

# THE UNDISCUSSED ISSUE OF ‘CHILD RIGHTS’ OF YOUNGER SPORTSPERSONS: A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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**ABSTRACT:** The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (2010) gave a list of children’s rights. These rights are applicable to all children in the world. The constitution of India, along with the rights cited in UNCRC, guarantees all the children of India some compulsory rights also. Despite the presence of national policies, laws and child rights, many children of India are victims of unfulfilled rights. This issue becomes even grave when some particular domain is left undiscussed at higher community levels, such as the one discussed in this study. The study tried to explore the rights of sports children from psychological perspective. The objectives of this study were to investigate: (1) The child rights which are generally not protected in various sports institutions of Punjab and (2) Specific concerns of female sportspersons in fulfillment of child rights in sports institutions. This study used focus group discussions (FGDs) as research method. Random, purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to enroll participants in the study. The findings of this study have been summarized in this research paper.

**KEYWORDS:** Sports, child rights, drop out, psychology.

## I. INTRODUCTION

19% of world’s children (nearly 430 million) live in India, and every fifth child of world lives in India (Ministry of Women and Child Development [MWCD] 2007). Surprisingly, the National Policy for Children 1974, declared children as ‘supreme national asset’ and all their needs need to be secured and safeguarded. The Indian Juvenile Justice Act of 2000 (Care and Protection of Children) has defined a child as “a person who has not completed eighteenth year of age”, and a person is deemed to have reached “majority” on completion of 18 years under the Indian Majority Act of 1875 (Human Rights Watch, 2013, p. 13). For every child, what needs to be kept in mind always, as mentioned by Thoreau (2011), is that a particular child has never existed before and will never again. Further, each child brings with it the added value of its personality to the world. Every child, according to Thoreau, begins the world again. Hence, gives the society another chance to improve condition of human kind (Hart, Lee, & Wernham, 2011).

### Rights of children

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, while acknowledging the fact that children require protection that usually differs from that of adults, gave a list of children’s rights. As cited in United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 2010, p. 9-36) there are 34 rights which are applicable to all children in the world. Hence the states have the responsibility to reduce the levels of child injustice through the application of preventive measures, as well as also have the legal responsibility to provide protection, justice and care for those children who have been the victim of this (World Health Organization [WHO], 2006). The Convention on the Rights of the Child has formed international basis for ensuring the rights and protection of children. The constitution of India, along with the rights cited in UNCRC, guarantees all the children of India the following rights (MWCD, 2006, p. 6):

- Right to free and compulsory elementary education for all children in the 6-14 year age group (Article 21a).

- Right to be protected from any hazardous employment till the age of 14 years (Article 24).
- Right to be protected from being abused and forced by economic necessity to enter occupations unsuited to their age or strength (Article 39e).
- Right to equal opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and guaranteed protection of childhood and youth against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment (Article 39f).

Besides these rights the children of India also have rights as equal citizens, just as any other adult, man, woman, or child (MWCD, 2006, p. 7). Despite the presence of national policies, laws and child rights, many Indian children, unfortunately, experience not fulfilment of their rights as children. A recent report over child rights has been provided by Joining Forces for Children-India (JFCI), in 2019. Joining Forces for Children-India, is an alliance of six leading child development organizations: ChildFund India, Plan India, Save the Children- India, SOS Children's Villages of India, Terre des hommes and World Vision India; working towards well-being and protection of rights of vulnerable children in India. Surprisingly, the report has been named as "Child Rights in India: An unfinished agenda", clarifying in the name itself about the extent of implementation of child rights in India.

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) 2018 report suggests that for the first time India in history has reached the current global average of under-5 mortality (39 per 1000 live births) and is more likely to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Other areas with noteworthy progress include universal enrolment in primary education (as literacy rate among 7-14 years children has gone up from 64% (Census 1991) to 88% (Census 2011)). But still not even half of the targets have been achieved (UNICEF, 2018). As identified through international KidsRights Foundation (2018), India is performing lower than the desirable level with an overall score of 0.64 and ranked 120 in list of 182 countries. This is cause of concern both for India and for the international community as India's rate of achieving SDGs is notably influencing the global rate of achieving SDGs.

