

## Child Begging In India: Violation Of Child Rights

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*"A happy childhood is perhaps the most-fortunate gift in life" - Dorothy Richardson*

**A** happy childhood is when a child has enough nurture and love, when they are physically and mentally fit, and have access to basic needs such as food and shelter. But this is not the case with Child beggars, they are victims of severe physical, emotional and mental trauma as they are exposed to physical violence, drug abuse and psychological coercion.

Child beggars can be seen in every city and town in India. It is one of the most significant social issues which explicitly reveals the failure of the country to provide basic amenities for the poor children. The Constitution of India expresses concern for upbringing of children in safe, secure and healthy manner through various provisions in the Constitution. However millions of children become victims of many crimes such as rape, kidnapping, abduction, buying, selling, exposure, abandonment, infanticide, foeticide and child marriage, and abetment of suicide. They also become victims of neglect, abuse and child bondage or slavery, many children exist below poverty line and are malnourished and many of them die. Many children spend their childhood begging either due to poverty or under threat.

Children comprise about 50 percent of the earth's population and out of this India has almost 19 percent of the world's child population which is the largest child population in the world in any country. Children are the most vulnerable as they are dependent on adults and can be manipulated and are susceptible to all kinds of influences including both mental and physical.

Despite of rapid rapid economic growth in India, poverty and begging are still big problems. Data from census 2011 reveals that India has over three lakh child beggars, although some organizations claim them to be one million. Report by the Indian National Human Rights Commission suggests that approximately 40,000 children are abducted in India every year, which means one child goes missing every eight minutes, and over 25% of whom remain untraced. These children fall into the clutches of gangs (often known as mafias : who keep a check on child beggars so that they cannot steal the money) who forced them to beg.

For a meager amount, these small young children are often injured, maimed and handicapped and are left on roads, at religious places and streets to beg. One of the major reasons that force children into child begging in India is coercion by parents/guardians and drug addiction. Many child beggars are addicted to solvents, alcohol and charas. This helps the children to forget where they are and it also helps the gang masters to keep them under control.

Over the decades, many provisions were made to stop child abuse and child begging, some of them are:

- ✓ Article 15 (3): Enables the State to make special provisions for children.



- ✓ Article 24: Explicitly prohibits child labour and hazardous employment of children.
- ✓ Article 39(f): Further directs the State in its policy towards the well-being of the children.
- ✓ Article 39 ( c ): Provides that children of tender age should not be subject to abuse and should be given opportunities to develop in a healthy manner.
- ✓ Article 45: Makes provision for free and compulsory education for children.
- ✓ Article 47: States that it is the duty of the State to raise the level of nutrition and standard of living and to improve public health.

Other than these provisions we have the Child Labour Act, The Bombay Prevention of Begging Act (1959) , Indian Penal Code, BPBA Reform in Delhi (2018) , Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act (2015), The Children Act (1960) Persons in Destitution Model Bill (2016) Indian Railway Act (1989,) and many several regulations at state, national and international level.

All these provisions provide the child with the right to live a better standard of living, the right to education, provides them protection against child abuse. But despite all these provisions, rules and regulations both Central governments and State governments failed to stop child labour and child begging and to provide them with a better standard of living. There is a continued violation of child rights.

Children need love, affection and security but they have to face poverty, loneliness, and sexual and physical abuse. Therefore there is a need to develop sustainable intervention strategies to rehabilitate child beggars, to provide them with basic necessities and safe, secure, and joyful life.

At an individual level, one should volunteer at a Centre for children and donate to charities that work for uplifting the conditions of these beggars. Both Central and State governments should work together as this problem is taking alarming proportions. We need a holistic approach to tackle the problem of child begging, which combines compulsory education for children, good orphanages for orphans, financial assistance to children in need, and punishment for the beggar mafia.

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**Image source:** <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-27994318>

#### Facts About Child Begging in India

1. 3 Lakh children are forced to beg across India. (<https://delhipostnews.com/child-beggars-indias-invisible-citizens-of-tomorrow/>)
2. Total of 63,407 children in 2016, 63,349 in 2017 and 67,134 in 2018 were reported missing, says NCBI reports.
3. Around 10 percent of the children were brought to Gurgaon by contractors from rural areas of Bihar and Jharkhand and were pushed into begging (The Hindu, February 22, 2014).
4. As per Census 2011, India has 3.72 lakh child beggars below 14 years of age. Out of them, 1.97 lakh are boys, and 1.74 lakhs are girls.