

**THE VULNERABILITY STATUS OF CHILDREN  
LIVING ON THE PLATFORMS OF  
HOWRAH AND SEALDAH RAILWAY STATIONS**

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RESEARCH BY

**DON BOSCO ASHALAYAM**  
**158/18 Belilious Road,**  
**Kadamtala, Howrah-71 101,**  
**West Bengal, INDIA**

FUNDED BY

**GROUPE DEVELOPPEMENT**  
**BATIMENT 106-BP 07**  
**93352 LE BOURGET CEDEX**  
**FRANCE**

**TEL:- (00 31) 01.49.34.83.10**

**MAIL:- [groupe-developpement@wanadoo.fr](mailto:groupe-developpement@wanadoo.fr)**

# **PREFACE**

In India, technological and economic development has overtaken social development which has accentuated regional disparities catalyzing the process of pull-push factors leading to rural-urban migration. Children lured by the glitter of city life, the scope for unbridled freedom and option for earning easy money has dragged them away from their home and families finally to end up on the streets and platforms of Railway Stations.

The Indian Railway has several divisions of which the Eastern Railway and South Eastern Railway are headquartered in Kolkata. There are two major railway stations in Kolkata - Howrah and Sealdah. Howrah is the intersecting zone of both Eastern as well as South Eastern Railway while Sealdah is under Eastern Railway.

Howrah Station is one of the largest and probably the largest railway complex in India connecting all major Indian cities as also means of linkage between suburban areas. The importance of twin-station complexes in Howrah (old complex having 15 platforms -Platform No. 1-15 and new complex having 4 platforms - Platform No 18-21) has resulted in the generation of innumerable hotels, restaurants and commercial markets around the station area.

Sealdah Station is predominantly a suburban railway system terminus catering to suburbs as far south as Diamond Harbour, Canning, Laksmikantapur, and as North as Krishnagar, Burdwan and Bongaon which is also the Indo-Bangladesh Border area.

The focus of this Research is to study the vulnerable status of the lives of the children living in the platforms of these two major railway stations, viz. Howrah and Sealdah, to help us frame suitable recommendation to address and combat their problems and develop a coherent and cohesive system for their reintegration with their families, if they have any, and/or pave the path for mainstreaming them into the same society which has rejected them.

This Research Report presents the observations of the push-pull factors which lead to migration to the platforms; the status of the living conditions and magnitude of exploitation of the platform children; educational and occupational status; problems of reintegration with the family and society; health status and risks including physical and mental health and sexually transmitted diseases; the role of the stakeholders in terms of awareness about the children and the involvement of the GO/NGO/INGO/CBO/Civil society in providing support, local resource mobilization and gaps and barriers therein.

During the course of this research it was observed that life at railway stations violates the survival, protection and development rights of the “platform children”. It should be noted that these platform children who are the silent minority today shall soon become the screaming majority. These platform children are highly mobile. Over and above their number being left out of “statistic-friendly “ infrastructures (censuses, schools, etc) they become seemingly invisible. An in-depth study of the plight of these platform children in Howrah and Sealdah Railway Station, where they face exploitation as child labourers, trafficked, sexually abused and prostituted, will provide food for thought and enough material for designing advocacy tools to create mass awareness on this issue which is a great human tragedy but lies unheard and unsung most of the times.

Many promises were made but few have been kept. This is the reason that these children have no faith in the system and have total disrespect for the legal authorities. The time has come to take action at all levels to try and develop a right-based approach to address and combat the issues of these children. There is acute need for cohesive action to secure each and every child his/her inherent right of being a child and enjoying a happy childhood; addressing the root cause that negate the healthy growth and development of these children and awaken the community in the wider societal context to protect these children from all forms of abuse.

***“We have many promises to keep and miles to go before we sleep.....”***

Place : Kolkata

Date: 15.10.2005

Fr. Mathew George SDB, Ph.D.  
Director, Don Bosco Ashalayam

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

On behalf of Don Bosco Ashalayam we would like to take the opportunity to thank all those individuals and organizations that have helped us in the preparation of this Research Report.

We particularly thank the platform children and their families who have given us their time and unconditional assistance by way of talking openly and freely and having shared with us their feelings, emotions and thoughts.

***We are indebted to the Police (GRP & RPF) for their co-operation and support in allowing us to work freely on the stations and platforms of Sealdah and Howrah Stations.***

We would like to render our thanks to the railway staff members, hawkers, coolies and stall owners for sharing information and facts with us which has helped us abundantly.

We are thankful to the NGOs working in the area for these street and platform children.

We express our gratitude to Vidyasagar School of Social Work, Salt Lake, Kolkata for helping us in the preparation and compilation of this Research Report.

Lastly, we thank Groupe Developpement, France, for providing the necessary financial support to enable us to bring out this publication.

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# CHAPTER I

Behold, children are a blessing from the Lord. -Psalm 127:3-5

## 1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY:

### 1.11 Introduction:

India has the largest population of street children in the world. At least eighteen million children live or work on the streets of urban India, labouring as porters at bus or railway terminals; as mechanics in informal auto-repair shops; as vendors of food, tea, or handmade articles; as street tailors; or as rag pickers, picking through garbage and selling usable materials to local buyers (UNDP: 2003). However by their very nature, street children are excluded from 'statistic-friendly' infrastructures (such as families, censuses, schools etc) and they are also very mobile and therefore difficult to count. A significant number of these children take shelter in the railways stations where they find the basic infrastructure for living and also various livelihood options. As the railways stations offer various income opportunities from hawking to begging, even the children who are not living in the station are drawn to these stations thereby spending a considerable period of time during the day. These children came to be known as 'platform children'. The life at railway station violates the survival, protection and development rights of these 'platform children'.

There is no separate law or charter to describe these children and little research work has been done to highlight their causes. Broadly speaking, they belong to the category of street children sharing the same vulnerable status and exposed to similar kinds of risks. Along with street children, they also come under the purview of 'Children in Need of Care & Protection' as defined under Section 2(d) of Juvenile Justice Act, 2000. Hence it is imperative to review the socio-economic status as well as legal status of street children and the rights they enjoy under Indian constitution and international conventions, which are equally pertinent for platform children.

### 1.12 Definition:

The term 'street children' is hotly debated. Some say it is negative that it labels and stigmatizes children. Others say it gives them an identity and a sense of belonging. It can include a very wide range of children who: are homeless; work on the streets but sleep at home; either do or do not have family contact; work in open-air markets; live on the streets, railway platforms with their families or alone; live in day or night shelters; spend a lot of time in institutions (e.g. prison). (Consortium For Street Children).

According to UNICEF (as cited by Nandana Reddy in Street Children of Bangalore: A Situational Analysis (NOIDA: Government of India, 1992), street children are those for whom the street (in the widest sense of the word, i.e. unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, etc.) more than their family has become their real home, a situation in which there is no protection, supervision, or direction from responsible adults.

They belong to three operational categories:

#### 1. Children on the Street

Forming the largest category, these are children who have homes; most return to their families at the end of the day.

## 2. Children of the Street

These children are a group who have chosen the street as their home and it is there that they seek shelter, livelihood, and companionship. They have occasional contacts with their families.

## 3. Abandoned Children

These children have severed all ties with their families. They are entirely on their own, not only for material survival but also psychologically.

The reality of the street child is the naked and vicious face of poverty, sickness and exploitation. The tragedy is, that those who bear it are themselves innocent, lonely and frightened young children.

Street Children are those unfortunate children who basically:

Have only intermittent contact with parents or family (usually mother or sisters) but live most of the time with other street children in the city streets, or are on the move.

Have been literally abandoned by their parents/relatives, found themselves on the street from the beginning because of family problems, or have chosen to leave home due to some kind of constant abuse.

Those who have run away from home and or have an unpleasant or traumatic home environment.

The majority of street children are still in contact with their families and/or extended families. Many of them work on the streets in order to contribute to their family's income. Those who run away often do so because of family problems they are unable to solve: i.e. physical, psychological and/or sexual violence, alcoholism, or abuse at home. Family breakdown is also common in the case of re-marriage and problems with step-parents. Their tolerance level has been far exceeded, leading to the drastic decision to leave their family.

Delinquency or the lure of enjoying unbridled freedom in the glitterati of city life, glamourised by magazines and movies with option to earn liquid cash also drag out children from their home. Yet street children are rarely alone, even if they have no family contact: *Here we do not have any kind of blood relation with each other. But when we are in the street with other friends, though we do not have any name for our relation, we are like a family. We are all actually members of our street family. [Street Diary, Save the Children (UK) Nepal, 2001]*

### 1.13 How many are they?

Nobody knows how many street children reside in a particular place due to their highly mobile nature. Street children are not easy to count because: they move around a lot, within and between cities and many of them maintain mutual exclusivity from 'statistic-friendly' infrastructures (schools, households etc.). In many countries, there is anecdotal evidence that numbers are increasing, due to uncontrolled urbanization (linked to poverty), social tensions,

conflict and children being orphaned by AIDS and other lethal diseases. Most statistics are just estimates e.g. Kenya: 250,000; Ethiopia: 150,000; Zimbabwe: 12,000; Bangladesh: 445,226; Nepal: 30,000; India: 11 million (Consortium for Street Children).

It is widely accepted that India has the largest population of street children in the world. (UNDP Human Development Report, 1993) though it is extremely difficult to enumerate the exact number.

While there are no statistics for the total number of street children in India under the UNICEF definition, the Government of India's 1991 Census estimated that eighteen million children lived and worked in India's urban slums (huts, tenements, pavement dwellings), which under the government's definition, qualified them as street children, by virtue of their residence, the fact that they were considered working, and the fact that their families were also living on the street as pavement dwellers or in huts which are street-level shelters.

From the UNICEF 2004 report, out of 640 million children around the world who do not have sufficient lodging 147 million are in India alone. Globally 270 million children do not have health care services with 85 million of them in India. Out of the 140 million children in our world today who have never attended school 33 million are in India. Before the age of one year almost 2 million children die every year in India caused by disease and malnutrition in most cases. According to Railway Children (UK) there is an estimated 100,000 -125,000 street children in each of Mumbai, Kolkata and Delhi alone

Children living in poverty in India also face exploitation as child labourers, trafficking, sexual abuse and prostitution. Quality of life scenarios for these poverty stricken children can be as runaways from home to living on the streets, in brothels or in railway stations. This puts these children at high risk for sexually transmitted diseases and HIV. There are stories of children in this country who are sold as a way for a mother to feed her other children or kept out of school to help support the family as a labourer from ages 5 to 14. According to one report between 40 and 115 million child workers in India work in agriculture, commercial sex work, and in industries, as well as debt bondage where children are working to pay off debts that the family accumulated. (Linda Poplin)

Based on 1981 census data, UNICEF estimated that Bombay has a population of 100,000 street children, New Delhi has 110,000 street children, Madras has 40,000 street children, and Bangalore has 45,000 street children. According to Center for Concern for Child Labour, a nongovernmental organization, Kolkata alone may have as many as 500,000 street children (1996).

Regardless of the statistics, even one child on the streets is too many if his/her rights are being violated.

### **1.14 Occupation & Hazards:**

Most street children find themselves some work, even though they may not be steady and lose jobs regularly. Many think of rag picking as a "job". A study in 1989 showed that 39.3% working children are paid inadequately and 34% complained of being forced to overwork. Many children are lured into bonded work or "work-camps" that they are unable to escape from, due to unscrupulous and cruel proprietors or middlemen. (N. S. Manihara)

Street children are mostly engaged in the following type of activities:

- Collecting and selling waste paper, plastic, scrap metal etc.
- Cleaning cars and two-wheelers,
- Selling water, sweets, food items, vegetables, clothes etc.
- Selling newspapers and flowers including garlands on streets.
- Begging, pimping, pick pocketing, stealing
- Working in roadside stalls or repair shops
- Coolie work or working in wayside hotels

Street children are constantly harassed and abused in all ways because there is none to take responsibility for them. They live in fear of arrest and long detainment. They have no faith in the system and disrespect legal authorities because they have rarely experienced any kindness or understanding from anyone at that level.

Street children are arrested, locked up, sent to remand homes, runaway are arrested to be beaten and locked up without ever being offered a word of legal advice, much less a lawyer, or a government counsellor. They languish in custody for days without even a hearing. Fortunate ones sometimes make their way to various remand homes and night shelters. But it is just as well known that many of these so-called juvenile care centres like observation homes, remand homes sadly lack any semblance of actual care. Some of them eventually escape from these "Homes" just as they run away from their real home.

A child thus grows up in an environment of cruelty & abuse (physical, mental and sexual) and if he/she does not have the wits to escape, emerges a hardened criminal with total contempt for society in all its aspects when he/she is 18.

The health condition of street children is generally poor. Many suffer from chronic diseases like TB, leprosy, typhoid, malaria, jaundice and liver/kidney disorders. Venereal disease is rampant among older ones (14yrs+). Scabies, gangrene, broken limbs and epilepsy are common. HIV & AIDS cases are now widely seen. Most street children are exposed to dirt, smoke and other environmental hazards. They are also constantly exposed to intense sun, rain and cold.

### **1.15 Gender Disparity:**

In general there are fewer girls than boys actually living on the streets (studies indicate between 3% and 30% depending on the country). This is for several reasons. In many cultures, there is much greater pressure for girls to stay at home than boys. Research shows that girls will put up with abuse at home longer than boys, but that once girls make the decision to leave home, the rupture is more permanent than for boys. Girls are also less visible on the streets as they are often forced or lured into brothels. Even though there are fewer street-living girls than boys, they are extremely vulnerable to human rights abuses both on the street and when they are arrested. However, it is important to note that street boys are also at risk of sexual abuse and exploitation as well as girls.

## 1.16 Legal Safeguards & Existing Laws:

According to United Nations Child Rights Convention, a child should enjoy

- ❑ The Right to survival
- ❑ The Right to education
- ❑ The Right to good health
- ❑ The Right to free expression
- ❑ The Right to be heard
- ❑ The Right to enjoy their own language

In accordance with the constitutional provisions, the Government of India announced National Charter for Children, 2003 to reiterate India's commitment to the cause of children. Underlying this charter is the intent to secure for every child its inherent right to be a child and enjoy healthy and happy childhood, to address the root causes that negate healthy growth and development of the children, and to awaken the community in the wider societal context to protect children from all forms of abuse.