During the study conducted by JFCI (2019), both boys and girls accepted that children should be involved in decision making at family and community levels. They further clarified that at family level, children should be involved in the decisions related to their education, career and marriage; while at community level they should be involved in all the decisions related to children. In the same study, when the parents were asked to speak regarding what they know about rights of children, it was found that parents in most states were quite aware about child rights like right to food, clothes and education. But it was only in one state (namely Haryana) where parents mentioned that both boys and girls should be provided with equal rights.

According to JFCI (2019), as many as 170 million children in India are in need of care and protection. These children can be from any arena: poor socio-economic conditions, schools, streets, sports, etc. This study has attempted to discuss rights of children in the arena of sports. Sport is defined as a social or cultural institution or organisation, rather than one which is confined to bricks and mortar, thus, falls under the terms of institutional child abuse and protection (Brackenridge & Rhind, 2014). To that extent, it is alike other social institutions, such as religion (with its churches or temples etc.) or education (with its schools and colleges) in potentiating abuses of power relations. Just like organised religion and education have had to implement child protection, sport too had to come to terms with violation, abuse and abusers in its ranks and with the ways of preventing and responding to such problems (Department of Education, 2013).

Studies in a range of countries have shown that sport can provide a context in which child rights violation can take place, whether perpetrated by authority figures, such as coaches, or by peer athletes, and at all the competitive stages, from college to elite level. Such studies have been conducted in the USA, Australia, Canada and Denmark (Starr, 2014). Summarising the studies from ten European countries, Fasting (2012), reported sexual harassment prevalence in sports as 14%–73% and sexual abuse prevalence in sports as 2%–22%. Although sport was viewed as positive for many children, many had also suffered negative encounters. Participants reported experiencing of: emotional harm (75%), sexual harassment (29%), physical harm (24%), self-harm (10%), and sexual harm (3%).

Child rights violation in sport gradually emerged as a theme of interest in the centres of sporting power, and this has led to changes, such as policy discussions and public statements by politicians (Brackenridge & Rhind, 2014). The term commonly adopted to describe the approach towards preventing child rights violation in sports is "sport for development" or S4D. S4D project is defined as any project, initiative, programme, campaign, multi-stakeholder initiative, or other activity that uses sport as a tool to reach development or humanitarian objectives (Sport and Development, 2014).

There is a need for child's rights to be protected in organised sports. The United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP) has a strategy in place to protect the rights of the child when it comes to child rights violation in sports. The most commonly abused human rights in relation to sport recognised by the UNOSDP found in combination with 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child are: right to health (Article 24), right to rest (Article 31.1), right to protection from all forms of violence and maltreatment (Article 19), right to protection from trafficking (Article 11), and right to education (Article 23) (Paulo, 2005). The most common forms rights violation in sport are physical abuse, child trafficking and labour, peer violence, physical violence by adults including physical punishment, violence due to participation in competitions, sexual abuse and harassment, emotional abuse, psychological abuse, neglect, and bullying (Paulo, 2005). Abuse due to child rights violation can lead to other problems which may have lifelong effects on the child such as physical injuries, sexual health problems, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, low self-esteem, eating and sleeping disorders, suicide etc. (Paulo, 2005).

Child rights violation in sport can happen for numerous reasons (Sport and Development, 2014). Violations occur because children feel a sense of dependency. Children find themselves in situations where they often train with those who are elder or with an adult coach, therefore the environment they are in tends to create a pseudo family within which there are certain expectations, rules and pressures on them which often create strong emotions and they form a dependency to adults in charge. Training to impress and the psychological development of children often impulsive them to train excessively and to do almost anything to please the adults and achieve in their chosen sport which make them vulnerable to the possibility of abuse. Further, there is lack of qualified trainers specifically for children and also the lack of international standards. But the UNOSDP is working to develop international standards, with respect to human rights to safeguard children in sports, as the lack of international standards often leads to the violation of child rights in sports (Sport and Development, 2014).

Not much initiatives and research has been done in the field of child rights in sports in India. The only in charge of the issues of sports in India is the Sports Authority of India (SAI) which is the field arm of Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports established in 1984. But the objectives of SAI are limited up to: promotion of sports in India; establishment and management of institutions to produce high calibre coaches, sports scientists, physical education teachers, etc.; and construction, development and maintenance of sports infrastructure and facilities. Although SAI encourages sportspersons of any age by offering promotional schemes and providing them with the requisite infrastructure, coaching facilities and exposure, it does not concretely implement sport specific standards addressing the safety of the child sportsperson. SAI has not framed or implemented any concrete policies and intervention for safeguarding the rights of younger sportspersons. This study has attempted to bring forward the issues of unfulfilled rights of children in the arena of sports.

