



A new Chapter in Child Care

Contribution of Child Welfare Committees during the Covid pandemic

Work of CWC'S In Marathwada :
Work and learnings of CWCs IN Marathwada

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12 children “offered” to God land up in Child Protection homes

A complaint was registered at the Beed Rural Police Station in August 2020 regarding abduction of a minor girl from the premises of a religious place.

Sujeet Bade was the Senior Police Inspector of the Police Station. He began investigations after informing the District Child Welfare Committee. The investigation revealed that the concerned minor girl had been left at the premises as an “offering” to God, by her own parents. Despite the threat of Covid, the police machinery was activated and within 3 days the girl was found and the abductor apprehended. The machinery also detected 5 more minor children “offered” to God in the same religious premises and 7 more children already living on the premises.

The Police along with the CWC immediately visited the site and took all 12 children into custody and admitted them in Child Protection Homes. Their parents were identified and summoned. All the children were returned to their homes after due counselling. A written guarantee was also taken from the parents stating that they would never again abandon their children under any circumstances. The CWC is still in touch with these children and regularly follows up with them. Police alertness along with the support of the CWC resulted in rejuvenating the lives of these 12 children.

Introduction

It's heart-rending to see these divine flowers shrivelling and wilting away...

Children whom we refer to as “divine flowers” were confined and suffered during the Covid period. Children are the worst affected in any kind of disaster. This was once again proved to be true in Marathwada during Covid times.

The Child Welfare Committee at the District level works for protecting the rights as well as lending protection to children and women. The Committee was active even during Covid times and worked to understand the problems faced by children and to solve them. A new Chapter in Child Care was written. This report is an overview of the work done by the Child Welfare Committees of 8 districts of Marathwada region during Covid times.

The first Covid patient was identified in Maharashtra on the 9th of March 2020 and within a few months the infection had reached the villages and settlements. Along with education and health, the issue of child care also suffered greatly during Covid times.

Between March 2020 and July 2021, in Maharashtra State

- 15,127 children lost at least one parent
- 482 children lost both parents
- 1,742 children lost their mothers
- 13,385 children lost their fathers. A greater number of women turned single parents
- 790 child marriages were stopped during the period between March 2020 and August 2021

(These figures are up to July 2021)

The Task Force appointed by the State Government at the district level is still in the process of conducting the survey in 36 districts. As these numbers grow, so does our concern. The administration is making effort to provide support to children through various interventions like the Child Welfare Committees, Child Protection Committees, Child care schemes, Children's Homes, etc. The number of single women being on the rise, there have been simultaneous attempts to support them through various Government schemes. Contact, detection, counselling, support and care are the various steps involved in this work.

This is a report that reviews the work done by the State administration and the challenges faced by them during Covid times, in the Aurangabad Revenue Division, aka, the Marathwada region.

Why Marathwada?

Among the 7 Revenue Divisions in Maharashtra, Marathwada region stands socio-economically, the most under-developed.

A deficit of basic infrastructure for health, education and other services, lack of livelihood opportunities are the defining characters of this region. 5 out of its 8 districts show a very poor Human Development Index – Hingoli (0.648), Osmanabad (0.649), Nanded (0.657), Jalna (0.663) and Latur (0.663). Beed (0.678) and Parbhani (0.683) show a medium HDI while Aurangabad (0.727), is the only district in this region that shows a high HDI. (Reference: Economic Survey of Maharashtra, 2020-2021 report).

Drought is a regular phenomenon in this region. Majority of agricultural land in Marathwada is rain-fed with a less than average annual rainfall. Therefore, the key problem of this region is the large-scale migration that takes place every year. Hundreds of thousands of labourers from this region migrate to more prosperous towns and cities for contractual work like sugarcane harvesting, etc. And these were the labourers from Marathwada, who were forced to return to their villages from their wage-earning locations, during the lockdown announced due to Covid. They lost their means of livelihood. To add to it was the spread of the epidemic to the rural areas. Several families lost their wage-earning male members. This resulted in a multi-fold rise in problems related to women and children. It has been observed that the extent of child marriages has been high in Marathwada region due to poverty and backwardness. Out of the 10 high-child-marriage districts in the State, 4 are from Marathwada. Increased number of child-marriages during Covid times was an added problem.

More the problems, more are the challenges. Thus, the Government appointed Child Welfare Committees had to face numerous challenges during the Covid period. This study was undertaken to understand and give visibility to the work done to overcome these challenges by these Committees along with the district-level Task Force appointed as per a government order dated 7th May 2021. The Aurangabad Revenue Division has been selected for this purpose.

(This report is also available at <https://naviumed.org/>)

About **SAMPARK**

- Sampark is a forum that attempts to bring about social change by linking researchers, media persons, field experts and citizens.
- Identifies with social organizations and collectives as well as activist movements.
- Intervention involves communication with policy makers and working with elected representatives.
- Studies the day-to-day operations of the Legislative Houses.
- Remains updated about the various global trends
- Accepts new challenges in the social sector.
- Pursues a healthy and egalitarian social system.
- Partnership with UNICEF since 2015.
- Sampark's "Navi Umed" (New hope) forum on social media recently completed five years.

