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ATTITUDE AND AWARENESS TOWARDS CHILD RIGHTS AMONG TEACHERS AT SECONDARY LEVEL IN WEST BENGAL

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Abstract

The idea of child rights emerged in the 20th century. Child rights are a pertinent and significant issue not only in India but also across the globe. The study aimed to evaluate the level of attitude and awareness of teachers at the secondary level towards child rights. This study also compares the attitude and awareness of teachers at the secondary level towards child rights based on gender and locale. The investigators have chosen 210 teachers from ten schools, which are situated in Nadia and Hooghly districts of W.B., as a sample for conducting the study. The 'descriptive survey method' was used, and it was quantitative in nature for the current investigation. The result indicated that only 18.57% of teachers have a highly favourable attitude, and only 21.43% of teachers at the secondary level have a high awareness of child rights based on locale and gender. Additionally, insignificantly differs in the teachers' attitude towards child rights based on locale, but there exists a significantly differs based on gender. Similarly, there exists insignificantly differs in the teachers' awareness based on locality and gender. The result indicates that there is a necessity for enhanced awareness regarding child rights among teachers.

Keywords: Child, Child Rights, Human Rights, Secondary School Teachers, UNCRC.

1. Introduction

The idea of child rights emerged in the 20th century (Chopra, 2015, p. 11; Bajpai, 2017, p. 1). Child rights are a pertinent and significant issue not only in India but also across the globe. Children are the most impacted and vulnerable segment of society (Gupta & Lata, 2013). The escalating trend of human rights violations and misuse of children, including child labour, substance abuse, sexual assault, child trafficking, and pornography, is concerning. From this

lens, a significant concern confronting India and the world is the safeguarding of children's fundamental human rights. The rights approach is encapsulated in the 'United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child' (UNCRC) 1989, a significant milestone in global 'human rights' law. India adopted the declaration in December 1992. The '86th Amendment of the Indian Constitution', 'Article 21-A', states that "guarantees free and compulsory education for all children in the age group of six to fourteen years as a fundamental right".

'Child rights' are basic freedoms and intrinsic rights of all individuals under 18 years (Gupta & Lata, 2013). It is embedded in each child, regardless of "race, colour, sex, creed, or other status" of the child's parents. Again, Shah, Shrestha, & Thapa (2016); Lansdown (2005); and Sah et al. (2022) assert that child rights encompass human rights specifically tailored to minors, emphasizing the rights to safeguarding and care, which involves their right to a relationship with parents, human identity, and fundamental needs. UNCRC has defined "child rights as the minimum entitlements and freedoms that should be afforded to every citizen below the age of 18 regardless of race, national origin, colour, gender, language, religion, opinions, origin, wealth, birth status, disability, or other characteristics" (Amala & Sheena, 2020). The 'Convention on the Rights of the Child' (CRC) 1990 includes the entirety of 'human rights'— 'civil, political, economic, social, and cultural'—and asserts that the respect and safeguarding of all children's rights are fundamental for the all-round development of each person within an environment of 'freedom, dignity, and justice' (UNESCO, 1995, p. 1). In this regard, Justice V.R. Krishna asserts that it's our duty to the next generation to provide "all opportunities for each child to develop their personality and achieve their full potential— "physically, morally, mentally, and spiritually" and it's the inherent right of each child to seek justice (Amala & Sheena, 2020).

Children's rights have been delineated as entitlements that must be regarded for the welfare of the child, facilitating their healthy growth in a free and dignified manner across physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual aspects, within the confines of legal regulations (Akyuz, 2016). Another way these rights are explained is as entitlements established to safeguard children from various forms of exploitation, disregard, and abuse (Ertas, Batmaz & Kilic, 2022). Gupta & Lata (2013) stated that, although the presence of rights, children endure "poverty, homelessness, abuse, neglect, preventable illnesses", and inequitable opportunity to education and judicial process that fail to acknowledge their unique needs. The UNCRC delineates fundamental human rights entitled to children, categorised into four

comprehensive classifications encompassing all ‘civil, political, societal, economic, and cultural rights’ of each child:

