

Keeping Vigilance at All Times: Preventing Lost Children

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Abstract

The study on lost children was carried out to bring to light the main causes resulting children being lost from their homes, the person responsible for the incidents, the role played by the community and the major stake holders. The data shows that children carelessness, coming in late hours from movie or dish watching, wandering and interested to visit unknown places, habit of going to distant places alone without bringing into the notice of the parents, loose supervision of the family, missing the house location by the child because of his immaturity emerged as the major causes of the incident. In this connection the study pinpoints certain measures to minimize the chances of such incidents in future. They include; proper supervision of the child, provision of good education, systematic guidance, Check on the circle of child's friends and strict control on child's movements to distant places alone.

Introduction

Background

Pakistan is a signatory of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child since 1990, which calls for the country to uphold the laws of this Convention. In view of this, a National Committee on the Rights of the Child has been set up as well as a National Commission for Child Welfare and Development (NCCWD) was formed. Setting up of NCCWD by the government could be auspicious as it aims to network with NGOs and related agencies in developing a system for monitoring child right violations. The present study will provide the opportunity to explore the reasons and factors responsible for the children being lost from their homes. It will provide us the chance to have a common agreed upon status of the issue in the light of discussions with all group of the population concerned and related with the issue one way or the other. The finding will be a guideline for the policy makers and will prove to be an eye opener for the parents and teachers to mend their way at home and school level respectively, to normalize the situation.

Objectives and Methodology

The main objective of this study was to understand and assess the reasons/factors responsible for causing the incidents of children being lost from their homes and to comprehend the responses of state institutions, communities and families towards these children. The methodology adopted for the cases of lost children was mainly based on primary data. The tools which have been used were; questionnaires for; children, parents/Guardians and neighbors. Interview guides were used to cover up the institutions such as; police, Edhi centre, and Orphanage house. It was very difficult to get information about the cases of lost children. In this regard police department was identified as the main source of information where such cases of children are registered generally. Furthering the first hand information gathered from police stations regarding the addresses of the children were supposed to be supplemented and refined in a shape of required information to be utilized for the purpose.

Thus further required information had to be collected through instruments mentioned above from the children affected, parents/guardians, neighbors, Police officers, In charge Edhi center, In charge Orphanage House and NGOs. The major reasons of the children being lost include; loose supervision by the parents/guardians, permission to children for going to distant places alone and missing the house location upon his return because of his immaturity. The major improvements suggested by all respondents (police authorities, neighbors, besides children and their parents/guardians) in the result of the discussion can be presented as; brought up of the child be based on provision of good education, proper and systematic guidance, home supervision, the style and quality of supervision as well as child's movements to distant places alone be controlled.

Scope and Significance

The scope of the Study is limited to three cities (Quetta, Sibi and Loralai) of Balochistan in order to make it manageable. This Study is undertaken to add momentum to the current national and international concern and to aware the masses about the Rights of the children. The study corresponds to relatively an unexplored area in Balochistan, because no worthwhile research work exists in this regard. The present study will be an addition in the sphere of child studies. It explores an important issue, which is directly related to the welfare of children. The findings may be utilized by Social Welfare department, Population Welfare Department and NGOs as well as by other agencies in chalking out certain policies and Planning in the said areas.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Children’s activities

The children exposed to the situation where they get lost are important to be looked at because on one hand the distance from the home and on the other the location of the activity is to be seen from safety point of view. It needs to be taken into consideration to see who are around the child. To note in what activities the child is busy, sports, movie or dish watching, playing video games, visiting distant places, wandering or spending time with friends. The children moving without any guidance and passing through the unknown tracks and returning back home in late hours, causes the incident of being lost.