WORK OF CWCS IN MARATHWADA: A STUDY REPORT

The establishment of District-level (as well as State and National level) Child Welfare Committees is an expression of the commitment that the Government of India has towards its Child Care policy. The CWCs constitute an important part of the broader policy framework to protect Child Rights. On 11th December 1992, several nations made a commitment to protect children's rights in the United Nations General Assembly. It was decided to create a policy framework keeping in mind the best interests of children. Criteria for the same were also laid down.

On this background, the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act 2000 came into being. Article 27 of this Act directed the establishment of CWCs. Similarly the Juvenile Justice Board was created vide Article 4 of the Act. The Act is also amended from time to time.

Functions of the District Child Welfare Committee

The primary function of the District CWC is to provide protection and care to the vulnerable children in the district. The Government appoints one Chairperson and 4 members to the CWC. Regular meetings of these Committees are also conducted. The appointment to the CWC is qualified by certain pre-determined criteria. Child labourers, lost children, orphans or children who wish to leave their homes due to abuse from parents, children who have been abandoned by their parents at birth, all such children between the ages of 0 to 18 years, are presented before the CWC. They are then admitted to Children's homes as per the CWC's directives. The CWC also instructs the concerned agencies to look for the parents of these minor children as applicable. The CWC also plays an important role in giving these children up for adoption. The Police present the children before the CWC and take its help to resolve the problems faced by children.

- ❑ **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act 2000**
<https://legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/2000-56.pdf>
- ❑ **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act 2015**
<https://womenchild.maharashtra.gov.in/upload/5ab8d61cb2a02jj%20ruls%202018%20press%20copy.pdf>
- ❑ **Government Resolution (dated 17th June 2021) directing payment of Rs. 5,00,000/- (five lakhs) as support to an orphan child**
<https://www.maharashtra.gov.in/Site/Upload/Government%20Resolutions/Marathi/202106171652077530....pdf>
- ❑ **Establishment of a Task Force (dated 7th May 2021) for reinstating the rights of those children who have lost both parents due to Covid-19.**
<https://www.maharashtra.gov.in/Site/Upload/Government%20Resolutions/Marathi/202105071820373630.pdf>

CWCs meet the challenge of the Covid pandemic

Taking into account the gravity of the Covid pandemic, district-level Task Forces were established through a Government resolution dated 7th May 2021, to join hands with the CWCs for searching for children who had lost their parents in the pandemic. A comprehensive survey was undertaken in all the 8 districts of Marathwada under the leadership of the District Collector. The distressing information that emerged from the survey was that in Marathwada, 2068 children had lost at least one parent to the pandemic (as per the data on 15th August 2021), while 65 children lost both parents.

ASHA workers, Gramsevaks, Anganwadi workers played an important role as volunteers who collected information going door-to-door. As soon as the information about children who had lost one or both parents was in hand, the administration took steps to directly contact them and estimate the need for support. This complex process was expedited with the help of the Child Welfare Committees.

Information of district-wise work done

1. Aurangabad (HDI 0.727 – high)

Child Welfare Committee – (current CWC operational since April 2018)

1. Jyoti Patki -Chairperson (Mobile no. 982278215)
2. Adv. Meghana Chapalgaonkar
3. Dr. Manohar Bansalwar (Mobile no. 9890841439)
4. Prof. Ashwini Lakhmale
5. Adv. Anita Shirurkar

Aurangabad is the central hub of Marathwada. The district has 10 blocks. On 15th March 2020, the first Covid patient was identified in Aurangabad in the form of a professor returned from abroad. Up until 13th August 2021, the total number of Covid patients had reached 1,47,696 while 3517 persons had lost their lives to the pandemic.

403 children lost their parents

403 children lost their parents in Aurangabad, where maximum number of patients were registered in the 1st and 2nd wave of Covid. Out of these 63 children lost their mothers while 324 children lost their fathers. 17 children had the misfortune of losing both their parents.

350 out of 403 children receive recommendations

The CWC of Aurangabad district has recommended 350 children for the benefits of the Government's Child care support scheme. The administration is planning a way so that the remaining 53 children shall receive the benefit of some other government schemes.

State of Children's Homes

Aurangabad district has a total of 18 Children's homes. Besides, there are also 2 early childhood care homes functioning. There are 3 children's homes only for girls. There is also 1 Observation Home available in the district.

Task Force

Both the 1st and 2nd waves of the Covid pandemic proved to be extremely intense in Aurangabad district. The CWC was even more alert during these times to monitor the problems faced by children. A Task Force was formed for identifying children who had lost their parents and for their care and protection. Three meetings of the Task Force were conducted in Aurangabad district. When the actual survey was initiated, Anganwadi workers and ASHA volunteers collected information by visiting door-to-door, at times at the risk of their own lives, which helped the administration to identify as many children as possible. This information is now being used to provide support to orphaned children. The Child Protection Cell as well as the Childline also provided valuable help in this process.