### **OBJECTIVES OF STUDY**

The major objectives of this study were to investigate:

1. The child rights which are generally not protected in various sports institutions of Punjab.
2. Specific concerns of female sportspersons in fulfillment of child rights in sports institutions.
3. The possible causes of sports drop-out among younger sportspersons.

### **PARTICIPANTS**

To achieve the aim of study, 204 budding sportspersons (comprising both male and female subjects, in the age range of 10 – 15 years) were selected from 8 schools of Punjab. Along with, to study specific gender issues in the fulfillment of child rights the subjects were also selected from 6 girls' sports hostels/wings. Recruitment of participants took place from middle socio-economic groups and urban locations via high schools across Punjab. These schools catered to middle class section of society. This was done in order to span demographic axes known to be of relevance to the issues under consideration, although, clearly, the respondents cannot be taken to be representative of the population.

## **II. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

This has been a qualitative study. This study used focus group discussions (FGDs) research method. Following were the key questions discussed during all focus group discussions:

1. What brought you into sports?
2. Has your interest still the same in sports, as it was in the beginning?

3. What caused your interest to decline in sports?
4. What upsets you in the area of sports?
5. Have you ever discussed or complained about this ill-treatment to any one?
  - i. If no, why?
  - ii. If yes, does it ever get sorted out?
6. What affect all this ill-treatment has on your mental health and sports performance?
7. Do you know children also have rights as citizens of India?

### **III. PROCEDURE OF DATA COLLECTION**

Random, purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used in the study. The groups comprised of sportsperson who were randomly chosen, who willing nominated their names for participation and also the sportspersons with deviant behaviours. For recruiting sportspersons with deviant behaviours, school teachers and counsellors acted as key informants. Teachers and school counsellors were requested to nominate sportspersons who according to the available evidence or school records participated in various risk-taking behaviours like violence/ alcohol/ tobacco/ irresponsible sexual behaviour/ physical inactivity/ unhealthy dietary behaviours/ risky road behaviours etc. The young sportspersons nominated by the teachers were encouraged to bring in more of their peers for who also participated in risk-taking behaviours. Parental consent was obtained for each participant prior to conducting the focus groups. All parents were educated at least up to graduation.

### **IV. PROCEDURE OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS**

The moderator conducted the interview whilst the other investigator was responsible for taking notes during the session. The moderator was able to direct conversation to the less vociferous members of the group in an attempt to span the diversity of all experiences and opinions. Although this was not always entirely successful with less forthcoming participants, it did prevent an over-representation of the views of small numbers of more vocal members. Each discussion lasted approximately 100–120 min (with a ten minutes break after 50 minutes in between). A total of 23 focus groups with sports children, representing 204 participants, with 7 – 11 individuals per group, were conducted. This is in line with the consensus that 7–11 participants for each focus group are optimum to enable effective discussion within the group (Morgan & Krueger, 1998).

### **V. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

The overall concern of focus group discussions was to elicit as much information as possible which may lead to the awareness of the extent of child rights being fulfilled for children in sports. When the transcripts were analyzed some peculiar themes emerged from focus group discussions. The following section summarizes the main themes discerned from the focus group discussions:

The first key question was “What brought you into sports?” The aim of this question was to find out the proportion of children who are joining sports professionally these days. Under the blanket of ‘overall development’ many parents pressurize their children to be multi-talented. Overall development does not mean forcing any child into a domain in which he/she lacks interest. The term ‘overall development’ which actually means holistic development of child physically, mentally, emotionally and socially, is being confused with forcing the child into maximum number of coaching classes, dance classes, language classes, sports, etc. thereby draining the child physically, mentally, emotionally and socially. Doing this jeopardizes the child’s right to avail Articles 3, 6, 12, 13 and 18 of UNCRC. When a child is forced into professional sports without child’s interest, the child’s right to avail Article 3 is hampered. As according to this article the interests of the child should be a primary consideration. When a child is drained physically, mentally, emotionally and socially, owing to his/her forced participation is maximum number of activities, the child’s proper development can never be assured. This hampers the child’s right to avail Article 6 of UNCRC, which ensures the survival and development of every child. Forced participation in sports effects the child’s right to express his views of not taking sports professionally, thus hampering his/her right to avail Article 12 of UNCRC, which makes it mandatory for every child to express his/her views freely in all matters affecting him/her. This also effects child’s right to avail Article 13 of the right to freedom of expression. Finally forced participation in sports also leads to non-fulfillment of the child’s right to avail Article 18 of best interests of child as the basic concern for care-givers.