- a) Survival rights: It encompasses the child’s ‘right to survival’ and the fundamental necessities for existence, including food, shelter, clothes, health, an appropriate standard of living, and accessibility to medical services. It also involves the right to identity and ‘nationality’ (Bajpai, 2017, p. 27; Amala & Sheena, 2020).
- b) Development right: It encompasses the ‘right to education’, ‘early childhood care and development’, societal safety, leisure and play, cultural activities, and all-round development— ‘emotional, mental, and physical’ (Amala & Sheena, 2020; Gupta & Lata, 2013).
- c) Protection rights: Assure the safety of children from any type of ‘abuse, neglect, and exploitation’, with particular attention to ‘refugee children’; implement safeguards for children within the criminal legal procedure; provide special protection in situations such as emergencies and armed conflict, as well as safeguarding and rehabilitation for children who suffered from any form of misuse or abuse (Bajpai, 2017, p. 27; Amala & Sheena, 2020).
- d) Participation rights: It includes children’s liberty of expressing opinions, access to suitable information, and participation and freedom of thinking, belief, and religion (Bajpai, 2017, p. 27; Amala & Sheena, 2020).

2. Review of Literature

Shah, Shrestha & Thapa (2016) found that most primary school teachers were sufficient knowledge and a favourable attitude regarding child rights. Additionally, there was a connection between attitude and teaching experience. Sathiyaraj & Jayaraman (2013) mentioned that only 27% of teachers in primary school was high awareness of child rights. Also, no significantly differs among teachers in relation to gender and locale. Again, Singh & Verma (2013) found that most of the teachers at primary school was an average level of awareness towards child rights. Sah, et. al., (2022) indicated that teachers at private school had a higher level of understanding about child rights than government school. Also, there exists a meaningful relationship between ‘knowledge and ethnicity, religion and information’ among teachers at private school. Deb et al., (2016) stated that need for societal awareness regarding child rights and punishments for violations of child rights. Sarathy & Veliappan (2019) found a meaningful variation in parents’ awareness regarding child rights in terms of gender, locality, and educational qualification.

3. Rationale of the Study

Children embody innocence, trust, and happiness of joy. The ‘National Child Policy’ (1974) designated children as the ‘supreme national asset’. Children have a crucial role in the present and future of the ‘country’. ‘Child rights’ are basic freedoms and intrinsic rights of all individuals under 18 years. Education has a crucial role in safeguarding not only ‘child rights’ but also ‘universal human rights’. The ‘World Health Organisation’ (WHO) reports that annually, 40 million children under 15 years suffer from familial abuse or neglect severe enough to necessitate medical intervention (Chopra, 2015, p. 22). In addition to being a desirable social investment for the future of the country, investing in children is a step towards ensuring that each child’s rights are fulfilled (ibid., p. 28). India holds the biggest child population globally. As per the 2011 Census, India has 158.7 million children aged 0–6 years, approximately 16 percent of the overall population (Government of India, 2015). Approximately 40% of children in India are susceptible to or enduring adverse conditions, including those lacking familial support, subjected to labour exploitation, abused, or trafficked, living on the streets, vulnerable due to various factors, affected by “drug abuse, armed conflict, civil unrest, or natural disasters, as well as those who, due to their circumstances, have committed criminal offences” and encountered legal issues (ibid., p. 29). So, ‘survival, growth, development, and protection’ of these substantial populations require special emphasis (Government of India, 2011). From this backdrop, teachers play a critical role in safeguarding the rights of children. Teachers can exert a substantial and favorable influence on children’s lives through both formal and informal interactions. The awareness regarding child rights among teachers is crucial. Therefore, from this lens, these propositions are justified and require a depth study. Therefore, in this context, the study has arisen.

4. Statement of the Problem

Ascertaining the justification of the study, several research objectives arose in the mind of the investigators. The investigators were interested in addressing all enquiries under the overarching theme of “Attitude and Awareness towards Child Rights among Teachers at Secondary Level in West Bengal”.

5. Objectives of the Study

- i. To examine the level of attitude of teachers at the secondary level towards child rights.
- ii. To examine the level of awareness of teachers at the secondary level towards child rights.
- iii. To compare the teachers' attitude at the secondary level towards child rights based on gender and locale.
- iv. To compare the awareness of teachers at the secondary level towards child rights based on gender and locale.

