



"CIVIL SOCIETY INTERVENTION IN CHILD TRAFFICKING: THE ROLE OF NGOs IN INDIA AND ANDHRA PRADESH"

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ABSTRACT: -

Child trafficking remains one of the most pressing human rights challenges in India, threatening the safety, dignity, and future of children. Despite the presence of laws and government mechanisms, gaps in enforcement, poverty, porous borders, and lack of awareness make children highly vulnerable to exploitation. In this context, civil society organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play a pivotal role in combating child trafficking. Their interventions extend from prevention and awareness-building at the grassroots level to rescue operations, rehabilitation, legal support, and reintegration of survivors into society. In India, NGOs such as Bachpan Bachao Andolan, Childline India Foundation, and Save the Children have been instrumental in creating networks to monitor trafficking, rescue victims, and advocate for stronger policies. In Andhra Pradesh, where socio-economic vulnerabilities and migration trends heighten the risk of trafficking, NGOs have worked closely with local communities, law enforcement agencies, and government departments to reduce incidences of child trafficking. They focus on preventive education, livelihood support for families, and rehabilitation centers for rescued children.

The study highlights that NGOs are not only service providers but also powerful advocates for child rights. Their efforts demonstrate the significance of community-based, collaborative approaches in eradicating child trafficking.

Keywords: Child Trafficking, NGOs, Civil Society, Rehabilitation, Andhra Pradesh, Child Rights, Prevention, Rescue, Exploitation

INTRODUCTION

Child trafficking can be defined as the process of illegally transporting, transferring, or harboring a person below the age of 18 years, for the purpose of exploitation, this problem is prevalent in most developing countries due to porous borders and weak domestic laws to counter the issue, there are various causes of child trafficking like lack of employment, poverty, low level of education, a breakdown of social structure, etc., child trafficking is a violation of the mental and physical integrity of a child. Child trafficking is very dynamic, with the traffickers employing new methods every day to lure a child away from his home and then sell him in the market. Child trafficking includes physical and sexual violence, and it violates the right of a child to grow up in a healthy environment. In India too, the number of such incidences have gone up, although the exact figures are not known.

Child trafficking in India is often considered as a destination, source, and transit country for trafficking of human beings, still it is very difficult to get the exact statistics and comprehensive of the numbers and the extent to which the issue has grown. According to a study, it has been found that almost 400 districts in India are affected by the issue of child trafficking. It is also estimated that 90% of the trafficking is done internally, and the victims are used for forced labor. The children who are a victim of trafficking are exploited in various ways like forced to work as agricultural and industrial workers, beggars and domestic servants. The girl child

is more vulnerable to trafficking. Girls are mainly trafficked for the purpose of prostitution and forced marriage. The porous borders of are considered to be one of the prime reasons for an increase in the rate of trafficking. In such situation, cross-border trafficking becomes easy, and girls from Nepal and Bangladesh are often trafficked into India/ ECPAT International has estimated that, l every year around 1,50,000 children and women are trafficked into (or through) India from South Africa. It has also been estimated that around 2, 00,000 girls have been trafficked into India from Bangladesh and Nepal in the last seven years. Even though the incidents of trafficking are very rampant, there still does not exist a law which regulates the return of the trafficked victims from India to Nepal or Bangladesh. Only a few concerned organization and NGOs have helped the victims of trafficking to return to their own country by working in collaboration with the partner organization in that country.

Child Trafficking – Child Labour

There is a close link between child labour and child trafficking. However, so far almost all anti trafficking work is largely limited to child trafficking for commercial sex exploitation. However our experience and evidence from the field suggests that a large number of children are being trafficked for labour. The incidence of child trafficking for labour is hugely under reported. We define trafficking on line of Palermo Protocol. Our approach to combat trafficking is based on the 3Ps strategy: Prevention, Protection and Prosecution. We work both in source and demand areas with a community-based approach.