*“I will run, when I will want to. Just because I am a good runner, does not mean that I should always be forced to run. Yes I like to run, but I hate to compete in this. I don’t like to take classes in it. I just want to play. I fear running due to the expectations of my father for me....”*

(Boy, 15 years)

The themes discerned from the transcript analysis suggested that 16% of the participants were forced into professional sports due to parental pressure. Hence the child’s right to avail Articles 3, 6, 12, 13 and 18 of UNCRC for such children were not being fulfilled by the parents. Coaches and sports teachers may also be responsible for this, as they continue to make such children participate in sports professionally. Such players are very likely to drop-out from sports in the future. Yes physical activity for children is necessary for children for their proper growth but it need not be in form of professional sports only. Play and sport are terms which should not be confused as being one. It is important for children to play, but not imperative to indulge in sports, especially out of interest.

The second and third key questions were “Has your interest still the same in sports, as it was in the beginning?” and “What caused your interest to decline in sports?” respectively. The aim of these questions were to find out if their specific sports circumstances or acts have in either way declined their interests in their sport or sport related activities. The focus was to discern such circumstances or acts, so that a clear understanding of circumstances can be made under which generally the fulfillment of child rights is not obtained.

*“I thought that since my friend was good in taekwondo, I too could perform well. But now I have started feeling that I am little heavier for this sport. It does not feel the same now. I wish someone has guided me prior that my body is not for this sport..... may be I could have done well in some other sport.... Meant for my specific body..”*

(Boy, 15 years)

The themes from these questions suggested a decline of interest from the beginning for 43% of sports children. For all sports children in a particular sport the coach is same, the field is same and the sport is same, yet experience of every child is different from the other. The difference in experience was found to be mainly due to following situations. Although training is provided to all, but there is difference in the amount of training provided to all. Strong candidates are given more extensive training and more motivation, thereby widening the split between strong and weak players more and more. This jeopardizes the child right to avail Article 2 of UNCRC, which protects the child from discrimination of any kind. Also, anthropometric qualities strongly determine the specific sports which suit the body of a sports person. The children of such age group have not fully developed bodies, yet any sports teacher and coach with his/her expertise can discern the anthropometric qualities and particular sport suited for child’s body. But many sports teacher and coaches often do not relate anthropometry and sport, leading to poor performance and declining interest of sport person. This jeopardizes many children’s right to avail Article 5 of convention, which focuses on the respect of child’s evolving capacities. Such players have a very high probability for sports drop-out.

The fourth key question was “What upsets you in the area of sports?” The aim of this question was to find out the behaviors/ actions/situations etc. which are stressful for children and to find out if they are related to the non-fulfilment of child rights. The themes discerned from the responses suggested various child rights which are not being fulfilled in various sports institutions of Punjab.

*“We have many other requirements too. We need good quality shoes, sports kits, dietary supplements, equipments..... etc. etc... and these things are costly. Not all can afford these. Our clothes should be body friendly according to our sport. But there are many players who practice in normal clothes. Not all can afford this”*

(Boy, 15 years)

23% of sport children mentioned financial constraints as a cause of concern from them. Participation in sports demands more requirements on the part of players such as equipments, better diet, clothes, etc. The financial constraints restrict the opportunities of players in many cases. This indirectly jeopardizes Article 39f of Indian constitution, which mentions right of equal opportunity for every child.

*“Ours is a same sport. But he is senior, elder to me..... he is trained more by our coach. I sit idle on field for many hours.”*

(Boy, 10 years)

11% of sport children reported biased attitude of coaches and trainers towards elder players. It is easier and advantageous for them to train and guide elder players. Since these are senior players who participate at higher levels and are more likely to earn medals and trophies. This jeopardizes Article 2 of UNCRC, which is against discrimination of any kind on the basis of child's younger status, and similar Article 15 of Indian constitution.

*"I sometimes feel hungrier on field, than the refreshment I am provided over there."*

(Girl, 11 years)

9% of children expressed a desire to have greater amount of refreshments on fields that they normally get.

