The Psychological Impact of Violence On Runaway Boys in Mumbai

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Abstract

This research project is a documentation of the circumstances of a select group of runaway children in Mumbai, India. In an attempt to broadly understand the hinderances in the   development of their psyche as affected by violent and other incidents encountered by them. This has been achieved by summarising the key findings obtained from interactions and first-hand interviews with a sample of runaway children now being housed and rehabilitated at shelters, experienced social workers, Non-profit organisations and caretakers working towards the protection of these children.

Tracing the experiences of these children in chronological order, starting at the point they leave home to the point that they are rehoused and rehabilitated in an organisation established for their care This project also aims to analyse and critique governance and policy with respect to the State's commitment to childcare. The study outlines and analyses how these policies may be better implemented. Having looked at the status quo, the study has also attempted to outline future improvements through suggestions of activists and our own recommendations based upon primary and secondary data.

1. Introduction

At the beginning of this project, seven aspiring researchers under the tutelage of our mentors at Pukar, brainstormed on a topic for their research. We spoke of everything that means anything to us but found it difficult for all of us to connect to a single topic. Then one researcher spoke of his childhood and his experience with violence, hearing which another researcher opened up about her experience. Slowly and steadily we all realised that the one thing that all of us connected with is children and violence. So we dwelled deeper into this niche. We moved from topic to topic even here, from domestic violence to that in the community, to just one time experiences and how it affected their minds. Seeing as to how all these too were related, we then narrowed down to the effects of violence on children, more so-The Psychological Impact of Violence on Children. We realised that this was still a very wide topic and so to narrow it down further we decided to limit this research to runaways and those in shelters, as they as often overlooked and even ignored. No one really knows what they go through and we couldn't stand not knowing about them especially since they are in such large numbers.

So to get a clearer idea we went on a field visit. Due to the limited time we had, we split up into two groups and visited two shelters, and although we went to different shelters in two opposite ends of the city, we found similarities in our observations. Based on these similarities we went ahead to finalize our topic and started assembling all the information we have and making sense out of it all. One thing all of us realised was that we were all in the deep end and the need for guidance from our mentors made itself quite clear.

Soon, we refined it to the Psychological Impact of Violence (subjected to and / or witnessed) on Runaway boys in Shelters. This therefore formed the base of our research and what follows in this document is the outcome of it.

2. Objectives

Initial discussions regarding this topic of research project one of the main challenges we faced as a team was clearly problematising a broad problem and further sustaining clarity of an argument. We took a week to decide on the different areas of research in the city that interested each of us which brought us to —
'How violence witnessed or experienced by an underprivileged child affects his/her psychological development?'

We knew that interviewing children required an extensive amount of sensitivity and skill; we were also aware that probing into these children's past would require a lot of caution. At this stage we now had slightly more clear objectives, which were only refined further after a though rough literature review.

Our objectives at the beginning of the project were as follows:

• Measuring the psychological effects of witnessing or experiencing incidents of violence.
• Defining and classifying types of violence.
• To focus specifically on Homeless and Runaway children and study the impact on their behaviour and their development.
• Follow up on who should protect these children
• Analysing the concept of Caretaker and the role of formidable governance in supporting caretakers

As a result of shortage of resources, we decided that it would become too difficult to find children that have only experienced violence and hence, we chose to keep it children who have 'witnessed' or 'experienced' violence.

Preliminary meetings and sensitivity training sessions with children at shelters helped us finalise out questionnaire.The questions were designed in a way, that gave us discernments about how they think about things and circumstances around them.

Furthermore, we also clarified the gains of this study and how it could add to existing resources and research on this subject.

This question thus brought us to also recording and analysing the environment (prior to and after running away from home) of each participant of the sample size. His/her community space does have an evident effect on the child and therefore couldn't be ignored. Immediate environment includes every group from family to friends to his/her co-workers (in instances of illegal child labour). Naturally, since these children are runaway railway children, there has to be a part played by the officials responsible for that particular public space. This is where governance plays an important role. It has many programmes that are or should be dedicated to the well- being of these homeless runaway children.

Railways are a hub of communities of such children. Drug abuse, sexual assault, smuggling, begging etc. are some of the activities that are regularly carried out on the railway station, the major conduits for such illegal happenings are the children that stay there. They are easily influenced in their

vulnerable state.For most newcomers the desire to be like the other boys at the station is like their version of an American dream. To break this network the government and their policy play a pivotal role. For all the reasons stated above, we found it fitting to emphasise the role of the government.

In the scheme of things a fundamental thing to consider is what can be done for the child once he has run away. For this sole purpose, we knew it was important to interview members from the organisations that work for runaway children. This led us to understand what these children undergo and the harsh reality of their choices and actions.

We encountered different children who ran away from home for multiple reasons; from abusive parents to running away due to fear of their relatives. In the process we also learned about how difficult survival really is at railway stations and how some government centres solely meant to care for these children can be no different from the where places they were found.

Since we were dealing with two organisations we came across stark difference in the responses. The children from one organisation were surprisingly more content than the others. It is important to mention that these differences were not because of the organisations but due to the time gaps between the stay of children in both organisations. Children who resided at the centre for a longer period of time were seemingly more satisfied and happier than those who hardly spent any time there.

We primarily wanted to study the effects that such violent situations had on these children in relation to their sense of decision making, confidence, goal orientation etc. This data would the be compared with the data that we derived from the literature review done at the beginning of the research study. The relative quotient would be important to know how much of the data that we had was parallel to the studies already done.

Each person in the group had varied personal experiences and observations that were not expected when we began the research study. Each individual member had their own insights about each story being told.

Through the course of our research we stumbled several times, in retrospection it was all part of our research process. To state an example, we had decided to use a drawing activity in our focus group discussion to in some ways establish comfortable communication with the children and also to assess the basic nature of their current psyche. It barely led to much fruition. One of the reasons was because some children were not participating seriously in the activity while some didn't want to share anything of their past through any method.

It is undeniable that there is a slow and constant change in a child's behaviour and thinking processes as he/she grows. These growth years are when the child is the most impressionable and during this time the child should be in surroundings of warmth and care and not violence and abuse. There have been several research studies suggesting the adverse impact that exposure to such violent conditions has on a child's mind and behaviour. The objectives of this study originally based on assumptions which later shaped and solidified though field visits have attempted to shed light on the experience of a runaway child.

Through the journey of this study it must be said that the most important objective of our research initiative was to understand the impact of the violence that has tainted the lives of many throughout

their experience away from home and to shed light on the rising numbers of children that continue to be affect due to lax governmental policy.

3. Sampling

We used non-probability convenient sampling method for this research, where we approached few organisations who work on the issues related to runaway children. In the process we ended up finalising two organisations, involved in rehabilitation of runaway children in Mumbai.

To have multiple perspectives on this topic we decide to gather information from multiple sources (Primary and Secondary).

Our primary sources of data were :

1. Children (14 Boys)
Both the organisations that we finalised, coincidentally housed only boys which is why we did not get a chance to explore the issues of runaway girls*. We interviewed boys between the ages of 6 and 14. It is also to be noted that many in our sample size were not completely aware of their exact age.

2. Caretakers (3)
We interviewed a total of three caretakers, out of which one was female and two male.

3. Director/Managers of the organisations(2)
We got in touch with the director or main spokesperson in each of the organisations, who were males.

* *As discussed in the parameters of our research design we did not want to indulge in any gender based division of our respondents. However, as a limitation of our research it is to be noted that we have only male respondents.*

The primary data was collected from the semi-structured interviews conducted with caretakers and directors/managers of the caretaker organisations and FGDs (Focus Group Discussions) conducted with runaway child followed by in-depth personal interviews.

The secondary data was collected from information available on public domain – research papers, news articles and policy documents as cited in the references.

4. Data Collection Tools

The two methods that were thought to be best suited for our topic were:
Focus   group discussions
Personal in- depth interviews

Focus group discussions were primarily conducted to ease the children into the whole interview process and to establish a basic level of communication and comfort among the researchers and the respondents. This was fundamental as it was expected that the children would not be comfortable conversing with us in the first interview itself. The Focus Group Discussion also helped each child to voice his opinion. As the children listened to their peers being vocal about their opinions, they gained more confidence and shared their own views with us.

