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FOSTER CARE AND CHILD WELFARE ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO REWA DISTRICT

ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents an in-depth socio-legal investigation of the foster care system and alternative child welfare mechanisms in Rewa District, Madhya Pradesh. By analysing the structural transition from institutionalization to family-based alternative care under the national flagship initiative, **Mission Vatsalya**, this paper highlights the gap between de jure statutory mandates and de facto ground realities.

While the Juvenile **Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 (amended in 2021)** and **The Model Foster Care Guidelines** prioritize non-institutional care, administrative datasets reveal an overwhelming reliance on institutional confinement within **Child Care Institutions (CCIS)**.

Using a mixed-method empirical and doctrinal approach, this study evaluates the specific socio-economic and demographic vulnerabilities of Rewa, such as high rural child populations, elevated levels of childhood malnutrition, and low maternal healthcare indicators. The study identifies key structural barriers, including cultural resistance to non-relative foster care, chronic under-staffing of the **District Child Protection Unit (DCPU)**, procedural delays in declaring children "legally free" for adoption or foster care, and underfunded sponsorship programs.

Finally, the paper offers strategic, actionable recommendations to reform the district's child protection framework. It outlines steps to build localized foster care registries, enhance financial incentives through Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT), improve coordination among local agencies, and transition the district's child protection paradigm from protective custody to rehabilitative, family-based care.

KEYWORDS : Alternative Care, Foster Care, Kinship Care, De-institutionalization

INTRODUCTION

Child welfare in Rewa district, Madhya Pradesh, operates within a complex socio-economic landscape, striving to balance institutional care with non-institutional, family-based alternatives like foster care and sponsorship. As per 2011 census data, a significant portion of the population resides in rural areas, making community-level child protection critical. The district Women and Child Development Department (WCD) in Rewa acts as the primary nodal agency, mandated to implement policies aimed at safeguarding vulnerable children, including those who are orphans, abandoned, or victims of abuse.

Foster care in Rewa is a temporary, court monitored arrangement where a child is placed in a domestic environment - either with related kinship care or unrelated licensed families until their biological family's circumstances improve or a permanent solution like adoption is reached. Under the JJ Act and the latest model foster care guidelines (2024), the district provides monthly maintenance allowances ranging from ₹1500 to 2500 depending on the child's age to support their nutrition, health and education.

The system, under the overall umbrella of Mission Vatsalya, aims to ensure that every child in Rewa has a stable, nurturing environment, preventing, as far as possible, long-term institutionalization.

HYPOTHESIS

The implementation of family-based alternative care systems in Rewa District is heavily constrained by structural and cultural factors. The foundational propositions of this research are structured as follows:

H1: Despite the legislative mandate of the JJ Act 2015, institutionalization remains the default administrative response for vulnerable children in Rewa.

This proposition suggests that although the law prioritizes family environments, local systems default to institutional placements due to ease of administrative processing, structural habits, and a lack of alternative family networks on the ground.

H2: Socio-economic challenges, such as widespread rural poverty and severe malnutrition, drive families to use CCIs as a primary survival mechanism.

This statement addresses the economic drivers of child protection, indicating that child welfare issues in Rewa are often rooted in familial poverty rather than direct abuse, where CCIs are used as a desperate protective strategy.

H3: Deep-seated cultural values regarding lineage and bloodlines create strong resistance to non-relative foster care, making kinship care the most viable alternative in the region.

This points to the sociological barriers where families show high interest in permanent adoption but resist temporary, non-relative fostering, rendering kinship care within extended families the most practical path.

BRIEF HYPOTHESIS

This study proposes that the structural limits of Mission Vatsalya in Rewa District stem from a mismatch between national policy and regional realities. High rural poverty, administrative staff shortages, and a lack of public awareness of the difference between temporary foster care and permanent adoption make it difficult to implement family-based alternatives.

Consequently, foster care remains primarily a "written service" on paper, while local Child Care Institutions continue to serve as the default destination for Children in Need of Care and Protection (CNCP).

ANALYTICAL MATRIX OF THE HYPOTHESIS

To test these hypotheses, the study sets up a comparative analysis between the legal mandates (under the Central JJ Act and MP Rules) and the physical realities of administrative speed, cultural compliance, and institutional capacity within Rewa's eleven blocks.

