

# **Systematic Review of Institutional Mechanisms for Child Protection in India: Roles, Challenges, and Best Practices**

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## **Abstract**

The networks of institutional mechanisms that were established under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act and the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) facilitate child protection in India. These institutions include Child Welfare Committees (CWCs), Juvenile Justice Boards (JJBs), District Child Protection Units (DCPUs) and other related structures that maintain the rights and welfare of children. The paper is a systematic literature review, as it follows the PRISMA framework to examine works published between 2010 and 2025 and investigate the roles, challenges, and best practices of these institutional mechanisms. Relevant literature has been identified using Google Scholar, Scopus, and official government and NGO reports. The review presents three main findings: (1) institution plays a central role in case management, rehabilitation, and inter-agency coordination; (2) a lack of enough resources, training, and weak monitoring systems are recurrent challenges; and (3) promising results are obtained by innovative practices, including community-based protection, rights-based models. The paper concludes that though India has developed an elaborate child protection system, its effectiveness is dependent on capacity building, better coordination and increased involvement of social work professionals. The review is highly informative to policy makers, practitioners and researchers who want to enhance the institutional child protection systems in India.

**Keywords:** Child Protection, Institutional Mechanisms, PRISMA, Juvenile Justice Act, Social work

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## **I. Introduction**

Child protection refers to the set of measures and institutional structures that are put in place to prevent and address violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect of children to ensure their survival, development, and rights to participate. It forms part and parcel of the social welfare policy and practice, where the aim is to protect the right of all children to live in a safe and healthy environment. In modern India, child protection has shifted towards a rights-based and institutional paradigm in lieu of the charity-based welfare approach, in that children have been viewed as persons with inherent rights advocated by both national and international legal frameworks (Menezes, 2009). This development highlights the transformation of humanitarian aid to a more established, rights-based one, which is consistent with the discourses of child protection at the global level. In India, the initiative of child protection is deeply entrenched in the constitution, especially articles 15 (3), 24, 39(e) and 39(f), which provide the necessity to safeguard the rights of children against abuse and exploitation. These constitutional requirements work as the main law of the other statutory and regulatory actions of protecting the vulnerable groups. Over the years, the child welfare system in India has been influenced by several social reform movements, legislative acts and policy interventions, all of which aimed to protect the vulnerable children against neglect, child labour and exploitation. This evolution of these protective mechanisms is an effort that is cumulative to ensure that child welfare is institutionalised on various levels of governance. The initial efforts in child protection were mostly affected by welfare schemes of the colonial period, religious organisations, and voluntary organisations, who sheltered and gave relief to the poor and orphaned children (Pachau & Sarathy, 2015). The attempts of this era were marked by an entirely philanthropic tendency and with little legal support. After gaining independence, there was a dramatic paradigm shift as it was based on rights instead of welfare. This became very compatible with the international acknowledgement of child rights as stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which India signed in 1992. This international obligation forced the Indian state to strengthen its legislative and institutional framework, thus considering the multifactorial aspects of child protection with a focus on prevention, rehabilitation, and reintegration. In India, modern-day child protection is a combination of both curative and preventive care in an effort to not only prevent the occurrence of harm but also provide a responsive measure to any violations. This is a complete strategy that goes beyond the legal requirements, which is a social responsibility of

the state, family, society, and the professionals involved in social work and other related fields.

### **1.1 Institutional Mechanisms for Child Protection in India**

India has developed a system of institutional mechanisms in order to streamline the successful adoption of child rights and child protection strategies as detailed by the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 and the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS). These organisations work on national, state, and district levels to offer care, protection, and rehabilitation services to needy children. Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) are the main body to deal with matters touching on the children requiring care and protection. They also make sure that such children get good places of refuge, education, and rehabilitation. CWCs are pseudo-judicial bodies that issue decisions that are in the best interest of the child, and thus, they promote the principles of child-friendly justice. The Juvenile Justice Boards (JJBs), on the contrary, deal with children who are in opposition to the law. They give preference to restorative justice over punishment, with emphasis on counselling, rehabilitation and social reintegration. District Child Protection Units (DCPUs) are coordinating units at the district level and provide the implementation of the child protection programme, institutions surveillance, and inter-agency coordination. Childline 1098, a 24-hour helpline service, is an emergency response system for children in distress, which connects them to CWCs, the police and the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to respond instantly. In addition, the State Commissions on Protection of Child Rights (SCPCRs) and the National Commission on Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) are the bodies that regulate policy development, resolving grievances, and controlling child protection levels in institutions. Nanjunda (2023) notes that these institutions create a solid framework of law and administration to protect children; this success largely relies on coordination, sufficient funding, and staff training. The institutional gaps often lead to the ineffectiveness of response, lack of sufficient rehabilitation, and lack of psychosocial support, which undermines the overall system of protection.