We began the focus group discussion by showing the children a clip from an action movie, specifically a violent scene.

It was important to know how the children felt about violence in general. After noting the reactions of the children we then moved to certain basic questions pertaining to the clip.
The questions were meant to know their thoughts about what they saw. Before coming up with a questionnaire we did some research online on various methods of conducting FGDs with children that would yield the most accurate results. After considering various methods we finally decided on situation based questions. Wherein the child would be given a situation and his response to each would be recorded. This was done to gauge the quotient of aggressiveness of each child. During the FGD we also asked them to draw something that they disliked, in order to gain an insight into what and why they disliked something in particular, and also if a connection could be derived to their past experiences.

The personal interviews were far more in depth as compared to the Focus group discussion, we had a pre-set questionnaire that touched upon the various aspects of information we required to gain for this research topic. The questions structured such that the child was eased into the entire conversation. Establishing trust and also effectively gauging the comfort level of each child was a fundamental part at this stage of the research process, taking note of the child's body language was also inherent to this.

The children had varied reactions to the questions. Some children were open about talking about it while some absolutely refused to mention anything related to their past. It was, to an extent a semi-structured interview where we would occasionally stray away a little from the questions that were finalised.

A personal interview was important because in a group the opinions of the child are influenced by his companions and some children also may not like to talk about their past in front of others due the fear of being teased. The interview ended with regarding their future. The aim was to know to what extent and what they think of their future. Some children wanted to grow up and be doctors while some wanted to help children who are in the same situations as them and some want to steal cars and be chased by the police. Each answer had a reflection of what had been taught or seen by the child somewhere. An observation that came through their questions was that these children were heavily

influenced by the media. Be it the action movies that they were all so excited to watch or be it WWE. Everyone wants to be either the hero or villain of some movie that they have watched.

To further our research, we progressed to interview the organisational staff and the caretakers who could explain to us the various aspects of the lives of these children, and also to give us an in-depth insight on the subject of violence. One of the caretakers stated that a majority of these children are negatively influenced whilst witnessing violence.

It was imperative to interview the people that have experience in dealing with such children. The questionnaire established to the caretakers focused on their views about the governmental provisions and policies that are currently in place, each giving their own recommendations on how the existing structures can be further improved. The conversation with the caretakers helped us further understand the current state of the 'Care and Protection Act'.

4. Findings and Analysis

Our findings an analysis have been further chronologically detailed in the chapters ahead -

Chapter 1:Home
Chapter 2: Transitional Space Experience
Chapter 3: Caretaking organisations
Chapter 4: Governance

While this method of outlining our research and findings may be slightly unorthodox, it was the view of our research director and mentors that this would be the best way to effectively tell the stories of our participants but to also without diluting them to mere points of reference in a sample size.

Chapter 1

Home

<u>**Basic concepts and operational definitions:**</u>
- The concept of support – family, friends and community that gave them financial and social support.
- Environment of home – the atmosphere at home, socio-economic & community background.
- Conducive environment – an environment that meets with the basic necessities like food and   shelter for the child and provides for his overall development and growth in terms of education and also where he is shielded from violence and abuse.

<u>**Areas of Study:**</u>
- Reasons for the children to leave home.
- The places from where they have come.
- Their mature behaviour as compared to other children of their age.
- The influence of the support system on their opinions about violence.
- Their attitude about returning to their home space.
- Their overall development and the flaws in their support system.
- The relationship between economic background of their home and them leaving.

"Their shadows danced on the walls of our makeshift home.
In hushed whispers we heard them say,
"It's time, we must send them away".

Two brothers, hand in hand; out of our minds and in over our heads.
At dawn, one last glance at Ma,
And we fled."

— An excerpt from a poem 'the runaways' by Daniella Singh

Home is defined as a place where family of the child was present from which he either ran away or was sent out. As the chapter's name suggests the study has attempted to understand the reasons for the child to leave home. Most of The children who participated in our study were from Maharashtra, Bihar or Madhya Pradesh, while a few could not recollect their place of origin.

Through the findings of this study we have inferred that the attraction towards the stereotypical "Mumbai Life" is not the only thing that draws children to this city. The reasons are varied, ranging from being sent to earn by their own family, to escaping the violent environment of their homes, to the lack of support systems (which includes family, friends and community) that brought them to the city. One of the Heads of an organisation that works towards the rehabilitation of runaway children claimed that there have been children who have run away for reasons like the mother pressurising the child to secure a higher rank in the school examinations. The study has thus resulted in a realisation that there are a lot of reasons beyond the scope of violence that cause children to run away or leave home.

As related to us by the heads and the caretakers in the organisation, the demeanour of a lot of these children is surprisingly mature for their age.

For a few of them, crime and substance abuse is a very casual subject, which they treat with indifference, thus indicating their approach towards these practices. From the stories of the participants who have witnessed community violence, we observed that the capacity of the community to influence the child's ideologies and the way he conducts himself is substantial. An example of this would be Participant 5, who cited an incident where he described how in his village, people fight with swords and guns and he realised that this was life threatening and as a result of these encounters he now stays away from any such fights. During the course of the interview, he repeatedly maintained that he steers clear from any sort of violent situations.

For a few of these children, the subject of running away from home is a sensitive one, the questions to which they dodged. Some participants seemed flustered and began to get emotional when probed about the violence that they experienced back home. However, from the inputs that we did receive, we have come to understand that the support systems at home have influenced their opinion about violence and the fear that they associate with it; either due to the violence they have witnessed or experienced or due to the way their support systems taught them to deal with violence meted out to them by other people.

For example - Participant 7 said - *"Meri maa bachpan se kehti thi kabhi maar khake nahi aaneka. Vapas maar ke hi aaneka" (My mother always said never get beaten and come home, rather hit back and only then return).* On the other hand, 5 of the 14 participants said that they feared violence as a consequence of their experiences. For example, Participant 5 said, *" Ha bohot darr lagta hai. Apni jaan ke liye to darr hi lagta hai. Agar mai un logo ki ladaai mai padd gaya to vo mere ghar valo ko maar dalenge. Uska bhi darr lagta hai." (Yes I am scared. I am often scared for my life. If I do get involved in gang fights they might find and attack my family as well.)* These examples clearly show the amount of influence that the experiences and dialogue with their respective support systems, hold over the child in developing their opinions and their demeanour towards either perpetrating or not supporting violence.

When we asked participants if they want to go back home, out of the 14 participants, 3 responded saying that they don't want to go back home, 3 said that they want to go back home, 6 of them said they do not have a place to go back to, while the other 2 did not have pertinent information regarding the same.

We have observed that all of the three children who do not want to go back home reason with the fact that they experienced violence and don't wish to return to that environment. An integral part of that environment comprised of members of their family practicing substance abuse and then perpetrating violence under the influence. In case of Participant 3, with respect to his reason for not going back home is the presence of his elder brother who is a violent alcoholic. The reasons for three participants wanting to return home are subjective, with some wanting to see their parents while some, even though having seen violence at home, wanting to go back. Participant 6 said that he wanted to return home after he had grown up and made a successful man out of himself as his mother had told him to do so. This is despite having witnessed and been part of violence back home. All of them did not provide specific reasons for wanting to go back.

As perceived by the Head of one of the organisations, the assumption of the general public is that most runaway children are from an economically weak background. However, from the findings of this paper, we found that this was not always the case since 4 of the 14 participants claimed to belong to an economically unstable background. We inferred this from the claims of the participants. For example, one of them claimed that he was pulled out of school in fourth grade by his parents because they could not afford the fees, another one said that he was sent by his parents to his relative's house to work at a tea stall to earn money and yet another one said that he was forced to work as a labourer back in his village.

