

Child Friendly Juvenile Police through Social Work Approach

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Abstract

The police are the first agency of contact for children in conflict with the law and children in need of care and protection. These children undergo varied problems that are bio-psycho-social, which is beyond their coping, which will lead to children resorting to unacceptable behaviors such as involving in unlawful activities. Department of Women and Child Development, Kerala, with support from NIMHANS, initiated a novel program to provide psychosocial care and support for children in conflict with the law. As part of the program, Special Juvenile Police Officials were trained in psychosocial care for children in need of care and protection and children in conflict with the law. Incorporating social work techniques in training police and skills in practice, especially among the special juvenile police units, will sensitize police on psychosocial problems and care for children that will support better execution of law in favor of children.

Keywords: Law, Women, Empathetic, Child Rights, Justice and Policy

Police are the primary agency of contact for the child in varied situations such as being victims, conflict with the law, or a witness to any unlawful event. These children need to be supported and reintegrated into society. To achieve this, the role played by the police is very crucial. Empathetic and supportive policing would help the children to feel secure and safe; also to develop confidence in the juvenile justice system.

Review of Literature

The role of police officers in the juvenile justice system includes law enforcement, maintain order, and service provision. Challenges are faced by the police while dealing with children can be improved through various programs to enhance skills in working and interacting with children (Lawrence, 2008). New Internationalist (2015) reported tribal children being detained, ill-treated at Sukma, Rickard & Szanyi (2010) report various child rights violations by police in India, abusive interrogation techniques used by police against children were also reported in the study, and DCPCR (2015) reported brutal experiences of children by police. The studies violate The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act (2015) by police in dealing with cases concerning children.

Children who come in contact with police undergo multiple difficulties and experience poor self-esteem and adjustment, demonstrate behavioral problems (Sekar & Kavitha, 2015; Kavitha, Sekar, and Raj, 2012; Sekar et al. 2012). DCPCR (2015) reports unsafe communities as contributing factors for children's conflict with the law. These difficult circumstances induce stress in children, including toxic stress that will hurt the brain (AEDC, 2012). Adolescent actions are mostly guided by the amygdala in the brain, and they are more likely to act impulsively and involve in high-risk behaviors (AACAP, 2015). The impact of difficult circumstances among children is biopsychosocial and is at higher risk of deviating from the mainstream of society. Hence the sensitive and empathetic approach is essential in supporting these children, especially from the police.

Provision of Special Juvenile Police as Per Guest

The Juvenile Justice (Care & Protection of Children) Act (2015). Section 107 (1,2,3) Model Rules, 2016, mandates the Special Juvenile Police Unit in all districts/ city headed by an officer whose rank is the Deputy Superintendent of Police and appointment of Child Welfare Police Officers in all police stations who will be officers not below the rank of an ASI. These officers need to have an aptitude for working with children, specially trained in handling cases concerning children and coordinating with voluntary and non-voluntary organizations. Juvenile justice draft model rules 2016 also provide provisions to ensure child rights thorough, varied provisions that warrant special training for the special juvenile police officers to support children.

A review of training modules for police on issues of children pointed out that training currently focuses more on the Laws related to children. Training Manual on Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses (POCSO) Act & Rules, 2012, for Police/ SJPU developed with NIPCCD (2015) focus on the laws related to children, UNCRC, child rights, and the POCSO act. UNICEF & JHALSA (2012) model of training focuses on the JJ Act (2015), child rights, laws related to children, and the needs of children. Manual on training police on anti-human trafficking (GOI, UNODC, 2008) covers areas such as human

trafficking, police action, facilitating change where police approach, attitude, effective communication, gender sensitivity, and the human rights approach. There is a lacuna of "biopsychosocial development and care" and specific "skills and techniques working with children."

J.J. Act (2015) provides provisions for developing sensitive and empathetic special police force. Psychosocial approaches are the most appropriate in the Indian context to ensure sensitivity towards children to provide a link between a child's behavior and the social environment. The current module was developed by the NIMHANS Department of Psychiatric Social Work and Women and Department of Child Development, Government of Kerala, to train the police officers to be sensitive towards the problems of children. This will further support to address the gap in the existing training system where the police need to be sensitized on the psychosocial problems of children and its impact on their biopsychosocial development, to ensure a sensitive and empathetic approach among police officials, as well as develop support systems available for children and the process of mainstreaming children in need of care and protection and conflict with the law.