6. Hypothesis

- i. There is no significantly differs in the attitude between male and female teachers at the secondary level towards child rights.
- ii. There is no significantly differs in the attitude between urban and rural teachers at the secondary level towards child rights.
- iii. There is no significantly differs in the awareness between male and female teachers at the secondary level towards child rights.
- iv. There is no significantly differs in the awareness between urban and rural teachers at the secondary level towards child rights.

7. Definition of Important Terms and Concepts in the Study

Child: As per 'UNCRC' (1989), "a child means every human being below the age of 18 years, unless the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier".

Child Rights: In this work, child rights are used as the 'right to survival, protection, development, and participation' as given in the UNCRC (1989), as well as provisions of the Indian government on the rights of the child.

Secondary Level Teachers: In this work, 'Secondary Level Teachers' refer to teachers teaching classes IX and X in 'secondary schools' affiliated with the 'West Bengal Board of Secondary Education' (WBBSE).

8. Delimitation of the Study

To conduct the study, the investigators had delimited to investigation in the following way:

- The investigation was delimited to Nadia and Hooghly districts of West Bengal (W.B.).

- The study was restricted to the secondary school teachers in Nadia and Hooghly districts of W.B., and only schools affiliated with WBBSE.

9. Method and Materials

The ‘descriptive survey method’ was accepted, and it was quantitative in nature for the current investigation. The current researchers employed two categories – ‘Independent variable’: Gender – (‘Male and Female’), Locale - (‘Urban and Rural’), and ‘Dependent variables’ (attitude & awareness towards child rights).

Tools Used

For the current research, the following scales were constructed by the present researchers-

- **Attitude Scale:**

An ‘Attitude Scale for teachers’ regarding child rights was constructed by the current researchers. It was prepared on a ‘5-point scale’, i.e., “Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD)”. It was a bipolar scaling process to reveal ‘positive or negative’ responses to each item. It comprises 37 items distributed in four areas – “Survival rights, Development rights, Protection rights, and Participation rights”. This scale’s reliability score was 0.79 utilizing ‘Cronbach’s alpha’ via ‘SPSS 22.0 versions’, and ‘content validity’ was proved with the assistance of distinguished specialists in the education subject.

- **Awareness Scale:**

An ‘Awareness Scale for teachers’ regarding child rights using a ‘Likert 5-point’ scale was constructed by the current investigators. These tools were prepared on 5 points, such as: “Properly Aware (PA), Aware (A), More or Less Aware (M/LA), Poor Aware (PA), and Very Poor Aware (VPA)”. The standardized tool consists of 35 items distributed in four dimensions – “Survival rights, Development rights, Protection rights, and Participation rights”. This scale’s reliability score was 0.81 utilizing ‘Cronbach’s alpha’ via ‘SPSS 22.0 versions’, and ‘content validity’ was proved with the assistance of eminent specialists in the education subject.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The ‘population of the study’ comprises all teachers teaching in class IX and X of ‘secondary schools’ in W.B. The investigators have chosen 210 teachers from ten schools, which are situated in Nadia and Hooghly districts of W.B., as a sample for conducting the study.

Techniques of Analysis

Quantitative data for analysis was utilized. After the collection of data, it was analysed via ‘SPSS 22.0 versions’, and several statistical methods, i.e., “Mean, Standard Deviation (S.D.), and t-test”, were utilized in this work. The t-value’s significance was evaluated at the ‘0.05 level’.

10. Data Analysis and Interpretation

- i. To examine the level of teachers’ attitude at the secondary level towards child rights.

Table 1: Level of attitude of teachers towards child rights

Level	Range of Scores	Response of Teachers
High Favorable	Above 164.43	39 (18.57%)
Favorable	Between 139.58-164.43	116 (55.24%)
Unfavorable	Below 139.58	55 (26.19%)
Total		210(100%)

Table 1 revealed that only 39% of school teachers have a highly favorable attitude, remaining near about 55.24% of school teachers show an average level of attitude, and 26.19% of school teachers show an unfavorable attitude.

- ii. To examine the level of awareness of teachers at the secondary level towards child rights.

