**From streets to prisons**

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Consortium for Street Children(CSC) in London estimates that there are about 1.5 million children on streets of Pakistan they are often subjected to violence, sexual abuse, child labour or forced into drugs. Karachi is the city of Pakistan- where it is said that 50,000 children have been connected to street many among them are involved criminal cases informed to the Sindh High Court by Sindh authorities in response to a petition filed to the Sindh High Court.Approximately, 20,000 street connected children said to have been in Quetta city of Balochistan out which 60 % are scavengers.However, population of street connected children must have been much higher in Punjab considering its all over population. Out of 1.5 million 43 % said to have not attained more than 15-year of age. Most of those have been associated with garbage collection work, begging, drugs users, and some of them have association in capital making industries as child labour. These children do not have access to education, health, and legal supportapparently, they are deprived of basic fundamental human rights. Despite laws in place across Pakistan (even weak to some sense) population of street children had increased in last decade or so even after introduction of numerous policies and strategies in order to minimize rampant increasing population of street connected children.

Prior to introduction of Destitute and Neglected Children Act (DNCA) 2004 (amended in 2017) in Punjab, primarilyfour major laws said to have existed across Pakistan for protection of rights of children. After the promulgation of DNCA 2004 in Punjab Child Protection & Welfare Bureau was created under the law for overseeingissues of childrenacross Punjab. Today, it had 08 operational units all across Punjab, and some 11 units will be established in coming year all across Punjab. It is on record of Child Protection Bureau that from 2013 to 2018, the Child Protection Bureau had rescued 30,992 children (a total of 2,093 children were rescued in 2013 while in 2014, 4,707 children were saved). Similarly, the figure was 4,536 in 2015; 7,087 in 2016, 7,412 in 2017; and 5,157 in 2018.Akin to that, a total of 117 children were taken into judicial custody, while another 113 children-who experienced domestic violence-were given protection.Moreover, cases against 489 accused persons-who were charged with the crime of forcing children into beggary and subjecting them to physical and sexual abuse-were registered.Throughout the five-year period, around 25,766 children were reunited with their families.

Juveniles behind prisons and street connected children do not have access to education as guaranteed under Article 25 (A) of the Constitution of Pakistan, 1973 nor authorities tend to have schemes or strategies for their integration into society

To the other hand, Sindh provincial assemblyin year 2011 passed a set of laws on basis of which Sindh Child Protection Agency was notified in year 2014.The funds for the agency were allocated in the 2016-17 budget, but the institution had yet to start operations and nothing had been happening in Balochistan and KPK provinces. However, it is not out of place to mention here that law passed in Punjab, Sindh are meant to provide protection to children those who have not charged with any criminal act. For dealing with such incidence, Pakistan introduced a Federal lawJuvenile Justice System Act (JJSA)2018 for protection of rights of children in conflict with law. JJSA 2018repealed Juvenile Justice Ordinance 2000 with a view of strengtheningjuvenile justice system of Pakistan, and integrating juvenile offendersin lines with General Comment No. 10 on United National Convention on Rights of Child (CRC) which Pakistan ratified and signed in 1990.

A non-governmental organization Legal Awareness Watch (LAW) orated in recent Conference on Issues of Street Childrenorganized by(CSC) held virtually in London this year due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 that the street childrenhave often subjected to violence, abuse, or sexual exploitation all across Pakistan akin to that it is safely depicted that children who have been behind notorious 104 prisons of Pakistan were street children at glance. The first premises of children who have no parents/orphans or eloped from their homesdue to poverty, lack of food, family’s oppression, etc.live on streets andthey are the ones languishing in prisons on account of alleged criminal act. Furthermore, it surfaced during the said conference exact figure on population of street children, and juveniles behind prisons across Pakistan to date is not unknown to this reason policies and strategies aiming at protection of children those introduced in past years had found to be miserably failed and inoperative. Promulgation of JJSA 2018 at national level, and child rights laws at provincial levels could not provide protection to children those behind bars and on streets of Pakistan. Provisions of JJSA 2018 to date had not been implemented all across Pakistan. Children below the age of 18-year often found subjected to violence(as same as street children) in prisons or killed extra judicially during physical remand under section 167 CRPC 1898 i.e. Muhammad Rizwan in 2017 in Lahore.

Juveniles behind prisons and street connected children do not have access to education as guaranteed under Article 25 (A) of the Constitution of Pakistan, 1973 nor authorities tend to have schemes or strategies for their integration into society. In writer’s view juvenile justice system and laws pertained to street connected children shall be construed and seen from the prism of UNCRC itself and its comments i.e. General Comment No. 10, and 21. The process of protection of child rights had emerged in Pakistan after it withdrawn its reservation on July 23, 1997 (that the provisions of the CRC shall be interpreted according to the principles of Islamic Laws and values). Thereafter, in year 1999 the then President of Pakistan Pervez Mushraff issued a presidential notification grating remissionto children behind bars and sentenced to death or life. That was a point where laws specifically for juveniles and children in general beginning to emerge from the floor of Parliament. The writer submitted that children either allegedly accused of criminal acts or living on street of Pakistan shall be given their due fundamental human rights and laws promulgated for their protection must be implemented effectively. That would only be achieved if exact figure pertaining to street children and children behind prisons would trace out. Population of street children and juveniles across Pakistan isn’t accurate rather outdated.

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