIS)



Abstract

This research examines the restoration process of children admitted to Child Care Institutes (CCIs) in Mumbai Hub. Based on data collected between January 2020 and December 2023, the study analyzes the socio-economic background of 108 children from the CCI's run by the Don Boscoss in Maharashtra, Goa, Gujarat. The study aims to understand the reasons why children are admitted to the CCI, the processes of restoration, including challenges during follow-up, and various forms of alternative care. In line with child rights frameworks and the Juvenile Justice Act (2015), this research proposes alternative care approaches and strategies to support children who have spent time in CCIs.

Introduction

Globally, child care institutions (CCIs) serve as crucial safety nets for children in vulnerable situations. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) outlines the fundamental rights of children, including the right to protection, education, and a nurturing environment. The UNCRC emphasizes the need for community-based care and support systems to ensure that children grow up in environments that best support their development and well-being. Globally, approximately 5.4 million children live in institutions (Desmond et al., 2020), despite international efforts to promote family-based care.

In India, the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 provides the legal framework for child protection. As per Women and Child Development, Government of Maharashtra, Maharashtra alone has 1,100 CCIs for children in conflict with the law and children in need of care and protection.

Objective

1. To investigate the socio-economic conditions and duration of children's stay in Mumbai Hub's CCIs.
2. To explore the details of children's restoration, including the authorities and families to whom they were restored.
3. To gain an understanding of the current circumstances of these children
4. To propose alternative forms of care that could better serve the needs of children who have spent time in CCIs and who are likely to be admitted in CCIs.

Methodology

Data was collected using the Child MISS (Child Management Information System), which includes records of children admitted to Child Care Institutes within Mumbai Hub from January 2020 to December 2023, case studies and interviews.

Limitation

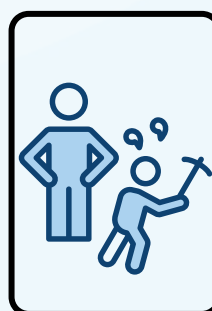
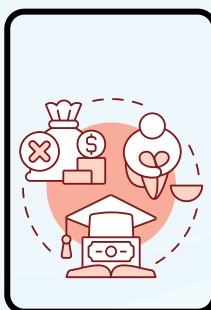
The research was hindered by incomplete data on ChildMISS, the limited time frame of the data considered and difficulties in contacting restored children. These limitations could potentially affect the generalizability of the findings the ability to draw definitive conclusions about the long-term effects of CCI placement on children.



Reasons for Children Entering Child Care Institutes

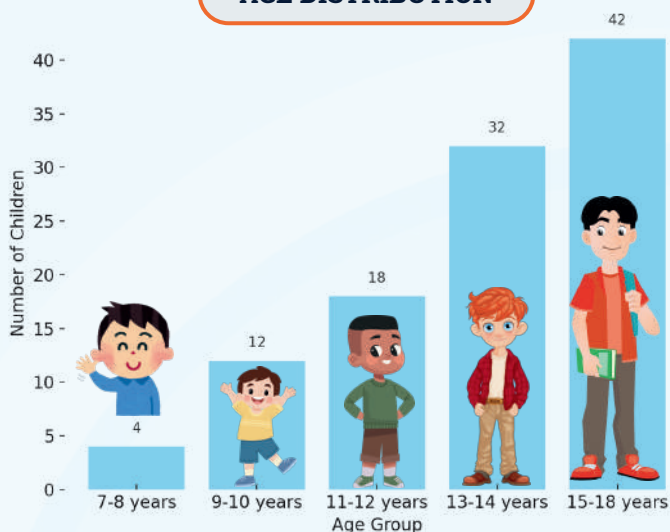
Children are admitted to CCIs for multiple reasons, many of which are linked to socio-economic and family challenges. These include:

