



NAVAJEEVAN BALA BHAVAN

VIJAYAWADA

(A home for Children in need of care and Protection)

D.No: 24-3-35, Bavajipet 1st lane, Andhra Raha Road, Vijayawada, Krishna Dist. AP-India-520003
Ph: 0866-2439913, Fax: 0866-2431221, Email: navajeevanvja@gmail.com, FB Email: njbbvjafacebook@gmail.com. URL: www.njbb.org.



HOME ABOUT US SERVICES DEPARTMENTS CENTERES SUCCESS STORIES GALLERY DONATE/SPONSOR CONTACT US

Article - 2

NAVAJEEVAN EXPERIENCE WITH STREET BASED CHILDREN and CHILD WORKERS Fr Thomas Koshy, SDB

- 'Sooner the Better': The experience is that when a child is rescued at the earliest, he or she will be less addicted to street life and can be integrated with family easily. The more a child stays on the street, the more he or she gets addicted to street life, making the home integration or any other rehabilitation measure more difficult. Hence, applying the principle 'sooner the better', utmost importance is given for rescuing the child at the earliest, especially intensifying the coordinated rescue efforts at railway stations as more than 95% of the children travel by train after leaving home to reach different urban centers. Out of the 2606 children fresh to street, thanks mostly to the efforts of Street Presence team, 78.20% children were rescued/weaned away within 7 days of their street life.
- The Risks they are in: Runaway/street children and youth sleep on the platforms, in markets, bus stands, abandoned buildings, etc. They were either forced to leave unbearable conditions at home (violent alcoholic father, broken family, poverty and concomitant hunger) or for survival in the cities. They suffer physical, mental, emotional and social deprivation and stress of enormous proportions. Bereft of a benign home with loving parents, once on the road, or platform or in a train, they face starvation, police brutality, and loss of personal belongings and lack of safe place to sleep. They suffer from malnutrition, vomiting, swelling, accidents, fractures, septic wounds, skin diseases, ENT problems, chicken pox, gynecological problems, diarrhea, dental problems, dog bites, respiratory infections, tuberculosis, diabetes, fits, jaundice, malaria, stomach pain, fevers, HIV etc. This is compounded by their inability to access health services. In their struggle for survival, they meet up with children in similar circumstances, get accepted in the group, share their sleeping places etc. In the process, they get into early sexual experience either for affection or forced into it by colleagues. Some of them develop multiple sexual partners and/or resort to commercial sex workers. Most are ignorant of sexually transmitted infections or HIV. Their unsafe sexual behavior leads to acute stress and substance abuse.
- Substance Abuse: Experience of Navajeevan Street Presence team points to the latest development that most of the children, formerly addicted to erasers (more than 39% as per the latest random study by the team), are now being addicted to Petwin injection, made available by anti-social gangs and children under their hegemony, at Rs 20/-. This is now being spread not only among street children, but also, perhaps, more in number, among city's college and school children.
- Parental Status: Out of the 2606 new children rescued, 69.38% are having both parents and 18.03% are semi-orphans and 9.23% are orphans and 2.19% are from broken families and 11.54% did/could not reveal the parental status as they were either not willing or did not know or were mentally challenged or deaf. The data also reveals the growing number of orphan/semi-orphans due to the death of their parents because of HIV/AIDS.
- The Age Analysis points out that, out of the total number of 2606 new children rescued, 0.81% were below 5 years and 4.07% in between 6-8 years and 8.10% in between 9-10 years and 12.43% in between 11-12 years and 24.10% in between 13-14 years and 28.93% in between 15-16 years and 16.92% in between 17-18 years and 4.64% 19 and above years. As the data indicates, the highest number is in between 15-16 years followed by those in between 13-14 years and those in between 17-18 years.
- Absence of traditional joint/extended families – a reason for growing number of Run-Away Children: The 'reason-for-leaving-home' analysis points out that, out of the total number of 2606 new children

rescued, 24.41% of children came away from home as they were verbally and physically abused/neglected by parents, forced to go for work, scolded or beaten for getting less marks, stole money from home or when the alcoholic parents become unbearable. Ultimately, the advent of nuclear families replacing the traditional joint/extended families may be one of the main reasons for the growing number of run-away children, where a child has no support from the close relatives when the parents many a time vent their frustration and stress of life on the children. 2.95% are from broken families; 4.34% (99 boys and 14 girls) are orphans and not taken care of by close relatives; 7.02% ran away to escape from the abuse of their teachers or hostel wardens or were not interested in studies for other reasons; 18.46% left home to escape the torture of the work place or when they were forced into work by their parents and 12.43% came due to peer pressures/ city attractions, etc.