62 child marriages stopped

An increased number of complaints regarding child-marriages was seen in the first stage of lockdown. The CWCs, with help from the administration, implemented measures to prevent this phenomenon. 62 child marriages were stopped during the period of 1 ½ years. Its block-wise distribution is as below:

Paithan – 14, Sillod – 8, Vijapur – 2, Gangapur – 8, Kannad – 5, Phulambri – 7, Khultabad – 1, Aurangabad – 16, Soygaon – 1

Even after preventing those child-marriages, the agency still keeps in touch with the families monitoring that girls are not married unless they are 18 years old. Controlling child-marriages was effectively achieved with the help of the CDPO (Child Development Project Officer) at the district level and ASHAs and Talathis at the village level. In those areas where child-marriages were rampant, awareness programs were widely implemented with the help of the Police. Along with information about Prevention of Child-Marriages Act, information regarding the ill-effects on the minor girl's health, problems of early motherhood was also widely disseminated. District Police Superintendent, Mokshada Patil, actively participated in the process and had made her mobile number available for all the vulnerable girls. The helpline was also extremely useful in this process.

Importance of Counselling

Once the Task Force was formed under the leadership of the District Collector, the entire machinery in Aurangabad district took up the search for children who had lost their parents. CWC members state that several children were found to be suffering from loneliness during this period. They were found in need of counselling and hence the machinery spared as much time as possible with these children to reassure them that they were not alone, and the administration was present to support them. This resulted in some success in relieving the little ones of their mental stress.

In those cases where relatives came forward to care for the children after loss of their parents, the administration took guarantee letters from these relatives.

2. Parbhani (HDI – 0.683, medium)

Child Welfare Committee – (current CWC operational since April 2018)

1. Adv. Sanjay Kekan – Chairperson (Mobile no. 9860017489)
2. Adv. Yashwant Ashtikar
3. Adv. Manisha Mundhe
4. Sukeshini Chaudhari
5. Ravi Puranik
6. Counsellors – Sopan Patange, Vinod Dhoot kunvar

On 16th April 2020, the first Covid patient was found in Parbhani district which comprises of 9 blocks. Up until 13th August 2021, the total number of Covid patients had reached 51,196 while 1,287 persons had lost their lives to the pandemic.

317 children lost their parents

As per the directives from the administration, a comprehensive survey has been undertaken in the 9 blocks to identify children who have lost their parents to the pandemic. As on 13th August 2021, 317 children have lost their parents to the pandemic. Out of these 3 children have lost both parents, who are being cared for in Children's Homes, as per the directive of the CWC. While this report was being written, the survey still continued, and the District Women and Child Development Officer Govind Andhare feared that this number might increase by the time the survey was completed.

150 children benefitted from Child care schemes

Instructions were issued to the district machinery to rapidly collect data of those children who had lost either one or both parents, or whose parents were under treatment in hospitals. Accordingly, documents of 150 children have been submitted. These children are eligible to receive a monthly amount of Rs.1100/- through child care schemes.

Task Force

Two meetings of the Task Force have been conducted so far in Parbhani District under the chairpersonship of the District Collector.

State of Children's Homes

Currently, there are 15 children residing in the Government-run Children's Home in Parbhani district, while in the Home run by Swapnabhoomi, an NGO in Kerwadi in Palam block, there are 43 children. Similarly, there are 10 children in an Observation Home, while in the Early Childhood Care Centre there are 11 children between the ages of 0 to 6 years. There are a total of 52 officers and employees responsible for the care of these children.

21 child-marriages stopped

An increased number of complaints regarding child-marriages was being received in Parbhani district during the lockdown. The system went on a red alert during this period. The Child Protection Cell was successful in preventing 21 child-marriages. Moreover, children in need of care and protection have also been identified, taken care of and provided counselling. These child-marriage incidents were found in the blocks of Parabhani, Pathri, Poorna, Jintoor. The administration continues to conduct awareness programs on this issue and information about the

ill effects on the girl's health is disseminated in these programs. Similarly, detailed information about the Child Marriage Prevention Act is also widely disseminated in schools and colleges.

3. Beed (HDI – 0.678 – medium)

Child Welfare Committee – (current CWC operational since April 2018)

1. Adv. Abhay Vanve – Chairperson (Mobile no. 9657663795)
2. Tatvasheel Kamble
3. Sunil Balwante
4. Seeta Bansod
5. Kaveri Nagargoje
6. Counsellor – Dhanaji Koopkar

Beed is known as the district of sugarcane harvest labourers. Nestled in the Balaghat ranges, drought is a regular phenomenon with exception of one or two years here and there. Comprised of 11 blocks, the district is characterized by lack of livelihood opportunities, drought and deficit of development infrastructure, thus recording maximum migratory population in the State. An estimated more than 5 lakh labourers migrate for sugarcane harvesting every year for a period of six months.

The first Covid patient in the district was found in Pimpla, Ashti block on 7th April 2020. Up until 14th August 2021, the total number of Covid patients had reached 99,327 while 2,666 persons had lost their lives to the pandemic.

354 children lost their parents

In Beed district, 354 children lost their parents to the pandemic. Of these 27 children lost their mothers while 314 children lost their fathers. 13 children lost both parents and 256 women lost their husbands to the pandemic.

Children who lost their parents were found to be feeling insecure and suffering from loneliness. All the members of the CWC and the counsellor Dhanaji Kupkar visited these children and talked to them personally, making them open up and reassured them. All other children except the 13 orphaned children, are in a condition where they will be cared for. Some of the relatives have come forward. The CWC has taken assurances from those concerned about the care and protection of these children.