*"I was told either to join gymnastics or lawn-tennis, as these are so called 'girly sports'. I was told that I will lose my girl-attributes if I join sports like wrestling or weight-lifting."*

(Girl, 13 years)

24% of children have reported discrimination on the basis of gender in sports. Especially when it comes to the choice of sports, heavy sports are referred to as 'manly' and comparatively lighter sports are referred to as 'girly'. The children who don't choose 'presumed' gender-specific sports many times lack peer-acceptance, experience bullying, are labeled as tom-boy girls or girly boys. Boys are more motivated to take sports professionally than girls. This again many times jeopardizes Article 2 of UNCRC, which is against discrimination of any kind on the basis of child's gender, and similar Article 15 of Indian constitution.

*"I was hit on my ankles by my coach on field. Many of my classmates watched this from outside the field. I felt embarrassed in front of my classmates"*

(Boy, 14 years)

Corporal punishment in any form has been banned by Indian government a long time back. But still it many time happens with sports children. It is considered a normal part of their training regime. But it affects the child psychologically and sometimes physically also. 27% of children reported to have faced corporal punishments on field. Corporal punishment is a form of physical abuse, emotional abuse and sometimes violence. Thus it many times hampers the child to avail Article 19 (i.e. the right to be protected from abuse) of UNCRC.

*"I am sun-tanned due to regular practice in sun. My peers make fun of my skin and colour"*

(Girl, 12 years)

Bullying in sports was found to be the most prevalent cause of stress among sports children. Around 48% of children reported to have faced it at one point or are still facing. All forms of bullying (physical, verbal, emotional and social) was found to be prevalent in various sports institutions. As found during the discussions, bullying amongst sports children can acquire many forms such as: Social exclusion from peer groups, ganging up, or group teasing; Physical hitting/kicking victims; threats and intimidation; Targeting team members who do not perform as well as others; Intimidating the most promising players in order to eliminate the competition for the best positions and the limelight; Targeting new team members and forcing them to prove they belong to the team; Ganging up on team members because a "leader" on the team doesn't like them; Targeting someone because they get more attention and praise from the coach or because they appear to be the coach's favorite; Harassing team members when they make a mistake during the game; Making junior sports children do all the chores of senior players such as cleaning rooms, washing clothes/utensils, body massages etc.; Making others do pity jobs such as tying shoe laces; Consumption of dietary products and supplements of other players; etc. Bullying is a form of child abuse, which may become psychologically devastating for a victim, thus it many times hampers the child's right to be protected from abuse as mentioned by UNCRC in Article 19.

*"We are treated differently than rest of the classmates. Many times we are given some extra tasks to do. Everyone assume us to more physically fit and on the pre-text of it sometimes we arrange benches in classroom, have to discipline younger students even during breaks, and so on."*

(Boy, 15 years)

6% of children reported differential treatment of teachers and peers towards them. Many times sports children are engaged in strenuous activities in the name of extra-curricular work. Some children even have reported tasks such as field maintenance which sometimes include soda lime markings in field. All this is expected from them under the disguise of training and physical activity required for them. Once again being a form of abuse, Article 19 of UNCRC is jeopardized here.

Thus there are many instances where being upset or stress felt by sports child is actually the non-fulfillment of child's right. In many of the cases the ultimate result is sports drop-out.

The fifth key question was "Have you ever discussed or complained about this ill-treatment to any one?" and it had two subparts: (i) If no, why? (ii) If yes, does it ever get sorted out? The aim of this question was to find out the extent of complaints/issues brought forward by children, and also the extent of action taken by those in position of control.

*"The coach said me to leave the court, if I have to make mountain out of mole every time. Then I stopped complaining.*

(Boy, 10 years)

The transcript analysis suggested that 18% of the participants have at one point discussed/complained to the higher authorities. Rest of the participants has accepted such behaviors as part of their informal training. Some fear that complaining to authorities will bring even more negative consequences for them, such as group exclusion, bullying, etc. For those who bring the problems of misconduct to higher authorities, simple warnings are generally given to the culprits. The actions are taken but without considering the gravity of cases concerned. Some acts require strict actions. All this has ultimately created a culture of acceptance of unfair within sports. Thus, it ultimately many times hampers the Article 4 of UNCRC, which focuses on proper action towards safeguarding the rights of children by state parties.

The sixth key question was "What affect all this ill-treatment has on your mental health and sports performance?" The aim of this question was to find out the psychological problems faced by sports children due to the lack of protection of their basic rights.

