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LEGAL CHALLENGES AND SYSTEMIC GAPS IN THE FOSTER CARE FRAMEWORK IN INDIA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of a child extends beyond mere age and legal definitions to encompass a critical phase of physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development. While instruments like the UNCRC define a child as a person below eighteen years, such a definition fails to fully capture the essence of childhood.² Childhood is a formative period that shapes an individual's psychological and emotional health, educational achievements, and social adaptability. It is during this time that children acquire values, ethics, and personality traits, laying the foundation for responsible adulthood and a compassionate society.³ Children hold immense societal importance as inheritors of cultural traditions and future contributors to national development. Their proper upbringing reflects a society's moral priorities and ensures economic sustainability by creating a healthy, skilled workforce. Neglecting their needs leads to long-term social issues like crime and unemployment, whereas investing in their well-being enhances human development. As future agents of change, children challenge outdated norms and foster progress in areas like environmental conservation, technology, and social justice. Their role in preserving traditions and shaping ethical interactions further underscores their significance. Central to a child's development are basic needs like nutrition, healthcare, education, and, most importantly, a family. A family offers not only physical and emotional security but also a foundation for trust, empathy, and social interaction. It plays an unmatched role in instilling values, guiding behavior, and building resilience.

Millions of children worldwide grow up without families due to various distressing circumstances such as parental death, abandonment, socio-economic hardship, pandemics, wars, and societal stigma.⁴ Many are orphaned due to diseases, accidents, or natural disasters,

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² Shalini Sharma, *Child Rights and Laws (International and National Perspective)* 223 (2nd edn, Universal Publications, Allahabad, 2022).

³ Ibid

⁴ Radhika Kapur, "Status of Children in India," 4 *International Journal of Professional Studies* 100 (2017)

while others are abandoned by parents who are unable to provide adequate care or are driven by social pressures and discrimination—especially against female children or those with disabilities. Pandemics like COVID-19 have further exacerbated the problem, leaving many children parentless and emotionally traumatized. Additionally, armed conflicts and forced displacements contribute significantly to family separations, placing children at heightened risk of exploitation and abuse. The absence of a family negatively affects a child's emotional stability, educational opportunities, and moral development, often leading to neglect, delinquency, and psychological issues. Recognizing this, the state plays a crucial role in safeguarding such children through institutional and non-institutional care systems. While institutional care provides basic needs, it often lacks the emotional support vital for a child's development and can expose children to substandard living conditions and abuse. In contrast, non-institutional care—such as foster care, adoption, and kinship care—offers a family-like environment that supports the child's emotional, psychological, and social growth. As a result, many governments are now prioritizing and strengthening non-institutional care to ensure the holistic development and well-being of children without parental care.

Non-institutional care provides alternative child care outside institutional settings like orphanages, primarily through foster care, adoption, and sponsorship programs. Foster care offers temporary family-based care, supporting children until reunification, adoption, or independent living, while adoption establishes a permanent legal family relationship. Sponsorship programs help children remain with their biological families by providing financial and educational aid. Foster care is considered the most effective, offering children emotional support, stability, and a nurturing environment crucial for their mental and psychological well-being. The Indian Constitution, though not explicitly mentioning foster care, upholds children's rights to protection, dignity, and development through Articles 15(3), 21, and 39(e) and (f). These provisions collectively support alternative care systems like foster care as essential for children lacking parental care.

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, is the key legal framework governing foster care in India. It defines two categories: “children in conflict with law” and “children in need of care and protection,” both under eighteen years of age. The Act emphasizes rehabilitation and reintegration rather than punishment, with Juvenile Justice Boards handling the former and Child Welfare Committees (CWC) managing the latter. Foster care is recognized as a vital alternative care option under Sections 40 and 44, allowing children

without adoption prospects to be placed in foster families. The CWC regulates foster care by assessing foster parents and monitoring child welfare to prevent abuse. The Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) also supports foster care alongside its adoption role. The Model Foster Care Guidelines, 2024, update earlier guidelines to be more inclusive and child-centric, notably expanding eligibility to include single individuals such as unmarried, separated, divorced, or widowed persons, enhancing flexibility and promoting stable, nurturing homes for children.