1. Survivals, Life and Liberty.
2. Promoting High Standards of Health & Nutrition.
3. Supplementary nutrition to children belonging to BPL families.
4. Assuring Basic Minimum Needs and Security.
5. Play and Leisure.
6. Early Childhood Care for Survival, Growth & Development.
7. Free and Compulsory Primary Education.
8. Protection from Economic Exploitation and All Forms of Abuse.
9. Right to protected against neglect, maltreatment, injury, trafficking, corporal punishment etc.
10. Ensure children are not used in the conduct of any illegal activity.
11. Protection of the Girl Child.
12. Empowering Adolescents.
13. Equality.
14. Opportunity for all round development of personality including creativity.
15. Freedom of Expression, Freedom to Seek and Receive Information.
16. Freedom of Association and Peaceful Assembly.
17. Strengthening Family.
18. Responsibilities of Both Parents.
19. Protection of Children With Disabilities.
20. Care, Protection, Welfare of Children of Marginalized & Disadvantaged Communities.
21. Recognition of the need to provide care, protect and ensure welfare of Children of Marginalized & Disadvantaged Communities.
22. Ensuring Child Friendly Procedures.

Although there is no legislation that specifies the term "Street Children" in the judiciary of India, the laws applicable under the Juvenile Justice (Care & Protection of Children Act) 2000 relate quite strongly to the care of and rights of street children in general, without mentioning them in any term (Chapter I, 2 (d)), but are found, on a national level, not to be implemented properly at all. In fact, many police officers/constables in the field do not know about the details of the Act.

## 1.2 SITUATION ANALYSIS:

*They think every child who lives or makes a living in the streets is a bad child. I wish that our community and government would love us and guide us and not be ashamed of us. -*

*Street Children of Philippines*

### 1.21 Situation at Kolkata

Calcutta now renamed Kolkata, the so-called City of Joy, the lifeline line of West Bengal, the pivotal of all development activities of eastern India and India's gateway to East Asia needs no further description. "From the mid-day halt of Charnock, grew a city", as observed by Rudyard Kipling, the city flourished as a chief centre of trade and commerce under the British patronage. People from all over the then undivided India flocked to this place rendering its characteristic cosmopolitan character. As the city spread its wings, so grew its railways stations namely Howrah and Sealdah. Post independence, the infrastructural growth of these stations scaled up with increased traffic and became the chief terminal stations of eastern India. Post independence Kolkata too underwent a sea-change in its demographic composition and socio-economic setup. Kolkata bore the brunt of heavy refugee influx from newly formed East Pakistan completely upsetting its demographic setup. More slums and slum-like areas began to spring up in and around Kolkata to accommodate these hapless refugees. Industrial and commercial activities of the city from the 50s right upto the 80s continued to draw people from neighbouring states of Bihar, Orissa, as well as far flung areas of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and even neighbouring countries. People with all sorts of livelihood but living in the lower income bracket crowded the slums and shanties. Their children spent most of their time wandering around streets, railway stations, bus stands and other public places where they could get some food and shelter. Howrah & Sealdah stations, which could provide such facilities, became the house of thousands of urban deprived children of which platform children comprised a sizeable section. During the construction boom in Salt Lake area, a vast amount of cheap unskilled labour was necessary. Given the poor economic condition of the rural hinterland and neighbouring states and lack of opportunity therein, a large number of people came to Kolkata and stayed on thereafter (**J Mazumdar: 2003**). Many of their children found their way to the stations due to its readily available infrastructural facilities like drinking water, toilets, sheds to take night shelter, etc.

### 1.22 The Kids Drama

*"...there is a tendency inherent in the free play of market forces to create regional inequalities, and that tendency becomes more dominant the poorer the country is. – Gunnar Myrdal"*

The phenomenon of street children as well as platform children is the result of complex social, economic and cultural factors working at the micro level in rural and semi-urban hinterlands of the big cities.

Broadly speaking, in India technological and economic development has always overtaken social development and the latter has mainly remained concentrated in the urban pockets. This uneven growth with distinct tilt towards urban growth centres have accentuated regional disparities and catalysed the process of rural-urban migration. (**Economic Survey 1992-93, Seventh Five Year Plan 1985-90, Eighth Five Year Plan 1992-97**).

The discrepancy between the growth in the economic sector and the social sector particularly deepened in the post globalization period whence in spite of stunning advances in the economic sector buoyed by the performance of sunshine industries, the social sector remained blighted by hunger deaths, institutional poverty, deprivation in basic support services and raging social inequalities. Dev & Mooij (2002) showed that expenditure on social sector (which included social services & rural development) as a proportion of GDP has not increased in the post-globalization era.

Liberalization of economy has been followed by the unceremonious death of many traditional livelihoods, iniquitous resource ownership, rampant exploitation for cheap labour in a steeply competitive market and more importantly a completely recast value system which emerged from the entire process. The output of the new economy have been large-scale unemployment, rapid urbanization, unprecedented population growth, extreme poverty, increasing disparities in wealth, inadequate social and educational budgets, high level of child abuse by the parents/societies and a breakdown of traditional family and community structures. **(J. Mazumdar: 2003)**

As witnessed in typical third world countries, the rapid growth of a handful of urban centres may not necessarily spread the pulse of development to its rural hinterland. It rather unleashes a powerful 'backwash' effect that tends to draw labour, raw materials and capital from rural hinterlands to support further development of growth pockets.

Responding to the regional/local imbalance, people (including children) living in the rural backyards of West Bengal as well as neighbouring states have steadily streamed to the ever-popular destination of Kolkata. Rural to urban migration has significantly contributed to a substantial increase in the number of street and working children. These migrants shift to cities in search of higher income and secure employment mainly in the unorganised sector. Consequently children are forced to live on the streets and earn a livelihood for themselves and also support their families. The children who come on their own find a readily available shelter in the platforms of Howrah and Sealdah stations where basic living needs like water, toilets and shelter are available for free. Also, the station and its buffer zones offer livelihood options in form of working in the wayside eateries, engaging in loading and offloading of goods and luggage, selling the leftover of the passengers like empty mineral water bottles and a wide gamut of options for underworld activities like drug peddling.

Many children take shelter at these stations due to parental abuse and neglect, delinquency and sometimes even peer influence. The cosmopolitan glitterati of the metropolis and the lure of enjoying unbridled freedom away from the glaring watch of the parents often prompt children of many well-to-do families to leave their homes and don the garb of 'platform child'. The social causes for migrating to the stations may be attributed to the breakdown of traditional familial structure and disintegration of the community structure and emergence of a value system bereft of these components. The extreme economic conditions prevailing in many families have stoked the causes for social tensions leading of gradual alienation of many children from parental bondage.

### **1.23 The Stations: Howrah & Sealdah**

The Indian Railways has several divisions of which the Eastern Railway and the South Eastern Railway are headquartered in Kolkata. There are two major railway stations in Kolkata - Howrah and Sealdah. Howrah is the intersection zone of both Eastern as well as South Eastern Railways while Sealdah is under Eastern Railways.

Howrah Railway Station is one of the largest or probably the largest railway complex in India. In 1854, the inaugural train in Eastern India ran from Howrah to Pandua in Hooghly. The Howrah Station has two adjacent terminals. The new terminal is for the South Eastern Railways. The old terminal is served by both the South Eastern Railways and the Eastern Railways. The old Station has Platform nos. 1 to 15 split by a cab road between Platform nos. 8 and 9. Platforms 18 to 21 are new addition for arrival and departure of trains for South Eastern Railway.

Express trains link Howrah to all major Indian cities. Hundreds of electric suburban trains link Howrah to the various suburbs. The Howrah Station area is also probably the site of one of the biggest pedestrian subway systems in India. The Howrah Station also has a hotel - the Rail Yatri Niwas.

Sealdah Railway station has two sections - Main and South. Sealdah station is more of a suburban railway system terminus. The south section has only suburban services. The Main section has both suburban and long distance train services.

The original station, designed by Mr. Walter Glanville was built in 1869. This was the main station. Subsequently as Kolkata spread, large areas of the south became suburbanised and it became necessary to provide these new areas with railway communication. The lines radiating to Diamond Harbour (once the main port), Laksmikantapur, Canning and Budge Budge were known as south section. Interestingly this part of Sealdah station was built close to the main station but at right angles to the main station. Due to the same reasons for growing traffic to and from northern suburban areas another new north Sealdah station was built adjacent to main station.

### **1.24 Rationale Of The Study**

The term 'Platform Children' is in vogue now with occasional flashes in the media, NGO workshops and even drawing attention of various other organizations. Their occurrence in various railway stations of the metropolises and big towns are routinely attributed to the deep socio-economic malaises that are deeply entrenched in a third world state and the solution to this problem is unanimously left to the policy makers. In a country like India where civil society is still in its nascent stage or in many cases conspicuous by its absence, little thought is spared on the plight of these children, their awry lifestyle, the organized exploitation they are subjected to and the role of the community in general to address their issues. Although the platform children are not covered under any specific law, they come under the broad definition of "child in need of care and protection" under Juvenile Justice Act, 2000 (Chapter I, Sec 2 (d)). Moreover India being an important member state of the United Nations and vying for a permanent seat in the Security Council has the moral duty to protect these children (Art.2 and 3 of U.N. Convention of the Right of the Children).

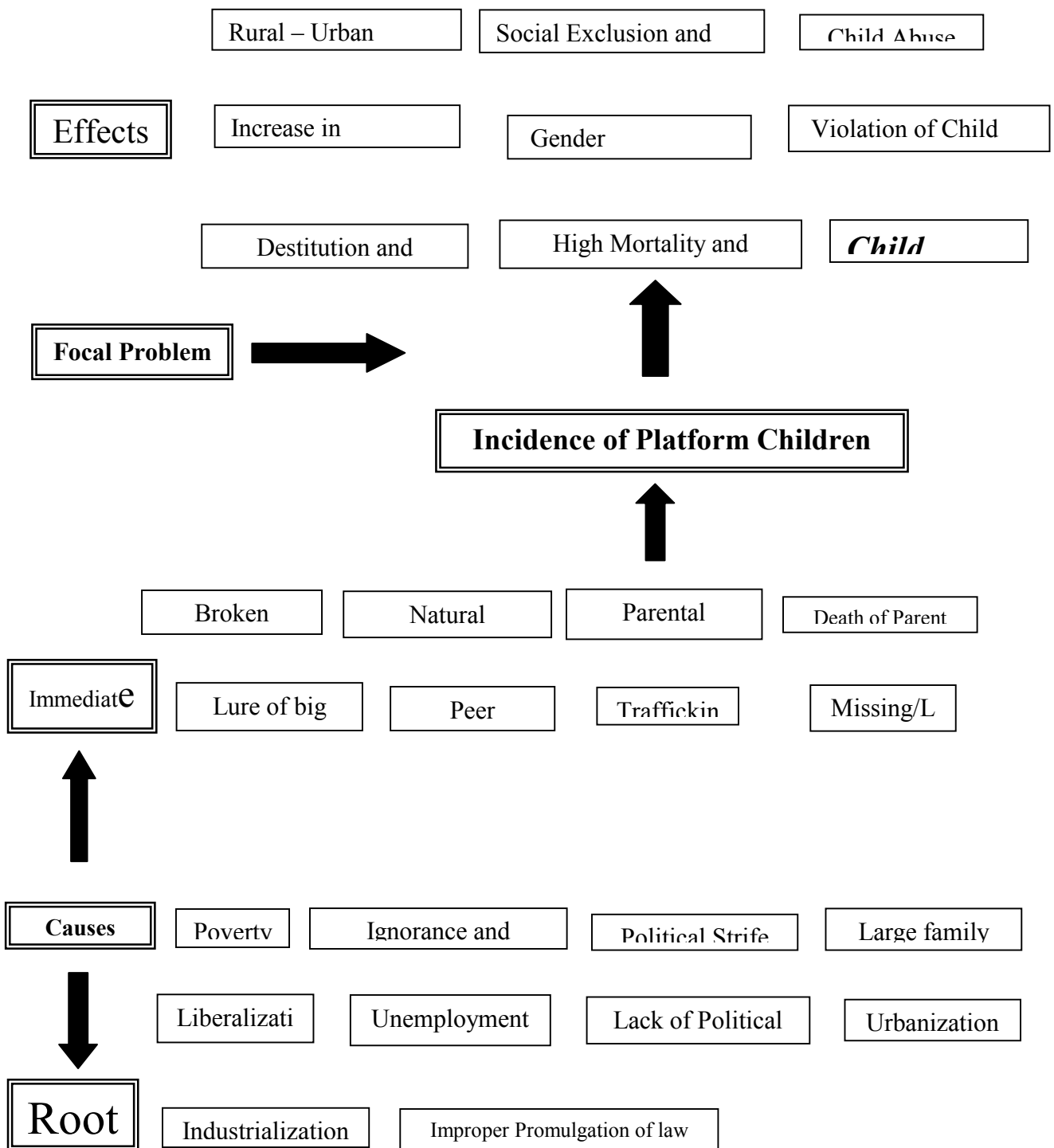
It is axiomatic that like any other normal children, the platform children too have the right to enjoy their livelihood in its all hues of colour, splendour and glory. They have the right to live, right to good health, right to quality education, right to let know their wishes and aspirations and above all the right to be free from abuses and exploitations.

Thus a right-based approach is needed to address the issues of these children. To formulate a right-based approach one needs to be deeply aware of the present living conditions of the children, their level of trauma, the nature of the exploitative forces that are operating on them, the future that beckons them. A comprehensive documentation of all these issues is needed before any suitable intervention programme can be designed.

Another aspect in the life of the platform children is the insensitivity of the stakeholders and the community in general which stems from their ignorance about these children in spite of them sometimes stealing few bytes in the media. Their problems have been dwarfed by child labour, child domestic workers, street children with their respective plethora of problems. Even the Government has no particular programme targeted towards these children.

An in-depth study of the plight of these children in Howrah and Sealdah stations, which are India's nay Asia's amongst the busiest stations, will provide enough fodder for designing advocacy tools and create mass awareness on this issue which is a great human tragedy but lies unheard and unsung most of the times.

# Emergence of Children on Railway Stations: Causes and Effects



Source: Situation Analysis of Children of Howrah Station: J Mazumdar (SEED) (2003).

## CHAPTER II

*We are all guilty of many errors and many faults but our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the fountain of life. Right now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made, and his senses are being developed. - Gabriela Mistral (Chilean Poet)*

### 2.1 Objectives Of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to map the vulnerability status of the children living the platforms of Howrah and Sealdah stations and frame suitable recommendations to address their problem.