### **1.2 Rationale for the Review**

Although there is a large amount of research and official reports that have been conducted on the operations of child protection institutions in India, there is no explicit and detailed synthesis of their effectiveness, operational issues and best practices. The literature to date

tends to focus on individual institutions, region-specific analyses, or statutory frameworks, without coming up with a unifying framework. As a result, policymakers and practitioners do not have unified evidence that can inform reforms and improve service delivery. Moreover, insufficiency of empirical evidence on coordination between CWCs, JJBs, DCPUs, and related bodies disrupts the evaluation of the effectiveness of the general child protection system in India. In order to both generalise scattered evidence, identify trends in the literature and isolate recurring challenges and innovations, a systematic literature review is thus necessary. This kind of enquiry may fill knowledge gaps, provide information about institutional operations and enlighten successful strategies which may be replicated or scaled across regions.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The research aims at synthesising any available evidence on the functions, problems and good practices of institutional mechanisms in protecting children in India by conducting a systematic literature review. The review aims to examine peer-reviewed studies, governmental publications, and reports by non-governmental organisations published in the last 10-25 years to gain a comprehensive view of how the institutions operate to ensure the protection of the rights of children. Bhushan (2025) explains that even with the elaborate legal frameworks in India, there have been challenges of implementation because of structural and administrative inefficiencies, inter-agency cooperation, and monitoring. Combining the findings of international research, including that of Isokuortti et al. (2020) assessing the usefulness of structured child protection models, the review is also aimed at making comparisons between the best practices in the international sphere and the Indian setting. Overall, the goal of this paper is to critically analyse how institutional mechanisms in India can be reinforced to have a more responsive, coordinated and rights-based child protection system based on the principles of social work ethics and evidence-based practice.

## **II. Objectives of the Review**

The paper is a systematic review that tries to critically analyse and synthesise the available literature on child protection institutional mechanisms in India, with a specific focus on the roles of the mechanisms, challenges, and best practices of the mechanisms. The review aims to synthesise evidence based on both national and international research so as to provide an overall picture of how institutional frameworks operate, existing gaps and gaps, as well as to

offer a possible course of action to improve the situation by providing robust models and knowledgeable suggestions.

### **2.1 To identify and analyse the key roles of institutional mechanisms in ensuring child protection in India**

The child protection system in the Indian context is based on institutional mechanisms, including the Child Welfare Committees (CWCs), Juvenile Justice Boards (JJBs), State Commissions for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCRs) and District Child Protection Units (DCPUs). This objective focuses on determining their legal mandate, their administrative duties and their functions in ensuring that children are not abused, neglected and exploited. According to Sharma (2024), it is essential to have awareness of the stakeholders, inter-agency coordination, and timely responsiveness to respond to child abuse that occurs in families. In turn, the examination of such roles assists in determining the way in which institutions implement child protection laws and how they can hold them accountable.

### **2.2 To examine challenges faced by these institutions in the effective implementation**

Despite the existence of a strong legal framework, the institutional structures of India do face major challenges in terms of the policy-to-practice translation. These obstacles include a lack of adequate human resources, a lack of specialised training, too high caseloads, delays in the procedures, which is typical of bureaucracy and a lack of inter-departmental coordination. Similar struggles faced by the social workers in South Africa are captured by Sibanda and Lombard (2015) in their report, which is similar to that in India, especially in areas including limited resources, role confusion, and burnout among child protection professionals. A fundamental analysis of these hindrances provides a cutting-edge insight into institutional weaknesses that hinder the realisation of the rights and welfare of children.

### **2.3 To highlight best practices and successful models from existing literature**

This goal will include the identification of evidence-based models and strategies that have been proven to enhance child protection outcomes. The literature in international studies has shown that institutional efficiency is stimulated through a structured pattern of practice, early intervention programmes and community-based involvement. According to the systematic

review by Isokuortti et al. (2020), such models of practice as Signs of Safety, Reclaiming Social Work, and other integrated models based on the focus on partnership with families, strengths-based assessment, and multi-disciplinary cooperation are effective. The lessons learned with these successful models can give an idea of what can be applied to India in its context in the socio-legal environment.

