



In the communities we work, child labour and drug abuse are major problems affecting children. To mark International Labour Organisation's (ILO) 'World Day against Child Labour' and United Nations' (UN) 'International Day against Drugs and Illicit Trafficking' this month, we would like to ponder on these prevailing issues among children.

Ranita Sarma works as a Relationship officer at Oasis India, Bangalore and is passionate about supporting humanitarian issues like child rights. Read her thoughts below on child labour and substance abuse.



In India, we often find children at restaurants cleaning a table, or serving chai (tea) at a nearby stall. Some may think it is a compulsion due to family constraints, but most of us look away and regard it as a menace. The 2011 Census in India recorded nearly 10.1 million children aged between 5-14 years employed in various work environments. UNICEF suggests that poverty is the biggest influence of child labour. Child labour not only affects a child's physical well-being but harms their

overall psycho-social development. This also leads to adolescents being highly de-motivated to pursue a career.

On the other hand, the world faces yet another social problem among children and youth – substance abuse. According to the World Drug Report 2017, released by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) about a quarter of a billion people (or 5.3% of the global adult population) used drugs at least once in 2015. Over the last decade, children and youth resorted to drug consumption (majority of whom are street children or child labourers) to avoid hunger, cold and poverty. How can we address this issue?

As we look into the 'World Day against Child Labour' and 'International Day against Drugs and Illicit Trafficking' this month, we are reminded of a cruel and unsafe world for children. The themes for 2019 is 'Generation safe & health' and 'Listen first - listening to children and youth is the first step to help them grow healthy and safe'. A strong bond between parents / teachers and children / youth can bring about a positive influence for them to grow happy and resilient.

Ranita Sarma
Relationship Officer
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"Child labour and poverty are inevitably bound together and if you continue to use the labour of children as the treatment for the social disease of poverty, you will have both poverty and child labour to the end of time." ~ Grace Abbott



Engaging children in factories and workshops for employment is a common sight in

Halleguddadhalli, Bangalore. People living here suffer from poverty and low standard of living which leads to child labour. During a community intervention program, our staff met Vivek, a 16-year-old who works to provide for his family.

When Vivek was just four, his father left his family, making his mother the sole breadwinner. Vivek was a regular after-school programme (ASP) student and a bright one too! When his mother fell ill, he had to discontinue school to work. He supports the education of his younger brother with his salary.

Vivek works for long hours in a very non-conducive environment and receives unfair wages. His only getaway is the Oasis football practice every morning. He also attended the life skill sessions during practice which helped him identify the wrong in his community and that child labour is also a problem. He now has decided to continue with his education and complete grade 10. When asked about his dream for life Vivek says, "My mother always says that she wants me to live a happy life and that's what I want to do."

Causes of Child Labour in India

- Poverty
- Lack of educational resources
- Social and economic backwardness
- Addiction, disease or disability
- Lure of cheap labour
- Family tradition
- Gender discrimination

Source: www.indiacelebrating.com



Sadvik* lost his parents in an accident when he was just 14 years old. He had to move in with his grandfather in Kamathipura, Mumbai where he suffered physical abuse as his grandfather was an alcoholic. Trying to find refuge, Sadvik sought help from his uncle but his aunt was abusive towards him as well. He ran away from home knowing that this was his last resort.

While living on the streets of Mumbai, Sadvik's grandfather found him and put him in a boarding school. Lack of attendance led to Sadvik getting expelled, hence he started working in a jewellery-making shop to support his ailing grandfather. He got involved with bad company in Kamathipura and eventually became addicted to smoking and chewing tobacco.

Arun*, Sadvik's friend in Kamathipura, introduced Sadvik to our drop-in center where individuals from the red-light area come in for counselling and guidance. He received a lot of awareness on education, effects of drug addiction, health and hygiene. He is now a part of our night shelter where women and children from the red-light area stay. He has also successfully completed grade 10 and hopes to study more.

*names changed

HOW TO SPOT DRUG USE IN CHILDREN

- Evidence of drugs and/or drug paraphernalia
- Behavioural problems and poor grades in school
- Emotional distancing, isolation, depression, or fatigue
- Overly influenced by peers
- Hostility, irritability, or change in level of cooperation
- Lying or increased evasiveness about after-school or weekend whereabouts
- Physical changes, such as bloodshot eyes, runny nose, frequent sore throats, and rapid weight loss
- Changes in mood, eating, or sleeping patterns
- Widely dilated pupils even in bright light

Source: www.stanfordchildren.org

Subha, a 25-year-old mother of two has been a resident in Kannagi Nagar for the past four years. Here's a quick interview with her that highlights the problems that children face in her community.



What are the crimes children in Kannagi Nagar are involved in?

A large percentage of children in Kannagi Nagar are addicted to drugs. Most of them use marijuana and spend their time at street corners with friends using drugs. If they smoke near my house I often tell them to leave.

Where do they get marijuana from?

Someone will buy it as bulk from the city and distribute it to the children here for various sinister reasons.

What kind of reasons?

Adults use children to steal for them and to sell drugs. The only way they can get them to do this is by paying them with drugs. Adults use children to commit crimes because hiring adults is not cost effective. Therefore they entice children with drugs and alcohol.

At Oasis, our hope is to help youth and children who are caught in this vicious cycle. From the initial survey that we conducted at Kannagi Nagar, we found that almost 50% of children face alcoholism and substance abuse issues. Our combat strategy against this is by beginning a holistic education center for children between the age group of 7-14 years where they will focus on four core areas: academic development, personal development (mentoring, activity-based learning), behaviour modification (sports) and creating change agents. This will help children take ownership of themselves and their community.



How can you be a part of the solution?

Be a part of our mentoring programme and mentor a child. If interested, email
raja.ganesh@oasisin.org

If you would like to give in support of this cause, click the link below.

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