Table 2: Level of awareness of teachers towards child rights

Level	Range of Scores	Response of Teachers
High Aware	Above 158.42	45 (21.43%)
Average Aware	Between 133.99-158.42	140 (66.67%)
Poor Aware	Below 133.99	25 (11.90%)
Total		210 (100%)

Table 2 revealed that only 21.43% of teachers have a higher level of awareness, about 66.67% of school teachers show an average level of awareness, and 11.90% of school teachers show a poor level of awareness.

- iii. To compare the attitude of teachers at the secondary level towards child rights based on gender and locale.

Table 3: Comparison of the teachers' attitude towards child rights based on gender and locale

Variable	Sub-group	N	Average	S.D.	t-value	df	Sig.
Gender	Male	118	152.24	12.557	.306	208	.760*
	Female	92	151.71	12.316			
Locale	Urban	109	157.42	10.232	7.349	208	.000**
	Rural	101	146.16	11.961			

* Insignificant, ** Significant

Based on the mean variation in the male and female teachers' attitudes regarding child rights, it was insignificantly found. As a result, the H_01 has been adopted. In this regard, gender does not an important factor influencing the average variations in attitudes toward child rights. On the other side, based on the mean variation in the attitudes towards child rights between urban and rural teachers, it was found significant. As a result, the H_02 has been rejected. In this regard, locale is a significant factor influencing the average variations in attitudes toward child rights.

- iv. To compare the awareness of teachers at the secondary level towards child rights based on gender and locale.

Table 4: Comparison of the teachers' awareness towards child rights based on gender and locale

Variable	Sub-group	N	Average	S.D.	t-value	df	Sig.
Gender	Male	129	146.84	12.681	.954	208	.341*
	Female	81	145.19	11.446			
Locale	Urban	112	145.18	12.273	-1.297	208	.196*
	Rural	98	147.37	12.112			

*Insignificant

Based on the mean variation in the male and female teachers' awareness regarding child rights amongst, it was insignificantly found. As a result, the H_03 has been adopted. In this regard, gender does not an important factor influencing the average variations in attitudes toward child rights. Other hand, based on the mean variation in the awareness towards child

rights between urban and rural teachers, it was found insignificant. As a result, the H₀₄ has been accepted. In this regard, locale is not a significant factor influencing the average variations in awareness toward child rights.

11. Findings Briefly

The results of this investigation are the following:

- The result showed that only 18.57% of teachers at the secondary level have a highly favourable attitude about child rights based on locale and gender.
- The result indicated that only 21.43% of teachers at the secondary level have a high awareness of child rights based on locale and gender.
- Considering the mean difference, urban area teachers have a more favourable attitude regarding child rights, and it insignificantly differs based on locality, while male teachers show a slightly more positive attitude towards child rights, and it significantly differs based on gender.
- Considering the mean difference, rural area teachers have a more positive awareness towards child rights, and it insignificantly differs based on locality, while male teachers show a slightly more positive awareness towards child rights, and it insignificantly differs based on gender.

12. Conclusion

In the 21st century, 'child rights' is a central issue in the world, and India is no exception. Children are universally recognized as the most important asset in any nation. Awareness and understanding about child safety are most relevant in modern society, where the incidence of 'child abuse' and violations of child rights is growing significantly every day (Deb, 2018). A proper understanding among teachers regarding child rights would improve the quality of life for all children. The results indicated that only 18.57% of teachers have a highly favourable attitude about child rights, and only 21.43% of teachers have a high awareness of child rights based on locale and gender. On the other hand, urban-area teachers have a more favourable attitude regarding child rights than rural teachers, and no significant variation based on locality. Similarly, male teachers show a slightly more positive attitude towards child rights than female teachers, and there exists a meaningful variation based on gender. Again, rural-area teachers have a more positive awareness regarding child rights than urban-area teachers, and no significant variation exists based on locality. Similarly, while male teachers show a

slightly more positive awareness towards child rights than female teachers, and no meaningful variation based on gender. Therefore, the results indicate that teachers need to acquire adequate knowledge on child rights. In this regard, various programs, such as seminars, conferences, workshops, etc., can be organized to increase awareness about child rights among teachers. Therefore, the government must take an active role in promoting child rights awareness among teachers.

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