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- Push factors, which lead to the migration of children to the platform, and the pull factors intrinsic in the stations contributing to the migration process.
- The status of living conditions and the magnitude of exploitation of the platform children.
- Educational & Occupational status of the platform children
- Problems of reintegration with the family and society.
- Health status and risks including physical and mental health and sexually transmitted diseases.
- Role of various stakeholders in terms of awareness about the children, their living conditions and exploitation.
- Involvement of GO / NGO/ INGO / CBO/ Civil society in providing support, local resource mobilization and gaps and barriers therein.
- Frame recommendations to address their socio-economic problems.

### 2.2 How Many Are They?

There cannot be an absolute figure in determining the number of children in the two platforms. The population of platform children is very dynamic; it varies according to the season, according to the time of the day and a host of other factors. For example, a small field near the approach of Sealdah (South) station is frequented by migrant community. During November – February each year honey sellers from Burdwan, Midnapore come and pitch their settlement in this field. Their children enjoy all the infrastructural facilities of the station. In the month of March, bird trappers who mainly sell parakeets, replace them. In Howrah station, just after harvest, people from Bihar mainly from Arrah, Gaya, Sonapur, etc arrive to work as daily labourers. The station is also a halt for quacks who sell ethno-medicine just before the onset of summer.

The population of the platform children also varies during every hour of the day. In the daytime, Catchment children who primarily come here for livelihood dominate along with the Night Stay children. The situation of the platform changes dramatically post evening when the Catchment children and the Night Stay children steal the show giving us an idea of their population size. However that figure too is not absolute as some of them are highly transitory in nature. They shuttle between various stations and do not remain glued to one single station only. Police hyper-activism is another reason for the fluctuation in the number of children.

Whenever there is a police overdrive, the children take cover in a safer place, normally some other station, only to surface later when the dust has settled down.

### **2.3 Methodology:**

After a physical head count of platform children, 100 children each from Howrah and Sealdah station were interviewed based on purposive sampling. Because the population of children in the stations is highly dynamic, it is not possible to undertake any kind of random sampling. A pre-coded interview schedule was prepared to collect information from the respondents which was pre-tested while ensuring coverage of the important issues. Semi-structured questionnaire were also prepared for the platform children as well as the other stakeholders like railway authority, hawkers, vendors, police, coolies, NGO and the families living in the adjacent shanties of Howrah and Sealdah stations. While framing the semi-structured questionnaire, flexibility has been the key issue where the respondents have been allowed to express themselves candidly. The data collectors were imparted orientation training for 5 days before the collection of data where they were briefed about the objectives of the study and method of data collection. The senior children especially those who are associated with Don Bosco Ashalayam Night Shelter and non-formal school were engaged to identify the platform children and mobilize them to provide information. Focus group discussions were also conducted with 10 platform children of Howrah and Sealdah stations each with special reference to substance & sexual abuse.

Data for the study has been collected, both from secondary sources and through a field survey at Howrah & Sealdah stations.

#### **Primary Source:**

1. The platform children
2. Railway staff members
3. Police (GRP and RPF)
4. Other stakeholders like hawkers, coolies, stall owners
5. Family members of the platform children.
6. NGO working in the area.

#### **Secondary Source:**

1. SEED Study on Howrah Station.
2. Information and literature available at Railway Children (UK).
3. Reports of Don Bosco Ashalayam.
4. News clippings, press releases and other articles on platform children .

### **2.4 Tabulation:**

After the collection of data, they were tabulated using software packages. Simple data displays in the form of tables and charts were prepared. The data were presented according to the topics of discussion and the various sub-topics contained therein.

The key issues discussed are

- Demography
- Push – pull Factors
- Living Conditions & Organised Exploitation

- Problems of Reintegration
- GO/NGO Support
- Substance/Sexual Abuse

**2.5 Time Frame:** January 2005 – June 2005

### **2.6 Sample Frame & Data Collection Design:**

At first a physical headcount of children in both the stations was done at various times of the day as well as night. Based on the headcount an average number of children was computed which is as follows:

Station	Night Shelter	Catchment	Migrant	Total
Howrah	66	71	18	155
Sealdah	90	50	35	175

It has already been mentioned that the population of children in the stations is highly dynamic in nature and these numbers that were calculated during January and February will definitely change in the following months.

The sample size for administering the pre-coded questionnaire for each station was 100, which comprised 64.51% & 57.14% of total children population of Howrah & Sealdah respectively and is fairly representative.

The sample frame of the 100 children is as follows

Station	Night Shelter	Catchment	Migrant	Total
Howrah	60	38	2	100
Sealdah	43	44	13	100

Migrants were few in number as during data collection period most of them had left the station with the onset of summer.

The sample size for semi-structured interview of the platform children was 30 for each station.

Focus group discussions were made with the platform children.

### **2.7 Operational Definition**

The platform children have been broadly classified into three categories:

1. Night Stay Children that is the children who spend the night at the platform
2. Catchment Children that is the children who spend a considerable amount of time during the day in the platform.
3. Migrant children that is the children who make brief stopover in the platforms.

All three categories of children have some unique reasons for coming to the platforms that portray diverse socio-economic factors responsible for this phenomenon. Hence it is imperative to study the children under separate categories to have a thorough understanding of their problems.

### **2.7.1 Platform:**

All 21 platforms including the stalls inside the Howrah station area and all 17 platforms including the stalls inside the Sealdah station area.

Entire station area including over-bridges, ticket counters, waiting rooms, refreshment rooms, subway (Howrah) etc.

Shanties within the station area mainly Sealdah.

Platform Children have been classified into three categories

### **2.7.2 Night Stay Children :**

Children sleeping in the platform at night.

Using the station facilities like toilet, water, bath and other infrastructural facilities.

Using the platform for earning, living and recreation.

#### *Night Stay Children...*

Arjun Shaw (name changed) aged 16 came to Howrah from Rishra, Hooghly district after his acrimony with his step-mother. He still maintains some relations with his family although discordant. Sometimes he visits home just to see his 3 sisters or give some money to his father. Being a hardcore drug addict, most of his earning is wasted on drugs. Shaw has been picked up by the police a number of times and was once sent to Barasat Kisholay Home. After spending 3 years there, he ran away to again resettle in Howrah station. Shaw is now firmly entrenched in the station earning through searching of trains, doing menial jobs, etc.

### **2.7.3 Catchment Children:**

Children spending some time (not less than 2-3 hours) on the platform.

Using all the station facilities for earning a living.

Do not sleep on the platforms.

Sleep with their parents / others at night outside the platform area.

#### *Catchment Children...*

Babloo (name changed) aged 10 lives in Naihati, 24 Parganas (N). His father died when he was of a tender age leaving behind his mother and two sisters. His mother makes *mooya* (a kind of sweet-dish made from puffed rice and molasses) at home which he sells in the platforms of Sealdah (Main) station. Everyday he comes to Sealdah at 8 AM and leaves the station at around 7 PM. At the age of 10, Babloo is the sole bread earner of the family. Due to acute poverty, Babloo has never been to school.

### **2.7.4 Migrant Children:**

Migrant children have been classified into two categories:

#### **2.7.4.1 Transit Children**

Frequent traveller, does not stay in a station for a long period.

Enjoy station facilities.

May or may not sleep in the platform at night.

##### *Transit Children...*

Sunil (name changed) aged 11 hails from Nadia. He left his home unable to adjust with his alcoholic father and the ill treatment of his stepmother. He came to Sealdah and settled there for 6 months till one day he decided to move to Howrah after making contacts there. Once he received severe thrashing from the police following which he went to Kharagpur. Nowadays he never stays in any particular station and is always on the move, frisking between various stations.

#### **2.7.4.2 Children of Migrant Community**

Children belonging to migrant community who migrate to the town and live within 50m from the station for a certain period every year and most of whom have unique livelihood options.

##### *Children of Migrant Community...*

Kabir Rathod (name changed) has his home at Sonnagar, Aurangabad, Bihar. He had come to Howrah station with his family comprising his mother, brothers, sister-in-law and sister. Every year, at a particular period of time, they come here with the purpose of selling herbs/local medicines etc. They stay in the platform and after a certain period, move out from here. His family earns an average of approximately Rs.50 per day by selling the herbs and ethno-medicine. Kabir is illiterate.

### CHAPTER III

*Like lovely freehand they curved for miles  
East and miles west beyond us, sagging  
Under their burden of swallows.  
- Seamus Heaney (The Railway Children)*

### 3. DEMOGRAPHY

In the present chapter, the demographic profile of each category of the children belong to both Howrah and Sealdah station have been briefly dealt with which will lead to the understanding of the age, gender-mix, level of education, religious/ethnic composition and other details.

The tables related to Sealdah station has been prefixed S while that of Howrah have been prefixed H. Children of Sealdah station means the sample population of Sealdah station while the children of Howrah station means sample population of Howrah station.

#### 3.1 Age, Sex and Type of Platform Children

Table No. S-1

Age (years)	Upto 8		8+ To 12		12+ To 15		15+ To 18		
Type	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	Total
Night Stay	1	1	22	6	14	5	8	3	60
Catchment	1	2	14	6	6	3	6	0	38
Migrant	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
Total	2	3	37	12	21	8	14	3	100

60% of the respondents belong to Night Stay category, 38% belongs to Catchment category and the rest 2% are migrants.

75% of the night shelter respondents are male and the rest 25% are female. 71.05% of the catchment respondents are male and the 28.94% are female.

100 % of the migrant respondents are male.

Majority of the children (49%) belong to the age group of 8+ - 12 years followed by 12+ To 15 years (29%) and 15+ To 18 years (17%)

In general an overwhelming number of platform children is male. In a social order that is prevailing in our country, it is easier for the boys to leave the home than the girls because they have greater agility and flexibility to participate in the job market. Also the boys are far less concerned about any physical threat posed to them.

Table No. H-1

Age Type	Upto 8		8+ To 12		12+ To 15		15+ To 18		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
<b>Night Stay</b>	0	0	13	3	18	1	6	2	43
<b>Catchment</b>	3	6	15	6	9	2	3	0	44
<b>Migrant</b>	2	3	4	1	2	1	0	0	13
<b>Total</b>	5	9	32	10	29	4	9	2	100

43% of the respondents belong to Night Stay category, 44% belongs to Catchment category and the rest 13% are migrants.

84% of the night shelter respondents are male and the rest 16% are female. 68.2% of the catchment respondents are male and the 31.8% are female. 61.5 % of the migrant respondents are male and the rest 38.5 % are female.

Here too, the majority of the platform children are male.

Majority of the children (42%) belong to the age group of 8+ to 12 years followed by 12+ to 15 years (33%), up to 8 years (14%) and 15+ to 18 years (11%).

### 3.2 Distribution of Children By Religion

Table No. S-2

	Hindu	Muslim	Others	TOTAL
<b>Night Stay</b>	48	12	0	60
<b>Catchment</b>	25	13	0	38
<b>Migrant</b>	2	0	0	2
<b>Total</b>	75	25	0	100

80% of the total night stay respondents are Hindus and the rest 20 % are Muslims. 34.3% of the catchment respondents are Muslims while the rest 65.7% are Hindus. 100% of the migrant respondents are Hindus.

Table No. H-2

	Hindu	Muslim	Others	TOTAL
<b>Night Stay</b>	35	8	0	43
<b>Catchment</b>	25	19	0	44
<b>Migrant</b>	9	4	0	13
<b>Total</b>	69	31	0	100

31% of the total respondents are Muslims and the rest 69 % are Hindus.

### 3.3 Distribution of Children By Mother Tongue

Table No. S-3

	<b>Bengali</b>	<b>Hindi</b>	<b>Others</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	48	12	0
<b>Catchment</b>	9	20	9
<b>Migrant</b>	2	0	0
<b>Total</b>	59	32	9

59% of the children are Bengali speaking, 32% of them speak Hindi and rest 9% speak in Urdu and other languages and dialects.

Table No. H-3

	<b>Bengali</b>	<b>Hindi</b>	<b>Others</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	14	24	5
<b>Catchment</b>	19	14	11
<b>Migrant</b>	5	6	2
<b>Total</b>	38	44	18

Around 38% of the children are Bengali speaking, while Hindi-speaking population is 44%. There are some other children who speak Urdu, Oriya and Telegu and constitute 18% of the population. The Oriya and Telegu speaking children have come from Orissa and Andhra Pradesh respectively.

### 3.4 Distribution of Children By Education

Table No. S-4

	<b>Illiterate</b>	<b>Just Literate</b>	<b>Primary</b>	<b>High School</b>	<b>SF&amp; above</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	27	16	17	0	0	60
<b>Catchment</b>	19	4	12	1	2	38
<b>Migrant</b>	1	0	0	1	0	2
<b>Total</b>	47	20	29	2	2	100

45% are illiterate, 26.7% are just literate and 28.3% children have reached/completed their primary level among the night stay category.

50% are illiterate, 10.5% are just literate, 31.6% have completed primary, 2.6% have done HS and 5.3% are SF and above among the catchment respondents.

Overall, 47% are illiterate, 20% are just literate and 29% have reached or completed primary level.

Table No. H-4

	<b>Illiterate</b>	<b>Just Literate</b>	<b>Primary</b>	<b>High School</b>	<b>SF&amp; above</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	27	8	8	0	0	43
<b>Catchment</b>	30	2	10	0	2	44
<b>Migrant</b>	11	2	0	0	0	13
<b>Total</b>	68	12	18	0	2	100

Here too the level of education is very low. 62.7% of the Night Stay children and 68.1% of the catchment children are illiterate. Overall, 68% of the sample population is illiterate.

It is quite clear that in both the stations the level of education amongst the children is quite poor. Due to acute poverty many children could not study and had to leave home or take up some job at a tender age. This is particularly apt for the Catchment children. The Night Stay children too have come to the station at a tender age abandoning their studies. The level of education is poorest amongst the children of the migrant community because of their transitory nature for which the children are deprived of their studies.

### 3.5 Identification of the Platform Children

Table No. S-5

	<b>Ration Card</b>	<b>ID Card</b>	<b>Bank Pass Book</b>	<b>Others</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	30	0	0	0	30	60
<b>Catchment</b>	17	0	0	0	21	38
<b>Migrant</b>	1	0	0	0	1	2
<b>Total</b>	48	0	0	0	52	100

50% of the Night Stay children and 44% of the catchment children have ration cards. Overall 48% of the children have ration cards, which is the only source of their identity. However most of them have left their cards back at home.