*"I am neither a part of my sports group, nor I am fully included into my peer group. I don't have friends now."*

(Boy, 13 years)

The responses of participants suggested that 23% of them are aware that they have been affected psychologically due to inappropriate treatment. They have deteriorating sports performance. They have problems in the domains of interpersonal relationships with parent, peers and teachers. They suggested having lower self-confidence and self-esteem in comparison to their counterparts. They show signs of withdrawal and aloofness in class. They tend to experience more sports anxiety in comparison to their counterparts. They lack the ability to initiate, develop and sustain mutually satisfying relationships. They fear failure in sports and studies to the extent that they are on the verge of sports drop-out. The psychological effects hampers Article 27 of UNCRC, which ensure every child's right to have a living standard adequate for his/her physical and mental development.

The final key question was "Do you know children also have rights as citizens of India?" The aim of this question was to discern the extent of awareness among children regarding their rights as citizens of India. This is imperative because it is awareness which ultimately leads to action.

*"Yes I have learnt rights of children in my class, but I don't know what is their purpose and how can I use them."*

(Girl, 10 years)

The responses suggested that around 73% of children have heard about child rights, but only 2% of them were actually aware of their mandatory implementation for them. Most children have just memorized them as a part of their curriculum, without getting the actual reason behind having such mandatory rights according to constitution of India. Surprisingly not even a single child was aware of child rights imposed by UNCRC on every child of world. Lack of accurate awareness regarding their own rights itself hampers Article 17 of UNCRC, which mentions children rights to access appropriate information.

Another concern of this study was to find out the specific concerns of sports girls residing in sports hostels/wings. One issue for girls in sport was that they are often considered as tomboys. This is a severe threat to identity for some. Being viewed as possessing less female attributes and more masculine attributes can be threatening for many. This severely jeopardizes Article 8 of UNCRC, which aimed at preserving the child's identity. Girls in such hostels face all kinds of bullying as mentioned in previous section, but for greater amount of period. As they spent more time with bullies, not during day, but even after calling-off the day at hostel. Sports girls often face social isolation from non-sports girls in hostel. This may occur because of strong group association within sports girls, and the subsequent fear of group rejection if interacted outside group. This fear may sometimes jeopardize UNCRC's Article 15, which mentions the right of child to freely associate with others. Another concern for female sportspersons was less number of female trainers and coaches. Such children being nearer to the age of puberty have certain bodily issues which are many times ignored or the players cannot freely share with male trainers or coaches while training. The drop-out among female children is mainly due to the societal pressure of conforming to female roles. The drop-out rate among female sportspersons is higher after puberty.

Summing up this entire section it can be said that many of the incidents/acts/behaviors which take place within the arena of sports may sometimes be the violation of child rights. This violation often provokes the child to drop-out from sport. There are issues with which many are familiar but the need is to bring those issues into notice, so that proper implementation of child rights can be ascertained.

In the end it may be concluded that many children are resilient and may emerge as national and international players in future. But still there is a proportion of children who are being affected owing to the lack of fulfilment of their child rights. This proportion might be small, but child rights are meant to be fulfilled for every single child. India has ratified various international conventions like the UNCRC, the ILO Convention 138 and 182 on the Child Labour and the Optional Protocol on Trafficking in Human Beings. Further, formation of the National and the State Commissions for Protection of Child Rights build positive child rights environment in the country. The government has identified particular issues (e.g. decreasing child sex ratio, girls facing neglect, etc.) for campaigns and programmes. India even has some unique laws such as the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostics Techniques Act, 1994 to prevent sex selection during pregnancy. But still there are areas where child rights are not being safeguarded. The violation of child rights has not yet been fully acknowledged by government and organizations. There is a need to highlight such areas also. One such area as highlighted in this investigation is children in sports.

The study suggests that although such incidences where the rights of children are hampered are not very large, but still they exist in various sports institutions of Punjab. Safeguarding the rights of every child is pivotal. This is imperative so as to fulfill the 'Leave No One Behind' Pledge (i.e. Development policies and programmes formulated for the children must ensure that no child is left behind) of Indian government. There is a clear lack of administrative controls at the levels of children in general and sports children in particular. There is almost negligible research on safeguarding the rights of sports children. This study was an attempt to highlight and bring into notice the concerns of sports children in Punjab, so that better strategies could be framed at higher community levels.

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