#### **2.4 To suggest recommendations for strengthening institutional frameworks and social work practice in this field**

The objective of this review is to provide evidence-based solutions to improve the child protection mechanism in India. This is done by assessing the quality of the current structures and the depth of the structure, and where reforms are necessary. As Finan et al. (2018) emphasise, the practice frameworks should be dynamic, comprehensive, and supportable with explicit theoretical frameworks to ensure effective and reliable child-protection responses at all times. Based on this, this review seeks to recommend solutions that enhance professional capacity, optimise inter-agency, and encourage preventive and child-centred practices through institutional processes.

Together, the objectives aim to bridge the gap between policy making and execution by explaining the working of the institutional mechanisms, the challenges they encounter, and which best practices in the globe can be used to influence their improvement. By so doing, the review has the potential to advance the knowledge, policy, and practice in child protection in India.

### **III. Methodology**

This systematic review aims to synthesise previously existing research on the topic of institutional mechanisms of child protection in India into one coherent synthesis. By relying on the published research, state publications, and NGO reports, this review intends to present a careful overview of the presented evidence of the functions, difficulties, and excellent practices of child protection institutions. The review reveals gaps in the need for further research, as it systematically summarises the results of numerous sources to explore the areas where the evidence is sufficiently founded. Such a method would provide a full and systematic expression of the literature, enlighten policy, social work practice, and the agenda of future research, as well as augment the transparency, rigour, and reliability of the results.

### **3.1 Data Sources**

To have a holistic and representative corpus of literature, this review used several electronic databases and institutional repositories. Google Scholar, Scopus, and ResearchGate academic databases were methodically searched to find peer-reviewed journal articles, empirical research, and other scholarly publications within the field of child protection in India. Such databases offer a vast level of coverage of the research in the field of social work, child welfare and related social sciences, allowing one to consider a wide range of methodological directions and perspectives. Besides academic literature, official reports and policy documents on behalf of governmental and non-governmental agencies were included to get the practical, policy-oriented, and institutional point of view. The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), dealing with the promotion of child protection programs, the UNICEF, which delivers nation-wide and country-specific child welfare statistics, and the National Commission of Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), which controls and assesses the work of child protection institutions in India, were considered as the key sources. The synthesis of academic and official reports allowed seeing the whole picture of institutional roles, challenges, and best practices, incorporating both information and practical findings. This multi-source method added validity, credibility and applicability to the review so that the research has a foundation on scholarly analysis and real-world experience in the institution.

### **3.2 Search Terms**

The systematic review took a methodological search approach in order to identify relevant literature. The major search terms included child protection India, Child Welfare Committee (CWC), Juvenile Justice Board (JJB) and Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS), institutional mechanisms, and child rights. These terms have been combined using the Boolean operators to make sure that the studies that discussed the issues of institutional roles, challenges, and best practices in child protection are retrieved. The search was performed in a chosen range of databases and official reports, which allowed a scope for including scholarly research and policy-related publications. This was an extensive way of reducing the chances of missing relevant studies.

### **3.3 Inclusion Criteria**

Inclusion criteria were clearly defined to make sure that the systematic review is relevant, methodologically sound, and applicable in context. First, the publications issued after 2010 were included, thus covering modern practices, policies, and research findings of Indian child protection. Second, the review selected only studies carried out in the country to indicate the institutional, legal, as well as socio-cultural context in India. Third, peer-reviewed journal articles, governmental reports, and publications published by the recognised NGOs have been used as sources to ensure that the evidence was credible and authoritative. Lastly, the studies that were included were restricted to those published in the English language, which made it easy to interpret and synthesise them. Together, these criteria make sure that the review incorporates high-quality, contextually applicable evidence that could make a difference in policy as well as social work practice.

### **3.4 Exclusion Criteria**

Research works were excluded in cases where they did not meet the inclusion criteria. This included studies done beyond the Indian borders, and these studies would not be a true mirror of the Indian child protection system. Further, non-scholarly sources, e.g., blogs, opinion articles, or news articles, were not used to maintain the scientific rigour and reliability of the review. Through the use of these exclusion criteria, the review reduced the effect of bias and focused on the evidence-based and relevant and credible sources that would have any useful contribution to an understanding of institutional mechanisms of child protection.