The remainder of the10 participants did not clearly state if their families were economically stable but there are some parts of their conversations where they did hint upon financial stability. An example stated by the head of an organisation is of a child who ran away due to parental pressure to do better in his academics. He belonged to an economically stable background with his father employed as an LIC officer and mother employed as an English teacher. He also emphasised the importance of understanding that not all of the children who run away from home hail from economically unstable backgrounds. To substantiate the same, he gave another example of a child who ran away from home to meet Sachin Tendulkar. It was later learnt that he was the son of an IAS officer.

A unanimous thought echoed amongst the participants was that they considered education a very important aspect of their development and growth and most of them want to pursue higher education and get a respectable position in society.

However, it remains unclear if this idea was instilled in them at their home or at their care-taking organisation. Our study shows that when the children were at home, 2 of them were not educated at all, 4 of them were pulled out of school by families before the age of 14, and the rest of them did not divulge information about their schooling.

3 of the participants who were taken out of school were made to start working.

Participant 4, who was never schooled, was sent out at a very young age to support the family financially, which is a serious concern considering that the family is supposed to provide financial support to the children, as specified by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child, which was ratified by India in 1992. This attitude of the support systems towards education goes on to explain how the support systems lacked in giving these children a wholesome upbringing.

A majority of the participants have an inadequate support system with respect to their exposure to varying degrees of violence, either perpetrated by them or someone else, and the reluctance of family member to continue their schooling, which is an integral part of their rights.
Participant 5 unlike other participants was abandoned by his elder brother, while Participant 11 had no familial support system.

As a collective understanding of everything stated above, we inferred that a majority of the children did not have a conducive environment at home. These children left home owing to a variety of reasons like violence at home, unwillingness to work, not being schooled, being sent by parents to work and the death of parents. The children left home for several reasons, but certain things remain common to most of them like the lack of an adequate support system and the exposure of the children to violence and abuse. The inadequacy of the support systems is also reflected in the initiation of a few of these

children into child labour at the home stage. Their overall development and growth was stunted, as result of reasons ranging from the lack of education, distorted relationships with people at home and the community, to being employed at a young age as well as living in a violent environment.

In conclusion, the home space for most of these children has been colored with an inadequacy of sorts that led to them running away from the security that is supposed to be home to find a space that would provide them a respite from the problems that marred the home space. However, what awaited them was not exactly what one would call an ideal space.

Chapter 2

Transitional Space Experience

Basic Concepts and Operational Definitions:

- Independence: Economic and Physical; Economic Independence pertains to the child's means of sustenance and the freedom of choice that comes with it, while the second aspect which is Physical Independence pertains to the child's independence of movement.

- Violence: demonstrated force which can take the form of being verbal, physical, sexual or emotional abuse.

- Support: The overall development of the child is defined by the sort of support it receives, including the emotional and financial support, her/his support structure which include – Family, Friends, Community, Employers and Organisation

- Hierarchies of power: Structure of authority that defines who has control over the child and to what extent

- Transitional Space: The physical space that the runaway child has found refuge in either by choice or because he was abandoned/ sent to the space by family or other support structure in the Home space. The study introduced us to two types of transitional spaces – one that is a government run shelter that the children were sent to after being picked by the police machinery in the city while the second type includes those outside of the government run shelter such as railway stations, public places like the 'Mahim Dargah' in Mumbai (Mahim Mosque) or even a work space or industry. We have examined the child's means of sustaining themselves, their control over their own actions, the support they receive and the basic characteristics of the transitional space in this chapter.

Areas of study:

- The two types of transitional spaces, their characteristics in brief and the processes involved in getting the children to the transitional space.

- The economic and physical independence that the children have at the transitional spaces and the contradictions expressed in the caretaker's perspective of the same.

- The hierarchies of power in the transitional spaces.

- Support systems of the children in the two transitional spaces and the flaws in the same.

- Substance abuse a constant in the support systems and the children's experience with substance abuse.

- Children's experiences with violence, as summarised from the entire chapter.

"We weren't the only ones over there,
the streets of Mumbai had many like us to spare.
Fate had us hopping into trains and scavenging platforms
But what were we searching for?
What did it matter, we had nowhere to go."

Every child who has left his home finds himself in a new environment; which can be referred to as the transitional space. A transitional space is thus, any place/space where the child lives after running away from home and before reaching the care-taking organisation. For the purpose of this study, the transitional spaces for the participants can be broadly classified into 2 spaces – government-run shelter home and participants living outside the government-run shelter home, such as the railway stations, Mahim Dargah and a bangle making factory in the case of our other participants.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the journey to these transitional spaces is undertaken for various reasons, like fulfilling the family's economic needs or running away from a threatening and violent home. In the transitional space they hoped to find a more secure and stable space to live in, be it physically, mentally or economically. For all the boys, it is an unfamiliar space, with new faces, where they are solely responsible for themselves. In most cases the transitional spaces were stumbled upon and the way of life it offered was accepted by the children as there was no clear idea of what they expected to find.

The first space encountered by some of our participants was the government-run shelter home for homeless children, in which six participants were put after being caught by the police. They were sent to the government-run shelter home after going through a legal procedure as prescribed by the Juvenile Justice Act, 2000. The children remembered this place as being violent. "Bade ladke bohot maarte the mujhe. Aur complaint karne jao toh saabji bhi maarne lagte the. Aise bohot maar peet hoti thi wahan" said a participant from the shelter. While this was about six of these children, the transitional spaces for the others included Mahim Dargah and various stations in and around Mumbai.

Three of the children found sanctuary in Mahim Dargah, a religious place where there was a promise of food and shelter. For one of the children it was a bangle making factory which promised employment. Different stations in and around Mumbai also became a place of shelter for four more children. Most of these children chose trains to make their getaway from home and upon arriving at the stations were faced with a means of livelihood and sustenance which had been adopted by many others they acquainted at the station. This could be cited as one the reasons for them choosing a railway station as their transitional space.Once the children are in these spaces, they have to fend for themselves which ultimately leads to a sense of unmarked independence.

When one pictures a child wholly responsible for himself, three questions that come to mind are how were their basic sustenance needs met, were there any limitations placed on their daily activities and if there was any physical force exerted upon them. There is a clear contrast in the independence, economic and physical, enjoyed by the children based on the characteristics of their various transitional spaces. The children living outside the government shelter home, had some form of employment which to an extent allowed them the liberty to go and do as they pleased.. The various jobs that children undertook included selling vegetables, tobacco, working in factories, doing odd jobs outside the Dargah, among many others.

Thus, their economic independence directly greatly influenced their physical freedom

The station was a space that allowed for physical independence because it allowed the child interaction with anyone while going unnoticed on a crowded railway platform. For instance a child who has spent time at the station said, "Station pe mai akela hi rehta tha. Sirf tamatar bechta tha mai." *(At the station I lived alone. I used to sell tomatoes)*. The participant's statement viewed in perspective points to the life of a child at a railway station, controlled by no one while he earns for himself. Self sustenance and a restriction free environment are key to evaluate independence in the railway stations. Even in the Mahim Dargah, there is no authoritative figure that stops the child from moving around.

Despite what the children said about their experienced independence at the stations, we found certain contradictions in what one of the caretakers had to say. He claims that a few of the children are economically dependent on the act of begging. "Kyuki vo agar nasha nahi karenge, gande phate hue

kapde nahi pehenenge to unko bheek nhi milegi. Issliye vo ye sab station mai karte hai." Which also goes to tell us the tradeoff that many children are ready to make-a bit of their independence for "easy" money.

While all our participants denied being subjected to sexual harassment, one of the caretakers, who has been working in the field for the past 4 years, claims every child who has come to them from railway stations has experienced some form of sexual abuse. Thus, taking into consideration this statement, it is safe to assume the decimation of their physical autonomy and safety and overall development in such an environment.