Methodology

The training program aimed to orient police officials on psychosocial care for children in conflict with the law and develop skills to address issues of children in need of care and protection (CNCP) and children in conflict with the law (CCL). A module was developed, consisting of four sections. A 10 item checklist focusing on the areas covered in the training, 5 points visual analog scale was developed for self-evaluation of knowledge gained by the participants. A quasi-experimental study was conducted among the police officials with pre and post assessment to understand the level of knowledge gained through the training. The data collected was assessed using the statistical package of social sciences (SPSS 20). The result of the study was assessed through descriptive and inferential statistical tests to understand the level of knowledge before and after the training. The topics and methodology of training were thereby standardized.

The samples for the study were all the officials of different ranks. DYSP in charge of SJPU from 9 districts were trained as master trainers through 12 days training program at NIMHANS. The SJPU/CWPO from 14 districts of Kerala were trained through 6 training program. The first batch of 122 police officers was trained in three batches in 2016, and the second batch of 136 police officers was trained in the second phase in 3 batches in 2017.

Results

The background information collected from the police officials showed the mean age of the police officials at 42.2 years ± 8.2 years. Gender distribution among the participants showed that the majority were male police officers, 70.5% (n=182). Female police officers formed 29.5% (n=76).

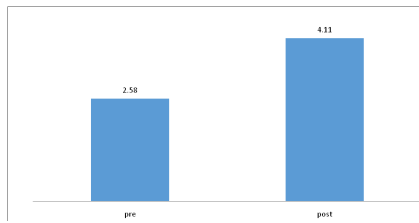


Figure 1: Knowledge Assessment

Knowledge assessment of the topic psychosocial care for children among the participants carried out before and after the training showed a significant increase in knowledge after the training. The mean for the knowledge after the training increased to 4.1 ± 1.3 from 2.1 ± .87. The paired sample t-test conducted showed a significant increase in the knowledge in .01 levels (t=-18.9, DF=256, p<.01), confirming better knowledge among the participants after the training.

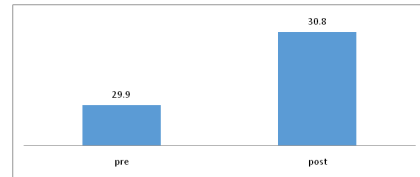


Figure 2: Knowledge Gain

Assessment of knowledge gain was carried out using a 10 item checklist carrying questions on the topics covered in training. The total mean increased from 29.9 ± 4.8 to 30.8 ± 83.3. Paired sample t-test carried out showed that the increase in the total mean is significant at .05 levels (t=-3.2, df=257, p<.05)

Table 1: Understanding Children

Item	Pre	Post	x ²	df	p
Understanding children (CNCP & CCL)	18.2 (n=47)	34.9 (n=90)	26.7	1	.000
Risk factors among (CNCP & CCL)	84.1 (n=217)	95.7 (n=247)	18.8	1	.000
Identifying behavior and emotional problem among children	75.2 (n=194)	88 (n=227)	19.8	1	.000
Impact of difficulties on children	76.4 (n=197)	81.4 (n=210)	3.07	1	.08

Police officers need to have a clear understanding of the multiplicity of problems experienced by the child, bio psychosocial risk factors, the impact of difficulties in a child in the form of multiple stresses that affect their behavior. The section covered multiple problems experienced by CNCP and CCL that affect their normal biopsychosocial development leading to deviating from the mainstream of society. The knowledge gain among the police officers in understanding shows a significant increase after the training (df=1, x²=36.7, p<.01). The results confirm the importance and effectiveness of the brainstorming methodology used for the training in enhancing knowledge on varied difficulties experienced by the children.

The understanding of the multiplicity of risk factors that are biopsychosocial would help the police in better understanding as well as early identification of high-risk children and supporting them to prevent from entering into conflict with the law. The results in this area show a significant increase in knowledge level (df=1, x²=18.8, p<.01), confirming the relevance and effectiveness of the group discussion to explain the topic to the participants.