Table 1 Children’s Activities

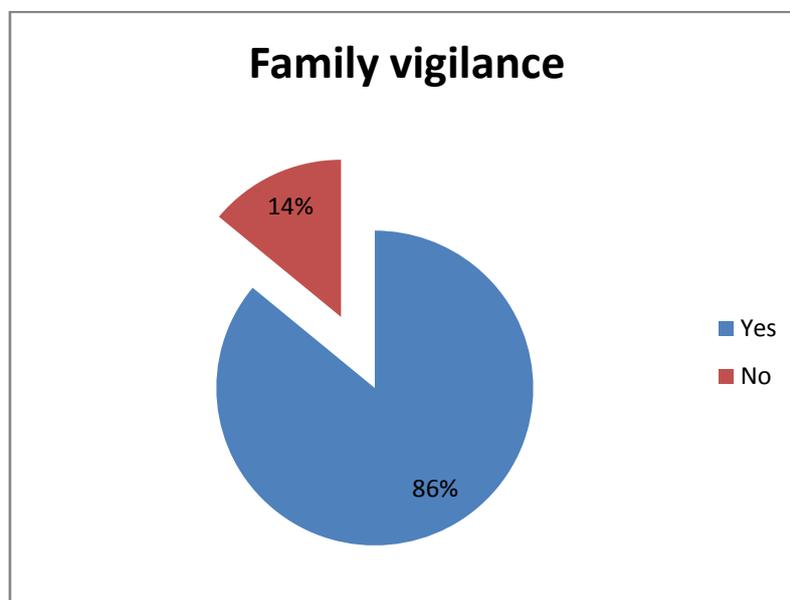
Child’s activities	%
Coming in late hours from movie and dish/ cable watching	38
Wandering and interested to visit unknown places	19
Involved in sport	19
Interested in playing video games	14
Spending time with friends	10

The highest number of children got lost while coming in late hours from movie or dish watching. The next higher number is of those children who were wandering and interested to visit unknown places. Such children were 19% of the total number of children lost. Likewise, 19% children were lost involved in sport activities. The children interested in playing video games being 14% also didn’t turn up to their homes. Likewise, 10% of the children whose special interest was spending time with friends were lost perhaps due to returning back home in late hours.

Family vigilance

The vigilance of the child by family is an important factor. The proper vigilance makes the child disciplined in terms of movement from one place to the other. Going to unknown places without bringing into the notice of the family members exposes the children to be lost. If the child is left alone to go anywhere without proper company and guidance will necessary create the room for getting lost. The children who got lost were given the liberty to express themselves about the vigilance by the family.

Fig 1 Vigilance by the Family



A high percentage of the children (86 %) didn't blame their families of showing poor vigilance they rather reiterated that the vigilance was proper only 14% claimed about no vigilance by the families.

Going to distant places

The chances of being lost increases when the children go to distant places without the company of a family member. Going alone without informing the family and to distant places causes the incident and we see in day to day life that a large number of children usually get lost.

Table 2 Going to Distant Places

Going to distant places	%
Yes	57.1
No	42.9
If yes with whom	
Accompanied by brother	25
Accompanied by sister	25
Accompanied by friends	
Going alone	25
Accompanied by Mother	25

The study shows that 57% children who got lost were used to go to distant places and 43% were not in the habit of doing so. Out of the lost children, 25% confessed that they always used to go to distant places alone. The rest, 75% were accompanied by either brother or sister or a friend most of the times. Therefore, the incident happened to those children who were either accompanied by younger brother, sister or friend or it was due to the unusual outing without any company.

Time spent while away

Usually, lost children reach to places such as mosques, police stations, houses of a relative, houses of friends, orphanage house, stranger's houses etc.

Table 3 Time Spent During the Incident

Places	%
Police Station	7.1
House of friends	7.1
Mosque	21.4
Madrasa	7.1
Stranger's Home	35.7
On Roads	14.3
Jungle	7.1

The children lost were interviewed and the conclusion was that the highest number, 36% remained during the period at some stranger's house, 21% stayed at mosques and 14% didn't reached to any house or place but were jus wandering on roads. Some 8-10% stayed at either police stations or in friend's house. This brings forth the fact that important places are the strangers homes and mosques, while the cases are just reported in the police station to link the child with his family.

Facilities at place the child stayed

The child reaching at the unknown, undesired and undecided place is generally over whelmed by the fear, surprise and anxiety, in addition to that, if faced with the low level of food, shelter, behaviour and surroundings will definitely be harassed. These considerations have been taken into account to assess the level of satisfaction over these facilities available at that place. In the case of lost children surprisingly the children showed their satisfaction over the surroundings and places they stayed, food available to them, the attitude of persons they came in contact with and the shelter they were in.