Despite the progressive reforms introduced in the foster care system, several challenges continue to hinder its effective implementation in India. One of the primary issues is the lack of awareness and societal acceptance of foster care as a viable alternative to institutional care. Many people remain unfamiliar with the concept, often confusing it with adoption, which results in fewer families coming forward to foster children in need. This lack of awareness is further exacerbated by cultural and social stigmas, where fostering is not widely perceived as a mainstream practice for child care. The process of identifying and approving foster parents remains slow and bureaucratic, discouraging willing families from participating. Another major concern is the inadequate financial and emotional support provided to foster parents, which often deters families from taking on the responsibility of fostering, especially in cases where children require specialized care due to physical or psychological trauma. Moreover, the monitoring and supervision mechanisms for foster care placements remain weak, leading to instances where children may not receive the quality of care they need or may even face neglect and exploitation. Additionally, many children with special needs struggle to find suitable foster families, as there are few incentives or structured programs to encourage their placement. Overall, while foster care is a promising alternative to institutional care, its success in India is currently hindered by societal resistance, bureaucratic inefficiencies, inadequate support systems, and weak monitoring, all of which must be addressed to ensure that children in need receive the nurturing and stable environment they deserve.

CONCEPT OF FOSTER CARE

Foster care refers to an alternative care arrangement in which a child is placed, through the order of the Child Welfare Committee, into the domestic setting of a family other than the child's biological parents. This arrangement is meant to offer care and protection in a home environment that is not institutional. The selected family, which is not related to the child, must be qualified, approved, and supervised for the purpose of providing such care. The Juvenile

Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, specifies that such placement is possible only through proper legal orders and after determining the suitability of the foster family. The term "foster family" is defined under the Act as a family that is found suitable by the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) to provide foster care under Section 44.⁵

According to Section 44(2) of the Act, the selection of a foster family must be based on the family's ability, willingness, capacity, and any prior experience in caring for children. This means that not every household qualifies to take in a foster child; there must be a thorough assessment to ensure that the child's best interests will be served in that environment.⁶ The objective is to place the child in a supportive and caring home, even if it is for a short or extended period, ensuring that the child's emotional, physical, and psychological needs are met during that time. The role of the foster family is thus recognized as a crucial element in providing a protective and nurturing atmosphere for children who cannot be immediately placed with their biological families.

LEGAL EVOLUTION OF FOSTER CARE IN INDIA

The journey of foster care's integration into India's child welfare and legal systems has been shaped over several decades through a series of legislative reforms and policy initiatives aimed at promoting family-based alternative care. The approach to child protection in the early years was heavily reliant on institutional care, but gradually, the idea of nurturing children in family settings began to take root. One of the initial milestones in this direction came in 1960 with the enactment of the Children Act. This legislation underscored the importance of not only meeting the physical needs of neglected children housed in children's homes but also working towards their emotional, educational, and character development. It served as a starting point for the idea that comprehensive care should go beyond mere shelter and sustenance.

A few years later, in 1964, the Central Social Welfare Board made a significant move by including foster care as part of its Third Five-Year Plan, under the umbrella of "Child and Family Welfare Plans." The core objective was to enable children to remain in family-like environments close to their original homes instead of being placed in large institutions. Though the initial implementation began with only three NGOs—two based in Mumbai and one in Chennai—the program faced setbacks. These included a lack of space in households, financial

⁵ Nayan Joshi, *A Handbook on Juvenile Justice* 233 (Kamal Publications, Allahabad, 3rd edn., 2019)

⁶ *Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015*, s. 44

limitations of foster families, and mismatches in cultural or social backgrounds, which impeded the practical rollout of foster care at that stage.⁷

A more structured attempt came in 1972 when Maharashtra introduced a non-institutional child welfare initiative through a Family Service Centre NGO. The State Government later adopted and renamed it as the Bal Sangopan Yojana. This scheme offered foster support specifically to children from vulnerable families, including those affected by HIV, focusing on integrating them into home-based care rather than placing them in institutions. By 1974, the Ministry of Social Welfare had rolled out a Scheme for Children in Need of Care and Protection. It added foster care as one of the components, and, with UNICEF's collaboration, efforts were made to evaluate and enhance the model. Administrative backing was provided to NGOs for three years, but the absence of sustained funding proved to be a challenge for long-term implementation.

Between 1994 and 2000, multiple Indian states began exploring state-specific foster care initiatives following the Ministry of Social Welfare's directions. States like Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Delhi expanded the model and introduced variations such as group foster care. In such models, multiple children lived together under the care of a designated 'house mother' with support staff, thereby introducing flexibility in how foster care could be administered. During the same period, in 1995, the Central Adoption Resource Agency (CARA) issued regulations that initially permitted only those adoption agencies with physical infrastructure to be eligible. This inadvertently excluded organizations that provided pre-adoption foster family care. By 1998, however, adjustments were made to accommodate foster family care as a legitimate form of care for children, particularly those below the age of six awaiting adoption.