The difficulties experienced by children will be manifested as behavioral and emotional problems, which are often considered unacceptable behaviors. The Knowledge of the topic has significantly increased from 75.2% to 88% (df=1, x²=19.8, p<.01), showing that the topic was well understood

and relevant to the section and the methodology of case discussion was effective.

The difficult circumstances experienced by children will affect the bio-psychosocial development, which complements each other, i.e., the impact in one area will affect other areas.

This emphasizes the holistic care for the child. The knowledge on the topic shows an increase after the training though not significant at .05 levels, indicating more attention and explanation to be given in the area during training.

Table 2: Bio-Psychosocial Development and Psychosocial Care for Children

Item	Pre	Post	χ^2	df	p
Bio psychosocial Development of children	78.3 (n=202)	92.6 (n=239)	26.8	1	.000
Neurobiological Development	84.9 (n=219)	96.1 (n=248)	24.02	1	.000
Net working with multiple stakeholders	86 (n=222)	94.2 (n=243)	11.11	1	.001

The second section of the module aimed to educate the police officials on the bio psychosocial vulnerabilities of CNCP & CCL, leading to various psychosocial and developmental problems among adolescents. This understanding would provide sufficient knowledge among officials in developing an empathetic approach towards children.

The section explained the biopsychosocial development, multidimensional needs, and the impact of the non-availability of these needs of children that has biological, psychological, and social dimensions. The results showed a significant improvement in knowledge among the participants (DF=1 $\chi^2=26.8$, $p < .01$), confirming the relevance of the topic in developing knowledge among the police officials on biopsychosocial problems among children and the effectiveness of group discussion and consequent discussion towards explaining the

relationship between lack of biopsychosocial needs to the behavior of the child.

The neurological development focused on the brain and behavior of adolescents to develop a better understanding of adolescents. The significant increase in knowledge (df=1, $\chi^2=24.2$, $p < .01$) reported by the police officials confirms the importance of the topic effectiveness of the training methodology through PowerPoint presentation, discussion, and sharing of experience.

The section explained the police officers on the role of multiple stakeholders in providing a spectrum of psychosocial care for children. The knowledge on the spectrum of care through networking shows a significant increase (DF=1 $\chi^2=11.1$, $p < .01$) after the training confirming the knowledge gain in networking to support children.

Table 3: Techniques and Skill to Work with Children in Conflict with the Law

Item	Pre	Post	χ^2	df	p
Impact of punishment on children	31.8 (n=82)	53.5 (n=138)	32.67	1	.000
Skills and Techniques of working with children	66.3 (n=171)	75.6 (n=195)	8.47	1	.000
Spectrum of psychosocial services	79.8 (n=206)	88 (n=227)	8.02	1	.001

The traditional practice of managing or controlling unacceptable behaviors among children was punishments. It is scientifically proved that punishments will hurt the child. Police officials should understand and master skills and techniques to support children.

Police resort to various practices such as threatening, physical and emotional punishments for children to restrain them from unlawful acts. This often puts police officials in official trouble

as punishing children is against the law and child rights. The session focused on the negative feelings the child goes through when punished, which adds to the existing trauma, further deteriorating the child's behavior than showing a positive result through an activity. The results of the data analyzed showed a significant increase in knowledge among the police officers on the impact of punishment on children (df=1, $\chi^2=32.67$, $p < .01$), showing the understanding of the impact of punishment and the need for

adopting better methods to restrain children from unlawful activities among police officials.

Police are the first point of contact need to be extremely skilled to handle children. This is their entry to a juvenile justice system that influences a child's attitude towards the Juvenile justice system. Skills and techniques of working with children such as rapport building, empathy, reassuring, active listening, paraphrasing were covered under the topic through activities and role play. The results show a significant increase in the knowledge on the topic ($df=1$, $\chi^2= 8.74$, $p<.01$), ensuring the effectiveness of the session to reach the participants on adopting various positive and soft skills and techniques of social work while dealing with children.

Supporting CNCP & CCL involves multiple stakeholders with specified roles and responsibilities. A child may experience multiple problems, and hence the multidisciplinary and inter-sectoral approach is needed to support children. An activity-based approach based on a case study adopted to educate the police officers on providing a spectrum of psychosocial services for children showed a significant increase ($df=1$, $\chi^2=8.02$, $p<.01$) in knowledge after training.