Statistics of Child Labour in India and Andhra Pradesh State

Child labour remains a significant issue in India, despite ongoing government efforts and legislation to eradicate it. According to the 2011 Census, around 10.1 million children aged 5 to 14 were engaged in child labour, either as main or marginal workers. This number is expected to be around 7.8 million child labourers in 2023, with 57% boys and 43% girls involved. Poverty, lack of education, and economic distress are key drivers forcing children into work at an early age. The most affected sectors include agriculture, services like domestic work and street vending, and manufacturing industries.

In Andhra Pradesh, the prevalence of child labour is significant, especially in rural areas, where children often work in agriculture, brick kilns, and small industrial units. The state has witnessed rising child labour cases exacerbated by socio-economic factors, including poverty and family migration. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic increased vulnerabilities, disrupting education and pushing more children into work. The government and NGOs in Andhra Pradesh focus on rescue, rehabilitation, education, and awareness programs to curb child labour.

Despite legislative frameworks like the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, enforcement challenges remain, and India is unlikely to meet the international target of eliminating child labour by 2025.

Incidence and Recent Trends

Between 2016 and 2025, child trafficking in Andhra Pradesh has been alarmingly high, consistently placing the state among the top three in India for reported cases along with Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. According to a report by Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation (KSCF), over this period, more than 13,500 children under 18 were rescued across India, with Andhra Pradesh contributing significantly to these numbers.

The majority of trafficked children—about 80%—are between 13 to 18 years old, while around 13% are aged 9 to 12, and over 2% are below 9 years. Post-COVID-19 pandemic, the rates of trafficking showed a notable increase, partially due to heightened enforcement leading to better detection and rescued cases. Children are trafficked mainly for forced labor, illegal adoption, sexual exploitation, and begging.

Between 2016 and 2022, Andhra Pradesh registered 1,396 sections under the Indian Penal Code related to trafficking and rescued 2,119 victims, but with just 109 convictions, reflecting a low conviction rate of 8%, signaling gaps in justice delivery. Only half of the districts have notified Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs), and these often lack independence and resources.

Efforts to combat trafficking involve enhanced law enforcement vigilance, survivor-centered approaches in AHTUs, public awareness campaigns, and NGO collaboration, though challenges remain in dismantling trafficking networks fully.

NGOs Advancing Child Welfare in India and Andhra Pradesh"

Several top NGOs in India and Andhra Pradesh are dedicated to child welfare, playing crucial roles in ensuring children's rights, health, education, and protection.

Bal Raksha Bharat (Save the Children India) is one of the most prominent child rights organizations working across India, including Andhra Pradesh. Since 2004, it has worked in 15 states and three union territories, reaching over 10 million children. Their programs are holistic, covering health, nutrition, education, and protection from abuse, exploitation, and trafficking. They engage with communities, governments, and partners to create safe environments for children to grow and thrive. In Andhra Pradesh, their past project in

Guntur addressed seasonal child labor in spice cultivation—highlighting the link between economic vulnerability and trafficking risks.

CRY (Child Rights and You), founded in 1979, is another leading NGO working extensively in India, including Andhra Pradesh. CRY focuses on enabling children's right to education, health care, and protection from abuse and exploitation. Its community-based approach helps ensure sustainable impact and increased awareness about child rights in vulnerable populations.

Smile Foundation is a major development organization impacting over 1.5 million children and families annually through projects in education, healthcare, livelihoods, and women's empowerment across 25 states. In Andhra Pradesh, Smile Foundation's work includes its Mission Education project in Saket colony, Hyderabad—providing basic education, residential support, nutrition, and care aimed at helping slum children escape cycles of child labor. While this support indirectly protects children from exploitation—including trafficking—it is not solely focused on trafficking prevention or direct rescue operations. Meanwhile, numerous child trafficking rescues in Andhra Pradesh and India have been conducted, but these efforts are primarily led by police, Child Protection agencies, and NGO coalitions, not specifically by Smile Foundation. For example:

- Four AP children were rescued from bonded labor in Tamil Nadu in June 2025.
- Large-scale operations like “Operation TRACE” (Andhra Pradesh) and “Operation Smile-XI” (Telangana) were police-led interventions with NGO support

Bachpan Bachao Andolan, working against child labour and trafficking, and local organizations focusing on rescue, rehabilitation, and counseling services. These NGOs collaborate with government agencies and law enforcement to create a safer environment for children in Andhra Pradesh and beyond.