Table No. H-5

	<b>Ration Card</b>	<b>ID Card</b>	<b>Pass Book</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	10	0	0	33	0	43
<b>Catchment</b>	14	0	0	30	0	44
<b>Migrant</b>	1	0	0	12	0	13
<b>Total</b>	25	0	0	75	0	100

In Howrah, 23.3% of the Night Stay children have ration cards while for the catchment children the figure is 31.8%. For the migrants there is barely any identification card. Most of them do not care for any such card. Lack of legal identity has increased the vulnerability of these children, as they are open to abuse from legal authority which is has been reflected in the following chapter. It is of no surprise that the Night Stay children may not have any sort of identity for being away from home but it is interesting to note that the Catchment children who have some linkages with home also lack this legal identity.

### Major Findings:

- In both the stations, the overwhelming majority of the platform children are boys.
- Majority of the platform children are Hindus and rest are Muslims. No other religion has been found.
- Bengali speaking children are majority in Sealdah station while in Howrah the Hindi speaking are the majority. It is because Sealdah witnesses intra-state migration and Howrah due to its connectivity with other states witnesses inter-state migration.
- In both the stations, majority of the children (minimum being 42%) belong to the age group of 8+ to 12 years followed by 12+ to 15 years. However in Howrah there are a larger number of young children (upto 8 years) compared to Sealdah.
- Level of education of the children is very low. Most of them are either literate or just literate. Only a handful of them have reached the High School or School Final level.
- Majority of the children do not have any sort of identity card. Ration card is the only identity card for the luckier ones. However possession of identity card does not mean anything for the Night Stay children because they had left it back at home. The number of children having a ration card is much less in Howrah compared to Sealdah.

## CHAPTER IV

### 4. PUSH-PULL FACTORS

Every migration process is a result of certain push-pull factors. The push factors relate to lack of livelihood, socio-cultural problems, ethnic and political strife, natural disasters, etc in the source areas. Pull factors relate to livelihood options, availability of shelter and other infrastructure, security, etc in the destination areas. In case of platform children too, the push-pull factors are both economic as well as social. The present chapter analyses the reasons for the children's migration to the station. This migration is primarily rural-urban in nature although there are a number of instances of urban-urban migration.

#### 4.1 Source of Migration

Table No. S-18

	<b>Intra State</b>	<b>Inter State</b>	<b>Born in Station</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	48	9	3
<b>Catchment</b>	34	4	0
<b>Migrant</b>	1	1	0
<b>Total</b>	83	14	3

In Sealdah station, 83% of the children belong to West Bengal and 14% hail from neighbouring states of Bihar and Orissa. The former mainly come from 24 Parganas (N), 24 Parganas (S), Nadia etc. In Sealdah the movement is primarily intra-state.

Table No. H-18

	<b>Intra State</b>	<b>Inter State</b>	<b>Born in Station</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	27	11	5
<b>Catchment</b>	36	8	0
<b>Migrant</b>	7	6	0
<b>Total</b>	70	25	5

In Howrah station, 70% of the children belong to West Bengal and 25% hail from the states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh. Source areas in West Bengal are Midnapore, Burdwan, Howrah, 24 Parganas (S) etc. Thus the movement noticed is intra-state as well as inter-state.

#### 4.2 Occupation of the Platform Children (multiple choice)

Table No. S-6

	<b>Menial Job</b>	<b>Hawking</b>	<b>Begging</b>	<b>Shops / Establishment</b>	<b>Others</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	1	4	13	11	32	5
<b>Catchment</b>	0	9	7	3	17	3
<b>Migrant</b>	0	0	0	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>	1	13	20	15	49	9

91% of the children are working while 9% of them are not working. 53.84% of them are engaged in train checking i.e. collecting empty plastic bottles, newspapers, valuables left by the passengers etc. 21.97% are engaged in begging while 16.48% work in the wayside shops/eateries. Other occupations include pulling thelas, working with the railway staff and some anti-social activities.

Table No. H-6

	<b>Menial Job</b>	<b>Hawking</b>	<b>Begging</b>	<b>Shops / Establishment</b>	<b>Others</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	1	0	11	5	36	1
<b>Catchment</b>	2	12	6	6	15	4
<b>Migrant</b>	0	0	1	1	13	0
<b>Total</b>	3	12	18	12	65	5

95% of the children are working while 5% of them are not working. 68.42% of them are engaged in train checking, 18.94% are engaged in begging while 12.63% each are engaged in wayside shops/establishments or in hawking.

Children come to stay in the platform because of some easily available livelihood options. Almost all of them are associated with some kind of economic activity. This is the single most important pull factor which draws a substantial number of children to the station. Most of them are involved in 'train checking' i.e. collecting empty plastic water bottles, newspapers food and other leftovers of the passengers. While checking the train, they sometimes get cellular phones, spectacles, watches which they promptly sell off to local agents. They sell the empty plastic bottles and newspapers to the local traders who operate from the nearby platforms. Some of them work in the stalls and eateries in and around the station. Many children are also engaged in begging which is also a good source of income. Says Chhotu (name changed), "In Sealdah station one can earn upto Rs 25-30 per day by selling water bottles, or Rs 50-70 per day by pulling trolleys." There are some children who work in shops and other units. Raju (name changed) of Sealdah station works in a grill factory and earns Rs 1200 per month. A hotel or wayside eatery pays a child Rs 10-20/- per day along with food for carrying water and washing utensils.

In Howrah station the income is more because of more number of long distance trains.

Most of the children earn within Rs 100/- per day, a part of which they send back to home.

Apart from getting a livelihood, the children get the readily available infrastructure of the platform and its adjacent areas like drinking water, toilet and a place to sleep at night. The nature of their living condition has been described in the following chapter.

### 4.3 Daily Income of the Platform Children

Table No. S-7

	<b>0 - 50</b>	<b>51 - 100</b>	<b>101 - 150</b>	<b>151 - 200</b>	<b>200+</b>	<b>NA</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	19	28	6	2	0	5
<b>Catchment</b>	8	20	5	2	0	3
<b>Migrant</b>	1	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	28	48	11	4	0	9

The income is mainly through activities like searching of empty compartments of long-distance trains, begging, and working in the shops. More than 90% of the children have a source of daily income which is a prime reason for them gelling in the platform. A few of those who are in the higher income bracket are reported to be engaged in anti-social activities.

Table No. H-7

	<b>0 - 50</b>	<b>51 - 100</b>	<b>101 - 150</b>	<b>151 - 200</b>	<b>200+</b>	<b>NA</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	14	15	8	4	1	1
<b>Catchment</b>	14	19	2	2	3	4
<b>Migrant</b>	8	4	1	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	36	38	11	6	4	5

Here too, basically the same income pattern follows. However in a significant departure from Sealdah, the platform children of Howrah depend more on train checking because of a large number of long-distance trains frequenting the station. In both the cases, the daily income has been calculated based on INR

Some of the children are involved in anti-social activities for which they earn handsomely. These include snatching, pickpocket, stealing from the passengers. They have an organized racket through which they sell off the stolen goods. Some say they have to regularly pay a part of the income to the police. Asim (named changed) of Sealdah station narrates how he nabbed a bag containing Rs 60,000 from a passenger and afterwards shelled out Rs 20,000 to a police inspector.

### 4.4 Whether the Platform Children are in touch with Family

Table No. S-8

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	39	21
<b>Catchment</b>	37	1
<b>Migrant</b>	1	1
<b>Total</b>	77	23

Overall 77% of the platform children are touch with their families. 97.3% of the catchment children either live with their families or maintain linkage. 65% of the night stay children maintain contacts with the family. In Sealdah, there are a number of platform children who live with their families in the area adjacent to Platform 13 of Sealdah (South) station.

**Table No. H-8**

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	37	6
<b>Catchment</b>	30	14
<b>Migrant</b>	13	0
<b>Total</b>	80	20

Overall 80% of the platform children are touch with their families. 68.18% of the catchment children either live with their families or maintain linkage. 86.04% of the night stay children maintain contacts with the family. Children belonging to the migrant category stay with their parents and the family as a unit migrates.

#### 4.5 Whether the Platform Children send remittance to the Family

Table No. S-9

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	23	37
<b>Catchment</b>	36	2
<b>Migrant</b>	0	2
<b>Total</b>	59	41

38.33 % amongst the night stay respondents send remittances and the rest % do not send any. Among the catchment respondents, 94.73 % send remittances to their homes.

Table No. H-9

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	22	21
<b>Catchment</b>	36	8
<b>Migrant</b>	0	13
<b>Total</b>	22	21

51.1 % among the night stay respondents send remittances and the rest 48.8% do not send any.

Among the catchment respondents, 81.8% send remittances to their homes.

While almost all the Catchment children regularly give money to the parents, it is interesting to note that a large number of Platform children too are in regular touch with the family and do send money back home. In many cases it has been found that the parents, mostly fathers, come to the platform to collect the money. It can be assumed that economic compulsion is the driving force behind the family's acceptance of their children being converted to platform children.

*Small hands, big work...*

Shyamal Maiti (name changed) is a 13 year old boy hailing from Ramnagar, Midnapore (E) now living in Howrah station. Back home he has both parents and three sisters. Yet Shyamal is the sole bread earner of the family. His father visits him every month to collect the money. He works in a tea stall and sells tea in the platforms apart from washing utensils, making tea, etc. He has been arrested by the police many times and physically tortured. His employer had to bribe the police to set him free.

#### 4.6 Whether the Platform Children visit their home place

Table No. S-10

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	32	28
<b>Catchment</b>	35	3
<b>Migrant</b>	1	1
<b>Total</b>	68	32

68% of the children have been found to visit their home place. As most of the Catchment children stay with their families, their familial connection is quite strong. 53% of the Night Stay children too visit their homes.

Table No. H-10

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	23	20
<b>Catchment</b>	42	2
<b>Migrant</b>	13	0
<b>Total</b>	78	22

78% of the children visit their home place. Here too it is seen that the Catchment children have close bondage with their families. 53.4% of the Night Stay children visit their homes.

#### 4.7 Frequency of visiting their home place (Night Stay only)

Table No. S-11

	<b>YES</b>							<b>NA</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	
<b>Night Stay</b>	9	10	5	5	2	1	0	28

**Table No. H-11**

	YES							NA
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
<b>Night Stay</b>	1	6	7	0	8	0	1	20

- 1 = Once in a week  
2 = Once in a month  
3 = Once in 3 months  
4 = Once in 6 months  
5 = Once in a year  
6 = During Festival / Domestic Ceremony  
7 = When sick or need money or any assistance

It has been seen that in Sealdah the linkage of the Night Stay children with their families is comparatively stronger than that in Howrah. One probable reason may be that the children of Sealdah mainly come from the adjoining districts and it is easier for them to maintain contact with their families. On the other hand, there are children in Howrah station who have come from Bihar, Orissa and even Andhra Pradesh for which they cannot visit their homes regularly.

#### 4.8 Whether the children used to work at home

Table No. S-12

	Yes	No	NA
<b>Night Stay</b>	12	45	3
<b>Catchment</b>	4	34	0
<b>Migrant</b>	0	2	0
<b>Total</b>	16	84	3

17.91% of the Night Stay children used to work at home. 89% of the Catchment children didn't work at home. This needs to be interpreted considering the fact that most of them are presently staying with their families and earning a livelihood working in the platforms.

Table No. H-12

	Yes	No	NA
<b>Night Stay</b>	16	22	5
<b>Catchment</b>	7	37	0
<b>Migrant</b>	0	0	13
<b>Total</b>	23	64	18

37.2% of the Night Stay children used to work at home. 11.6% of the children were born in the station or living here since their infant days.

In case of both the stations, no children ever mentioned that the reason for leaving their homes is the domestic workload. Hence this cannot be attributed as a push factor.

#### 4.9 Whether the children suffered from domestic violence at home

Table No. S-13

	Yes	No	NA
<b>Night Stay</b>	27	30	3
<b>Catchment</b>	11	27	0
<b>Migrant</b>	0	0	2
<b>Total</b>	38	59	3

A sizable proportion of Night Stay children (45%) were affected by violence at home. For the Catchment, the figure is less (40.7%).

Table No. H-13

	Yes	No	NA
<b>Night Stay</b>	15	23	5
<b>Catchment</b>	12	32	0
<b>Migrant</b>	1	0	12
<b>Total</b>	28	67	5

Here too, in the Night Stay category, the percentage of children affected by domestic violence is pegged at 34.88%. For the Catchment children, the figure is 37.5%.

Thus it is clearly seen that the spate of domestic violence is an important push factor compelling the children leave their home. The abusers are mainly alcoholic father or step-parent.

#### ***Daddy, what did you leave behind for me...***

Raghu Yadav (name changed) is around 9 years old and hails from Guwahati, Assam. His father is a driver and earns Rs 5000 per month. After the death of his mother, his father turned alcoholic and started abusing him everyday. Raghu came down to Howrah station and took the job of a helper in an adjacent hotel. He also checks the trains. Being a drug addict, he has now become physically very weak and had once suffered from tuberculosis. Due to police high-handedness Raghu now wants to leave Howrah and settle in Kharagpur or Burdwan station.

#### 4.10 Whether the children were treated at home when felt sick

Table No. S-14

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>NA</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	39	18	3
<b>Catchment</b>	31	7	0
<b>Migrant</b>	1	1	0
<b>Total</b>	71	26	3

Overall, most of the children (71%) were treated at home when they felt sick. The percentage is higher for Catchment children (81.5%) than Night Stay (65%). This suggests there exists an undercurrent of family relationship.

Table No. H-14

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>NA</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	27	11	5
<b>Catchment</b>	44	0	0
<b>Migrant</b>	0	0	13
<b>Total</b>	76	11	13

In Howrah too, 76% of the children were treated at home when the felt ill. It is interesting to note that all the Catchment children were treated at home.

#### 4.11 With whom the children came to the station

Table No. S-15

	<b>Alone</b>	<b>Family</b>	<b>Relatives</b>	<b>Friends</b>	<b>Employer</b>	<b>Others</b>	<b>NA</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	30	13	3	5	5	1	3
<b>Catchment</b>	20	13	1	1	0	3	0
<b>Migrant</b>	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	51	27	4	6	5	4	3

51% of the children came to the station on their own followed by 27% who came with their families. However half of the children of the night shelter (50%) came alone. 52.63% of the Catchment children came alone to the station

Table No. H-15

	<b>Alone</b>	<b>Family</b>	<b>Relatives</b>	<b>Friends</b>	<b>Employer</b>	<b>Others</b>	<b>NA</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	24	5	3	6	0	0	5
<b>Catchment</b>	17	17	3	6	1	0	0
<b>Migrant</b>	0	13	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	41	35	6	12	1	0	5

In Howrah, 55.8% of the Night Shelter children came to the station alone and very few with their family (11.62%). For the Catchment children, the share is exactly equal (39.5%).