The situation inside government shelters was at times similar where it was found that six of the children were denied physical independence. It is important to note that all of these children belonged to the government-run shelter. "Shelter se main bhaag raha tha, rassi latka ke, par main pakda gaya. Upar se rassi chhut gaya aur main niche gira... Saabji ne mujhe bohot laat maari," (I tried to escape the shelter with a rope, I was caught and also fell over and injured myself), said a child who has lived in this centre. While the participant's movement was curbed it is important to note that the reason for the participant wanting to escape the shelter also stems from the violence he experienced at the shelter. This perpetration of violence through an established hierarchy in the transitional space has been elaborated further.

One of the founding members of an organisation that works with runaway children had some insights about restriction on the independence of these children at the shelter. He said, "To in baccho ko jab bal-gruha mai rakha jata hai, government ke observation home mai rakha jata hai, vaha baccho ko leke janeke baad, unko kapde dusre pehenne padte hai, uspe number daalte hai aur usko number se bulaya jata hai. Actually socho aap ki koi kaidi number to hai nai." Another one of his quotes reads, "Aur usme bhi jo baccha ghar jana chahta hai usme bhi vo bolte hai ki aur counselling ki zaroorat hai. Usme 6-6 mahine nikal jate hai." Based on this individual's work experience the prolonged period that leads to the child's rehabilitation or reunion with the family is of great concern as the treatment meted out to the children while under custody is often tainted with violent experiences.

Independence of the child is also closely linked with who has control over the child's life. Few of the children spoke of who denied them their independence while for the rest we inferred the same through our interactions. We could observe some amount of difference in the hierarchies of power for children living in and outside the government-run shelter. Four participants who lived outside had control over their own actions. One of these children said, "Dukaan pe hi sota tha mai. Ek din ka subah saat baje se bara baje tak baithneka hai, dedh sau rupay dete the. Main udhar hi sota tha, uttha tha aur kabhi kaam pe nahi hota tha to ghumta rehta tha." As the participant has explicitly stated, these children did not have any restrictions in terms of their physical movements and daily decision making. This clearly points to physical independence in the transitional space.

However, there were seven children who had controlling figures in their lives in the transitional space. A majority of these were the ones who lived in the government-run shelter. It had a very distinct power structure that consisted of the caretaker, who the children referred to as "Saabji", at the top, followed by the elder children of the shelter and at the very bottom were the youngest children of the lot which includes our participants. When asked about the fights that happen constantly at the shelter and complaining about it, a child said, "Kabhi nahi bola. Bolenge to bhi kuch nahi hoga. Ek baar bola to saabji ne mujhe hi maara dandi ke saath." When asked if he had hit anyone, he said, "Shelter mai dosto

ke saath baccho ko maara tha ek baar. Vo humse chote the." This clearly goes to explain the power hierarchy existent in the government-run shelter. It was characterized by violence which was used as a tool by those above the younger kids to dominate. Outside of the shelter the child, who was employed at the bangle-making factory, was subjected to abuse by his employer who had complete control over his daily actions. Therefore, unlike the other children working outside of the shelter in his case even though he was employed, his independence was compromised by his controlling employer.

The concept of control is subjective to the children and the caretakers interviewed. Based on what the caretakers had to say, we saw the possibility of a power structure existing even in the lives of the children who had claimed to be independent. One of the caretakers said, "Dekhiye, jo bacche station par rehke aate hai, Mumbai aane ke baad jo bade bacche hote hai ... vo inn baccho (younger children) ke saath ashleel harkate karte hai. Station pe nashe mai rehte hai, unke saath galat ho jata hai, bacche bohot jyada bigad jate hai." The power structure on the station, according to them, has elder children at its top, influencing the younger children and coaxing them into substance abuse/violence, which is influencing their physical independence and their attitude towards it. Along with this, our interactions with the children have led us to understand that economic independence with respect to their employment in the transitional space does not always translate into them having control over that aspect of their life. Considering that in the work space the employer has final say over the child's pay and other living conditions, even the number of hours he works is dictated by the employer at times, which suggests the child's lack of control over every aspect of his work place.

At the spaces of transition, the children do not have a predetermined support system, they need to form one of their own in order to ensure protection and survive by themselves.

The concept of support differs in each transitional space. For the children who lived in the government-run shelter, as prescribed by the Juvenile Justice Act, the shelter is supposed to play the role of a support system for the child's rehabilitation, through education and reuniting them with the family or another organisation that can take the responsibility of the child's well being. Five of the children who lived in the shelter claimed that they have been subject to violent treatment by either the caretaker of the shelter or the elder boys. A child that we talked to said "Mere pe chillaya nahi hai par bohot maarte the bache log jo mere se bade the" The shelter is also supposed to protect the children from substance abuse. However, from one of the children's account "Bache log cigarette peete the andar". We have observed that all of them have either experienced or witnessed violence. This is a clear flaw in the shelter's role as a support system that was supposed to protect the child from the same.

With respect to the children who lived on the stations and in the Dargah, we believe that the government and the community at large has failed as a support system in ensuring a safe and healthy environment for them as all of the children have witnessed violence and 7 out of 8 participants that occupied this transitional space were child labourers. The same is reiterated by the founder of one of the organisations that we interacted with. "Agar hum station pe jaate hain toh yeh bheek maangne waale bachon ko TC bhi dekhta hai, police bhi dekhti hai, public bhi dekhti hai aur sab authorities – railway ya police adhikari hai, woh sabb dekhte hain. Toh woh koi bache ko rokta kyun nahi koi?" We have also examined their support systems in the form of their friends and employers and inferred have they have been exposed to violence in these circles as well.

Based on our interaction with the children we have inferred that 7/14 claimed to have witnessed, peddled or abused substances. When one of them was asked if he has ever indulged in substance abuse he claimed "Nahi. Kuch nahi kiya, ek do baar woh kaagaz ka phuka. Usse thodi na kuch hota hai?" There was a variance in the attitude towards substance abuse in the transitional space. When one of the boys drew for an activity we conducted he drew different substances and put a big cross over them to indicate his hatred for the same. A few others were casual in their attitude about the same.

Of those who had a casual demeanor, some were also involved in selling "Gutka" on long distance trains as a means of earning. However, our findings showed that not many of these children indulged in substance abuse are in contradiction with the claims of caretakers who have worked with the children. They claimed that most of these children have indulged in substance abuse - "Yeh bache jo koi bhi state ke hote hain woh idhar aake (Mumbai) nasha karte hain"

We have elaborated on violence with respect to all the concepts. However, looking only at the concept of being violated and perpetrating violence in the transitional space we found that nine of the participants have experienced violence in the transitional space, of which six have perpetrated violence as well. Four have only witnessed violence of which one has perpetrated violence as well. Even in this case, all of the children of the government-run shelter have either witnessed or experienced violence and they talk about it as a way of life within the shelter. As one of the children said, "Shelter main maarte the tab main akele hi rohte baitha tha".

The transitional space plays a crucial role in the development of the child's attitude, because of the exposure that the child gets in this space. This exposure is a result of different elements such as the child's friend circle, employers, the community and others who play a major role in determining his independence, support systems, experience with substance abuse and violence. In conclusion there are very few elements in the transitional space that provide the child with ideal support that is not characterized by violence and even in the existing systems we found a number of flaws that questions the purpose of support.

Chapter 3

Care Taking Organisations

Basic Concepts and Operational Definitions:
- Care taking Organisation-An organisation that has devoted itself to bettering the life of boys by way of providing them with shelter, food and basic life essentials, that include but aren't limited to education.
- Violence within the organisation-The violence in any form, physical or mental, that a child may have to go through when under the organisation's wing.
- Care taking- The act of looking after the boys and removing them from a possibly hostile environment (transitional spaces) and placing them in a more conducive one that is better for their development (care-taking spaces).

Areas of study:
- Experience of the caretakers with the boys – any training before joining the organisation, interaction with the general public while picking up the child, the processes involved in getting the boys to the care-taking organisation.
- Hierarchies of power–In the caretaker organisation, we will talk about the hierarchy within the organisation. This will include the concept of fear, respect, authority and tools used to maintain power.
- Concept of support within the organisation–this is received at the hands of Caretakers, friends, Heads of organisations
- Violence within the Organisation – This will include incidents of being violated and perpetrating violence that take place within the organisation.