341 children benefitted from Child care schemes

Proposals for 341 children from Beed district have been prepared. Once the documents are in place these children will get the benefits from various child care schemes of the government.

State of Children's Homes

In Beed, 30 government children's homes, 1 observation home for boys and 1 observation home for girls in Ambajogai are the approved institutions. However, currently there are 169 children in only 8 of these children's homes. The government children's home in Beed can house 35 children, but currently only 7-8 children reside there.

Task Force

A decision to establish district-level Task Forces was taken through a Government resolution dated 7th May 2021, in order to help in the process of making arrangements for protection and care of children who had lost their parents to the pandemic well as to protect their rights.

Accordingly, a task force was appointed under the leadership of the District Collector of Beed. So far 2 meetings of the task force have been conducted.

314 women rendered single

314 women in Beed district have lost their husbands and all other support. Out of these 14 women are mothers of children between 0 to 18 years. The task force has resolved to support these women through various other government schemes along with the Sanjay Gandhi Niradhar Mahila scheme.

Increased number of CWC meetings

20 meetings per months is the expected norm for CWC's meetings. However, in Beed district, where there is a large number of migrant population involved in sugarcane harvesting, as well as due the largely rural population, a lot of cases were being presented to the CWC and thus there would be 25 meetings of the CWC per month.

42 child-marriages stopped

40 child marriages were stopped in Beed district between March 2020 and July 2021. Incidences of child marriages were higher among the population migrating for sugarcane harvesting. On the eve of Independence Day 2 child marriages in Gadhi and Kekatpangri in Gevarai block were stopped due to the alertness of local social workers. The girls' parents were summoned before the CWC on 16th August and a letter of guarantee was taken from them under oath about not getting the girls married till they completed 18 years of age.

4. Latur (HDI - 0.663, low)

Child Welfare Committee – (current CWC operational since April 2018)

1. Uma Vyas- Chairperson (Mobile no. 8446443499)
2. Adv. Rajani Girvalkar
3. Savita Kulkarni
4. Adv. Sujata Mane – Kendre
5. Umakant Biradar

Like many other districts, Latur district also faced a huge challenge due to the Covid pandemic. Up until 13th August 2021, the total number of Covid patients had reached 91,673 while 2,414 persons had lost their lives to the pandemic resulting in loss of parents for many children in the district. From the month of May, the district administration initiated the process to identify such children. Accordingly, in Latur district, 290 children were found to have lost one parent due to the pandemic while 5 children were completely orphaned. The district Women and Child Development Officer Varsha Pawar stated that as per the directives of the State Government, the search for identifying children who have lost either one or both parents to the pandemic, will continue further, under the guidance of the task force.

287 children benefitted from Child care schemes

287 children have benefitted from Child care schemes in Latur district. Besides, the 5 children who are completely orphaned will also be given financial assistance. Guardians of 3 children refused to take the benefits of the schemes. All these children are suffering a mental trauma due to the loss of their parents and district-appointed counsellors are helping these children to open up and express themselves.

Children being cared for in 25 Children's Homes

There are 25 functional Children's Homes in Latur District. Those children who don't have any support for their care and protection after losing their parents to the pandemic, can be admitted to any of these children's homes as is suitable. Currently 5 orphaned children have been identified through the survey. The administration is preparing for their care and support. When the 285 children who had lost one parent had been contacted, it was found that 2 out of them need assistance in care and protection, while information of 9 more children is still being completed. Once the documents of all these children are received, their information will be shared with the Government authorities.

35 child-marriages stopped

The district administration stopped 17 child-marriages between January 2020 to December 2020 and 18 child-marriages between January 2021 to July 2021. The Child Protection Cells were helpful for the administration to conduct the anti-child-marriage campaign. Most children forced into child marriages were from economically backward or migrant families. The administration while warning the concerned persons, also provided information about the Prevention of Child-Marriages Act. Clear instructions were issued that girls should not be married off unless they complete 18 years of age.

5. Jalna (HDI - 0.663 - low)

The tenure of the Jalna district CWC is over and as per rules the operations of Jalna CWC are being handled by the CWC of Aurangabad district.

Child Welfare Committee – Aurangabad district

1. Jyoti Patki -Chairperson (Mobile no. 982278215)
2. Adv. Meghana Chapalgaonkar
3. Dr. Manohar Bansalwar (Mobile no. 9890841439)
4. Prof. Ashwini Lakhmale
5. Adv. Anita Shirurkar

Jalna, is an industrial town connected with various cities through the railways. In this district comprised of 8 blocks, the first Covid patient was found on 5th April 2020, at Dukhhinagar, Jalna. Up until 13th August 2021, the total number of Covid patients had reached 61,633 while 1,182 persons had lost their lives to the pandemic.

176 children lost parents

In the survey conducted by the administration, 165 children were found to have lost one of their parents to the pandemic. Besides this, 11 children have lost both their parents to the pandemic. The administration's survey still continues at the village level, thus these numbers are expected to rise. Moreover, 415 women have lost their husbands.

125 children benefitted from child care schemes

Currently, documents of 125 children have been completed and they are receiving the benefits from various child care schemes of the government. Information of more children is still being collated. 3 children who have lost both parents will be receiving Rs.5 lakh each as financial assistance from the government. These proposals have been submitted for implementation.