### **3.5 Review Process**

The review was conducted in a guided and clear procedure to promote rigour and replicability. Firstly, all the identified studies were screened using the title and abstract to determine their relevance to the research objectives. This step made it possible to eliminate papers that were evidently not relevant to the institutional arrangements in India to provide child protection, as well as papers about other nations or dissimilar groups. The rest of the identified eligible studies were then subjected to full-text reviews to determine their appropriateness in the inclusion criteria. In this step, the studies were selected based on the methodological quality, correspondence to the research questions, and a full report of findings. Studies that passed through all inclusion criteria were only held to be synthesised. The last step was thematic synthesis, and the information on the chosen studies was summarised and coded to determine main trends and major themes. Three main areas, i.e., the

roles of institutional mechanisms, implementation challenges, and best practices, were used as thematic categories. This method facilitated the integration of evidence collected from various sources, including peer-reviewed articles, governmental reports, and NGO publications, thereby providing a comprehensive perspective on how child protection institutions in India operate, perform, and are constrained. Transparency, credibility, and reliability of the study conclusions are increased by the systematic review process.

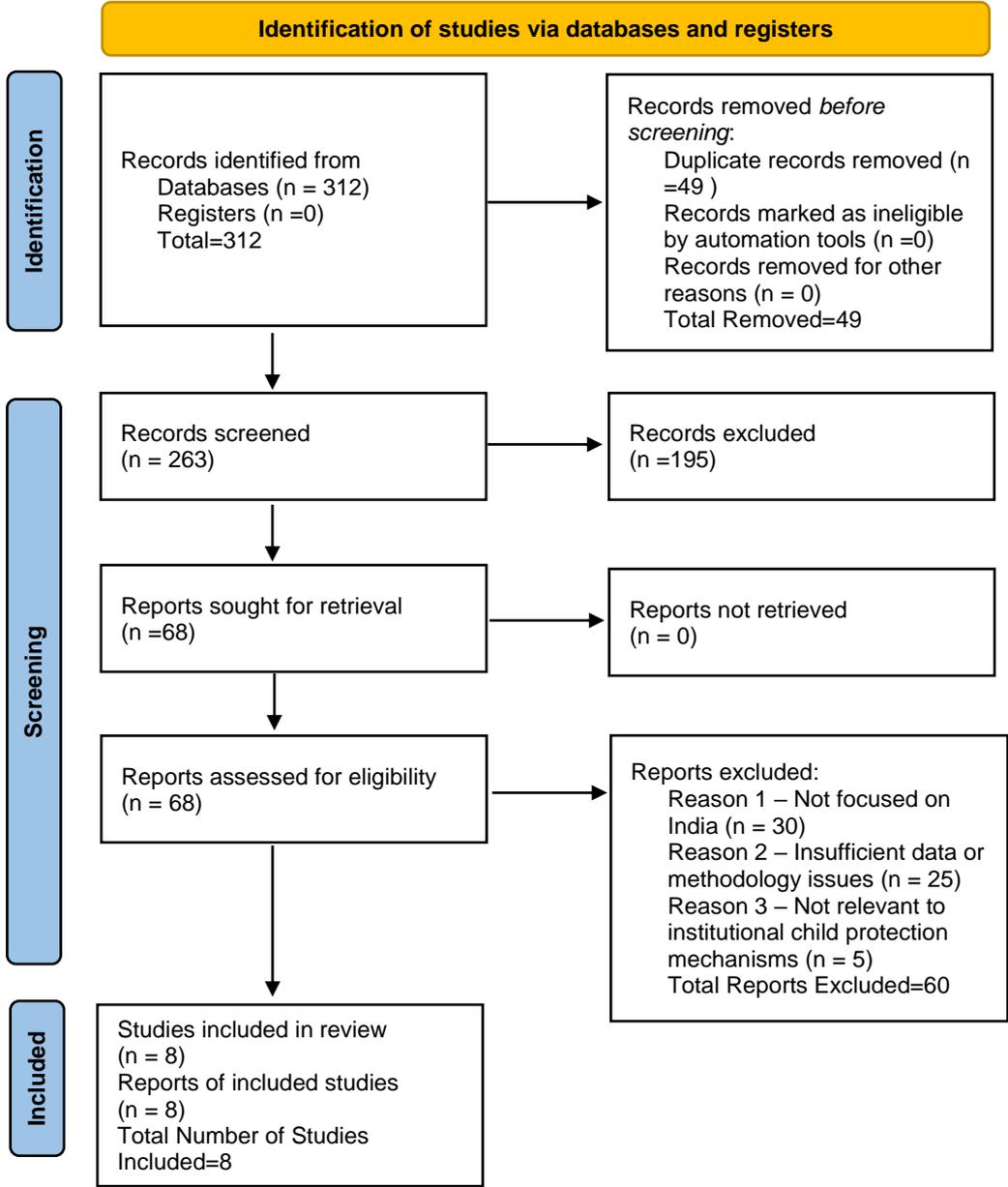
### **3.6 Data Analysis**

The thematic coding was applied to data analysis, a well-structured approach to identifying, analysing, and reporting the patterns in qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Upon the selection of the last set of studies, corresponding information from each source was identified and sorted according to the objectives of the research. The coding was done based on three main areas that included the role of institutional mechanisms in child protection, challenges the institutions have to grapple with in their implementation process, and the best or effective practices stated in the literature. Every study was carefully analysed, and the main results were identified, classified, and contrasted across the sources to ensure consistency and comprehensiveness. Thematic analysis was a source of descriptive and interpretive information, as it describes not only what is done but also the circumstances, constraints, and consequences of interventions of institutions. Trends, which were formatted by several studies, were cross-verified to determine recurrent patterns, differences and the gaps in the evidence. This process helped in systematised synthesis, which combines quantitative measurements, qualitative research and policy reports, resulting in a comprehensive understanding of institutional effectiveness. Through a rigorous thematic method, the review has managed to ensure that the conclusions made about the institutional roles, operational dilemmas, and effective practice are evidence-based, transparent, and practical, and therefore has provided viable implications to the practice of social work, policy formulation, and future studies in the Indian child protection system.