#### 4.12 Any acquaintance before coming to the station

Table No. S-16

	Yes		No		NA	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>Night Stay</b>	10	2	32	13	3	0
<b>Catchment</b>	14	1	12	11	0	0
<b>Migrant</b>	0	0	0	2	0	0
<b>Total</b>	24	3	44	26	3	0

27% of the platform children had some acquaintances before coming to the platform. . They are basically friends or relatives.

Table No. H-16

	Yes		No		NA	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>Night Stay</b>	15	3	18	2	4	1
<b>Catchment</b>	13	2	17	12	0	0
<b>Migrant</b>	0	0	0	0	8	5
<b>Total</b>	28	5	35	14	12	6

33% of the children had some acquaintances before coming to the station.

It has been seen that many children had acquaintances in the station and gradual interaction with them coupled with the opportunity to earn ready income with unlimited freedom attracted them towards platform life. For this reason once they come to the platform they have little problem coping with its adverse environment like police harassing etc. This peer linkage saves them from many unsavoury situations.

*Lost in the jungle...*

Rajib Das (name changed) aged 15 is from Howrah district. His father is a daily labourer and his mother works in a textile factory. The combined family income was not enough to sustain the family for which Rajib had to accept a job in a tea-stall. There he came to interact with a boy named Chhotu (name changed) who lives in Howrah station. He started visiting Chhotu and his friends in Howrah station and learnt the various income options available. This lured him to platform life and he started living in the station. His family bondage gradually weakened and he later became completely detached from them. Rajib is now a prominent member of the gang with an earning of Rs 150 per day. Apart from train checking, he earns from petty snatching and pickpockets. Being a drug addict he spends a bulk of it on drugs and also takes part in gambling. He invests the rest in local paan shops, eateries etc. Many times, the owners of the stalls dupe him taking advantage of his vulnerability. Rajib and his gang have also been accused of sexually molesting the newcomers in the station including the girls. He has been picked up by the police at least four times.

Rajib does not want to continue living at the station but doesn't know where to go.

#### 4.13 Reasons For Coming To the Station (Multiple Choice)

Table No. S-17

	<b>Earning</b>	<b>Domestic Violence</b>	<b>Adventure</b>	<b>Family Indifference</b>	<b>Others</b>	<b>NA</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	34	11	8	7	4	4
<b>Catchment</b>	35	26	4	0	1	0
<b>Migrant</b>	1	0	0	0	1	0

The primary reason behind moving to the station is economic factors. 69% of the children came to Sealdah station to earn money. Domestic violence is the second most important reason. 37% of the children said domestic violence is one of the factors for which they had to leave home.

Table No. H-17

	<b>Earning</b>	<b>Domestic Violence</b>	<b>Adventure</b>	<b>Family Indifference</b>	<b>Others</b>	<b>NA</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	9	4	18	1	5	6
<b>Catchment</b>	34	1	0	0	15	3
<b>Migrant</b>	10	0	0	0	0	13

53% of the children came to the station compelled by economic factors. The next important reason is adventurism and the lure to live in the glamour of city life. It is interesting to note that in Howrah station domestic violence, as a reason for moving out of the home is relatively less although not absent.

Coolies of both the stations like Raju Yadav (of Howrah) or Anil Paswan (of Sealdah) feel the children mostly come here because food is readily available. By searching the empty compartments of the trains or by begging, a child can easily get his day's provisions. Some feel the children come here after being driven out of their homes or due to economic compulsions. Loose family bondage may be another reason for the children to escape from home. This has also been opined by the ticket collectors, hawkers and stall owners of both the stations.

It has been already mentioned that poverty and the desire to make a livelihood in the city contributes significantly to the incidences of platform children in Howrah and Sealdah. Some children have left home to enjoy unbridled freedom in the city. Many of them hail from quite affluent families in the rural areas.

For some children, indifference towards studies, dropping out of school, delinquency, etc incurred the wrath of the parents that prompted them to leave their home and take shelter in the station. Sunita Sarkar (name changed) of Gobardanga, 24 Parganans (N) says her son Shyamal (name changed) came to Sealdah station twice after being rebuked by his father for failing to pass in the examinations. This time after failing in his Class VII examinations, Shyamal again ran from home and has reportedly taken shelter with his old acquaintances in Sealdah station. The poor mother is now running from pillar to post to locate her son.

***Every step he makes...***

Suvankar's (name changed) home is in Mollakhali in the Sundarbans. It's been a month that he left home and came to the Sealdah Station since his father scolded him for being inattentive to studies. He was not predestined to come to Sealdah. He had no idea as to where he was going when he left home. He came to the station by train and stayed back here. His father has a fishing trawler and has an average monthly income of around Rs.10,000. Suvankar was studying in standard V. He now does the job of supplying water to the shops and stalls at the Sealdah Station. The owner of the shop where he works provides him with lunch. He arranges his dinner from what he earns throughout the day. He has developed deep friendship with the other platform children who help him in all possible ways.

The problem is further compounded for delinquent children who do not get emotional support from the family or witness perfect nonchalance due to family disintegration.

The matter is pathetic for the physically and mentally handicapped children who are abandoned in the station and live at the mercy of the others. They have nowhere to go and living in the station is not a choice for them but the only option.

*He speaks like silence...*

Ajoy (name changed) can neither speak, nor can he hear. He is about 13-14 years old and has been staying for a long time in the platform of the Howrah station. He spends every single paisa he earns from begging, hence cannot save any. He doesn't know anything about the whereabouts of his home parents or any relatives. He cannot remember anything. Even he doesn't know how he came to the Howrah Station. He stays alone in the Howrah Station. He has no addiction and no friend. He maintains a furtive presence. Occasionally he also participates in train checking to get some food. However most of the times, he has to buy food from surrounding hotels.

*With some pain is fraught...*

Samiul (name changed) is coming to the Howrah Station for the last 5-6 months. He is a handicapped boy with both legs disabled since birth, as a result of which, he is absolutely uncared for in his home. His own mother is mentally handicapped and for this his father had deserted her and married again. His stepmother used to torture and torment him at the slightest pretext for which he left home. He goes home occasionally and that too when he can give some money to his step-mother. His stepmother won't let him enter the house when he's in need. Two of his own maternal uncles are well established: one is a doctor and the other a policeman. His father is engaged as a Zari worker.

Samiul now stays at the Tatanagar station in Jharkhand. Every morning he takes a train to reach the Howrah Station. Here, at the Howrah Station, he spends around 3-4 hours begging in the platform and in the afternoon catches a train to return to Tatanagar, again begging in the train all the way.

Disintegration of the family is another contributing factor to the making of platform children.

*The sheltering station...*

Sumita Kumari (name changed) aged about 10 originally hails from Bihar. Her father passed away when she was quite young after which there was acute poverty in the family. Her mother sold off their ancestral property for Rs 3,000 and came to Kolkata to start a paan (betel) shop. As ill luck could have it, her mother and brother fell seriously ill and all the money was exhausted for their treatment. Sumita and her family had to make Sealdah station their permanent home. She and her brother beg in the platforms while her mother is too weak to work. Although they earn Rs 50-60 per day on an average, sometimes their earning dwindles to even Rs 10. Sumita is now addicted to bidis and dandrite and most of her earning is wasted on drugs. Regular police harassment is also in store for the entire family for taking shelter in the station.

Many children who have been abandoned by the parents or detached from their families take shelter in the platforms. One instance has been found of children being displaced from their home due to natural disaster. Rabiul (name changed) of Mollahkhali, Sunderbans takes shelter in the platform of Sealdah (South) section along with her grandmother whenever their home is ravaged by floodwater.

#### 4.14 Summary Observations:

Analysing the findings from the qualitative and quantitative data, the push-pull factors can be summarised as follows

Push Factors	Pull Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poverty and abject economic conditions.</li> <li>• Family indifference/disintegration.</li> <li>• Domestic Violence.</li> <li>• Adventurism and desire to lead a free life.</li> <li>• Juvenile delinquency.</li> <li>• Peer Influence.</li> <li>• Familial indifference towards physically/mentally impaired children.</li> <li>• Missing/abandoned children take shelter in the station.</li> <li>• Children displaced by natural disaster.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The easiest way of reaching any city is its railway station.</li> <li>• Ready available livelihood options in the station like train checking, hawking, working in the stalls etc.</li> <li>• Free infrastructure like sleeping place, drinking water, toilets.</li> <li>• Presence of friends and other peer groups.</li> </ul>

## CHAPTER V

### 5. LIVING CONDITIONS AND ORGANISED EXPLOITATION

The present chapter aims to check the living condition of the children in the platforms which will give us more insight on their vulnerability and exposure to other hazards. While analysing the living condition of children at the platforms it is imperative to compare these with the conditions that were present back home to throw more light on the migration process.

It has already been mentioned in the beginning of the study that platform children are highly vulnerable and come under ‘Child in Need of Care & Protection’ as defined under Section 2(c) of Juvenile Justice Act, 2000. Taking advantage of their precarious condition, many individuals and agencies exploit them to their hilt. This organized as well as unorganized exploitation worsens their living condition. Hence attempts have been made to identify these agents of exploitation, mainly organized.

#### 5.1 Living Condition of the Platform Children at Home

Table No. S-19

	Food				Clothing				Shelter				NA
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	
Night Stay	1	19	22	15	3	18	24	12	3	14	23	17	3
<b>Migrant</b>	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0
<b>Total</b>	2	19	23	16	4	18	25	12	4	14	24	18	3

It is to be noted that the living condition of the platform children (mainly Night Stay) has remained varied. While the food served and cloths given at home ranged from average to poor, the home itself was described by most of the respondents as poor or extremely poor (67.74%).

Table No. H-19

	Food				Clothing				Shelter				NA
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	
Night Stay	7	15	15	1	7	16	14	1	7	16	14	1	5
<b>Migrant</b>	1	4	8	0	1	4	8	0	1	4	8	0	0
<b>Total</b>	9	19	23	1	9	20	22	1	9	20	22	1	4

Most of the respondents of Howrah station feel that food, clothing and shelter at home ranged from average to poor.

- 1= Good
- 2= Average
- 3= Poor
- 4= Extremely Poor

## 5.2 Place of Sleep (Night Stay/Migrant)

Table No. S-20

	<b>Alone</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Relatives</b>	<b>Work Place</b>	<b>Family</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	7	32	5	6	10
<b>Migrant</b>	1	0	0	0	1

Most of the Night Stay children (53.3%) prefer to sleep in groups. Those who live with the families sleep with their members.

Table No. H-20

	<b>Alone</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Family</b>	<b>Work Place</b>	<b>Family</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	10	29	4	0	4
<b>Migrant</b>	0	0	0	0	13

In Howrah too, most of the Night Stay children (67.44%) prefer to sleep in groups. It implies that there exists strong group bondage amongst the platform children.

## 5.3 Living Condition in the Platform. (Multiple Choice)

Sealdah and Howrah stations are one of the biggest railway terminuses of the country. Everyday these stations have lakhs of commuters. The provisions made by the railway authorities to cater to their needs like drinking water, toilets, sitting arrangements, sheds etc are used by the railway children. Many of them collect their food from the leftovers of the passengers mainly of Rajdhani, Shatabdi and other long distance trains. Thus the living condition of the night stay in terms of food and shelter is basically shaped by the prevailing situation of the platforms. For the Catchment children, the situation is wee bit different because they spend the night at their respective homes.

In Sealdah station, a large number of Night Stay children can be found adjacent to Platform 13 in the South section living with their families. An enclosure adjacent to platform 13 where the thela pullers take shelter at night is the home for some solitary platform children. Apart from that a number Night Stay children live in platforms 5, 6, 9 and also adjacent to Platform No.1 and the ticket counter of Sealdah (North) section. There a few places like in Platform 9 where the girl children cuddle together. People of migrant community normally take shelter in an open field next to the railway lines near Sealdah (South) section.

In Howrah, a number of children can be found living with their families in the abandoned Platform No. 1. Many seasonal workers mainly from Bihar also take shelter here. While the children are strewn all over the station, the Night Stay children mostly sleep in the platforms, near the ticket counters, subway, under the railway over bridge and the freight unloading area. A strip of land covered with dense vegetation and separating Howrah from New Howrah complex is their favourite hunting ground where they indulge in gambling, substance and sexual abuses.

Table No. S-21

## A. Arrangement for Toilet

Places >	Platform	Train	Working Place	Others
Night Stay	4	5	4	55
Catchment	8	2	25	33
Migrant	2	0	0	0

The children do not have any fixed place of toilet. They relieve themselves in the bushes, open space, near the railway lines etc.

## B. Arrangement for Bath

Places >	Platform	Train	Working Place	Others
Night Stay	3	0	51	16
Catchment	6	1	26	31
Migrant	2	0	2	0

Most of them take bath near their working place which is also platform or its adjacent areas. Some go to a public tap near NRS hospital to take bath.

## C. Arrangement for Drinking Water

Places >	Platform	Train	Working Place	Others
Night Stay	60	3	0	6
Catchment	27	5	2	10
Migrant	2	0	0	0

They collect the drinking water from the station taps.

## D. Arrangement for Food

Places >	NGO	Own Cooking/ At Home	Train Checking	Hotel	Working Place
Night Stay	0	8	17	31	8
Catchment	7	35	7	20	6
Migrant	0	2	0	0	1

Most of the children of Sealdah station get food from the adjacent hotels and the shops where they work. A number of them eat the leftovers of the passengers collected during 'train checking'. The groups who are engaged in train checking collect their foods from long distance trains mainly Rajdhani. Amit (name changed) of Sealdah station puts forward a generous invitation on behalf of his group, "*Rajdhanir somoye esho, mangsho khawabo*" (Come when the Rajdhani Express arrives, we'll give you meat feast.) Because of strong group bondage, if a regular member of the group fails to take part in train searching, the other members ensure he get his due share. The canteen boys of the Rajdhani canteen supply food to some of these children on a daily basis. However the food is not a free supply as the children need to perform some routine chores like sweeping, cleaning of utensils etc.

Sometimes the volunteers of Loreto House & Missionaries of Charity supplies breakfast to these children. CINI-ASHA also provides lunch and dinner to some children of Sealdah station.

#### E. Arrangement to keep Belongings

	<b>Platform</b>	<b>Employer</b>	<b>Residence</b>	<b>NGO</b>	<b>Others</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	50	8	0	0	7
<b>Catchment</b>	2	0	34	7	0
<b>Migrant</b>	2	0	0	0	0

The children keep their belongings tucked away on the bends and joints of the pillars of the platform away from public glare. They do not keep their belongings in the NGO's place because there are a few complaints of heist in the lockers provided by the NGO.