- **Incapacitated parents:** Some parents, due to chronic illness, addiction, or disability, are unable to care for their children adequately.
- **Single-parent households:** Financial instability and lack of support often lead single parents to seek temporary placement for their children in CCIs.
- **Abuse or neglect:** Many children face physical or emotional abuse at home, often being neglected or exposed to harmful environments.
- **Poverty:** Poverty is a leading cause of children being placed in CCIs, with families believing that institutional care will provide better access to food, shelter, and education.
- **Children of commercial sex workers:** In some cases, children of marginalized groups, such as commercial sex workers, are placed in CCIs to protect them from exploitation and abuse.
- **Orphanhood:** Children who have lost both parents.
- **Family disintegration:** Families experiencing domestic violence, parental substance abuse, or mental health issues.
- **Migration or displacement:** Children of migrant workers or those displaced due to conflicts or natural disasters.
- **COVID-19-** One significant reason for the increase in children admitted to Child Care Institutions (CCIs) during the COVID-19 pandemic was the loss of parents due to the virus. As families were affected by illness and death, many children found themselves orphaned or separated from their caregivers, leading to a need for alternative care arrangements.
- **Child labour:** Children who are rescued from child labor are often placed in Child Care Institutions (CCIs) as a temporary measure to provide them with a safe and supportive environment.



Data Analysis

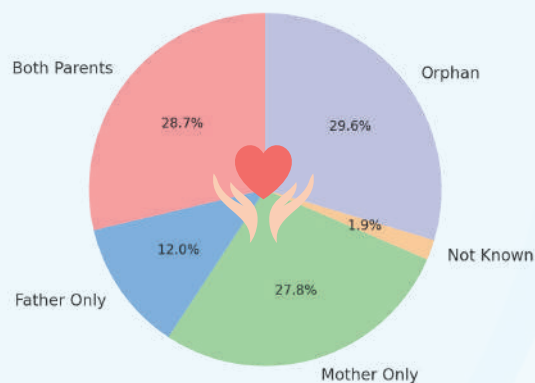
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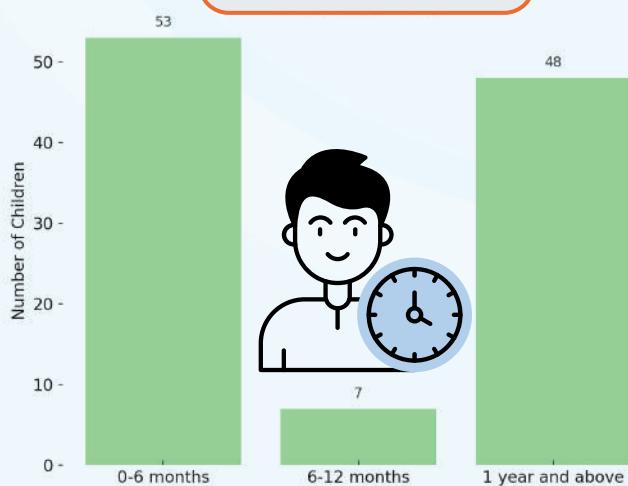
The majority of children (approximately 68.5%) were aged between 13 and 18 years when they were admitted to the CCI. This suggests that older children, especially those in their adolescence, are more likely to be in need of care and protection, possibly due to increased vulnerability at this stage of life, including the risk of child labour or exploitation. Younger children (7-8 years) represent the smallest percentage of admissions, which may be indicative of earlier interventions or family-based support mechanisms at younger ages.

The data on parental status shows a significant proportion of orphans (29.6%) and semi-orphans (39.8%), with 43 children having lost at least one parent. A total of 31 children have both parents alive, but this does not necessarily guarantee a safe home environment, as some parents may be incapacitated due to illness, addiction, or poverty. This finding highlights the need for comprehensive family strengthening programs, even for children who have both parents, to ensure a nurturing and protective home environment.