Task Force

A decision to establish district-level Task Forces was taken through a Government resolution dated 7th May 2021, in order to help in the process of making arrangements for protection and care of children who had lost their parents to the pandemic well as to protect their rights. Accordingly, a task force was appointed under the leadership of the District Collector of Beed. So far 2 meetings of the task force have been conducted. A fortnightly review of the task force is conducted. So far, 2 meetings of the Task Force have been conducted.

State of Children's Homes

Jalna district has 2 government and 4 non-government children's homes. Currently there are 10 children residing in the government children's home and 1 observation home. They are provided

with all facilities by the government. These children's homes also have counsellors who extended their services for children who had lost their parents due to the pandemic, along with counselling the children in the children's homes.

29 child-marriages stopped

29 child marriages have been stopped in Jalna during Covid times. The Childline, helpline for children, has been extremely helpful for this. Besides this, village-level committees are also monitoring the situation in the villages. The team comprising of District Women and Child Development Officer Surekha Londhe, Probationary Officer Sanjay Kalambe, District Child Protection Officer Gajanan Ingle, Protection Officer Sanjay Chavan, Social Worker Vinod Tavade, Counsellor Surekha Satpute, Field Worker Renuka Chavan, Data analyst Pratibha Suradkar have been working for this relentlessly.

6. Nanded (HDI - 0.657 - low)

Child Welfare Committee – (current CWC operational since April 2018)

1. Prof. Niranjankaur Swarupsingh Sardar – Chairperson (Mobile no. 9890103972)
2. Adv. Savitri Joshi
3. Adv. Ganeshlal Joshi
4. Dr. Surekha Kalantri

Nanded is situated in the basin of the Godavari River to the South East of Maharashtra. It has 16 blocks. Until 20th April 2020, Nanded did not have even one Covid positive patient. It was therefore a part of the Green Zone. But on 22nd April 2020, one patient was identified in the Peer Burhan area of Nanded and the numbers gradually increased till even the rural parts of Nanded were affected by the pandemic. Up until 13th August 2021, the total number of Covid patients had reached 91,242 while 2,659 persons had lost their lives to the pandemic.

242 children lost their parents

On the background of Covid-19, the administration carried out a survey in which 242 children in Nanded were found to have lost at least one parent. 6 children had lost both parents. These include from Dharmabad (1), Mukhed (1) and Nanded (3). The members of the CWC visited these children and helped them to express their feelings. They found out the difficulties that they were facing and accordingly extended the necessary support. Some relatives also came forward to care for these children who were verified by the CWC. 120 women with children under 18 years have become single mothers.

194 children benefitted from Child Care schemes

189 proposals of children who have lost one parent and 5 proposals of children who have lost both parents have been passed by the administration so far. The remaining proposals are being dealt with expeditiously, as per the CWC Chairperson Dr. Niranjankaur.

State of Children's Homes

Nanded district has 3 children's homes. Vadipati has one observation home for boys, while Nanded has 1 observation home for girls. Loha and Nanded have one Early Childhood centre each. Currently 14 children between 0 to 6 years, and 57 children between 6 to 18 years are being taken care of.

Children were prevented from contracting Covid

In order to prevent the children from contracting Covid from the visitors coming to the Children's Home, a quarantine cell had been created. The CWC constantly monitored the situation. Regular health check-ups of the children, communication with them through virtual media, all helped in preventing them from contracting Covid.

Task Force

A decision to establish district-level Task Forces was taken through a Government resolution dated 7th May 2021, in order to help in the process of making arrangements for protection and care of children who had lost their parents to the pandemic well as to protect their rights. Accordingly, a task force was appointed under the leadership of the District Collector of Nanded on the very same day. There have been 8 meetings of the Task Force as of August 2021. Normally these

meetings are conducted on Mondays, but if there's a special issue, it can also happen on other days.

139 women rendered single

139 women in Nanded lost their husbands to the pandemic. These women are between 18 to 40 years of age. The Task Force has resolved to extend their help to these women. They will be given the benefit of various schemes like the Sanjay Gandhi Niradhar Mahila Yojana, Shravanbal Seva Rajya Nivrutti Vetan Yojana, Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Vruddhapakaal Nivrutti Vetan Yojana, Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Vidhva Nivrutti Vetan Yojana, Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Apanga Nivrutti Vetan Yojana, Centre sponsored Rashtriya Kutumb Laabh Yojana, Antyoday Yojana, Pradhanya Kutumb Labhaarthi Yojana, APL (Keshari) Shetkari Yojana, as per their eligibility.

Increased number of meetings

The CWC meetings are expected to happen 20 times per month. However, considering the large geographical area of Nanded, these meetings happen thrice a week. If there's an important issue to be discussed, meetings are convened at any time. The number of meetings increased during Covid times, moreover, the CWC members contacted the various local police stations and administrative units to understand the problems of children in those areas.