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act of 2000 marked a defining point in India's legal history concerning child welfare. It included specific provisions addressing rehabilitation and social reintegration through various alternatives, among which foster care was formally recognized.⁸ The Act permitted both temporary and extended placements, effectively validating foster care as a crucial segment of the child protection system. In 2009, the Government of India introduced the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS), signifying

⁷ Maninder Kaur, "Tracing the Evolution of Alternative Care for Children in India in the Last Decade and the Way Forward", 10 *Journal of Indian Alternatives Care Network* 37 (2023)

⁸ Pritpal Singh Chahal, "Study of Juvenile Justice System in India" 8 *International Journal of Nove Research and Development* 362 (2023)

another milestone. This initiative required all states to develop and institutionalize their own foster care policies, with designated financial resources to support district-level implementation of child protection measures.

A revised version of ICPS emerged in 2014, allowing for greater programmatic flexibility and enhanced financial norms. With this, individual states began crafting tailored foster care programs to suit their regional needs. For instance, Rajasthan initiated the Palanhar Yojana, providing not only financial but also educational assistance to children who were orphaned or destitute. Bihar brought in Parvarish to support orphans and children of widows or disabled parents from economically weak families. Similarly, Goa adopted the Vatsalya program, committed to offering family-based care without resorting to institutional solutions.

The year 2015 marked a new phase with the enactment of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015. It consolidated the place of foster care in India's child protection strategy through Section 44, which made it clear that family-based care should be preferred over institutional options. This legislation introduced formal procedures for identifying, vetting, and monitoring foster families to ensure that children were not exposed to neglect or exploitation. Regular reviews by Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) were also mandated to uphold the safety and welfare of children placed under foster care.

In 2016, India reaffirmed its commitment to children's rights with the introduction of the National Plan of Action for Children (NPA 2016). This plan prioritized alternatives like foster care and adoption over institutional care, especially for children deprived of parental care. It aimed to strengthen all aspects—legal, financial, and administrative—of such child-centric programs. The same year saw the release of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Model Rules, 2016, which provided the procedural clarity needed for the implementation of Section 44 of the 2015 Act. These rules elaborated on eligibility requirements for foster families, roles and responsibilities of CWCs, the framework for financial aid, and oversight mechanisms to ensure accountability.

Also in 2016, the Ministry of Women and Child Development released the Model Guidelines for Foster Care. These guidelines played a crucial role in standardizing the foster care process across the country. They offered clear directions for the selection and evaluation of foster families, procedures for background checks, and requirements for financial assistance. They

also addressed the importance of psychological support and included mechanisms for periodic review and grievance redressal, making the foster care experience more holistic and child-friendly.

Most recently, in 2024, the Ministry brought out the revised Model Foster Care Guidelines. These updated guidelines took into account the amendments made to the Juvenile Justice Act and its Model Rules and were designed to simplify and improve upon the previous framework. The goal was to ensure that the legal and procedural aspects of foster care remained accessible, consistent, and more efficient in terms of implementation. These continual policy developments reflect a deliberate shift toward a well-regulated and legally acknowledged foster care system in India. The overarching aim has been to replace the impersonal nature of institutional care with the warmth and stability of family environments, thereby promoting the emotional, social, and mental well-being of vulnerable children through carefully monitored, family-based alternatives.

CHALLENGES AND SYSTEMIC GAPS IN THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM IN INDIA

1. Lack of Awareness and Misconception between Foster Care and Adoption

A significant barrier to the effective implementation of foster care in India stems from the widespread lack of awareness regarding the very concept of foster care itself. Most individuals, including prospective foster parents, often confuse foster care with adoption, despite the two being legally and functionally distinct. While adoption permanently transfers all legal rights and responsibilities of a child from biological parents to adoptive parents, foster care is a temporary arrangement meant for the care and protection of children who are in need of a safe and nurturing environment, often while efforts are underway to reunite them with their biological families. This confusion not only blurs the understanding of legal processes but also disincentivizes families from engaging in fostering, as they assume it entails permanent commitments and legal complications akin to adoption. Moreover, the absence of widespread sensitization campaigns, inadequate information dissemination through media, and limited educational outreach by child welfare institutions have compounded the problem, leaving a vast segment of the population unaware of the opportunities and responsibilities associated with foster care. This has led to underutilization of the foster care system and continued reliance

on institutional care, which often fails to cater to the emotional and developmental needs of children.