"Waiting and hoping for something to gain
We ran, ran to the ghosts of our dreams on the mail train.
When morning came,
We no longer ran helter skelter
We stood in reality that was no longer same,
A shelter."

After spending some time in their transitional space, the boys now move under the wings of a care-taking organisation. These organisations not only provide food and shelter but also imbibe a sense of discipline in them and bring them face to face with the importance of education. Additionally, the importance of discipline and routine was highlighted by the caretakers we spoke with.

The caretakers did not talk much about the methods they used while interacting and asserting discipline among the boys as they claimed that every child was different and no set model would work on all. It was greatly stressed upon on how the inculcation of their new lifestyle of discipline and order could only be integrated through a gradual process; the boys are first taught basic hygiene and a disciplined system for their three meals, as opposed to their previous lifestyles where they ate lived and went about as they pleased. Having introduced a set schedule into their daily lives, slowly they are then introduced to basic schooling and education and attempts are made to teach them the grave importance of it.

We learnt from the caretakers at the organisation that the process of detaching the child from his transitional space to introducing him into the sheltered walls of the organisation is a delicate process. This involves telling the boys about the better prospects they could have if they join the organisation.

Sometimes bringing the boys into the organisation proves difficult. "Kathnaai toh bohot hoti hai. Jab hum station pe baccho ko taabe mein lete hai, aapko toh pata hai ki station pe utni jagah nahi hoti, bohot saari public hoti hai.", said a caretaker who was working at a shelter for five years. "Public poochhti hai ki aap bacche ko kyu leke jaa rahe ho, kaha leke jaa rahe ho, yahi problem hota hai lekin hum uss samay iss problem ko bhi solve kar dete hai." This gave us an insight into the troubles the caretakers have to go through to bring a child under their care. To persuade the boy, to not cause a scene, to take mitigatory action if a scene is caused, to explain to concerned passersby and sometimes even the police that they are from an organisation and are here to do what's best for the child.

Looking through the stance of these boys, it was interesting to note a few discrepancies as to how they viewed this whole process of being brought to the organisations. Where a few participants ,2 and 4 to be specific, used the word ''pakad liya'' when asked about how they came to the organisation. This further highlights that the whole process of introducing the child into this new environment is an exceedingly challenging process which as several complex spheres to it and one can never be sure as to how the child might react.

When inquired why this process is so difficult for the boys one of the caretakers told us that no one likes their freedom taken away, much less a minor boy. At the transitional place the boy would do as he pleases, but at the organisation they have set rules that need to be followed. But Sometimes the boys willingly accompany these on the field caretakers. It often all depends on the process of persuading them to leave behind their current spaces for more conducive environments.

Once at the organisational shelter, life is starkly different to what the child knows. He is accustomed to his life at the railway station, his place of employment or the chaos of the government run shelter. As a result there is often an air of doubt and apprehension among the boys when they are brought to these new organisations explained a care-taker at one of the organisations. The child is now brought to completely foreign environment, where he is introduced to a more concrete and reliable support system, education and many other facilities that his previously inhabited environments were void of.

At one organisation when asked if the boys would rather go back home or to their previous environments the boys responded saying that they were happier here, as they received education and a space that was a lot more conducive to their overall development. The boys appreciated the facilities they were offered here in contrast to their previous transitional spaces at the station.

Initially, the participants are hesitant to embrace this new environment but consequently through time they begin to see the shelter as their new home. Where the people that reside within this new place become their family in a traditional sense, and strong bonds are established amongst peers and the caretakers at the organisation. "Yahi hain mere papa, father upar baithe hain aur meri ma kitchen mein hum sab bhai beheno ke liye khana bana rahi hain." Taking into consideration the scenario at one organisation one of the participants mentioned that her even saw the caretakers as his parents. He referred to them as 'mummy' and 'papa'. In some cases, for the respondents the organisation exists a lot like a traditional family in their lives. This feeling and sense of a familial bond also exists among the caretakers where, at one of the organisations, a caretaker stressed on how she sees herself as a mother to these boys, and grows deeply attached to them and even keeps in touch with them once they shift from the organisation.

The caretakers and founders of the organisations play a prominent role in the lives of the boys. They assume the role of a 'confidant' from time to time and at other times assert authority as well. The caretakers we encountered in both organisations were primarily trained by their experience on job, while in other cases they had received prior training. Having spent a considerable amount of time in the field and having interacted with so many boys, they have now come to an understanding of what works, what doesn't and how to deal with the situations as they arise. They now understand the mental makeup of the boys and know how to get the child comfortable with them. The caretakers at one organisation eat, live and sleep among the boys to gain their trust and to get them to open up to them, while another shower them with care and look out for them and so the kids look up to them. This only further reiterates the importance of knowledge gained through practical experience.

The dynamics of bonds shared between the boys among themselves differed in both organisations. Where in one all the participants had been together since their transitional space at the governmental shelter and shared a closed knit familial bond. They not only looked after each other but their connection went to the extent of them relying on each other for information on their own lives. While on the other hand, participants in the other organisation were relatively new to each other. Even so they still knew basic details about each other and even tried to make a comfortable surrounding for each other. For instance, when a certain participant couldn't communicate with the researches because of a language barrier the other boys helped in communicating with gestures.

As a part of information gathered from our interviews it came to light that the boys also associate some amount of authority with the older members of their peer groups. This authority is either positive or negative which initiates a certain degree of submissiveness from the younger members. When participant 2 was interviewed he claimed that he kept a watch on the younger ones and often 'put them in their place' as one might call it, if they did something wrong. This provides a subtle connotation into the nuanced existence of violence and force within the organisation, as also the concept of fear,where more than often there are members within a peer group that a feared by the rest. What we found more common was violence among the boys itself. In a certain shelter the older boys would be very aggressive towards the younger ones and the newcomers. It was observed through close interaction that some boys were left with marks both on their bodies and minds. However, the respondents were not comfortable divulging any details about this.

Thus, it can be inferred that primarily there exists a simple hierarchy within these organisations that being; the members that rank high are the caretakers and on a more intimate level the boys who are the oldest. This hierarchy is much like an abstract construct of a family where the boys look up to the older members and the younger members are affected by their assertiveness.

Although it is imperative to note that in certain isolated cases it was observed that the hierarchies existing within the organisation and peer group conflicts and social constructs did not affect the participants' way of being. They specifically remained indifferent but still slightly elated towards their current environments.

It can conclusively be inferred that these organisations provide shelter and initiate a more advantageous course of development for these boys. From our observations, the study was also able to gauge the attitudes of the boys towards the organisations wherein many participants were extremely grateful to be there and saw the shelter as a means to better their lives in a more conducive

environment or to gain education. While in some cases they were still getting used to the new environment which was completely foreign to them.

These findings were successful in diminishing several preconceived biases of the researchers in which they thought that most shelters for boys are thought to be infested with perpetrators of violence, foul play and an environment that is completely ignorant to the needs of the child.

Chapter 4

Governance

Basic Concepts and Operational Definitions:
• Aftercare Organisation- An aftercare organisation is one where the child should be sent after completion of his term in the observation home. The purpose of the aftercare organisation is to facilitate the child, now an adult, with all the grooming and help necessary to establish himself or herself independently with respect to education and employment. It may or may not be run by the government.

Areas of study:
• Guidelines for the care of runaway children, as prescribed by the government
• Alignment of facilities of the caretaking organisation to prescribed guidelines and policies
• Government support to non-governmental caretaking organisations working for child care, financial or otherwise
• Gaps between legislation and execution, and a critique of existing legislations
• Caretaker's recommendations towards better governance with respect to childcare

> *"The State shall create a caring, protective and safe environment for all children, to reduce their*
> *vulnerability in all situations and to keep them safe at all places, especially public spaces."*

Clause 4.8 of The National Policy for Children, 2013, elucidates state aspirations for all vulnerable children including runaway children. Most of these aspirations are scarcely met. In those cases where they are met it is not by government bodies but by nongovernmental organisations functioning in any capacity they can. In this scenario, there is a massive discrepancy between legislations passed for childcare and their execution. In case of runaway children, as reflected by our previous chapters, this discrepancy begins at home wherein a minor finds reasons to leave home, venture into an unprotected public space, finally being 'caught' by an NGO that decides his/her fate. Legislations applying to these children include the Juvenile Justice Act (JJA), Right to Education, The National Policy of Children, 2013 and several other laws related to the exploitation of vulnerable children. This chapter will shed light on the multiple facets of governance, the need for better governance and means to implement the same as opined by caretakers and heads of organisations having worked in this field.