The selection of the study was based on the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items to Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) principles, as the transparency and rigour in the process of including, screening, and identifying relevant studies were ensured. The first search in the electronic databases (Google Scholar, Scopus, ResearchGate) and institutional reports (MWCD, UNICEF, NCPDR) revealed 312 records. Following the elimination of duplicates and the filtration of titles and abstracts based on relevance, 95 articles were

eliminated because of not satisfy the inclusion criteria. Eligibility was assessed on 68 articles by carrying out a full-text assessment to exclude articles based on focus, methodology, and quality. After this process, eight studies were incorporated into the ultimate review.

Figure 1 below is a PRISMA flow diagram that presents a graphical overview of the selection process of the study, which implies the number of records identified, screened, deemed eligible, and included in the synthesis. Such an organised style can guarantee transparency and replicability, as readers can follow the choice of literature and how the ultimate dataset was chosen.



**Figure 1:** Flowchart of the search and screening process.

### 3.7 Quality Appraisal

Each study that was included went through a systematic quality assessment to guarantee the reliability and credibility of the review. The peer-reviewed articles, governmental reports, and NGO publications were analysed in the context of methodological rigour, purpose clarity, data validity, and applicability to child protection in institutions in India. The criteria included transparency of study design, suitability of data collection methods and data analytic techniques and strength of conclusions. Studies with high standards were given priority in the synthesis, with limitations recorded to be used in the context. This assessment exercise also meant that the results of the review were based on credible and evidence-based materials, thus improving the general validity and applicability of the conclusions.

**Table 1.** Summary of studies analysed

S. No	Title	Aim	Place of Publication	Type of Review/Study	Key Findings
1	Child Protection in India: Examining Institutional Governance and Legal Frameworks under POCSO Act ( <a href="#">Bhushan, 2025</a> )	To examine the institutional and legal systems underpinning POCSO in India and align them with global standards.	Atlantis Press (IMASEE 2025)	Qualitative Policy Review	Found gaps between international commitments and local implementation; highlighted institutional capacity deficits.
2	Rights-based Integrated Child Protection Service Delivery Systems ( <a href="#">Desai, 2020</a> )	To conceptualise an integrated rights-based model for child protection in India.	Springer Singapore	Conceptual/Policy Framework Study	Advocated intersectoral and community-driven protection mechanisms within a rights-based approach.
3	Overview and Way Forward for Child-	To identify future directions for	Routledge India	Thematic Review	Emphasised participatory and child voice approaches;