Table No. H-21

#### A. Arrangement for Toilets

<b>Places &gt;</b>	<b>Platform</b>	<b>Ghat</b>	<b>Train</b>	<b>Working Place</b>	<b>Others</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	27	0	16	0	0
<b>Catchment</b>	25	0	7	0	12
<b>Migrant</b>	13	0	2	0	0

In Howrah, children use the toilets of the platforms, the long distance trains as well as open spaces, bushes etc.

#### B. Arrangement for Bath

<b>Places &gt;</b>	<b>Platform</b>	<b>Ghat</b>	<b>Pay &amp; Use</b>	<b>Train</b>	<b>Working Place</b>	<b>Others</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	9	35	0	0	0	0
<b>Catchment</b>	10	16	0	0	0	19
<b>Migrant</b>	5	9	0	0	0	0

Most of the children of Howrah station prefer to take bath in the adjacent ghat of the Ganga.

#### C. Arrangement for Drinking Water

<b>Places &gt;</b>	<b>Platform</b>	<b>Ghat</b>	<b>Train</b>	<b>Working Place</b>	<b>Others</b>	<b>NA</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	43	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Catchment</b>	35	0	7	0	2	2
<b>Migrant</b>	13	0	0	0	0	0

The drinking water is mainly collected from the platforms.

#### D. Arrangement for Food

Places >	NGO	Own Cooking/From Home	Train Checking	Hotel	Working Place
Night Stay	14	15	30	15	3
Catchment	2	10	3	15	15
Migrant	0	13	0	0	0

There are a number of children in Howrah station who buy food from makeshift stalls run by aged ladies at a nominal rate. These children also maintain affectionate relationship with the ladies. Most of them are engaged in train checking to collect food. Since a large number of long distance trains frequent Howrah everyday, the children don't find any problem to collect their daily quota. Here too the group bonding is quite strong and the food is evenly shared amongst the group members.

#### E. Arrangement for keeping Belongings

	Platform	Employer	Residence	NGO	Others
Night Stay	43	0	0	0	0
Catchment	0	0	43	1	0
Migrant	13	0	0	0	0

The platform children do not have regular meals a prime reason being their addiction to drugs.

### 5.4 Time Spend in the platform

Table No. S-25

	M				F			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Night Stay	0	0	4	41	0	1	2	12
Catchment	1	9	13	4	0	1	7	3
Migrant	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0

88.3% of the Night Stay children spend more than 12 hours in the platform. 52.63% of the Catchment children spend 8+-12 hours in the platform while 26.31% spend 4+ - 8 hours in the platform

Table No. H-25

	M				F			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Night Stay	0	0	0	37	0	0	0	6
Catchment	3	9	10	8	3	8	0	3
Migrant	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	5

All the Night Stay children spend more than 12 hours in the platform. 38.63% of the Catchment children spend 4+ - 8hours in the platform while 22.72% of them spend 8+ - 12 hours in the platform.

- 1= 1- 4 hours
- 2= 4+ - 8 hours
- 3= 8+ - 12 hours
- 4= 12+ hours

It shows that the Night Stay children in both the stations are completely dependent on station infrastructure while most of the Catchment children are partially dependent on station infrastructure.

### 5.5 Nature of Entertainment (Multiple choice)

Table No. S-27

	<b>Games</b>	<b>Cinema</b>	<b>Radio / TV</b>	<b>With Peers</b>	<b>Others</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	54	36	17	57	18
<b>Catchment</b>	24	26	20	34	6
<b>Migrant</b>	2	0	0	1	0

Games (80%), cinema (62%) and spending time with peers (91%) are the prime sources of entertainment. Others forms of entertainment include gambling, freaking out with friends etc.

Table No. H-27

	<b>Games</b>	<b>Cinema</b>	<b>Radio / TV</b>	<b>With Peers</b>	<b>Others</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	34	34	23	31	35
<b>Catchment</b>	36	16	19	30	10
<b>Migrant</b>	8	6	6	3	13

In Howrah too, games (78%), cinema (56%) and spending time with peers (64%) are the sources of entertainment. While radio/ TV is the source of entertainment for 48% of the children, other sources of entertainment (58%) include gambling, substance abuse etc. Watching movies is extremely popular amongst the Night Stay children of Howrah station. Almost every evening they leave the station and go to the adjacent cinema halls.

Thus it is seen that the children make room for entertainment whenever they're free from their chores. The most popular forms of entertainment are games and cinema but few options are warped like gambling which shows their unleashed lifestyle. This kind of carefree lifestyle like taking part in gambling or going to watch a movie at own sweet will has an immense appeal in child psyche for which they remain glued to the station. It also shows that most of them have a steady source of income which pays for their entertainment cost.

## 5.6 Fight With Friends

Table No. S-30

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	42	18
<b>Catchment</b>	16	22
<b>Migrant</b>	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>42</b>

Although 58% of the respondents have fights with their friends, their group bondage is quite strong. In Sealdah the fight has been mainly witnessed over stealing of money and other valuables. Sometimes fights break out even on trivial matters.

Table No. H-30

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	26	17
<b>Catchment</b>	7	37
<b>Migrant</b>	8	5
<b>Total</b>	41	59

In Howrah 41% of the children fight with their peers. But here too the children maintain the group bondage. Here too the fight is over trivial issues.

However in both the stations, although the children frequently fight, their disputes too are quickly resolved. The reason for the frequent eruption of fights is the short tempered behaviour of the children.

There have been instances in Howrah as well as Sealdah station where some children have met with accidents while crossing the railway lines. Pappu (name changed) of Sealdah station says a passenger pushed off his friend from a running train. However he was lucky to escape with a only a few minor bruises.

*No reason to worry...*

Suman (name changed) living in Howrah station had lost a leg in an accident. When asked about it, he chuckles, "**Trainer tolai kata poreche**" (Amputated by a train). He begs in the platform and sometimes takes part in train checking. He doesn't seem to be worried about his lost leg because he knows being part of the group, the members will take care of him.

## 5.7 Diseases Suffered (Multiple choice)

Table No. S-31

	Chest Pain	Diarrhoea	Jaundice	Typhoid	Fever	Pox	Malaria	Skin Disease	NA
<b>Night Stay</b>	2	18	5	1	29	9	4	8	10
<b>Catchment</b>	1	9	8	2	22	4	1	8	4
<b>Migrant</b>	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	3	27	13	4	53	13	5	16	14

Diarrhoea and fever are the most common diseases suffered by the children with instances of jaundice and skin diseases. This figure indicates the unhygienic conditions in which the children live. The children collect their food from the trains which are mostly half eaten. They also do not care for baths, washing their hands or washing their dresses, as they do not have an iota of knowledge about health and hygiene habits. They sleep literally anywhere and everywhere in the platform even in the muck and squalor.

Table No. H-31

	Chest Pain	Diarrhoea	Jaundice	Typhoid	Others	Pox	Malaria	Skin Disease	NA
<b>Night Stay</b>	1	10	7	0	9	5	1	0	22
<b>Catchment</b>	2	8	2	1	5	0	0	0	18
<b>Migrant</b>	2	6	0	0	2	1	0	1	3
<b>Total</b>	5	24	9	1	16	6	1	1	43

Instances of diseases are relatively less in Howrah station. However diarrhea is the most common disease which indicates the prevalence of water borne diseases.

In both the stations, the platform children mainly suffer from water borne diseases indicating that the children do not have knowledge about safe drinking water or the some of the water sources available are contaminated.

## 5.8 Problems Faced In The Sleeping Place (Night Stay/Migrant)

Table No. S-22

	Weather	Police	Local goonda	Peer Group	Others	NA
<b>Night Stay</b>	3	38	0	3	0	21
<b>Migrant</b>	0	1	0	0	0	1

62.9% of the respondents feel that the main problem faced in their sleeping place is police raid and harassment.

Table No. H-22

	<b>Weather</b>	<b>Police</b>	<b>Local goonda</b>	<b>Peer Group</b>	<b>Others</b>	<b>NA</b>
Night Stay	1	28	1	0	0	13
<b>Migrant</b>	0	9	0	0	0	4
<b>Total</b>	1	37	1	0	0	17

In Howrah too, 66.07% of the respondents feel that police harassment is their main problem.

*Obscured by pains...*

Jahanara (name changed) aged about 17 hailing from Maldah has made her home at Howrah Station. Her job is checking train compartments. Due to abject poverty, Jahanara had to leave her home and make settlement at Howrah station at a very tender age. When this girl first came to Howrah, she became a victim of sexual abuse by her own friends. She also became the victim of physical torture by the police. Initially she wanted to stay at Howrah station permanently but now wants to move somewhere else because of police torture and the resultant insecurity.

**5.9 Do they need to change sleeping place for them? (Night Stay/Migrant)**

Table No. S-23

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	12	48
<b>Migrant</b>	0	2

Most of them have accepted police harassment as part and parcel of their life and chosen to stay in the same place barring some (19.35%)

Table No. H-23

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	11	32
<b>Migrant</b>	4	9

In Howrah too, the sleeping place of the children has not changed due to police raids barring some (26.79%).

## 5.10 Whether taken in Police Custody

Table No. S-28

	Yes		No	
	M	F	M	F
<b>Night Stay</b>	23	7	22	8
<b>Catchment</b>	9	0	18	11
<b>Migrant</b>	0	0	2	0
<b>Total</b>	32	7	42	19

It is interesting to note that 43% boys and 26% girls have been taken to police custody.

This clearly shows the children are in conflict with the law of the land especially the Night Stay children. In case of Night Stay children almost equal percentage of boys and girls were taken into custody.

Table No. H-28

	Yes		No	
	M	F	M	F
<b>Night Stay</b>	24	2	13	4
<b>Catchment</b>	5	0	25	14
<b>Migrant</b>	0	0	8	5
<b>Total</b>	29	2	46	23

In Howrah 39% of the boys and 8% of the girls have been taken to police custody.

In Howrah all the girl children taken to police custody belong to Night Stay category while 82.75% of the boys belonging to Night Stay were taken into police custody. Thus staying at night in the stations brings the children in direct conflict with the law.

Almost all the platform children are of the opinion that the biggest threat to them comes from the police who treat them with disdain and hatred. Many have been lifted from the station and taken to custody as the police suspect them of snatching, stealing and creating nuisance in the platform. Reports of physical abuses by the police in the platform as well as in their remands have also poured in.

The police regularly beat and abuse the children in their sleeping place. While some mainly the newcomers shift their sleeping place, the old timers have adjusted with police atrocities treating it as a sort of occupational hazard for living in the platform.

Some policemen also engage platform children as informers to keep a track on the wrongdoings of other children. In Sealdah a policeman is reported to maintain a network of informers to know how much the children have earned through anti-social activities. Later he extracts his cut from them.

The children draw police ire because some of them are engaged in anti-social activities including snatching, stealing, pick pocketing, lifting of the goods of passengers. Some are also reported to be engaged in drug peddling. Rabin Gupta (name changed) a constable of

RPF alleges that many of these children are habitual thieves. They steal the valuables of the passengers and sell them off to some local touts at a throwaway price.

*Dark side of the Moon...*

Amit Das (name changed) around 15 found himself growing up in the Howrah station right from his birth. He knows nothing about the whereabouts of his family and doesn't even know who his parents are. It is very clear that he is an abandoned child. Today, he has earned his notoriety in the station for stealing and snatching. He has fear of no one, not even the police and even boasts of being in police-custody for 9-10 times. He is happy with his mode of existence and has become a hard-core addict of tobacco, marijuana and bidi. All the money he earns is spent on his food, addiction and entertainment and not a single paisa is saved.

The platform children rely on strong peer linkage to cope with police atrocities. If a child is nabbed, then the others immediately rush to his/her rescue and plead with the police.

However Mr Singh, Officer-in-charge of RPF, Sealdah station has steadfastly denied the existence of children in the platform at night. According to him, though children come to the station during daytime in search of jobs, none stays here for the regular drive conducted by RPF. If any child is lost or comes to the station, then he/she is taken to CHILDLINE. He however admitted that children flee whenever they see the police.

### 5.11 Physical Abuse Suffered by Platform Children

Table No. S-29

	Yes		No	
	M	F	M	F
<b>Night Stay</b>	29	10	16	5
<b>Catchment</b>	11	2	16	9
<b>Migrant</b>	0	0	2	0
<b>Total</b>	40	12	34	14

Instances of physical abuse suffered by the platform children are high. About 52% of them have been physically abused by various people.

Table No. H-29

	Yes		No	
	M	F	M	F
<b>Night Stay</b>	27	3	10	3
<b>Catchment</b>	5	0	25	14
<b>Migrant</b>	0	1	8	4
<b>Total</b>	32	4	43	21

In Howrah 36% of the respondents are reported to have suffered physical abuses.

The principal perpetrator as mentioned earlier is the police. Instances of slapping, kicking, beating with sticks, chasing them across the platforms are only too common. In fact while approaching few children in Howrah station, they ran for cover mistaking the investigators as plain cloth policemen.

*Hit or Run...*

Md. Akram (name changed) has made Sealdah station his present address. He never liked staying back at home as his father used to regularly beat him. He is engaged in train checking to make his living. He earns an average of Rs.200 a week from the aforementioned activities. Akram says he is fortunate enough for not being detained in the police lock-up but was beaten up by the Police and the RPF several times during their routine raid against the platform children.

The coolies of both the stations admit the children are regularly beaten up by the police and sometimes put into 2-3 days custody. However many of them feel they deserve it as Rakesh Yadav (name changed) a coolie of Howrah wryly says, "***Bada hoke yeh sab chor banta hai.***" (They'll become thieves after they grow up).

## 5.12 Other Modes of Exploitation

The platform children are exploited by the coolies, thela pullers, hawkers and shop keepers who engage them in their work at a pittance and sometimes with no remuneration at all. They are looked upon as a burden of the station who can be exploited to the hilt with no one to account for. Mr Raghuvir Yadav (name changed), a ticket checker of Howrah station opines that the children working in the station shops are most exploited. They have to work from 6 AM to 10 PM and earning varies from Rs 5 - 20. Many times the owners thrash them for minor errors.