Child Welfare Committee

The protection of runaway children falls under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000. Section 29 of this Act provides for every State Government to constitute a Child Welfare Committee (CWC), comprising five members, the chief objective of which is to deal with children in need of care and protection. Only one member herein has to have expertise in the field, to which the founder of one of the organisations taken in this study responds with criticism, "Pure process mai legal process hi sabse jyada difficult hai kyuki CWC government recruit karta hai. Ye CWC ke jo members hai, kya unhone runaway children ke saath kaam kiya hai? Vo kabhi station pe jake ye samasya dekhe hai? To aisa kuch bhi nahi hai. Jo theory hai, uske aadhar par vo CWC ke member banaate hai aur unko samasya hi pata nai chalti."

The CWC has the sole authority to decide where the child will be placed and to authorise inquiries with respect to the child's background. Also, according to an organisational head, government officials and probation officers working in this field are often untrained in social work and have little to no

experience of working with children previously. Section 34 and 37 of JJA (Care and Protection of Children) discusses the establishment and operation of children's homes that serve to care for, train, educate and treat the children well until they can be rehabilitated. Six out of 14 participants were earlier housed in an observational home under this law and reported unpleasant experiences there. "Jab baccha vaha jata hai usko lagta hai mai jail aaya hu, agar 12 saal ke bacche ko lagta hai ki mai jail ja raha hu to uski mentality automatically change hoti hai," says the founder of one of the organisations in this study. "In baccho ko jab government ke observation home mai rakha jaata hai, vaha baccho ko leke janeke baad, unko kapde dusre pehenne padte hai, unpe number daalte hai aur unko number se bulaya jata hai. Actually socho aap ki jaise koi kaidi number hai." When the child is brought before the CWC, he/she is bewildered by his/her surroundings and often, neither government officials nor social workers understand the need to make him/her comfortable, opined this founder.

Railways

There is in place a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), or in other words a protocol for all the stakeholders to follow with respect to safeguarding rights of children in contact with railways as developed by National Commission for Protection of Child Right in 2013. This document outlines the role and responsibilities of the Indian Railways and allied systems in facilitating care and support to vulnerable children as defined under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000.

This SOP is an extremely significant document especially in case of runaway children, most of whom have travelled alone, often by train, to an unknown place far away from home. On a railway platform, or even while travelling alone, any number of things could happen to a child. Such as trafficking, assault, sexual assault and so on. A large sample of our research has reported such incidents and in light of governance, it becomes exceedingly important to put under the scanner the role of railway authorities who are in closer contact with these children than any other officials.

The SOP includes an enlistment of responsibilities of authorities at each level including the Railway Police Force (RPF), the Divisional Railway Manager, the Station Manager, the Train Ticket Examiner (TTE) and so on who are supposed to connect any child to a protection service as soon as possible. This is often not done, as our primary data bears testimony to the fact that some of the children have stayed at platform for several days and even then, were rescued or 'caught' by members of one of the NGOs in our study.

The Indian Railways is also supposed to have set up Indian Railways Child Protection Centers (IRCPC) at major railway stations to provide temporary shelter to children requiring care and protection who come into contact with railway authorities. The implementation of this is scarce as understood from organisational heads, and children are deprived of the facilities that could have come with centers such as these, leaving them more vulnerable than ever. In turn, children on railway platforms develop a peer group of their own and are afraid to lose their independence in case caught by police or social workers.

The Women and Child Development Ministry and the Railway Ministry have collaborated to set up an organisation dedicated solely to children, 'Childline', which has booths on railway stations for the protection of runaway children who most often end up on trains. This is evident through our sample as 10 out of 14 participants used the railways to run away from home. A member of the Juvenile Justice Board, lawyer Ananth Asthana has, while discussing about the credibility of these protective booths,

has elaborated on the resources that the railways can actually provide. In an article published on Rediff discussing the effectiveness of the Indian Railways' Childline scheme, she has opined: "The railways have no difficulty in renting out space to profit-making entities, but is not ready to spare a little space where children could feel safe."

Observation Home

The innate fear of authority such as police or government officials is often propounded by negative experiences at shelters where children should ideally feel safe. Children are to be segregated in an observation home according to their age: 7-12 years, 12-16 years and 16-18 years (Childline).This separation is necessary to prevent the bullying of the younger children at the hands of the older ones, and to protect them from the influence of those older children who may have committed violent offences or engage in illegal activities.

Even though this separation is obligatory, from our visitations to the government-run shelter we have learnt that the observation homes do not abide by this rule and house children of all ages together due to which they have to go through all kinds of rough experiences at a very young age. One participant from the sample expressed how he was beaten up by the elder boys every night. This has resulted in him being afraid of the dark and having nightmares which do not allow him to sleep.

If a child attempts to escape from the particular home that he or she is kept in then he/she is supposed to be sent back to the observation home/ special home/ fit person. In such cases the child cannot suffer the proceedings for his or her act of running away. One of the participants stated that while he was escaping from his center, he was caught by the caretaker there and incessantly beaten up even though he was already hurt. "Centre se main bhaagra tha, rassi latkake, par me pakda gaya. Upar se rassi chhut gaya aur me niche gira. Mere girne ke baad, mujhe bohot chot aayi thi. Uske baad saabji ne mujhe bohot maara. Saabji ne mujhe bohot laat maari."

Even in cases wherein children are not put into government observation homes and picked up by other external organisations looking to rehabilitate them, a fresh set of problems arrives with every case. A gaping limitation of this study is the unavailability of female runaway children with either of the two organisations. The reasons are multifold, explains a caretaker at one of them. "Kyuki humaare paas itna manpower nahi hai, humaare paas itni jagah nahi hai. Ladkiyon ke liye ladkiyo ka staff chaiye aur staff utne nahi hai. Bohot kam ladies hai jo sanstha se jud ke kaam kar rahi hai."

Conclusively, care for girls especially, even in the category of runaway children, is even lesser, making them prone to trafficking and other such mishaps.

After-care
Section 44 of the JJA 2000 encloses in it provisions for an after-care organisation by the state government, wherein an organisation for both boys and girls is essential for the purpose of encouraging these children, who are now blooming into adults, to lead useful and productive lives.
One of the directors of an organisation that has been working in the child care sphere for over thirty years repeatedly stressed on the fact that there is nothing being done for children after they turn eighteen. They are simply let off, with no follow-ups being done. On being inquired the head of the organisations explained how the children have no identity whatsoever. This causes them to be nowhere in terms of being recognized as a citizen and so they are not able to exercise their basic fundamental

rights - "They don't have proper documents, their birth certificate, the aadhar card, or passport, anything they don't have. How will they survive? They don't have identity. So again going back to their families and getting their documents is difficult. Some children don't have parents, parents are lost, where are they?"

There are no organisations working for boys above the age of 18. After the children turn 18, they are sent out of the organisations to fend for themselves which is impractical because they are habituated to a much protected environment of the organisations. The problem, says the care taker is that these young adults are defiant by nature because they have just started exploring the world without rules and regulations. They start questioning the authorities around them and demand for more than they bargained for. There are many NGOs who are working till 18, after 18 is very challenging, very tiring. Because the children are growing, they are also coming into adulthood, they need lot of things and the government will not provide. The child will say I want a mobile, by putting in a good college he'll want everything like a normal family.