PARENTAL STATUS

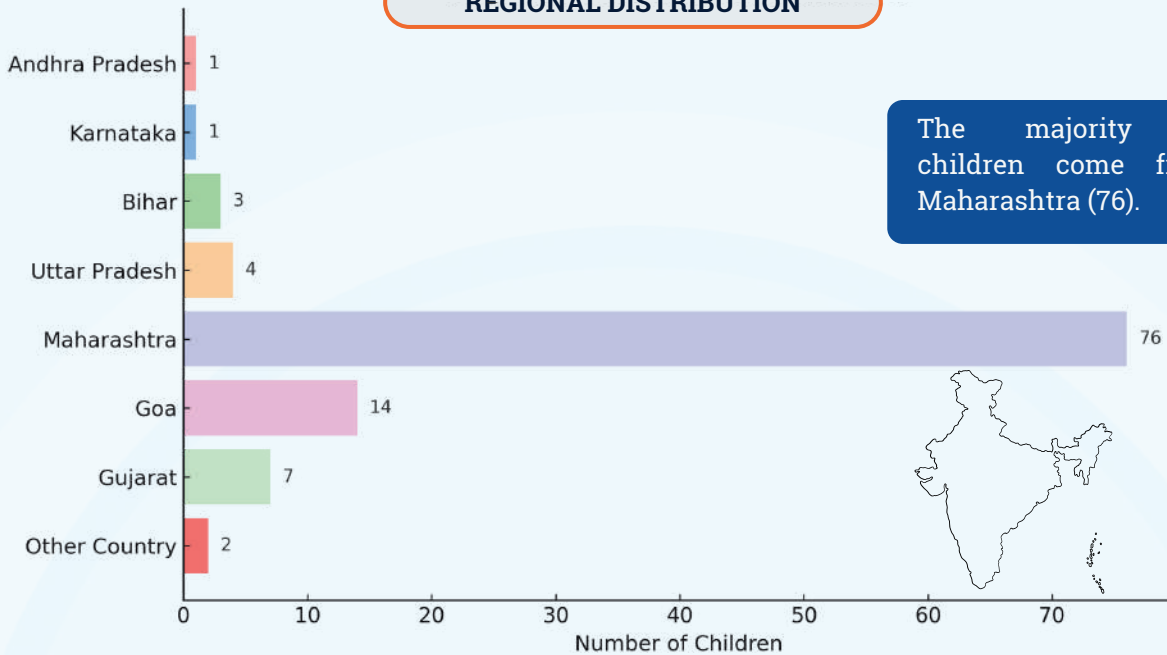


DURATION OF STAY



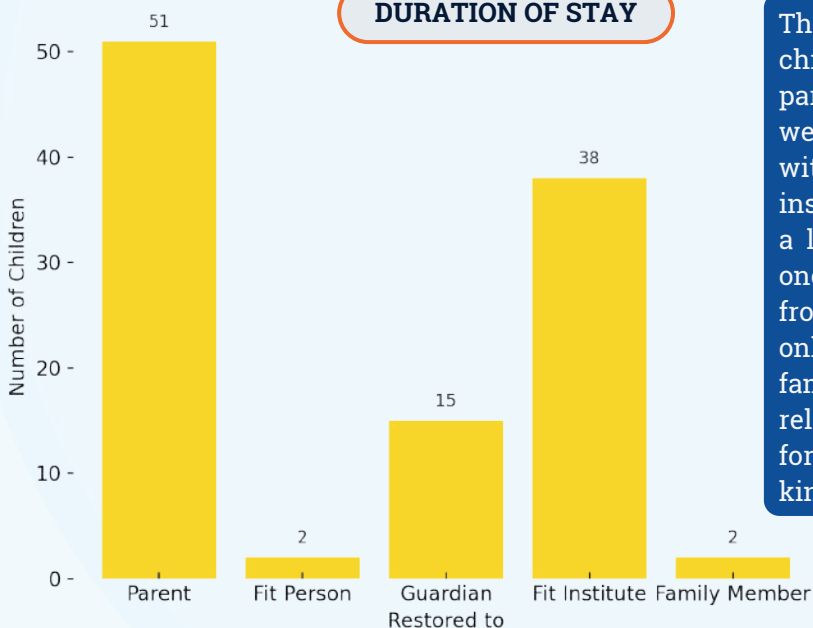
The duration of stay data shows that 49% of the children stayed in the CCIs for six months or less. A significant portion (44.4%) stayed for over one year, reflecting the complexity of the restoration process for some children. Those staying longer might be facing more severe challenges in finding a suitable family environment, or they may require extended support due to personal or familial circumstances. This also underscores the importance of equipping children with life skills, education, and vocational training before they are reintegrated into the community.

REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION



The majority of children come from Maharashtra (76).

DURATION OF STAY



The data indicates that the majority of children (47.2%) were restored to their parents. However, 38 children (35.2%) were sent to fit institutes, which aligns with the JJ Act's provision that institutional care should only be used as a last resort. This was mainly done as one of the Children's Home transitioned from CCI to providing After Care services only. The restoration of children to family members and fit persons was relatively low, which suggests the need for enhanced community-based and kinship care programs.

Correlation of Data

The data reveals key correlations:

- Age and Duration of Stay:** Adolescents (13-18 years) make up the majority of admissions and tend to have longer stays. This suggests that older children face more complex barriers to restoration, such as issues with reintegration into the family or community, education gaps, or emotional and psychological challenges.
- Orphan Status and Restoration:** Orphans and semi-orphans are more likely to be sent to fit institutes or fit persons, as their family ties may be weakened or non-existent. This highlights the need for alternative care solutions that provide these children with long-term stability and emotional support.

Pathways of Restoration and Reintegration

Restoration Process:

According to the Juvenile Justice Act, the process for restoring a child includes:

1. Individual Assessment

An evaluation of the child's and their family's suitability for restoration.

2. Suitability Assessment by Child Welfare Committee (CWC)

The CWC assesses whether the parents or guardians are fit to receive the child.

3. Determination of Fitness

The CWC determines if the child's home environment is conducive to their well-being.

4. Release Order

If deemed suitable, the CWC issues a release order after hearing from the child and their parents or guardians.

5. Restoration

The child is restored to their family or guardians. If immediate restoration is not possible, the child may be placed in a temporary shelter or care center.

Reintegration Pathways

Effective reintegration involves:

- **Continued Support:** Providing educational support, counselling, and life skills training even after the child is restored.
- **Family Strengthening:** Assisting families with resources and guidance to ensure a stable environment for the child.
- **Community-Based Programs:** Engaging in programs that support the child's transition back into the community, ensuring they have the necessary skills and support systems.





Challenges Faced During Follow-up

Restoring children to their families or guardians is an important milestone in the rehabilitation process. However, it is essential to acknowledge that this transition can be complex and challenging. Despite the best efforts of organizations and caseworkers, children and families may encounter difficulties during the follow-up period. These challenges can impact the child's ability to adjust and thrive in their home environment. Key challenges faced during follow-up include-

1. **Parental Relapse** – Families may revert to harmful behaviours like substance abuse or neglect.
2. **Economic Hardship** – Financial instability may force children back into unsafe environments.
3. **Psychosocial Barriers** – Restored children may struggle with emotional or behavioural issues, hindering their adjustment.
4. **Lack of Cooperation** – Some families are uncooperative or resistant to intervention, making follow-up difficult.

These challenges highlight the need for sustained support and intervention to ensure the long-term safety and well-being of children. By acknowledging and addressing these challenges, organizations can work towards creating a more stable and nurturing environment for children to thrive.