- Growing Number of Run-Aways from the Marginalized Communities – the dichotomies Perceived: Out of the 2606 new children rescued during the reporting period, the children from the marginalized communities (SC & ST together) constitute 39.63% (SC: 841 – with 734 boys and 107 girls and ST: 192 – with 159 boys and 33 girls). Unlike in the past years where majority of children hailed from Backward Communities, a comparative analysis of last 3 years data - 2007-08 and 2008-09 and 2009-10, reveals a steady increase in the number of children from SC and ST communities, from 27.94% in 2008-09 to 29.6% in 2008-09 to 39.63% in 2009-10 – an increase of 11.69%. One of the main culprits may be economic recession and escalation of prices of commodities and loss of livelihoods thereof, making the life of families of these marginalized communities all the more difficult and miserable. Within SCs and STs, the number of ST children, both boys and girls, decreased progressively, from 11.06% in 2008-09 to 10.15% in 2008-09 to 7.36% in 2009-10 – a decrease of 3.7%, where as a progressive increase was recorded in the case of both boys and girls of the SCs, from 16.88% in 2008-09 to 19.45% in 2008-09 to 32.27% in 2009- 10 – an increase of 15.39%. The reasons for this progressive difference are to be studied further. One of the reasons may be that, while STs, though the most marginalized among the lot, unlike SC children, the children from the interior ST communities, instead of coming to streets, are trafficked out to distant places across the country for cheap child labour, commercial sex work, etc. Of late, it was found that the Vijayawada railway station has become the main trafficking transit point.
- Growing Number of Run-Away Girl-Children: Out of the 2606 children rescued, 1.96% children were missing cases. The data reveals, while 22.81% of 285 girls, rescued during the year, ran away due to family problems, 13.68% came away seeking support to pursue their studies. When the reporting years 2007-08 and 2009-10 are compared, the number of rescued girl children increased from 6.01% in 2007-08 to 10.94% in 2009-10.
- Working Children at Autonagar Industrial Estate: As one of the biggest automobile industrial estate in the country, the first Navajeevan counting survey in 2001 revealed, that it had a minimum of 6294 child workers, below 18 years of age (including 2403 below 14 years), just in 400 acres of land with around 10,000 small industrial establishments dealing with body building of trucks, tinkering, repairs in radiator and batteries, foundry works, rubber footwear, steel vessel polishing, etc., along with way-side tea stalls and petty shops, etc. (Thanks to the efforts of Navajeevan along with other stakeholders, such as, the Labour Dept., Child Welfare Committee, Forum for Save the child by leading him/her to Navajeevan. Sponsor the child to realize his/her dream. 19 Child Rights/Childline Vijayawada, NCLP, Women and Child Development Dept., Police, Revenue, Education Dept., other NGOs, some of the child-friendly employers, etc., the number of child workers, especially below 15 years, has been progressively and considerably reducing down the years.) A vast majority of these children, at this automobile industrial estate (named as 'Autonagar'), were employed with their parents' own consent to substantiate the meager income of the family. These children are often engaged in hazardous jobs. They have to work 14 to 16 hours a day for a meager wage of Rs. 50/- to a maximum amount of Rs.100/- in certain cases. Sometimes, many of them are not paid at all under the pretext that they are admitted to learn a trade. In many a case, they are severely beaten up just because they dared to ask for their promised wage or could not reach the assigned work target of the day, in majority of the cases, due to physical weakness. There are instances of sexual abuse of girl-child workers too.
- Problem of Child Labour in General: When compared to the wage paid to adult workers, lesser wage is paid to child workers. As the law of the land does not prohibit completely and explicitly the employment of child workers above 14 years, the employers takes lightly the engagement of children

(above 14 years) in hazardous industry (even if the existing law “Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986” prohibits it. And, almost all the industrial units at Autonagar and other places in the city where children are employed are by nature hazardous. Along with tackling the problem of child workers below 14 years, the organization is now making concerted efforts, in collaboration with other stakeholders, to advocate the rights of the child workers above 14 years employed in the Industrial Estate, especially in hazardous units, while maintaining its vigil to rescue child workers below 14 years. In the final analysis, this category of children between 14 and 18 years constitutes ‘the Voiceless’ among the lot!

❖ **The Invisible Child Domestic Workers of the City and ILO Convention 182 – Domestic Child Work as one of the Worst Forms of Child Labour:**