The children who showed their satisfaction on all the facilities ranged from 71% to 79% where as those who didn't show their satisfaction ranged from 21% to 29%. This was because they stayed mostly (80%) in the houses of relatives, friends and mosques not in police stations or at the places of criminals or in houses located in slum areas. In other words it can also be assumed that in most of the cases they got good food and treatment better than their homes.

Assistance in contact with family

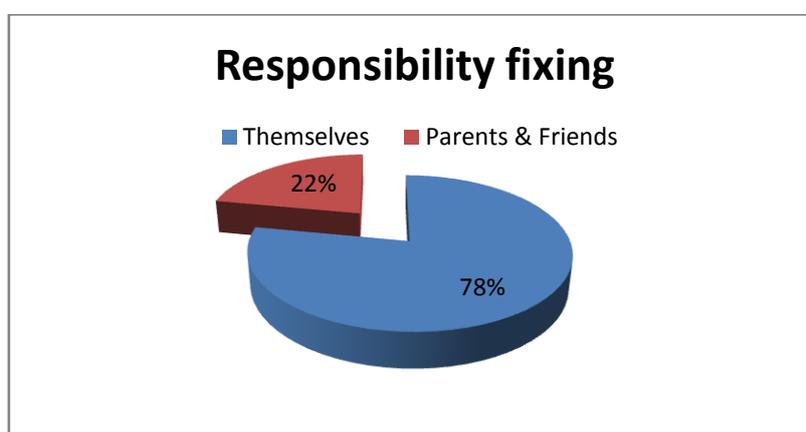
The lost children desirous to go home are helped by someone in most of the cases because generally, the lost child can't establish contract the family after loosing the sight and where about the family.

The family members can find a clue through friends who help in searching the child. But a major role is generally played by the 'Imam Masjid' that announces the incident on the speaker from Masjid. The people gathered at the time of prayers discuss and search for address of the child. Another important assistant can be the 'strangers' who being kind enough help the child in locating his house. The response we got from the children was that the type of people helping the child to contact his family are; strangers, Masjid Imam and family members of the child being 36%, 23% and 23% respectively. Then the turn of police and friends of the child and his family comes. Therefore, it can be concluded that the collective role of the community and realization by the community and the Mosques is very important because 85% of the children lost got control with family through the community members raising the role of community.

Responsibility Fixing

The responsibility of the lost children can vividly be transferred to the child him/herself. However, there may be certain reasons which create this situation and the blame can be shifted to others such as parents, teachers and friends etc. The children being innocent and immature can be misled or negatively persuaded for any act therefore, the role of other persons in interaction with the child can't be ignored. The point of view of the children was accommodated here to understand the reality of who is responsible as they know the background leading to such incidents.

Fig 2 Responsibility Fixing



A high number of children, 78% blamed themselves for the incident and accepted the responsibility of the incident. The remaining 22% children blamed their parents and friends who created such a situation through inappropriate guidance and negative advises. Some 11% identified parents and 11% their friends responsible for the incident.

Precautionary steps for future

Usually after such incident the family and the child both become careful and taking it seriously some precautionary steps are agreed upon to prevent the happening of such incident happen it again in future. Such steps usually are about the movement of the child outside home and the supervision from family in this regard because the family gets concern not only about this child but also about the other children of the family. The most popular precautionary steps adopted by the lost children and their family include; not going outside alone adopted by 54% while 31% adopted the principal of carefulness in going outside the house. Some 15% of the children have been advised not to go outside the house without informing the family members.

Conclusions

Under the UN Convention on Child Rights, the member countries are bound to ensure that there is no violations of the children rights. They are to be protected against all types of discriminations. Pakistan being a signatory of the CCR is determined to guarantee the rights mentioned in the convention to all the children. The study was undertaken to add momentum to the current national and international concern and to aware the masses about the rights of the children. It discovers the factors causing children being lost from their homes, the person responsible for the incidents, the role played by the major stake holders. In this connection, the main causes which emerged include; Carelessness of the child, coming in late hours from movie or dish watching, wandering and interested to visit unknown places, loose supervision by the parents/guardians, permission to children for going to distant places alone and missing the house location by the children because of their immaturity. The major steps recommended for the improvements of the situation suggested by all respondents including police authorities, neighbors, besides children and their parents/guardians are; brought up of the child be based on provision of good education, proper and systematic guidance, home supervision, the style and quality of supervision as well as child's movements to distant places alone be controlled.

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