*Big work, no pay...*

Babu (name changed) has been staying at the Sealdah Railway Station for the last 6-7 years. He has no parents but only an aunt and a younger sister. Initially, he used to stay with his aunt. He heard that her aunt has sold off his sister in her infancy. His mother died at the birth of his sister and his father passed away in an accident. After failing to cope with his aunt's behaviour Babu came to Sealdah station. He is engaged in the job of bed rolling of the passengers of long distance trains. Sometimes he makes 5-10 rupees from this; sometimes he is not given any money at all. At the end of the day he makes an average earning of Rs 10-20. He manages his food from a hotel or sometimes from leftovers of the commuters of the trains. He has no fixed time to go to sleep. It depends upon the schedules of the long distance trains at the station.

Md. Afzal (name changed), a thela puller of Sealdah station admits he has engaged two children to pull the thelas @ Rs 5/thela but charges @ Rs 35/thela from the vegetable vendors.

An interesting fact in Sealdah station is many of the present thela pullers were platform children. In their childhood they were engaged by the thela pullers and have now grown up to become thela pullers and are engaging the children. Shahid (name changed), a platform child of Sealdah who now pulls the thelas say, "***Mai bhi bada hoke yeh dhandha karoonga***" (I'll also do this business when I grow up). [On a side note, this has not been noticed in Howrah station. On attaining adulthood, they simply leave the station and move to the city or other metropolis like Delhi or Mumbai.]

A shopkeeper of Howrah who has engaged a platform child to work in his tea-stall at a wage of Rs 550 per month disagrees that shopkeepers exploit the children. According to him, it is the police who are the main perpetrators of child abuse. The child he has employed is regularly harassed by the police and was once put in custody. He had to pay a bribe of Rs 500 to free the child. Another stall-owner of Howrah who has employed a 13-year-old boy in his stall to carry water feels he is doing a service to him. "***Mere sath rahega to kuch sikhega nahi to dendrite leke para rahega.***" (He'll learn something if he's with me otherwise he'll doze off taking dendrite). According to him, police cannot be blamed for its action because these children live on stealing, snatching, pick pocket etc. Commenting on the physical abuses made by the police, he says, "***Dus din mein ek din mar khayega to kya hoga***"? (What's the harm if a child is beaten once in ten days?)

Another gross form of exploitation of the children occurs in the form of usurping their earned money. As most of the children are engaged in some sort of economic activity, many of them earn substantially a bulk of which is wasted on drugs and glue. The rest is invested with the local shops whose owners promise them of high returns. But in actuality, the children may not be able to recover the capital leaving aside the interest accrued. In most of the cases, the figure is distorted, the numbers juggled to make the uneducated children foxed to believe in what the shopkeepers are saying. There have been instances when the shopkeepers have stoutly denied taking any loan from them. Children who're hard-core drug addicts are more susceptible to this humongous deception.

Sadhu Yadav (name changed) of Sealdah station alleges sometimes parents engage their children to peddle drugs or to beg. Sometimes children below the age of 6 years are given on rent to the beggars in lieu of money. He adds that police is aware of these facts but keep silent because they accept cut money

From the quantitative as well as the qualitative data it is evident that:

The perpetrators of organized exploitation against children are:

- Police
- Coolies, vendors, thela pullers
- Shop owners
- Railway staff
- Anti-socials like drug peddlers

## CHAPTER VI

### 6. PROBLEMS OF REINTEGRATION

The only permanent solution to address the plight of the platform children is to reintegrate them with their family. Only this step can ensure their constitutionally guaranteed right to enjoy their childhood, have the fundamental right to education for their development and most importantly grow under parental care to become responsible citizens of India. Yet this seemingly logical step is fraught with uncertainties and difficulties. The present chapter looks at those problems.

It has already been mentioned in the report that platform children have been broadly classified into three categories, Platform, Catchment and Migrant. The Catchment children maintain regular contact with the family and most of them commute from their homes. Most of the migrant children move with their families. Hence the problem of reintegration arises for the Night Stay children who're detached from the families.

#### 6.1 Would they continue to live in the platform? (Night Stay only)

Table No. S-32

	Yes		No	
	M	F	M	F
<b>Night Stay</b>	34	11	11	4

Table No. H-32

	Yes		No	
	M	F	M	F
<b>Night Stay</b>	25	2	12	4

62.79% of the Night Stay children of Howrah would like to continue their existence here.

It clearly shows that the Platform children are unwilling to return home in spite of the difficulties faced at the stations. Although reunion with the families is the only logical step to return their lost childhood but is extremely difficult when the reasons for detachment are economic and social.

It has already been seen that although the Night Stay children are detached from the family, many of them do maintain contacts with the families, visiting them occasionally and remit a part of their income. Many of these children are the sole bread earners of the family and the sheer economic compulsion of keeping their 'chullahs' burning at home will ensure their place in the platform. Their parents too have the consent of sending their child work faced with no other option akin to 'building of consensus'. With increased pace of globalization, the burnout rate of the marginalized class will accelerate which will ensure increased flow of children to the urban centres., Social reasons like familial disputes, tortures and social tensions also compel many children to leave their homes (Ref. Table on Migration of Children by J. Mazumdar). In this cases unless the root cause of the dispute is not addressed, the chance of reintegration seems remote.

Children after coming to the platform get adjusted to certain privileges like enormous degree of freedom, option to watch films, hang out with friends, take drugs and indulge in other substance abuse, sexual gratifications which would not be possible back home in the familial environment. Hence although many children are willing to leave the platform, few are eager to return home.

*Life goes on...*

Ganesh aged 15 years, is staying at Sealdah station. He came here when he was 6/7 years old. He has no idea about his original whereabouts. He has no blood relation save his mother who is insane and roams in Salt Lake area. He knows nothing about his father. He, pulls 'thela', does train checking and is an occasional pickpocket. Sometimes he is engaged in drug trafficking in lieu of 150/- to 200/-. In spite of his earnings from miscellaneous sources he is unable to save because of his addiction to dendrite, tobacco and marijuana. He wants to reform his behaviour but doesn't have the mental support to do so. According to Ganesh, "*Sealdahar jol pete porle bhalo hoyo khub kothin*"(It is very difficult to reform yourself once you start living in Sealdah). He was arrested by R.P.F thrice & kept in custody for almost 15 days & had been abused physically

Due to their unbridled lifestyle, a barrier has been created between the children and their families. Some of the family members treat the children with disdain for their addiction, sexual relationships and anti-social activities although the same accept money from them.

*Quo Vadis...*

Sumit Biswas (name changed), age about 15, came from South 24 Parganas. At present he is staying at Howrah station. His family condition is fairly stable. One day he left home as his mother severely scolded him for his errant behaviour. He came to Kolkata to settle down at Howrah station. He goes to home occasionally or during festival but never thinks to stay there because of his addiction to substance. Apart from being a smoker, he regularly takes marijuana, and dendrite. He is also involved in sexual activities to earn money and earns on an average of Rs 200/- daily. He was put in police custody five times and was once reprimanded for nine months.

*Obscured by clouds...*

Sunjay Kumar (name changed), age 15 yrs., was a resident of Khardah, West Bengal. His family consisted of his father, mother and 2 young sisters. He has been staying in the station for the past two years. Before this he was in Sealdah for a short span of time. He left his home because of domestic trouble and since he knew some friends in Kolkata, he came to Sealdah. Through his daily activity of train searching and doing menial jobs, he is able to earn Rs.100/day and make a saving Rs.40-50 apart from his daily expenses on food, addiction and watching movies. Sunjay lives here in a group of almost 12-15 children comprising both girls and boys and is quite happy with his lifestyle. He has no such plans of moving out of this group because of the unrestrained freedom enjoyed by him away from the glare of his guardians. Although he sometimes misses his family he doesn't want to go back home. He fully understands he is in bad company and that he won't be accepted back in the family, though he provides monetary assistance to them as much as possible.

In his tender age Sunjay has understood that he has become a sort of ‘persona non-grata’ in his family, only it is his money that the family is interested in.

There are some children who really want to leave the station for a better alternative. The problem has been to identify a place, which offers them a livelihood option along with a ready-made infrastructure because some of them are bread earners of the family. In these cases the problem of reintegration lies in the roots, the poor economic status of the families. Seen entrapped in the Nurksian poverty cycle, it can be said “ the children are poor because they’re poor.”

*Life goes on...*

Molly (name changed) is from Dankuni in Hooghly and is aged about 12 years. In the daytime she hops around platform no. 18 & 19 of Howrah station and at night takes shelter in platform no. 10. Back home she has mother, elder sister and a younger brother. She earns Rs 80-100 per day by train checking, selling water bottles, begging etc. She is the only earning member of her family and all others are dependent on her income. After coming to Howrah, she became addicted to dendrite due to the influence of her peers. Some of the boys of her group have abused her sexually. She has also been physically abused by the police. Molly does not want to continue in the station but doesn’t know where to go keeping his livelihood options open.

## 6.2 Summary Observations

The Problems of Reintegration can be summarised as

- Economic reasons for which the children had to leave their homes. In spite of all its problems, the platforms can provide them a livelihood and two square meals which are absent back home. It is even more difficult to reintegrate the children who are in the platform solely to provide bread to their families. Parents pushing the children into work are has been observed in some cases
- Social reasons where it is practically impossible to stay in the family due to routine abuse of alcoholic parent or oppression by the stepparents who want to drive them out of their families under any pretext.
- Due to lack of knowledge of parents on child delinquency, they feel reprimands and rebukes would show them the correct path. However this alienates the children who after leaving home are scared to return for the fear more reprimands.
- The present livelihood of the children including their access to easy money, substance/sexual abuses and the option of enjoying unrestricted freedom which they are unwilling to sacrifice.

Thus the positive answer of staying in the platform is more a response to prevailing environment of a child than his/her own conscious decision.

## CHAPTER VII

*All kids need is a little help, a little hope and somebody who believes in them. - Earvin Johnson*

### 7. GO/NGO/OTHER INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

There are a number of NGOs who work with the platform children of Sealdah and Howrah. Some of the services provided by them are

- Night shelter
- Non formal education centres
- Health clinics
- CHILDLINE
- Nutritional support
- Dress materials

There is also Government run facility near the station namely hospitals/clinics etc. The present chapter analyses the extent to which the children are dependent on these support services. Although this issue logically comes under Living Conditions chapter, a separate chapter has been dedicated to obtain a brief review of the extent of utilization of these support services by the platform children.

NGOs operating in Sealdah station are:

- ✓ CINI – ASHA
- ✓ Don Bosco Ashalayam
- ✓ Missionaries of Charity
- ✓ Loreto House, Rainbow
- ✓ Calcutta Samaritans

NGOs operating in Howrah station are:

- ✓ Don Bosco Ashalayam
- ✓ Nirmal Hriday
- ✓ SEED
- ✓ Paschim Banga Krira -O-Janakalyan Parishad
- ✓ Navjivan
- ✓ #1 Trust (Uncle Michael)
- ✓ Lions Club

## 7.1 Assistance From NGOs

Table No. S-33

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	15	45
<b>Catchment</b>	8	30
<b>Migrant</b>	0	2
<b>Total</b>	23	77

23% of the children of the sample population of Sealdah station have been found to receive aid and assistance from the NGOs.

Table No. H-33

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	20	23
<b>Catchment</b>	6	38
<b>Migrant</b>	0	13
<b>Total</b>	26	74

In Howrah 26% of the sample population have been seen to receive assistance from the NGOs.

It should be noted here that in both the cases, the intervention programmes of the NGOs do not cover the migrants.

Most of the children in both the platforms do not rely on NGO or any other organization's support for their daily existence although some of them receive medicinal, nutritional and educational support. To them the NGO support is basically in "also there" category. Sangeeta Saha, staff of Don Bosco CHILDLINE, Howrah who thinks that the platform children don't even feel the need to take support of any NGO. They cuddle together and help each other during the hour of need.

## 7.2 Preference For Night Shelter (Night shelter & migrant)

Table No. S-24

	<b>Yes</b>		<b>No</b>	
	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	13	1	32	14
<b>Migrant</b>	0	0	2	0

It is interesting to note that most of the children (77.42%) are unwilling to stay at the night shelters run by the NGOs.

Table No. H-24

	Yes		No	
	M	F	M	F
<b>Night Stay</b>	7	0	30	6
<b>Migrant</b>	0	0	8	5

In Howrah too, most of the children (87.5%) are unwilling to go to the Night Shelters.

Children like Babun (name changed) of Sealdah station who are engaged in unloading and transporting vegetables from Bongaon local to nearby Baithakhana Bazar at midnight strongly refused to go to Night Shelters, as it would affect their livelihood. Children like Anup (name changed) of Howrah station who is an addict as well as a gambler avoid the Night Shelters, as it would deprive them of the excitements and unrestricted freedom of the platforms. Babai (name changed) of Sealdah station is unwilling to go to a Night Shelter because the authorities once handed him over to his parents.

From the discussion with the platform children it has emerged that mostly the Night Stay children shun the night shelters for the following reasons

- Loss of livelihood.
- Curtailment of freedom because of strict observance of disciplines.
- No scope for drug addiction or sexual relationships.
- Located far away.

*I can work it out...*

Ujjal Das, 17 yrs. old, is a resident of Chakdaha. He came to Howrah station 4 yrs. back. Since then, he has been living in a NGO run night-shelter for 3 consecutive years. Last year he left the shelter and started staying on the platform. Ujjal left his home for no specific reason. While he was in the night-shelter, he met some platform children who inspired him to join the group for which he decided to quit the shelter. Whatever he earns from train checking is quite sufficient for him and a part of it is also saved. Though he rarely visits his home, he never provides any financial assistance. Ujjal also gets assistance of food and medicines from an NGO. But according to him it is simply an additional support, which is not of much significance. He says he earns enough to buy the cheap food available in the station through the elderly ladies.

Open shelters do not observe the rigidity in discipline of the Night Shelters and follow lax rules to encourage children come and stay in these shelters. However they too have their share of problems.

Ms Sangeeta of Loreto House, Sealdah says there have been cases when girls were found missing from the shelters. Later they returned physically/sexually assaulted. Even one girl was found to be pregnant.

Around 5-6 children of Sealdah station have reported of insecurity in a NGO run shelter. They have complained that their valuables have been stolen from their lockers for which they have now started avoiding the shelter.

Some children of Sealdah station have remarked that although the lunch and dinner provided by a NGO working there is sufficient, the breakfast is less than adequate.

However there are a substantial number of children who are dependent on the NGOs for their sustenance. This help includes nutritional help, residential support and moral support.