	Centred Social Work Practice ( <a href="#">Desai, Manoharan, Mehta, &amp; Mehendale, 2022</a> )	child-centred social work practice in India.			recommended policy-practice integration.
4	Child-Centred Social Work and Restorative Practices ( <a href="#">Manoharan, 2022</a> )	To explore restorative approaches supporting child rights in Indian practice settings.	Routledge India	Applied Practice Analysis	Showed restorative practices enhance emotional recovery and accountability in child protection.
5	Childcare Institutions under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act, 2015: Status and Measures to Improve ( <a href="#">Nanjunda, 2023</a> )	To assess the functioning and challenges of CCIs under the JJ Act 2015.	ResearchGate	Empirical Policy Study	Identified inadequate staffing, poor infrastructure, and compliance gaps with JJ Rules.
6	Promoting a Responsive State: Role of NGOs in Decentralised Governance ( <a href="#">Gupta, Lele, &amp; Sahu, 2020</a> )	To study NGO roles in participatory governance relevant to child protection.	Elsevier (Forest Policy & Economics)	Empirical Case Review	Highlighted NGOs as mediating agents, enhancing state responsiveness in community welfare.
7	Bridging Gaps in Child Protection: Stakeholder Awareness & Response to Familial Child Abuse ( <a href="#">Sharma, 2024</a> )	To analyse institutional awareness and response to familial child abuse.	International Journal of Law, Management & Humanities	Analytical Empirical Study	Found inconsistent stakeholder training and underreporting; recommended awareness enhancement.
8	Child Welfare: An Historical Overview ( <a href="#">Pachau &amp; Sarathy, 2015</a> )	To trace the evolution of child welfare systems in India.	Mizoram University Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences	Historical/Descriptive Review	Provided a foundation for understanding institutional trajectories shaping present child protection policies.

## **IV. Results and Thematic Findings**

Data analysis revealed three main themes.

### ***Theme 1: Roles of Institutional Mechanisms***

Child Welfare Committee (CWCs), Juvenile Justice Board (JJBs) and District Child Protection Unit (DCPUs) are institutional mechanisms that play instrumental roles in the protection and rehabilitation of the vulnerable children in India. Nanjunda (2023) asserts that these bodies work under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 and have the responsibility of offering both short and long-term protection, rehabilitation, and reintegration to children raised in need of care and protection. Inter-agency cooperation is the key to effective child protection, where CWCs, JJBs, Childline services, police authorities, and NGOs will coordinate to provide a response and support promptly and fully (Desai et al., 2022). The social workers play the role of the connecting component in this network, and they will be involved in case management, home visitations, social investigation report preparation and ensuring that the rights of children during the protection process are taken into consideration (Green and Ellis, 2017). The fact that they are actively involved means that their interventions are child-focused and based on psychosocial knowledge, and not only administrative obedience. Moreover, institutional mechanisms have both legal and rehabilitative obligations which involve the provision of legal assistance, counselling, education and job training to the suffering children. These roles are used together in such a way that they form a multidimensional structure that is designed to protect children and provide them with comprehensive development in the context of the rights-based framework.

### ***Theme 2: Challenges in Implementation***

Although the legal and institutional framework is strong, there are a number of issues that curb the successful operation of child protection systems in India. The problem of resources and staffing remains one of the most persistent ones that restricts the operations of institutions like CWCs and DCPUs. It is critical to note that a shortage of qualified specialists and insufficient funding seriously hinder the case management and decision-making in a timely manner (Mehta et al., 2024). Furthermore, there are training and capacity-building gaps

between social workers, which reduce the quality of interventions because most frontline workers do not have current knowledge on child rights, psychosocial care, and digital case documentation systems (Taylor, 2017). There is also a lack of bureaucratic response, and poor inter-departmental coordination through overlapping roles and strict administrative lines, where bureaucratic delays and child-centric co-ordination are slackened by the system (Jagannath, 2016). In addition, the lack of uniformity of protection standards in the various states can be hindered by inconsistent monitoring and inadequate accountability protocols (Tilbury, 2006). Such hardships are compounded by regional inequalities, since cities generally have better infrastructure and human resources than the countryside or conflict-prone areas like Jammu and Kashmir, where systemic limits and social instability check institutional reach. All these impediments, taken together, reveal a fractured system in dire need of reinforcement by enhancing capacity, decentralisation and refining accountability mechanisms.