The results of the study can be concluded that there is a significant improvement in the knowledge level among the police officials after the training in all the areas. This further approves the module to be effective in sensitizing police officials on psychosocial care for children in conflict with the law.

Discussion

The establishment of Special Juvenile Police Unit (SJPU) and Child Welfare Police Officers and provision for special training for the police officers (SJPU/CWPO) is mentioned in Section 107 (1,2,3) of JJ Act (2015). The current training module will support in executing this provision in the Act that supports developing aptitude in working with children and coordinate with other stakeholders to ensure better care protection and services. The results of the study demonstrate the necessity of being fulfilled among the police officials through the training.

The four sessions on understanding children (CNCP & CCL) focus on educating the participants on the concept of CNCP, identify risk factors among the vulnerable population, the impact of nonconductive environment, and its manifestation behavior and emotions of children (Sekar et al., 2012, Sekar and Kavitha, 2015). Incorporating psychosocial explanation for the behavior of children developed as per the results of previous studies in the was successful in enhancing the knowledge of police officials as emphasized in Juvenile Justice draft model rules 2016, about not violating children's rights in any form through a sensitive and empathetic approach by police

The biopsychosocial difficulties children undergo impair their holistic growth and development. (Sekar et al., 2012) explains the linkage between the biopsychosocial needs and development of children and its influence on a child's behavior, thereby enhancing the information that would support developing a nonjudgmental attitude and empathetic the approach in supporting children (AACAP, 2015., AEDC, 2012).

Many a time's police officials become helpless to support children due to poor knowledge and networking skills to avail support from multiple stakeholders such as lawyers, health, education, social welfare, economic institutions, and NGOs. The network would facilitate police to follow the provisions mentioned in the J.J Act (2015), to inform and take support from District Legal Service Authority, probation officer, fit institutions for children until the child is produced before JJB. The JJ Act (2015) gives sanction to the police officers to take support from the probation officer and meet the immediate needs of children, which is a priority, including medical needs. The section developed as per the information from AACAP, 2015., AEDC, 2012 and Sekar et al., 2012 have supported improving knowledge in the area among the police.

Violation of the JJ Act (2015) while dealing with cases concerning children was reported by Sukma. Rickard & Szanyi (2010), DCPCR (2015), and New Internationalist (2015). Police need to be trained on the specific skills to work with children, such as rapport building, empathy, listening, reassurance & resourcefulness (Sekar et al. 2016). The sessions

on biopsychosocial development and the impact of punishment among children gave insight to the topic on the vulnerability of children to resort to unacceptable behaviors were the behavior is an indication that the child needs support or the child's cry for help. Incorporating the topics on skills and techniques to work with children would support police to develop understanding to be sensitive to children and not adopting violent measures that warrant child rights violations by adhering to the provision in J, J Act (2015).

The training for the police officials is confined to law and legal provisions (NIPCCD, 2015., UNICEF & JHALSA, 2012., GOI, UNODC, 2008) even in issues such as sexual abuse, trafficking, etc. The content of the training is usually the issue, law, actions to be taken by police, and child rights. To execute the provisions on issues related to children and confirm child rights, police need to adopt a sensitive approach by empathizing and understanding a child's helplessness and vulnerability. Incorporating the psychosocial care module into the current police training module would confirm developing skills to ensure sensitivity towards children among police officials.

Conclusion

Children encounter police in situations where the child is a victim; a child involves unlawful activities, or as a witness. Interactions and experience of the child with police officials are very important in building trust in the system. This warrants the need for sensitizing police officials and enhancing their knowledge and skills to develop an empathetic and sensitive approach.

A large majority of children coming into contact with police experience multiple risk factors that have an impact on their biopsychosocial development, forcing them to adapt erroneous ways of responding to unfavorable situations. An understanding of this by the police officers will help to develop an empathetic attitude that will prevent unwarranted violations of child rights. Moreover, supporting these children demands a multidisciplinary intersectoral approach to create a conducive biopsychosocial environment to support the prevention of violence against children and protection and reintegration to society.

Significant improvement of knowledge among police officials on biopsychosocial problems among children and skills and techniques of working with them in a sensitive and empathetic manner confirms the relevance of the module in developing a sensitive approach among police for better execution of law and strengthening the juvenile justice system.

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