Strategies and Recommendations

Strengthen Family Programs and Family Counselling Develop comprehensive family strengthening programs to support families before and after restoration. This includes counselling, financial support, and parenting education along with family counselling.	Enhance Vocational Training Expand vocational training opportunities, particularly in ITI courses, to provide children with practical skills and better employment prospects.
Improve Mental Health Support Increase mental health services for children both during and after their stay at the CCI. Ensure continuous counselling and support to help children adjust and thrive in their new environments.	Robust Follow-Up Mechanisms Implement a more structured follow-up program to monitor children for at least one year after restoration. This should include regular check-ins, family support, and counselling.
Promote Community-Based Care Prioritize community-based care models aligned with SDGs and UNCRC principles. Focus on providing children with support within their communities to ensure their emotional and psychological well-being.	Prepare for Reintegration Ensure children are adequately prepared to face the outside world before restoration. This includes life skills training, education, and support in developing coping strategies.
Documentation Assistance Helping children obtain essential documents such as birth certificates, orphan certificates, and identity cards can significantly improve their access to services and opportunities.	Legal Aid Providing legal assistance to children who may be victims of abuse, neglect, or exploitation can help them secure justice and protection.





Alternative Forms of Care

Alternative care is a non-institutional approach, that offers more than just a substitute for institutional care. It encompasses various facilities and services designed to support children without family or family support. This care can be provided within the family itself or in a family-like or family-based environment. Key non-institutional care provisions include adoption, foster care, sponsorship, and aftercare.

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, outlines several important principles to guide this approach such as-

- **Principle of Family Responsibility (Section 3(v)):** The primary responsibility for the care, nurture, and protection of a child lies with the biological family or, in the absence of a biological family, with the adoptive or foster parents.
- **Positive Measures (Section 3(vii)):** All available resources, including family and community resources, should be mobilized to promote the well-being of the child, facilitate the development of the child's identity, and create an inclusive and enabling environment. This helps to reduce the child's vulnerabilities and the need for institutional intervention.
- **Principle of Institutionalization as a Last Resort (Section 3(xii)):** Placing a child in institutional care should be a measure of last resort, used only after reasonable inquiry has been made to explore all other family-based and community-based care options.

This approach, emphasizing a child's right to grow in a family-based environment, is also supported by several key documents and legislations in India, including the Constitution of India, adoption-related laws, CRC, ICPS, National Policy for Children (2013), Adoption Regulations (2017), and Foster Care Guidelines (2016). and the latest Vatsalya Mission guidelines which align with the Sustainable Development Goals.

By incorporating these principles, alternative care ensures that children grow up in supportive, family-based environments, aligning with the best practices laid out in various key frameworks.

Defining various forms of Alternative care

- **Foster Care:** Children are placed with families who can provide a caring home environment.
- **Family-Based Care:** Options like kinship care (placement with relatives) and family group homes.
- **Community-Based Care:** Programs that support children and families, including early childhood education centers, after-school programs, and community-based rehabilitation centers
- **Aftercare:** Aftercare provides support for young adults who have aged out of institutional care, helping them transition to independent living with services like education, employment assistance, and housing.
- **Sponsorship:** It offers financial assistance to help children remain in a stable family setting, covering costs like education, healthcare, nutrition, and basic needs





Children's Voice (Names Changed)

Reza's story

Reza was a 13-year-old boy from Lucknow who ran away after a big fight with his father. Angry and hurt, he took a train to Mumbai and survived on the city streets for three days.

A police officer found Reza and brought him to Bosco Boys Home. The Child Welfare Committee (CWC) passed an order for Reza's temporary stay in Bosco Boys Home until they found his family.

At first, Reza was quiet and upset. Living at Bosco Boys Home, he met the boys and staff who were patient and caring. They helped him feel safe. Reza started to enjoy art classes and computer lessons. He began to smile again and make friends.

The staff worked hard to find Reza's family. They talked to the police and searched through records. After two months, they finally located Reza's parents in Uttar Pradesh.

Reza's father came to take him back home. The Bosco Boys Home staff didn't just want to send Reza home. They wanted to help the family understand each other better. Reza and his father were helped to learn better communication and conflict-resolution skills.

During Reza's stay, he attended counselling sessions where he learnt to regulate his emotions. They helped him learn how to solve problems without fighting. Reza learned how to express his feelings without getting angry.