### ***Theme 3: Best Practices and Innovations***

Recent developments have shown that there are a number of best practices and innovations that have made Indian child protection mechanisms stronger. The creation of convergent and coordinated systems, where different stakeholders like government departments, NGOs, and community networks usually join hands employing a systems-based approach in providing integrated protection services to children, has been one of the most effective strategies (Wulczyn et al., 2010). This has improved efficiency as well because the growing application of technology in reporting and case management has helped to share data instantly and track cases in a digital manner, and quicker response to emergencies (Kaonga et al., 2016). Furthermore, the community-based and NGO-supported mechanisms have also become an important element of the protection expansion at the grassroots level. Such organisations are critical towards creating awareness, capacity building and connecting marginalised children with institutional support (Gupta et al., 2020). Child involvement and the use of restorative means have also shifted attention towards the rehabilitation of children and empowerment as the responsibility of the child is always at the centre of the decision-making processes (Manoharan, 2022). Also, psychosocial and family-based interventions have been shown to be effective in fostering complete recovery, emotional, and reintegration into family settings (Meyler et al., 2010). These innovations together are a radical change towards a rights-based, inclusive, and preventative child protection model in India.

## **V. Analysis and Discussion**

The examined findings indicate that the Indian system of child protection based on the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS), the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act (JJ Act), and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act provides a detailed legal and institutional framework, although the lack of effective implementation challenges can still be noticed. According to Sharma (2024), there is a lack of cohesive awareness of stakeholders and coordination between agencies, resulting in fragmented responses to child abuse and neglect. Though the ICPS suggests a convergent, multi-stakeholder model, the review indicates that there is a gap in the policy intentions and realities on the ground, and that bureaucratic inefficiencies, resource limitation, and poor monitoring undermine its effectiveness. Similarly, the rehabilitation and aftercare services of the JJ Act often do not have adequate aftercare, especially in rural and conflict-prone regions like Jammu and Kashmir. Although POCSO has strengthened the legal measures against sexual offences against children, underreporting and social stigma remain as the reasons why the initiative is not achieving its goal. In the frame of the Systems Theory, the child protection mechanism can be visualised through the lens of a network of interdependent subsystems, such as the government agencies, non-governmental organisations, law enforcement, judiciary, and communities, all of which have to work together. But research like the one by Wulczyn et al. (2010) shows that lack of strong ties between these subsystems, ineffective feedback loops, overlapping mandates, and the like tend to create inefficiency and duplication. A Rights-Based Approach, which is the idea discussed by Desai (2020), assumes that the child is viewed as a rights-holder and the state as the duty-bearer in the system. However, it is also found that the voice of children is often side-lined during decision-making and their involvement is often reduced to tokenism. This nullifies the empowerment and accountability values, which feature prominently in a rights-based model.

Social work practice and training are also highlighted in the review as important in dealing with systemic gaps. Social workers are critical in enforcing the child protection systems, although they are faced with several limitations such as lack of training, large caseloads and institutional support. The intertwining of technology, exemplified by successful innovations of digital case management and community-based reporting, implies a changing field in which the innovations can be used to improve responsiveness and accountability. Therefore, social work programs need to include hands-on exposure to child protection laws and trauma-

informed practice, as well as inter-sectoral collaboration, and capacity building of frontline workers is urgently needed to help close the gap between theory and practice. Regarding policy implications, the findings highlight the fact of the necessity of an immediate change in the structure, which will help to provide convergence in the work of departments, including Women and Child Development, Education, Health, and Police. The strategies ought to move away from the reactive interventions in favour of preventive and community-based approaches. The strengthening of child protection committees, decentralisation of monitoring systems and provision of sufficient resources are important measures to the realisation of coherence in systems.

Lastly, the review created a number of research gaps. The remote and conflict-prone states, such as Jammu and Kashmir and the Northeast, have limited data, which leads to an unequal understanding of the differences in the regions. Lack of longitudinal research and child research limits the knowledge on the lived experiences of the affected children. In addition, outcome measures that involve rehabilitative and restorative interventions are minimal. Further studies, hence, must employ participatory and situational approaches to bring in the voices of children and to gauge the efficacy of policies. Even though the child protection framework in India is seen to be strong on paper, its effectiveness would be achieved by improving inter-system coordination, incorporating the rights-based ideals in the daily practice, and taking up the capacity building, data systems, and participatory monitoring so that not a single child is left without protection.