- The recent informal area surveys by Navajeevan Team revealed that Child Domestic Work (CDW) is rampant in the city of Vijayawada. It is corroborated by the number of Child Domestic Workers (CDWs) rescued in search operations conducted by the team in collaboration with Women Development and Child Welfare Department, National Child Labour Project (NCLP), city’s Police Commissionerate, Labour Department, Forum for Child Rights/CHILDLINE Vijayawada.
- Similar types of raid conducted in other parts of the State in the past could bring to the surface a brokers’ network closely interlinked with certain villages for trafficking children into CDW and other type of worst and inhumane types of child work, including commercial sex workers. In a State wide rescue drive conducted in 2006, Mantada, a village just 35 kms away from Vijayawada emerged out as the prime source of CDW. More than 90% of CDWs are girl children.
- Most of the CDWs are brought to the city by brokers from far away villages. In a way, they are ‘bonded’ labourers as their parents have taken a full year pay in advance from the brokers, however minimum it is. They are made to work long hours continuously with no proper rest; not having a day of rest during the week. They are constantly abused verbally and physically; many a time, denied for petty reasons even the meager quantity of food they are normally allowed.
- The cases registered with Child Welfare Committee (CWC) point to the fact that sexual abuse of these children is not uncommon, not only by the male members of the employers’ household but also by male visitors.
- In many cases, the impoverished parents surrender their children to outsiders or, distant relatives, simply to work in exchange for their housekeep, on the assumption that they will be better provided for as unremunerated servants in an affluent household than they could be in their families.
- Many a time, the agonies of these children, far away from their homes, never come out as they have no easy accessibility to their families; also, within the city, no NGO/GO focus their work on the plight of these children.
- In fact, they are almost ‘invisible’, except that the media highlights the issue now and then when an extraordinary situation occurs. As a widespread and accepted practice, the sphere of child domestic workers is often considered as a private affair of the individual employing household. Because domestic work takes place in the confines of the employer’s home, it is regarded as unskilled work and requires no formal training. This is further distinguished by low wages, unsecured and poor working conditions.

❖ **Slums in the Growing Cities like Vijayawada**

- The Municipal Corporation area of Vijayawada is spread over a 84 sq. km, with 59 divisions. A large percentage of the population lives in 109 slums/hutment colonies mushrooming around markets, bus terminus, railway junction and market yards, warehouses, embankments of canals and railway lines.
- As is the case with any other developing city and civic problems of urbanization thereof, these permanent slums and temporary hutment colonies of migrant construction workers and seasonal employees are gradually becoming the feature of growing Vijayawada city. Poor migrants who come to the city from far away interior villages in search of livelihood seek a cheap place for a shelter in the already established slums, or on pavements or on a vacant plot thus starting a fresh slum settlement.

- Slum dwellers form the part of the urban economy. Generally, they are employed in the category of unskilled workers and in the informal sector of the economy as self-employed persons in petty trade, repairs and transport.
- Slum or temporary hutment colonies are usually connected to anti-social problems as the concomitant of slums. They are said to be generally lacking in community organization and even promoting disorganization, except well-knit and organized slum communities. They exhibit mixed features of the presence of illegal or underground activities and of community organization involving residents engaged in both underground and over ground activities. Slums with a frequent floating population resulting in anonymity have the potential of turning into centers of commercial sex work, gambling, bootlegging, drug peddling, delinquency and crime. Slums, in some cases, are places of residence for the unemployed and destitute with underground activities.
- Most of the slum or temporary hutment colonies are deprived of basic amenities – safe drinking water, proper sanitation and shelter, etc., and the children suffer most – without sufficient opportunities for their survival, protection and overall-development, equitably with other children.
- Majority of the population are functionally illiterate. The socio-economic conditions propel them to send their children for work. Though enrolled in regular schools, many of the children tend to drop-out at an early age, especially the girl children. As noted, these slum or temporary Save the child by leading him/her to Navajeevan. Sponsor the child to realize his/her dream. 21 hutment colonies are prone to trafficking in children, especially girl children for commercial sex work and domestic work.

❖ **Children Affected By AIDS (CABA)**

- The situation seems to be grim with the growing number of children living with/affected by HIV/AIDS in the target villages located in and around the city of Vijayawada. The registered data of children at Navajeevan's shelter reveals the increasing number of children infected/affected with HIV/AIDS.
- Of late, the tendency to abandon children infected by HIV/AIDS and with other disabilities, by parents or close relatives, is on the rise.
- Within the State, the district of Krishna, the home district of Navajeevan, stands in the A Grade along with the neighboring district of Guntur. The project area – the 12 target villages (10 of the Penamaluru mandal, 2 bordering villages and Vijayawada Urban) – fall within the district of Krishna, which is more prone to HIV/AIDS than other villages within the district, with one of the busiest railway junctions in the country and is having one of the largest automobile industrial estates in South India.
- The target areas are located adjacent to National and State High ways, with busy transit traffic carrying vegetables, commercial crops, construction materials, etc. to different destinations. These areas belong to high risk group as they are having high inflow/outflow of bridge population, such as, temporary migrant construction/agricultural/industrial workers and truck drivers.
- Women Victims of Domestic Violence: Involvement of Navajeevan in the target villages of Child Safety net project was an eye-opener. The domestic violence suffered by mothers resulting in broken families is one of the culprits for the increasing number of children suffering from serious neglect, and many of them, leaving home disoriented.