*Help I need somebody...*

Akhtar (name changed), 10 yrs. old, is a resident of Fazilpur, Bihar. Akhtar lived in a family of 6 and is the oldest amongst the 4 siblings. Akhtar left his home around 2 years back for being beaten up by his family and came to Kolkata to live with his relatives. Denied shelter and not willing to return back, he decided to continue in Howrah station. Today he sells water bottles and does other menial jobs which makes him earn approximately Rs. 200/day. He saves his money with his employer who is very supportive. Akhtar has also become dependant on Don Bosco for his sustenance. During the day, apart from working, he hangs around in the platform with few of his friends but at night, he goes back to Don Bosco night - shelter. Akhtar has no plans of returning home but instead wants grow up to lead a decent life.

### 7.3 Procurement of clothes etc (Multiple choice)

Table No. S-26

	<b>Purchase</b>	<b>From Org.</b>	<b>Donation</b>	<b>Others</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	51	5	9	2
<b>Catchment</b>	37	6	5	0
<b>Migrant</b>	2	0	0	0

90% of the children purchase their own clothes. About 11% get it from organizations and 14% receive it as donations.

Table No. H-26

	<b>Purchase</b>	<b>From Org.</b>	<b>Donation</b>	<b>Others</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	25	5	5	15
<b>Catchment</b>	42	6	2	0
<b>Migrant</b>	13	0	0	0

80% of the children purchase their own clothes while 11% get clothes from organizations.

These figures show that the platform children procure their own clothes and are not dependent on any sort of support from any organization.

## 7.4 Platform children receiving singular/multiple benefits from NGO

Table No. S-34

No. of NGO	1	2	3
<b>Night Stay</b>	9	5	1
<b>Catchment</b>	4	4	0
<b>Migrant</b>	0	0	0

56.5% of the NGO beneficiaries receive support from 1 NGO, 39.13% receive support from 2 NGOs while 4.34% receive support from 3 NGOs.

Table No. H-34

No. of NGO	1	2	3
<b>Night Stay</b>	15	5	0
<b>Catchment</b>	5	0	1
<b>Migrant</b>	0	0	0

76.92% of the NGO beneficiaries receive support from 1 NGO, 19.23% receive support from 2 NGOs while 3.84% receive support from 3 NGOs.

It shows that there is an overlap in the assistance provided by the NGOs.

## 7.5 Savings of the Platform Children

Table No. S-35

	Yes	No
<b>Night Stay</b>	39	21
<b>Catchment</b>	31	7
<b>Migrant</b>	1	1
<b>Total</b>	71	29

71% of the children do have the saving habit in Sealdah station.

Table No. H-35

	Yes	No
<b>Night Stay</b>	21	22
<b>Catchment</b>	42	2
<b>Migrant</b>	8	5
<b>Total</b>	71	29

In Howrah too, 71% of the children have the saving habit.

In both the cases, the money is mainly saved with the local shopkeepers who routinely dupe them. There has been no GO/NGO support to ensure that the money earned by the children is not stolen. Some children do not save at all due to lack of security.

## 7.6 Arrangement of Treatment for Street Children (Multiple choice)

Table No. S-36

	<b>Govt. Hosp</b>	<b>Private Clinic</b>	<b>Charitable Org</b>	<b>Others</b>	<b>NA</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	30	15	6	4	10
<b>Catchment</b>	31	10	5	0	0
<b>Migrant</b>	1	1	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	62	26	11	4	10

The children of Sealdah station mainly rely on Government hospital (adjacent NRS hospital) for their treatment. A substantial section (26%) also go to private clinics.

Ms Sangeeta of Loreto House, Rainbow says they have an understanding with Government hospitals like NRS Hospital, B.R. Singh Hospital and nearby medicine shops to ensure that platform children are treated there at a minimal rate. The whole thing is monitored by Loreto House.

Table No. H-36

	<b>Govt. Hosp</b>	<b>Private Clinic</b>	<b>Charitable Org</b>	<b>Others</b>	<b>NA</b>
<b>Night Stay</b>	12	6	10	4	16
<b>Catchment</b>	24	11	6	2	2
<b>Migrant</b>	9	3	0	1	0
<b>Total</b>	45	20	16	7	18

In Howrah too, most of the children (45%) depend on Government hospitals for their treatment. 20% of them of them get treated at private clinics while 16% are treated at charitable organizations.

## 7.7 Educational Support

Some of the children of Sealdah station attend the non-formal education centre of CINI-ASHA. Loreto House offers educational support to the inmates of its Night Shelter. Don Bosco Ashalayam runs a support unit at St. John's church adjacent to the station where the children have the option to do various creative things like drawing, crafts etc.

In Howrah, some children attend the non-formal education centre run by SEED near Platform No. 1.

However there are few school goers because of the very simple reason that going to school is not on the priority list of the platform children as emerged from semi-structured interviews.

## **7.8 Summary Observations:**

A review of the support of the GO/NGO services points out to the following problems:

- Majority of the platform children are not covered under the assistance programme of any NGO. The children too in general do not rely on NGO's assistance.
- Broadly speaking, platform children are not interested to live in the Night Shelters because they perceive staying there will hamper their livelihood and put an end to their carefree style of living.
- There is an overlap in the assistance provided by the NGOs. A number of children are beneficiaries of more than 1 NGO.
- The children avail facilities provided by the Government hospitals/clinics adjacent to the station.
- There is no GO/NGO support mechanism to help the children save their money ensuring security.

## CHAPTER VIII

### 8. SUBSTANCE ABUSE /SEXUAL ABUSE & RELATIONSHIPS

Due to their high degree of vulnerability, the platform children are subjected to sexual abuse far away from public scrutiny. These incidents remain unheard, as the children are extremely furtive to share the trauma. Yet, some incidents have come to the fore which have been described in the present chapter and amply highlights their plight.

Substance abuse is of common occurrence amongst the platform children. The present chapter also looks into the nature of substance abuse which is making the children even more vulnerable.

#### 8.1 Substance Addiction of Platform Children (Multiple Choice)

Table No. S-37

	<b>Bidi/Cigarette</b>	<b>Marijuana</b>	<b>Tobacco</b>	<b>Dendrite</b>	<b>Heroin/Brown Sugar</b>	<b>Alcohol</b>	<b>NA</b>
<b>Male</b>	41	12	30	14	1	1	11
<b>Female</b>	4	0	0	2	1	0	18
<b>Total</b>	45	12	30	16	2	1	29

45% of the children of sample population are addicted to smoking, while 30% are addicted to tobacco. 16% of them are addicted to dendrite sniffing while 12% are addicted to marijuana.

Table No. H-37

	<b>Bidi/Cigarette</b>	<b>Marijuana</b>	<b>Tobacco</b>	<b>Dendrite</b>	<b>Heroin/Brown Sugar</b>	<b>Alcohol</b>	<b>NA</b>
<b>Male</b>	28	11	16	33	1	5	27
<b>Female</b>	0	0	0	2	0	0	23
<b>Total</b>	28	11	16	35	1	5	50

It is alarming to note that 35% of the sample population are addicted to dendrite sniffing while 28% are addicted to smoking while 11% are addicted to marijuana.

Thus while bidi/cigarette are the most common forms of addiction in Sealdah, in Howrah it is the deadlier dendrite that children are addicted to.

According to the coolies of Howrah station, almost all the children are drug/alcohol addicts. Ram Singh (name changed) of Howrah station says, "*Yeh kaminalog hamesha nasha karte hai aur chori chamari bhi karte hai.*" (These devils always engage themselves in addiction and stealing). According to the coolies the most common form of addiction are dendrite, marijuana, bidi, cigarette and occasionally country liquor. They dub the children as "dendrite lekar para rehta hai" (Behaves like a zombie after taking dendrite).

*Lucy in the sky...*

Anup (name changed) is a 12-year-old boy living in New Howrah complex. He wears a tattered shirt and multi-stitched pant. He is involved in begging and train checking and earns around Rs 50/- per day. He buys a brand new shirt and proudly displays it to the NGO workers. To their amazement he immediately tears off the shirt and distributes the torn pieces to his group members. These pieces will come handy in the evening when they'll pour glue on the torn parts and enjoy a cinema in a nearby hall while sniffing the glue.

## 8.2 Whether Approached To Try Substance

Table No. S-38

	YES		NO	
	M	F	M	F
<b>Night Stay</b>	29	10	16	5
<b>Catchment</b>	13	3	14	8
<b>Migrant</b>	0	0	2	0
<b>Total</b>	42	13	32	13

55% of the sample population in Sealdah station were approached to try substance.

Table No. H-38

	YES		NO	
	M	F	M	F
<b>Night Stay</b>	32	2	5	4
<b>Catchment</b>	7	0	23	14
<b>Migrant</b>	5	0	3	5
<b>Total</b>	44	2	31	23

46% of the sample population in Howrah were asked to try substance.

In both the cases the solicitation was mainly done by their peers and elder children. This shows how deep-rooted is the malaise of substance abuse in the station.

Most of the children belonging to the Night Stay category are addicted to substance. Although most of them deny at first, their drowsy eyes, spots in their hands, ruffled dresses tell another story. After persistence some of them agree sheepishly but quickly assures they won't take it again which is merely an empty promise. Sonali (name changed), a flamboyant platform girl of Sealdah station can correctly describe and act how it feels after consuming country liquor. When asked whether she ever consumed it, she steadfastly denied.

Rakesh Yadav (name changed) a coolie of Sealdah, Sajal Das (name changed) a hawker of the same station and some others have complained that these children are used as carriers by the drug peddlers for they won't draw police suspicion due to their tender age. Sadhu Yadav (name changed) alleges sometimes parents engage their children to peddle drugs.

#### 8.4 Nature of Sexual Abuse

Although the children of Howrah station have remained silent on the issue of sexual abuse, some of their Sealdah counterparts have candidly admitted the problem. There are many young boys of Sealdah who fulfil the lust of paedophiles for a paltry amount of Rs 20/. The older girls engage in sexual relationship with the coolies, thela pullers and other locals also for little or no money. Girls of the age group 12-13 may earn Rs 30-50/- per client in both the stations. More senior girls earn around Rs 50-100/ per client. Kajal (name changed) a 12 year old boy of Sealdah points to a queue of empty trolleys at the end of the platform, "*Raater bela okhane kharap kaj hoi.*" (Dirty things happen there at night.) While he quickly assures he has never been there, a friend of him whispers that he is lying. A friend of his said once he brought the matter to the notice of the police but was instead severely reprimanded.

That the platform children are involved in indiscriminate sexual relationship have been alleged by the ticket checkers, shopkeepers, hawkers and vendors. Coolies like Rakesh Yadav (name changed) of Sealdah, Anil Singh (name changed) of Howrah complained that many older girl children are engaged in flesh trade with the coolies and the other locals. For this reason they're treated with disdain and apathy. Ajoy Ghosh (name changed) of Sealdah station says these girls are routinely exploited by the coolies, thela owners and even the police.

Ms Sangeeta of Loreto House, Sealdah says many coolies and railway staff being completely detached from their families and marital life for long period sexually exploit these girls for paltry sum. The girls too accept it as an avenue to earn quick money. Her experience says there was a girl in the Loreto Open Shelter who left the home suddenly. As the home being open shelter, the rules are relatively lax. After sometimes she came back. Enquiries revealed she was pregnant.

According to Madan Biswas of Missionaries of Charity, cases of sexual abuses are very common in the station. Frequently they receive cases where children of 9-10 years come to them for treatment with wounds/ulcers in their private organs. A few years back a 5-6 years old girl was raped and dumped near the station.

Children having sexual relationship amongst them including homosexual relationship has also been reported. Sometimes the elder boys sexually assault the newcomers. They have coined their own vocabulary of slang to describe these incidents.

*Ma belle...*

Ritu Singh (name changed) is a 17 year old girl originally hailing from Burdwan district. Her father died when she was a child and mother works as a domestic help. Due to compelling economic situation, at the age of 13 her mother sent her to work in Calcutta accompanied by her distant uncle. Her uncle sold her off in a red light area of Bowbazar where she was forcefully inducted in flesh trade. After a few months, she escaped and came back home only to discover that her mother had married her uncle and there is no room for her now in the house. Ritu came to Kolkata and took shelter in Sealdah station. Gradually she developed intimacy with the platform children and started working in tea stalls. While living in the platform, Ritu has developed the habit of sniffing dendrite and smoking bidi. Afterwards she got married to one of her friends in the platform. Her husband who is now 19 years old was also a platform child. Ritu is now pregnant and her husband does not allow her undertake any work but meets all her expenses including drugs. Ritu however maintains physical relationship with some other boys of the platform creating family tension.

The coolies of Howrah station like Raju Yadav (name changed) say the platform children after coming to the station develop physical relationship with other children. Many of them have multi-partners. Because of their sexual relationship, they would never get out of the platform as this cannot be continued elsewhere.

Ms. Reba Das (name changed) a NGO employee of Howrah station says the older boys sexually abuse the younger children on a regular basis. When these young children grow up, they occupy the place of the older boys and molest the newcomers.

*Ma belle...*

Anwara Khatoon (name changed), around 15 yrs. old, is a resident of Bongaon, 24 Parganas (N). Though she visits her home in Bongaon once in every month and is in touch with her family, she never thinks of going back home permanently. Why she has been left here and her reasons for not going back home are completely unknown. She stays here with her friends and sells fruits. Apart from her daily expenses, the rest of the money is saved with a shopkeeper in the station. She admits that she sometimes gets engaged in sexual relationship in lieu of money. In the platform, there have been twice attempts to rape her. She even says that she has murdered a person for trying to rape her. She was kept in juvenile home at Howrah for 6 months. In spite of all the difficulties, she has decided to continue living in Sealdah station.

*Ma belle...*

Rekha (name changed) aged about 16 years was a new arrival at Howrah Station. She left her house to get respite from the physical and sexual abuse of his stepfather. She had a pleasant look and attractive physique. Very soon she became a target of the old ladies and on the plea of managing some job, they engaged her in sex trade. She later developed a relationship with a person and left for U. P. where she was sold off in a brothel.

*Source: Don Bosco CHILDLINE*

### **8.5 Summary Observations:**

- Substance abuse is rampant amongst the platform children. The most common form of substance abuse is bidi/cigarette, tobacco, marijuana and deadlier dendrite sniffing. Dendrite sniffing is more widespread in Howrah station than Sealdah (vide Table No. S-37 & H-37) In Sealdah 16% of the sample population is addicted to dendrite sniffing while the figure is 35% in case of Howrah.
- The peers and the senior children encourage the platform children to try the substance.
- Some of these children are also used by the drug peddlers as carriers or to sell the drugs.
- Sexual abuse is also widespread in both the stations although most of the children especially those in the Howrah station evaded the issue. The perpetrators of the abuse are senior children who assault the newcomers, coolies, thela pullers etc who are detached from their families.

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