This matrix allows us to examine the correlation between high regional poverty indicators (such as high stunting and wasting levels) and the low rates of community participation in foster care registries, showing how economic vulnerability directly translates to institutional dependency.

IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH

Most socio-legal research on child protection in India focuses on national trends or large metropolitan cities like Delhi, Mumbai, or Bengaluru. Little academic attention has been paid to the challenges faced by tier-2 and tier-3 districts in central India, such as Rewa. This research is important because it addresses this gap by analysing the child protection system in a rural-dominated district. At the state level, the "Vimarsh" State-Level Multi-Stakeholder Consultation on Child Protection-organized by the Juvenile Justice Committee of the High Court of Madhya Pradesh in collaboration with UNICEF-emphasized that a child is a life, not merely a file to process.

The Vimarsh consultations resulted in the Madhya Pradesh State Action Plan for Child Protection (2023-2027), which calls for active de-institutionalization and the expansion of family-based care. By conducting a detailed study of Rewa, this research provides a practical look at how these state-level policies are being implemented locally. It examines how local agencies, such as the CWC and DCPU, manage their workloads and

resources, and explores why families in the region may be hesitant to participate in foster care. The findings of this study can help inform targeted administrative reforms, helping to move child protection in Rewa from simple institutional custody to real, family-based rehabilitation

OBJECTIVE OF RESEARCHThe core objectives of this socio-legal study are:

1. To Evaluate the Legal and Policy Framework: Examine how the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 (amended in 2021) and the Model Foster Care Guidelines are being applied in Rewa District.
2. To Identify Implementation Gaps: Analyze the reasons for the low number of foster care placements in Rewa compared to the continued use of Child Care Institutions (CCIs).
3. To Assess Socio-Economic Drivers: Explore how regional poverty, childhood malnutrition, and low maternal healthcare indicators contribute to families relying on CCIs for support.
4. To Analyze Institutional Capacity: Evaluate the administrative resources, staffing, and monitoring capabilities of the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) and the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) in Rewa.
5. To Recommend Practical Reforms: Develop actionable legal, administrative, and financial recommendations to strengthen alternative care systems and improve the delivery of Mission Vatsalya services in Rewa.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This dissertation uses a Socio-Legal (Doctrinal-Empirical) Research Methodology to evaluate child welfare systems.

1. DOCTRINAL RESEARCH METHOD

The doctrinal component of this study involves a systematic analysis of primary legal texts, statutory provisions, and administrative guidelines: Statutes (The JJ Act 2015, amendments in 2021 and 2024), Rules and Guidelines (The JJ Model Rules 2016, Model Foster Care Guidelines 2016 and 2024), Constitutional Jurisprudence (Articles 15(3), 21, 39, 45, 47), Judicial Precedents, and Policy Documents (The Madhya Pradesh State Action Plan for Child Protection 2023-2027)

2- EMPIRICAL AND NON-DOCTRINAL RESEARCH METHOD

To understand how these laws are applied in practice, empirical data was collected through field interactions, administrative reviews, and semi-structured interviews in Rewa District: Interviews with Key Stakeholders: Discussions were conducted with child protection officials, including Smt. Pratibha Pandey (District Program Officer, WCD, Rewa), members of the CWC, and staff from the DCPU.

Field Visits to CCIs: Visits were conducted to registered Child Care Institutions in Rewa (such as those run by the Madhavam Trust) to assess living conditions, examine how Individual Care Plans (ICPs) are managed, and discuss transition planning with staff.

Data Analysis: Quantitative indicators on local demographics, health, and nutrition were compiled from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5).

This dual approach ensures that legal interpretations are grounded in local empirical realities, avoiding abstract doctrinal speculation and focusing on structural challenges in Rewa's legal administration.

PRIMARY DATA

TABLE 1: MISSION VATSALYA SERVICE DISTRIBUTION (NATIONAL SCALE VS. MPPOLICY INTENT)

The following table outlines the distribution of alternative care services under the national mandate and compares it directly with the ground realities in Madhya Pradesh and Rewa.