On the day Reza went home, he was different. He was no longer the scared boy who had run away. He was stronger and more confident. His father walked beside him, and they talked and smiled together.

This wasn't just about bringing a boy back home. It was about healing a family and giving them a new chance to love and support each other.

Reza learned that home isn't just a place. It's where people care about you and help you grow.

Deep's Story

Deep, was left all alone after his parents passed away. His neighbour placed him in the CCI, where he initially struggled with adjusting to his new environment and following the daily routine. The staff saw his potential and provided him with the care, guidance, and encouragement he needed. Over time, with support from CCI staff, he discovered a passion for fitness and is currently completing his higher studies. He is now a certified gym trainer.

He worked hard, balancing his higher studies with his dream of becoming a fitness trainer. He wants to motivate and encourage boys like him to work hard and follow their passion.



Children's Voice (Names Changed)

Wilfred's story

Wilfred's story is a powerful testament to the importance of family reunification. He was rescued from Vadodara Station. He spent 2.5 years in Don Bosco Snehalaya. Despite efforts by Childline and DCPU to trace his family, Wilfred's desire to reunite with his loved ones remained unfulfilled.

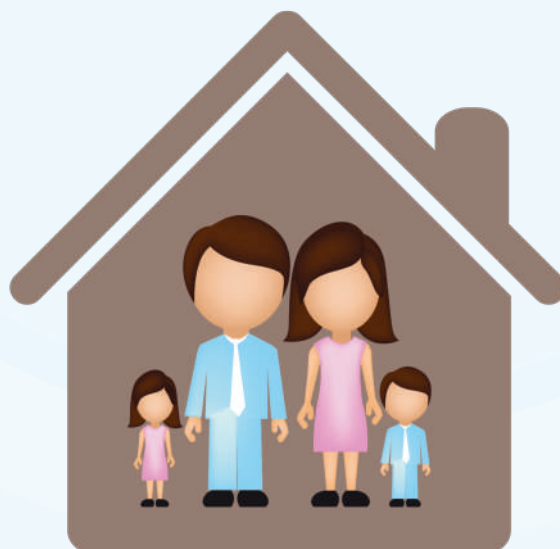
However, a breakthrough came when Wilfred shared some important information about his family in Nagpur, Maharashtra. The Vadodara CWC and Snehalaya staff collaborated to trace his family, conducting a house search in Nagpur. The outcome was nothing short of miraculous – Wilfred was finally reunited with his family.

This heartwarming reunion tells us the significance of prioritizing family tracing and reunification efforts. Institutions provide temporary care, but family love and belonging are essential for a child's emotional and psychological development. Wilfred's journey highlights the importance of:

- Collaborative efforts between organizations and authorities
- Preserving family ties
- Prioritizing children's emotional well-being

Wilfred's story shows how important it is to help children reunite with their families. When children can go back home and be with their loved ones, it makes a big difference in their lives. Wilfred's journey reminds us that every child needs a family and a place where they feel they belong.

Restoring children back to their families can help them feel loved, supported, and give them a chance to grow up in a caring home. It's not just about Wilfred - it's about giving hope to many other children who are waiting to be reunited with their families.



Conclusion

This research provides a comprehensive examination of the restoration process for children in CCIs. By focusing on child rights and practical recommendations, the study aims to enhance the well-being and future prospects of children leaving CCIs. Strengthening family units, expanding vocational training, and improving mental health support are crucial for ensuring that children transition smoothly into independent living.

It is imperative that policymakers, social work organizations, and communities work together to promote child-centred care models that prioritize the best interests of children and empower them to lead fulfilling lives.

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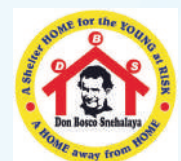
Wadala



Goa



Nashik



Vadodara

Thank you to all the nodes in Mumbai Hub , Homelink Network

Supported by



Don Bosco National Forum for the Young at Risk

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