CWC overcomes challenges

During the survey, the CWC had initially faced problems in contacting the children. However the members overcame these challenges by using social media to contact the local persons in those areas. They collected information about the number of children, their class, their current status, etc. Older children in Children's Homes helped younger children in their studies. Children would get bored as there were no external visitor allowed. Hence, their studies were conducted through the Telemee program on television, to keep them entertained. Indoor games were also encouraged. The District Women and Child Development Officer Rekah Kalaam said that although the pandemic situation was stressful, but as the administration focused on conducting activities, children's interest could be sustained.

7. Osmanabad (HDI – 0.649 – low)

Child Welfare Committee - (current CWC operational since April 2018)

1. Dr. Ashruba Kadam – Chairperson (Mobile no. 9405749325)
2. Nandkishor Kolge
3. Kastura Karbhari
4. Adv. Asha Gosavi
5. Dr. Kailas Mote

The first Covid patient in Osmanabad district was found on 3rd April 2020 in Balsur village of Umarga district. Subsequently the infection reached not only the cities and towns but also to villages and settlements. Up until 13th August 2021, the total number of Covid patients had reached 65,040 with 922 active patients, while 1,438 persons had lost their lives to the pandemic.

228 children lost their parents

228 children in Osmanabad lost either one or both parents. Out of these 221 have lost their fathers while 7 children have lost both parents.

State of Children's Homes

Osmanabad has 5 schools for disabled children and 2 children's homes. 83 children have been housed in these institutions. 5 proposals of children who have lost both parents have been approved for submission to the State for financial assistance of Rs.5 Lakhs. Secretary of Legal Services informed that a Committee of legal experts has been formed who will collect information about the child's family's property and facilitate the rights of the child on this property. Moreover, 150 children's applications have been recommended to receive benefits from various child care schemes.

45 child-marriages stopped

Child-marriages had become rampant in Osmanabad district during the Covid period. The administration activated the village-level child protection committees in order to prevent this phenomenon. As a result 45 child-marriages could be stopped during Covid times.

1114 women rendered single

As per the data on 14th July 2021, 1114 women lost their husbands to the pandemic. The task force has been visiting these women and collecting their data as well as information about their children. Information about their problems, prevalence of family violence, whether their name appears in the land ownership or other property documents, is being collected and estimation about which government schemes can be applicable for their benefit, is being done.

Mental strength built through counselling

In Osmanabad district, counselling is also being done for women who have lost their husbands, along with children who have lost their parents to the pandemic. The mental strength of these women is being built up through counselling. Besides, the administration is also making arrangements for those children who need to be admitted in Children's Homes. The survey still

continues and there is a risk that the number of children having lost one or both parents, might increase further.

8. Hingoli (HDI - 0.648 - low)

Child Welfare Committee - (current CWC operational since March 2019)

1. Adv. Vaishali Deshmukh – Chairperson (Mobile no. 9881188578)
2. Prof. Vikram Jawale
3. Adv. Sambhaji Mane
4. Adv. Jaya Kardekar
5. Counsellors – Reshma Pathan, Sachin Pathade, More

Hingoli District has 5 blocks. First Covid patient in Hingoli district was found on 2nd April 2020. After infecting the towns and cities, the wave soon reached all over the rural areas.

Up until 13th August 2021, the total number of Covid patients had reached 16,020 with 390 persons had lost their lives to the pandemic. In the meantime, the survey to identify children who have lost one or both parents, still continues, and so far 123 such children have been identified. Out of these 3 children have lost both parents. V.G. Shine, the District Women and Child Development Officer who is also a member secretary of the district Task Force informed that 141 women have lost their husbands to the pandemic.

Counselling continues

The district Task Force personally visited the children who had lost their parents due to the pandemic. The District Child Protection Cell makes home visits and provides counselling to children who have lost one or both parents, the living parent, and their relatives. The number of children having lost one or both parents is likely to increase further.

Operationalization of Foster parent scheme

Hingoli district had operationalized the foster care program in October 2020, for those children who had lost their parents to the pandemic. A committee to implement this program was formed under the chairpersonship of the District Women and Child Development Officer, Vitthal Shinde. Mr. Vikram Kale, District Child Protection Officer Saraswati Korde, NGO representative Akshay Patange from Dhaan Foundation, NGO representative Meerabai Ganagae from Saath Foundation, were the members of the committee while Protection Officer (non-institutional) Jabeerkhan Pathan served as member-secretary. This committee also assisted in the care and protection of these children.

Task Force

The Task Force formed as per the Government directive in May 2021, helped in expediting the process of identifying such children who had lost one or both parents to the pandemic. Up until 13th August, the number of such children has been reported as 123. These children will be given the benefits of the child care schemes of the government. So far, 3 meetings of the task force have been conducted.

Observation Homes

19 observation homes and 3 children's homes have been registered with the Hingoli District Women and Child Development Department. Out of these, Saraswati Observation Home for Girls in Hingoli, and Shri Swami Samarth Children's Home in Khanapur Chitta were functioning. There were 20 and 16 children respectively, residing in these homes.

27 child-marriages stopped

A large population migrates from Hingoli district in search of livelihoods. The Child Protection Committees were active during Covid times in order to prevent the incidences of child-marriages. 27 child marriages were stopped between March 2020 and August 2021.