SERVICE CATEGORY	NATIONAL FOOTPRINT	MP POLICY INTENT	REWA DISTRICT STATUS
SPONSORSHIP SUPPORT	91,958 CHILDREN		HIGH RELIANCE ON REGISTERED CCIs
FOSTER CARE	575 CHILDREN	IDENTIFY FOSTER-ELEGIBLE FAMILIES	ALMOST ENTIRELY WRITTEN SERVICE
AFTERCARE PROGRAMS	3554 BENEFICIARIES	IDENTIFY	EXTREMELY LIMITED TRACING

The statistical realities captured in Table 1 reveal an overwhelming national and regional bias towards institutionalization. Despite the mandate for alternative care pathways, actual foster care enrollments represent less than one percent of total placements. In Rewa District, this gap manifests as near-zero foster placements, leaving CCIs as the only functioning mechanism for children in distress.

This clear discrepancy highlights the need for a shift in resource allocation. While CCIs receive continuous, automatic state support, non-institutional alternatives face slow approval processes that discourage potential caregivers.

TABLE 2: KEY CHILD WELFARE AND DEVELOPMENTAL INDICATORS (REWA DISTRICT)

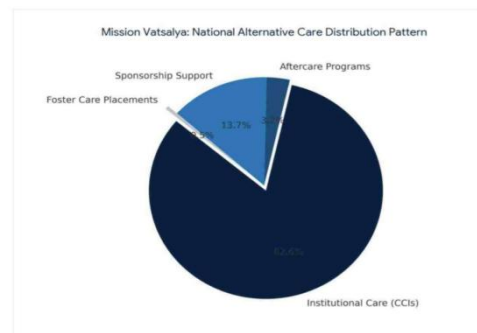
Socio-economic indicators from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) and district records illustrate the complex landscape in which child protection operates in Rewa.

The data in Table 2 clearly establishes that the high inflow of children into local shelter systems is driven by foundational health, nutritional, and demographic vulnerabilities, requiring systematic preventive intervention. High wasting (18.5%) and stunting (35.7%) metrics underscore that local childhood abandonment in the Vindhya region is rarely willful; it is predominantly an economic survival choice by impoverished families.

INDICATOR CATEGORY	SPECIFIC METRIC	STATISTICAL VALUE	SOCIO-LEGAL IMPLICATIONS
DEMOGRAPHICS	TOTAL RURAL CHILD POPULATION(0-6)	3,03,761	HIGH BASE OF VULNERABLE CHILDREN
GENDER DISPARITY	CHILD SEX RATIO RURAL	887 GIRLS PER 1000 BOYS	GENDER BIAS
MATERNAL HEALTH	MATERNAL ANC IN FIRST TRIMESTER	33.4%	POOR MATERNAL HEALTH OUTCOMES
NUTRITION	STUNTING IN CHILDREN (<5 YEARS)	35.7%	SEVERE PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT GAPS
NUTRITION	WASTING IN CHILDREN (<5 YEARS)	18.5%	MAJOR DRIVER OF POVERTY ABANDONMENT
MATERNAL ANEMIA	ANEMIC PREGNANT WOMEN	56.4%	GENERATIONAL CYCLE OF VULNERABILITY

SECONDARY DATA

To complement the primary field research, secondary data was compiled from various national, state, and academic publications. These sources help contextualize the local findings from Rewa within broader policy and legal debates. Data from the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) indicates that despite the central government's emphasis on family-based care, budgetary allocations remain heavily weighted toward institutional care.



Furthermore, records from the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) point to structural data gaps in the national tracking systems. Many rural child protection units lack the reliable high-speed internet and trained IT personnel needed to maintain real-time tracking systems, resulting in prolonged placement delays. This imbalance causes a self-reinforcing dependency on CCIs, as local

DISTRICT CASE ANALYSIS (REWA DISTRICT)

Significant Cases & Systemic Observations (2025-2026)

Recent incidents in Rewa provide specific local evidence of protection gaps and institutional accountability

The Private School Inhuman Treatment Case (July 2025): The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) intervened after

a 5-year-old student in Rewa was forced to wash soiled clothes by an attendant. This led to an FIR under Section 75 of the JJ Act and a *50,000 relief payment, highlighting the need for stricter monitoring of school environments.