The caretaker of an organisation suggests that there should be organisations for the children at least till they graduate from college, considering that they might face difficulties in coping with the demands of an educational institution, such as hostels. This will ensure that children with weaker academic background have good standing in the future. Also, all the work that has been done on the children all throughout their time in the organisation is in vain, once they go back to the streets. He calls this process a vicious circle from which it is very difficult for a child to escape because it is very easy for a child to go back the streets.

The above organisational director also expressed his concerns over how the organisation wants to take care of its children even after eighteen, but the government has shown zero interest in letting that happen. "Just few days back, we had a workshop for after care. We invited all the NGOs to talk about this and we raised a forum for this. But at the end, we realised that the government response is very poor. Each NGO if you want to do something, you handle your own problem. Then you need finance, you need money, you need structure. At this given moment, no NGO has any place to do something for 18+".

Governmental Aid
Section 43 of the JJA 2000 claims that the state government must provide children's homes and special homes with financial support for nutritional, medical and educational facilities. This is mandatory so that the quality of life is maintained. A caretaker of an organisation associated with child care said: "Nai Government se koi help nai milti hai, sab donation ke upar chalta hai."
The other organisation that is affiliated with the government and receives children from the government-run shelter voiced similar sentiments as given below:"The Government doesn't give at all. A lot of people support financially in location. We are ready to co-operate. We take all sorts of donations like books also".

Hundreds of runaway children are in vulnerable situations across the country, a country that promises to protect its children and keep them safe. Efficient, proactive and responsive governance can go a long way in reducing the disturbing statistics that unfold day after day.

5. A Holistic View On Violence

The purpose of this study was to explain and analyse the effects of violence on the psychological development of runaway children. In this chapter, we have attempted to further analyse our previously described observations and inferences, providing holistic view of how violence has affected their psychological development in entirety. For this purpose we have analysed the violence that the children have experienced at each stage.

Home:
A place where usually, most of us find support and solidarity within the protective walls of our familial environment. However, to most of the children this space is marked with their memories of violence.

A child's psyche fragile, and impressionable is easily moulded by the people and community that surround him. In the case of these children a family that perpetrates and indulges in violence,has greatly influenced their value systems and approach towards violence.Furthermore, it also has influenced their behavioural reactions in violent situations.

As an example; 5 out of 14 participants under study, were scared of violence as a result of experiencing it.

To further stress on the fragility of these children's persona's one can notice how the infliction of violence under influence of substances has also affected their personal choices in terms of indulging in substance abuse.

Violence experienced in an intimate environment like their homes was also known to have led to social, emotional and cognitive problems.

It also inherent to take into account the economic stability of these children's house holds where it was found the lower income households were more exposed to community violence as opposed to higher income households.

We were also able to analyse that several participants did not want to go home primarily because of an actively violent environment that existed there.This was slightly appalling to note because no matter the circumstances, it is rare for one to not want to return to their home, especially in the case of a child who is usually extremely attached to his family's love and affection. Thus clearly, denoting the intensity with which violence has affected these children.

The next stage in this journey away from home were the transitional spaces that these children were exposed to.

The Government Run Shelter:
At one organisation, all the children who were at the government shelter have described it as having a very violent atmosphere.

What can be analysed is that the government shelter is expected to run in accordance with the guidelines of the Juvenile Justice Act, specifically Sections 34 and 37, which talk about the necessary

requirements to ensure the well being and rehabilitation of these children.However, the statistics of our study show that all the children who had previously resided in this shelter have experienced or witnessed violence.

The problem appears to stem from the authority figures at this shelter, where they are known to inflict violence on the children which further gives older children the confidence to also inflict violence on their younger peers.Thus, posing an important question as to whether time spent at the shelter alters the perception of the child towards violence and its infliction.

Railway Stations
The railways station served as a place of employment for some and for others it was simply a place where they found themselves wandering towards their unknown fate.

The vastness of the railway stations renders a sense of anonymity to the children which leaves them more vulnerable to violence and exploitation.

Through the experiences of various participants under this study we were able to draw a nexus between the existence of crime, substance abuse, child labour, exploitation and violence, where one is dependent on or leads to the other. The simple act of selling 'gutka' for example left these children at the mercy of their employers or vulnerable to outer forces of exploitation.

Runaway children growing up in an unprotected environment such as this are susceptible to a higher degree of hardships and are thus often led to find solace or the will to cope through substance abuse. A report by The National Plan of Action For Children states that; 'solvents consumed by children through substance abuse, hit a part of the brain that suppresses hunger, cold and loneliness. Through our study it has also been discovered that every one of these children have experienced sexual harassment at some point in their lives.

A number of the children who had run away from the violence of their homes find themselves trapped in a more harsh and violent environment. Their original world view on violence becomes further reinstated and often asserts an attitude of normalcy to towards violence.

The Care-taking organisation
A conclusive stage in the life of a runaway child, where he is sometimes reunited with his family or is provided with adequate rehabilitation and education until he is no longer a minor. Through the upbringing inculcated at one of the organisations, the children clearly stated that they did not wish to play any part in violence and its perpetration.

However, life at these organisations does not always guarantee a simplistic existence for the children.There exists a fundamentally important concept of hierarchy. Where the caretakers are in a position to assert authority over the children and in some cases the methods of assertion could be by means of force.

This position is further strengthen by the lack of government involvement through regular assessments and checks at these organisations.

A majority of the respondents seemed to have a very normalised attitude towards the knowledge of this power held by the caretakers.

From our research we have found that 13 out of 14 participants have witnessed violence and 11 of them have been victims of it, while 10 out of 14 have perpetrated violence.

Having established these figures we have observed that different respondents have different approaches and reactions to violence; depending on their individual personalities, their age and their experiences with violence.Where we found that some boys were defensive, aggressive or withdrawn while some took pleasure in inflicting violence.

A majority of the participants have perpetrated violence and a few have an indifferent view towards violence, there still exists a few of them who are scared of violence and do not want to indulge in it because of having experienced and been victims of violence.

6. Conclusion

"India is home to the largest child population in the world. The Constitution of India guarantees fundamental rights to all children in the country and empowers the State to make special provisions for children. The State is responsible for ensuring that childhood is protected from exploitation and moral and material abandonment." – The National Policy for Children, 2013, Ministry of Women and Child Development

Above quoted is the beginning of a pledge made by the Government of India reiterating its commitment to the notion that a child should always be safe. The entire content of this report can be looked upon as a sample indicating the condition of runaway children in India. Even with its several limitations, it is clearly indicative of a few facts such as children who run away from home may have several reasons to do so including a violent atmosphere at home and that they are often exploited in multifold ways while they are outside any caretaking organisation or even within a government shelter as proved by our findings.

This report is jarring as it traces certain aspects of the lives of 14 children which are in complete dissonance to the State's expectations of how a child should be cared for, as specified in the National Policy for Children, 2013 and Standard Operating Procedures for all the Stakeholders in Safeguarding the Rights of Children in contact with Railways, specified by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights. The stories of these 14 children interviewed for the purpose of this research paint the larger canvas of what the everyday life of a runaway child could be like.

While the report is structured in a chronological pattern beginning from the period a child decides to leave home, it deals intimately with the concept of violence, at every stage, and its many ramifications on a child's psyche. Links have been established in the preceding chapters proving that a child who has experienced or witnessed an act of violence may resort to it, or on the other hand, be completely averse to it and suffer because of it. Sexual abuse, a form of violence not investigated in this report, was also proved to be an element in the experiences of many of these runaway children, as per accounts of heads and caretakers of caretaking organisations .

What has been the most clearly established is the gaping distance between policy and implementation with respect to childcare in our country. Within our sample of 14 children, there are cases of child labour, child exploitation, children being deprived of education, children exposed to verbal, physical and sexual abuse, domestic violence targeted at children, children exposed to and indulging in substance abuse and children longing for the love and care of family members. This brings to mind the question - Are our children really safe? And what more should be the priority for a child beyond safety and protection?