## **VI. Practice and Policy Implications.**

The review highlights a serious need to improve coordination and integration among the key child protection activities, such as the Child Welfare Committees (CWCs), Juvenile Justice Boards (JJBs), District Child Protection Units (DCPUs), and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Fragmented communication and duplication of mandates are often the cause of late interventions and suboptimal rehabilitation of children in need of care and protection. Formal coordination tools, including joint review meetings, integrated reporting systems, and single case-management systems, can be used to coordinate the decision-making process and ensure that the case of every child is addressed effectively and holistically. Enhancing this institutional synergy will institutionalise the spirit of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, where collaboration is essential in ensuring that vulnerable children are well protected and recovered. Another important implication that emerges is how the

capacity building of the social workers working in child protection can be augmented. According to Briar-Lawson et al (2011), successful child welfare structures are built on well-trained and adequately supported front-line staff. The fields that social workers need to develop their skills regularly include trauma-informed care, digital case management, the advocacy of child rights, and inter-agency coordination. Their competence and morale can be improved through regular refresher training, exposure to best practices and effective supervision mechanisms. Professional training can be institutionalised by introducing child-protection modules into social-work courses, as well as collaboration with higher education institutions, which would ensure a quality change in service delivery in the long term. Also, the urgent need to magnify government funding and accountability frameworks exists. Wessells (2015) argues that child-protection systems can be the most effective when the resources are directly distributed to the community and family-based programs. There must be sufficient funds to help finance the infrastructure of childcare facilities, emergency shelters, rehabilitation centres, as well as training programmes. It is also of importance to put clear accountability systems in place that keep track of budgetary usage, evaluate performance and see that budgets are passed to the grassroots level agencies. The introduction of participatory budgeting and autonomous audits may strengthen people and transform financial resources into practical protection results for children.

Another issue of concern noted in the review is the need to ensure the promotion of community-based child-protection models. Van Dijck et al. (2016) present an example of how the models exploit local connections, cultural values, and community involvement to prevent child abuse and promote child well-being. Local leaders, teachers, Anganwadi workers, and youth groups can be involved, which will help identify risks in early stages and provide responses in the community even before the situation gets worse. Child-protection committees, awareness, and reporting systems can be effectively established at the village and ward levels by NGOs and Panchayati Raj Institutions. Equipping the communities with knowledge and means to present the first response forms not only a part of the preventative response but also increases the sustainability of the entire protection structure.

Lastly, promoting evidence-based changes that include the involvement of others in decision-making is essential. Rovolis and Habibipour (2024) insist on the combination of the participatory strategies with data analytics to make sure that the policies mirror the reality on the ground and the voices of children. Case tracking, identification of service gaps, and

strategic planning can be supported by creating a national child-protection data repository. The inclusion and active involvement of children and families in the process of the monitoring and evaluation of the interventions can sustain responsive, inclusive, and rights-oriented interventions. A combination of coordination, professional capacity, funding accountability, community participation, and data-driven planning is a comprehensive approach to reforming the child-protection environment in India. These policy and practice implications, when implemented together, will guide the system to be preventive, inclusive, and child-centred, ensuring that the rights of all children to protection, care, and dignity are fully fulfilled.

## **VII. Conclusion**

The child protection system in India is based on institutional mechanisms for child protection, including the Child Welfare Committees (CWCs), the Juvenile Justice Boards (JJBs), and the District Child Protection Units (DCPUs). Their role in rescue, rehabilitation, case management, and redress of the law is critical in protecting children against neglect, abuse, and exploitation. As the systematic review shows, despite making considerable contributions to the enforcement of the child protection law, i.e., the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, these institutions still face certain challenges that limit their performance. The recurrent issues are staffing shortages, lack of inter-agency coordination, scanty resources and inconsistent monitoring, which have negatively affected the delivery of services efficiently. In addition, the fact of training gaps between social workers and bureaucratic inefficiencies often becomes an obstacle in the process of justice and rehabilitation. However, a set of some of the best practices, namely community-based models, technology-enabled case management, and child-partnership approaches, is characterised by the possibility of innovation and systemic fortification. The review highlights the need to have evidence-based, data-driven and child-centred reforms that resonate with the principles of the Rights-Based Approach and Systems Theory. Long-term sustainability requires the enhancement of coordinated work between institutions, accountability, and professional capacity. The upcoming studies need to focus on the empirical evaluation of the institutional performance, the regional differences in the implementation, and the lives of children in the system. Incorporation of the research findings into the policy formulation will see to it that the child protection framework in India is

transformed to become a more inclusive, responsive and resilient framework- one that will really support the rights and well-being of all children.

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