

Marginalized Children's Drawings Speak for Themselves: Self Advocacy for Protecting Their Rights

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Abstract : Introduction: Children of the urban migrant laborers have great difficulty in accessing government programs which are otherwise routinely available in rural settings. These include programs for child care, nutrition, health and education. There are major communicative fault-lines preventing advocacy for these marginalized children. The overarching aim of this study was to investigate the role of an innovative strategy of children's drawings in supporting communication between children, social workers, pediatricians and other child advocates to fulfil their fundamental child rights. Materials and Methods: The data was collected over a period of one-year April 2015 to April 2016 during the routine visits by the members of the Social Pediatrics team including a social worker, pediatricians and an artist to the makeshift colony of migrant laborers. Once a week a drawing session was organized where the children including adolescents were asked to any drawing and provide a narrative thereafter. 5-30 children attended these weekly sessions for one year. All these drawings were then classified into various themes and exhibited on 16th April 2016 in the Govt. College of Art Museum. The forum was used for advocacy of Child Rights of these underprivileged children to Secretary social welfare. Results: Mean (SD) age of children in present observational study was 8.5 (2.5) years, with 60% of the boys. Majority of children demonstrated themes which were local and contextualized to their daily needs, threats and festivals which clearly underscored their fundamental right to basic services and equality of opportunities to achieve their full development Drawings of tap with flowing water, queues of people collecting water from hand pumps reflect the local problem of water availability for these children. Young children talking about fear of rape and murder following their drawings indicate the looming threat of potential abuse and neglect. Besides reality driven drawing, children also echoed supernatural beliefs, dangers and festivities in their drawings. Anyone who watched these children at work with art materials was able to see the intense level of absorption, clearly indicating the enjoyment they received, making it a meaningful activity. Indeed, this self-advocacy through art exhibition led to the successful establishment of mobile Anganwadi (A social safety net programme of the government) in their area of stay. Conclusions: This observational study is an example of how children were able to do self-advocacy to protect their rights. Of particular importance, these drawings address how psychologists and other child advocates can ensure in a child-centered manner that the voice of children is heard and represented in all assessments of their well-being and future care options.

Keywords : child advocacy, children drawings, child rights, marginalized children

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