Brief Summary of number of orphaned children

During Covid times, in 8 districts of Marathwada region:

- ❑ **Total number of children who lost one or both parents : 2133**
- ❑ **Children who lost their mothers: 298, children who lost their fathers: 1770, children who lost both parents: 65**
- ❑ **Approved proposals for child care benefits: 1744**
 - ❑ **Child-marriages stopped – 304**

(The above information is as of 15th August 2021)

1. Hingoli

Stress resolved through counselling, she resolved to shape the lives of her children

A happy family in Hingoli. Husband was a private sector employee, wife was a home-maker and their two little kids. Life was indeed fulfilling. But then Covid appeared and things suddenly took a turn for the worse. Husband contracted Covid and died during treatment. The loss resulted in the wife losing her mental balance. She shaved off her head roamed the streets like a vagabond. What was to happen to those children?

When the district Task Force was conducting the survey to identify children who had lost one or both parents, they encountered this case. The task force members were moved by witnessing the situation and the state of the little ones. District Women and Child Development Officer Vitthal Shinde, District Child Protection Officer Saraswati Korde took the initiative and counselled the mother. On realizing that her maternal family can accommodate her, she was sent to stay there for a while. The maternal family members were also counselled. Her application was approved to receive the benefit of widows' pension. The woman is now recovering from her disturbed mental state. Benefits of child care schemes have also been proposed for her children. The mother now says that she has resolved to raise her children and shape their lives successfully.

2. Nanded

Innocent smiles of children at Early Childhood Centre, boosts the spirit to work harder

This is an incident from July 2021. The Task Force was conducting the survey to identify children who had lost one or both parents. After surveying the Centre, the officer entered the children's room. While enquiring about the well-being of the children, she noticed a cradle with an 8-month old baby in it, who had lost its parents to the pandemic. The officer had a sense as if the baby was looking at her from the cradle. On a closer look, she noticed the innocent smile on the baby's face and the curiosity in its eyes about the world outside. The officer had a strong urge to pick up the baby and hold it in her arms. But having been outdoors most of the day, she resisted the urge in order to prevent the baby from the risk of Covid. She was deeply touched by the baby's predicament and felt that the child had been dealt the worst of hands by destiny. She wished that at least one of its parents should have survived to comfort the baby.

While her mind was assailed with sad thoughts, a particularly bright smile from the baby boosted her spirits. She realized that her work could help in building the future of such children. District Women and Child Development Officer Rekha Kalam says that the pure and guileless smile was an inspiration to continue our work with even more passion.

Witnessed some very difficult situations, but felt gratified to provide support

When we undertook the survey in Nanded district to collect information of children who had lost their parents, the lockdown was a huge impediment. However, we overcame it and reached each and every affected family. We experienced the sense of loss of the surviving family members. We tried to build bridges with the children even in those difficult circumstances. In Mukhed block, we met a family of a mother and her four daughters. The father had passed away a few years ago. The mother had taken great pains to raise and educate the daughters after him. The eldest had trained to be a nurse. The second is studying to be an engineer. The younger two are less than 18 years of age. We also felt the anguish as they shared their grief with us. "Mother took care of us and now we won't have the opportunity to care for her", the daughters wailed. We tried to counsel and reassure them. As CWC members we had to bear witness to this grave situation. During Covid times our work not only increased but continued incessantly. Especially because our mobile numbers were published in the newspapers and displayed in public places. Thus we received phone calls all around the day and night. But we were happy that our work was in the interest of these young future citizens of the country.

- Dr. Niranjankaur Sardar, Chairperson, CWC, Nanded district

3. Parbhani

Care for the nomadic families, prevention of all children in children's homes from contracting Covid

We experienced the problems faced by children in Covid times, even more intensely than earlier. The work-load also was higher than usual. There were a number of nomadic and migrant families from out of the district, staying in make-shift huts in Parbhani city and neighbouring areas. The lockdown would not allow them any movement. We moved these families and their children, facing such difficult situation, to safer places. We provided them with sanitizers, Arsenic Album tablets, groceries and food. After caring for these families almost for a month, we were moved to tears when they left for their village.

During Covid times, when children from many government hostels, children's institutions were returning to their own homes, we did not allow 85 children from the 3 children's homes and 1 early childhood care centre to go anywhere. We cared for them. We visited them every 2 days and communicated with them personally, maintaining a safe distance. We were also daily in touch with the Superintendents of the institutions. The institutions were cleaned twice a day. Children were provided with a nutritious diet. This resulted in prevention of Covid infection for all the children. Not a single child was sick. They were not allowed to come into contact with any external persons, except the institution's staff.

The District Women and Child Development Officer Govind Andhare, District Probation Officer Vijay Narsikar, Superintendents of the institutions Ram Latpate, Vivek Nagre, Kasbekar, as well as the members of the District Child Protection Committee were all very helpful to us in this work.

- Adv. Sanjay Kekan, Chairperson, CWC, Parbhani

4. Osmanabad

Work increased manifold, but service led to satisfaction

After the Covid pandemic struck in March 2020, our Committee was more alert. We continued to regularly visit the Children's Homes in the district, handle any child-related emergencies that may arise anytime during the day or night, and manage the daily planning by working in our offices from 9.00 to 5.00. As the survey to identify children who had lost their parents in the pandemic began, our work increased tremendously. We had to collect and verify the children's documents for receiving benefits from child care schemes, keep notes, maintain daily diaries, write the proceedings, as well as conduct field visits. Attend all the meetings of the Task Force, present our work and discuss the problems faced. All members of our committee discuss every problem and take decisions unanimously. Although our work-load had increased four-times than usual, the feeling that our service was in the interest of the larger good, was very satisfying.