Even as our research proves this, countless children across India reach the streets or the railways every day, either when voluntarily running away or being involuntarily sent, abandoned or compelled by dire circumstances. In all governmental policies in India, runaway children are profiled as a section of street children, so no measures have been made especially catering to them. Childline, an NGO working to safeguard the rights of children in India has eloquently expressed the problems runaway children living without their families face: "Because of the lack of a permanent shelter and the fact that the number of street children is not recorded in any national survey or study, street children are often

called the 'hidden children'. Being hidden, they are at a higher risk to being abused, exploited and neglected."

This study also brought to the forefront that these 'hidden children' have aspirations too - to complete their education, to return home as adults, to get into successful careers such as the defense forces or police and to lead lives of dignity and happiness within a loving family- wishes that any child would have. The caretaking organisations have been a stepping stone towards that direction for these children, at least providing them basic facilities of food, shelter and clothing and helping them to inculcate positive behavioral changes, better hygiene and a more protected environment than found in a railway station or external institution.

A report aimed at understanding the psychological development of runaway children especially with reference to their encounters with violence, cannot be complete without documenting their body language during fieldwork and otherwise, as understood from the accounts of caretakers. The oldest child in the sample being merely 14 years of age, the research yielded observations with respect to the emotional state of children and the vulnerability of their tender years. It was also indicative of the fact that these children have matured far beyond their years as a result of their encounters.

Beyond the ambit of the structures of these caretaking organisations and our juvenile justice system lie adults, misguided as children, having often suffered through harsh experiences much like the 14 participants of this study. They often do not possess identification documents, sufficient education, vocational training or emotional support necessary to help them gain a footing in the world, as explained by the head of a caretaking organisation. These adults are the troubled vestiges of a State and society that failed to do its duty to protect them as children, and no has no measures to help them.

While the chapters on governance and caretaking organisations elaborated on actions the State could take to ensure child protection, this report shows clearly that these 'hidden children' live amongst the entire population. One encounters them at stations and religious locations and perhaps working in a factory or sitting on the streets at night, forgetting them as just faces and looking beyond them as though they were actually hidden. The 'hidden children' have heart wrenching stories of neglect, suffering and abuse and while this report examines their profile it also seeks to urge readers to remember these stories during their further encounters with such children, as suggested by the head of one of the caretaking organisations so that society as a whole may become more child friendly.

7. Recommendations

Here are a few suggestions that surfaced during the course of our research and our team would like to put them across:

1. Organisations that house runaway children should not do so just till eighteen but even beyond eighteen years of age. Letting them out, on their own, once they are eighteen leaves them lost and confused as they have no means of any guidance as to which direction to lead their lives into. Instead, organisations along with government assistance should make the children, responsible young adults who are no longer dependent on the care-taking organisation. Once it is finalized that the children can be made to stay for an extended period i.e. even after 18, the government should take an active interest in converting the organisation's juvenile space into an adult one.

   This conversion mainly includes getting larger infrastructures to encapsulate the young adults' growing needs. Most NGOs or organisations do not have enough room to keep that many children, like a director of an organisation that is immersed in childcare said *"Many a times these children after 18, they again come back on the street or they land back into the slums. That is why it's a vicious circle".* It is as though all the care that was provided till 18 has gone to waste as after leaving the organisation, the children go back to the same old fate and begin to adopt vices that they were kept away from in the four-walled organisation.

   Achieving this feat is not impossible, as implied by the following exemplary model explained by a child welfare organisation director:

   "We have a technical institute for 18+, for those not good in studies. You don't need any qualifications to be able to study there. First month you will be given ordinary work in each course. After that they analyse, then choose which course you are good in. Then he has to work for 3 months either in the organisation itself or he can search for work outside and only then after completing 3 months work will he get a certificate. 95% boys are employed out there. The teachers are specially trained to deal with adolescent boys".

   Listed above is a success story that organisations can pay heed to and incorporate in their respective organisation to better their systems. Additional skills should be taught and training should be given to the children once they start growing older so that they can survive in the cut-throat world of competition and make a living for themselves.

2. Picking on the previous point, the organisations should have better maintenance. Sometimes children runaway because of nano reasons, but other times children runaway as they are tortured, either mentally or physically. In such circumstances, the organisation should act as a home away from home. Not always is it best to try to make sure that the child goes back home.

   They may face severe consequences for running away and so the organisation itself should provide for a conducive environment, one which can sustain steady growth of the concerned child. With no intention of gender discrimination, a girl child does need special care and protection. It is not fair if there are no ladies in an organisation to take care of girls. If the child, a girl or boy, has runaway

at a tender, young age it should be given special attention.

3. The founder of a runaway children's organisation, who was also previously affiliated with a research-based programme, specified how government officials responsible for catching such children and dropping them off to organisations like his were not well-trained. In case of railways, not only Railway Protection Force (RPF), but also train ticket examiners and station masters should hold the onus of taking care of these children i.e. the entire umbrella term bracketing all railway officials should be deemed responsible. There needs to be a certain degree of compassion in dealing with children as they are not just any children, but they may be afflicted with torture and pain. These government officers should be given special training as they are the actual points of contact between the children and their welfare for real. They are the only people who can make promises to the children and also completely fulfill those promises. Workshops on how to behave with children should be conducted so that there is no room for error in actuality.

4. To curb violence: Since trains are a common platform for these children to traverse in, functional booths operating for safety of children should be erected on various railway stations. Childline (a government child welfare organisation) is working on such booths, but there has been stunted progress. These booths should track children's activities to ensure that they do not get embroiled in violent encounters. Again these places on stations should prove to be conducive for child growth and should be hygienic.

   A similar network could be formed on roads to dissuade runaway children from roaming in the open. Apart from general family background information, these booths should do regular follow-ups of the children registered under their booth. These booths like organisations could have visiting counselors to turn them away from violence and improve their mental well-being, especially for children who just want somebody to talk to. Counselors or psychologists can even delve into violence back at home and how the children can avoid or ignore it. Therapy would do wonders for children to do away with their trauma. With all these factors, they would still feel comfortable as they aren't being picked up and being off-loaded in some alien organisation, without even being heard.

5. Another major factor is the importance of segregation of children in these organisations or homes. There has to be a separation either age wise or trait wise. An age specific group division will help as older children will not be able to enforce their opinions on the younger lot. In short, bullying will be reduced as there is a lot of friction between older and younger children. Sometimes older boys feel helpless on being shouted at by people older than them whom they are scared of or cannot fight back and so they channelize all their anger and frustration onto the younger children.

   A trait wise separation at least in the space where they stay will help them to settle seamlessly into the organisation and thus, form friends easily. From amongst the children we interviewed, there was a clear divide between sensitive and insensitive or rather, care-free children. Hence, the sensitive children should be looked after with more care as placing them with the rest may close them down even more. Similarly, the more confident children should be looked upon more strictly and sternly so that they do not overpower the other set of shy children.

   Counselling sessions should be held with under confident children to open them up or if the child has no intention of opening up, atleast to make the child braver and confident since the

organisation is their only family now and thus their only hope of prospering in life. Simple segregation between types of children also should be kept in mind. For instance, when prostitutes, beggars, the homeless, addicts, etc are housed together, each group will influence the other in a wrong way. They may learn of robbing and stealing and there have been cases of children caught of theft in organisations.

Through our research, we also found out that organisations solely working for runaway children are less than a few in number. Organisations have other children too grouped with children who have run away from home. In this case, the runaway children maybe constantly reminded of what they are missing in the form of family, a home or familial love and support. On the other hand, the other children may find their lives less cool and adventurous as compared to the runaway children, who ran away fearlessly. The children do not realise that these children have actually run away from their problems instead of facing them with head-on courage. Segregation in such a manner will lead to effectively rehabilitating these children.

6. Organisations that have taken upon themselves the responsibility of sending children back to their homes should fasten the process. One of the organisations that was part of our research sample, has a track record of sending children back home within a span of a few weeks.
Their rehabilitation procedure involves explaining to the children why they must return home first and simultaneously following up on the children. Soon after the child has realised that he or she was wrong in running away because of session camps that the organisation arranges, they are sent back.

Above are just a few issues that need to be addressed from among an array of social evils and bigger problems and bigger difficulties.