Rewa Juvenile Adult Trial Case (2023-2026): The XIIth Additional Sessions Judge in Rewa upheld a JJ Board finding that a 17-year-old accused of a heinous crime should be tried as an adult after a psychological assessment. This case illustrates the practical application of Section 15 of the JJ Act within Rewa's judicial system.

Student Suicide Investigation (November 2025): A 16-year-old girl in Rewa was found dead, with a diary suggesting mental distress due to school punishment. This case underscores the urgency for mental health support and anti-harassment protocols in local educational institutions.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The ground-level scenario in Rewa shows a severe dependency on institutional care. The Child Welfare Committee (CWC) in Rewa works under heavy workloads. Due to a lack of pre-screened foster families, the CWC rarely has alternative care options available when a child is brought before it. As a result, the committee is almost always forced to place the child in a local Child Care Institution, such as those run by the Madhavam Trust.

The District Child Protection Unit (DCPU), under the administrative leadership of District Program Officer Smt. Pratibha Pandey, is responsible for coordinating child protection services across the district. However, the DCPU faces significant resource constraints, with only a few field staff responsible for all eleven blocks of the district, making regular

home studies and post-placement tracking nearly impossible.

Furthermore, the physical conditions within existing CCIs in Rewa reflect severe operational pressures. While primary needs of nutrition and shelter are addressed, individual psychological care is often absent. Individual Care Plans (ICPs) are filled out as a formal, paper-pushing exercise rather than treated as organic tools for child rehabilitation and community re-entry.

ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH AND KEY FINDINGS

The analysis of research indicates a major gap between the legal text of the JJ Act 2015 and the social realities of Rewa. Traditional family structures in the Vindhya region prefer permanent adoption over temporary, non-relative foster care. However, kinship care (placement with extended relatives) is highly accepted and represents the most viable path for alternative family care.

Moreover, the low amount of monthly sponsorship grants and bureaucratic delays in fund disbursements discourage potential foster and kinship families, further cementing the default option of institutionalization.

KEY EMPIRICAL FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Cultural Inertia: Non-relative foster care faces immense societal resistance due to ancestral inheritance and lineage values.

Administrative Bottlenecks: Staff shortages at the Rewa DCPU delay home assessments, rendering the CARINGS portal inactive at the local level.

Financial Gaps: Delayed direct benefit transfers of sponsorship money undermine kinship care viability, causing a high rate of CCI placement.

Socio-economic hurdles especially the low, delayed disbursements of sponsorship funds create a vacuum in preventative aid. Under these conditions, families facing extreme poverty find that surrendering their children to CCIs is the only practical way to secure food and safety. This structural dynamic turns CCIs into active shelters for economic refugees rather than protective refuges of last resort.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To transform the child protection landscape in Rewa and transition from institutional care to family-based options, the following legal and administrative steps must be taken:

1. DECENTRALIZED AWARENESS AND REGISTRY CREATION

The DCPU, led by District Program Officer Smt. Pratibha Pandey, should build a localized registry of pre-screened families in all eleven blocks of Rewa. This registry should prioritize kinship care arrangements where extended families are identified to receive vulnerable children immediately.

2. FINANCIAL REFORMS AND DIRECT BENEFIT TRANSFER (DBT)

The SFCAC must streamline its review processes. Financial assistance under Mission Vatsalya (recently raised to ₹4,000 per month) must be disbursed directly to the foster/kinship parents' bank accounts on a strict monthly cycle to prevent financial strain.

3. COMPULSORY SOCIAL AUDITS OF CCIS

An independent body should carry out bi-annual audits of registered homes (such as the

Madhavam Trust). Each audit must re-examine the Individual Care Plan (ICP) of every child to ensure they are not being held institutionally when alternative options are possible.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the child welfare system in Rewa District stands at a crossroads. While the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 provides a strong legal foundation, its execution is hindered by regional poverty, cultural barriers, and staffing constraints. By transitioning from institutionalization to kinship-based alternative care, Rewa can serve as an exemplary model for child welfare in central India.

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