- Ashruba Kadam, Chairperson, CWC, Osmanabad

Study findings:

1. There exists a robust machinery for child care and protection in our State and it appears to be functioning efficiently. Same is true for Marathwada region.
2. Even in an unprecedented pandemic like Covid-19, this machinery performed to its best abilities, throughout the State as well as in Marathwada region.
3. The Child Welfare Committees, the Child Protection Committees along with the Task Forces, not only performed their assigned duties, but went a step ahead and took risks, organized various activities and used innovative methods to overcome challenges whenever necessary, and exceeded what was expected from them.
4. The number of children who have lost their parents to the pandemic might increase further.
5. As of 15th August 2021 in Marathwada there were 2133 children who had lost one of their parents and 65 children who had lost both parents.
6. Applications of 1744 children have been finalized to receive the benefit of Child Care schemes.
7. As of 13th August 2021 in Marathwada, there are 1600 women rendered single due to the pandemic.
8. 304 child-marriages were stopped in Marathwada during the pandemic. Their district-wise distribution is as follows:
Aurangabad (maximum) – 62, Osmanabad – 45, Nanded – 45, Beed – 40, Parbhani – 21, Hingoli- 27, Jalna – 29, Latur – 35
9. The village-level Child Protection Committees also have an important contribution towards stopping these child-marriage incidences, along with the District Child Welfare Committees.
10. Anganwadi workers, ASHA workers were an important source of information in the survey conducted to identify children who had lost one or both parents in the pandemic. Anganwadi workers who continuous pay home-visits in the village, were easily able to obtain this information.
11. In several districts, the benefit of child-care schemes has not yet been reached the children. After sufficient financial provisions are made, this amount will be directly credited to their accounts. More than 200 children's applications could not be processed due to lack of appropriate documents like age proof. This is one of the reasons for the delay in receiving the child-care benefits.
12. After a child-marriage is stopped, it is expected that it is reported to the CWC and there is regular follow-up with the concerned family. However, it has been observed that sometimes this information is not communicated to the CWC.
13. The administration, CWCs as well as voluntary organizations work to solve the problems of children and to help children in difficult situations. However, this is not supplemented with public participation. It is necessary that citizens actively engage themselves in preventing social evils like child-marriages and child labour, and extend their help in bringing these children in mainstream education.

❖ Valuable contribution by Childline

Childline is a helpline that works for children in need of care and protection. A phone call on the number 1098, can bring the coordinators in that area rushing to rescue. Childline has a valuable role to play in preventing child-marriages, help to orphans, prevention of immoral trafficking, child labour, sexual abuse, child beggary, etc. Even during Covid times, members of all the district-level centres of Childline extended their valuable support to the District Child Welfare Committees. Successful coordination between these two agencies enabled valuable and timely support to various children in need of care and protection.

❖ Honorarium to Child Welfare Committees

As per the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act, the honorarium to CWCs is provided for in the Centre-sponsored Integrated Child Protection Scheme. Until 2015, the members were awarded an honorarium of Rs.500/- per meeting. The instructions were to conduct at least 20 meetings per month. As per revised guidelines of ICPS, the honorarium of the members has been increased to Rs.1500 per meeting. However, the number of minimum meetings was brought down to 12 per month, when in fact, the JJ Act has approved 20 meetings per month. Finally, the government has considered the provision in the Act as the norm, and has agreed to provide for the honorarium for 20 meetings per month. There is often delay in paying the honorarium; this process needs to be streamlined.

Recommendations :

1. People's participation is necessary

Information about children who have lost their parents in pandemic needs to be collated expeditiously. For this purpose, it is necessary to create awareness about this in the society at large and increase people's participation in the process. Especially in rural areas, eligible children may be deprived of their benefits due lack of knowledge about government's child-care schemes. Moreover, if there is delay in reaching the children who have lost their parents, their physical as well as mental well-being may deteriorate further.

2. Every instance of child-marriage has to be reported to the CWC

Initially, all the child-marriage instances are reported to the local Police. However, it has been observed that the parents and other concerned persons in this matter are not produced before the CWC as per rule. After a child-marriage is stopped, the CWC continues to follow up with the family and also takes a letter of guarantee from them. Therefore it is necessary that every such incidence be reported to the CWC. Instructions to this effect need to be issued to local Police Stations as well as to the administration.

3. Indication about how many children in a family can receive the benefit

The machinery visited a family in Bamni, Osmanabad district, to give them the due benefits, where both parents had been lost to the pandemic. Here, it was observed that there were 7 children in the family. As there is no clarity about how many children in a single family can receive the child-care benefit, only 2 children were given approval to receive the benefit. Thus, clear instructions to be disseminated about this issue.

4. Need to activate the village-level Child Protection Committees

It appears that there are still many villages where the Child Protection Committee has not been formed. Moreover, wherever they exist, they seem to be almost non-functional. Thus, it is important to activate all these committees for effective prevention of child marriages.

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