Salaam Baalak Trust

Salaam Baalak Trust (SBT), founded in 1988, has become one of India's most impactful NGOs working for street and working children, many of whom are victims of trafficking, exploitation, or abuse. Over the years, SBT has developed a strong system of rescue, rehabilitation, and empowerment for vulnerable children in Delhi, Mumbai, and other urban areas.

In recent years, SBT has expanded its outreach through 24-hour residential homes, contact points near **railway stations, and a Child Help Desk at Old Delhi Railway Station**. These interventions play a crucial role in identifying trafficked or missing children, rescuing them, and ensuring their safe restoration through Child Welfare Committees. The Trust not only provides immediate shelter, food, and healthcare but also focuses on education, vocational training, and psychosocial support, helping children reintegrate into society.

By 2025, SBT operates over 11 centers in Mumbai and Thane and several residential shelters in Delhi, supporting nearly 10,000 children annually. In collaboration with organizations like the CMA CGM Foundation, it has opened new childcare centers, reaching more marginalized children at risk of trafficking. Through prevention, protection, and empowerment, SBT has become a vital force in combating child trafficking and safeguarding child rights in India.

Childline is India's first 24-hour, toll-free emergency helpline for children in distress and the homeless. Receiving nearly two million calls annually, it rescues children from labour, abuse, and neglect. Functioning under the Ministry of Women and Child Development, it also coordinates with NGOs nationwide to strengthen child protection. Through its chapters across India, Childline has conducted thousands of rescues based on tip-offs. World Vision International, a global NGO operating in 90 countries, works in India for over 50 years across 24 states, focusing on education, healthcare, livelihood, advocacy, and emergency relief to empower vulnerable communities and children.

Preventive Measures Against Child Trafficking

Preventing child trafficking in India and Andhra Pradesh requires a multi-pronged approach involving legal enforcement, community awareness, education, and rehabilitation. Stronger legal frameworks like the POCSO Act, Juvenile Justice Act, and special anti-trafficking units have been established to tackle trafficking with more sensitivity and effectiveness. States, including Andhra Pradesh, have introduced fast-track courts and trained law enforcement officials to respond better to trafficking cases, increasing the chances of timely rescue and prosecution.

Community vigilance plays a pivotal role. Awareness campaigns using local languages via schools, public events, radio, and digital media educate parents, teachers, and neighbors about trafficking's dangers and warning signs. Programs like Bal Mitra Gram empower children and communities to protect themselves and stand against exploitation. Digital tools and helplines like Childline 1098 ensure quick reporting and response to suspicious cases, connecting victims with care and legal help.

Education is the first line of defense, keeping children in school and away from traffickers. Teachers trained to spot abuse can alert authorities early. During migrations, residential facilities and bridge schools act as protective buffers to prevent children from falling prey to traffickers. Finally, coordinated efforts between government agencies, NGOs, law enforcement, and community groups strengthen the entire safety net, making trafficking increasingly difficult to carry out.

Conclusion:

NGOs play a vital role in preventing child trafficking in India and Andhra Pradesh by complementing government efforts through awareness, rescue, rehabilitation, and advocacy. Their grassroots presence enables early identification of at-risk children, while shelters, education programs, and vocational training provide long-term protection. In Andhra Pradesh, NGOs collaborate with law enforcement and communities to address local vulnerabilities such as migration and poverty. However, stronger coordination with state agencies and sustainable funding are needed to expand their reach. Ultimately, NGOs act as guardians of child rights, ensuring that every child grows up safe, empowered, and free from exploitation.

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