2. Social Stigma Associated with Foster Care

Another major hurdle in promoting foster care in India is the deep-seated social stigma and cultural prejudices attached to the idea of fostering a child who is not biologically one's own. Indian society, which traditionally places immense value on blood ties and lineage, often views non-biological caregiving with suspicion or disapproval. This stigma is particularly strong in conservative communities where fostering may be interpreted as an act reserved for the childless or a form of charity rather than a social responsibility or legal caregiving option. Families who do choose to foster are often subjected to intrusive questioning, societal judgment, and at times even ostracization, making the process emotionally taxing and socially isolating. Moreover, there exists a presumption that foster children come from "troubled" or "tainted" backgrounds, further fueling negative stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes. These factors collectively discourage potential foster families from coming forward, thereby limiting the reach and effectiveness of foster care programs. The lack of community support structures and positive narratives around fostering in mainstream discourse further aggravates the problem, leading to a vicious cycle of low participation and persistent social bias.⁹

3. Cumbersome and Delayed Foster Care Procedures

In addition to societal challenges, the administrative and procedural hurdles involved in foster care create another layer of complexity that deters prospective foster parents. The legal and bureaucratic processes associated with being approved as a foster family are often lengthy, opaque, and burdensome. While thorough scrutiny and vetting are essential for ensuring the safety and welfare of children, the process in India is frequently marred by excessive documentation, lack of clarity in guidelines, and delays in approvals from child welfare committees and other competent authorities. This not only frustrates the applicants but also leads to a significant gap between the demand for foster care and the availability of eligible foster families. In many cases, individuals interested in fostering drop out midway due to procedural fatigue and lack of guidance. Furthermore, inconsistencies across different states in implementing foster care schemes, inadequate training for social workers, and poor coordination between various stakeholders only exacerbate these delays. The absence of a

⁹ Sitaram, *Child Rights and Child Protection Issues, Challenges And Strategies* 90 (Satyam Law International, New Delhi, 2ndedn., 2020)

streamlined, time-bound, and user-friendly mechanism for foster care placement significantly undermines the credibility and attractiveness of the system, leaving many children in need of familial care languishing in institutional homes.

4. Lack of Formal Training and Support for Foster Parents

A critical yet often overlooked challenge in the Indian foster care framework is the absence of structured and mandatory training programs for foster parents. Unlike many developed countries where pre-placement training and continuous support are essential components of the foster care system, India lacks a standardized mechanism to equip foster families with the necessary skills and psychological preparedness to care for children with diverse and often traumatic backgrounds. Most foster parents enter into the caregiving arrangement with little to no understanding of child psychology, trauma-informed care, or strategies to handle behavioral issues that may arise due to the child's past experiences. This not only hinders the emotional bonding between the child and the foster parents but can also lead to unintentional neglect, misunderstandings, and breakdowns in the placement. Formal training could play a pivotal role in helping foster parents build empathy, manage stress, understand the legal implications of fostering, and create a nurturing and stable environment conducive to the child's growth. Moreover, the lack of post-placement counselling or ongoing professional support further isolates foster parents, making it difficult for them to cope with challenges on their own. By failing to institutionalize capacity-building programs and professional guidance, the current system risks compromising the quality of care provided to foster children and undermines the long-term sustainability of foster placements.

5. Absence of Psychological Preparation for Children Entering Foster Care

An equally pressing issue in India's foster care system is the complete absence of structured psychological training or preparatory counselling for children who are about to be placed in foster homes. While much emphasis is placed—albeit inadequately—on screening foster parents, very little attention is given to the psychological readiness of the child, who is often uprooted from familiar surroundings such as institutions, shelter homes, or sometimes even abusive environments. The abrupt transition into a new family without prior emotional conditioning can be deeply unsettling for the child, leading to anxiety, fear, attachment issues, and behavioral problems. In the absence of professional psychological support and gradual integration, children may experience feelings of alienation, distrust, and even hostility towards their foster families. A structured psychological preparedness program, involving counselling

sessions, gradual exposure to the foster family, and ongoing emotional support, could significantly aid in the smooth transition and help the child develop a sense of belonging. Unfortunately, the current foster care policies and guidelines under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, lack any such mandatory provision, resulting in foster care arrangements that are emotionally strained and sometimes unsuccessful.

6. Lack of Coordination Between District Child Protection Units (DCPUs)

Another structural inefficiency that severely hampers the functioning of foster care in India is the lack of coordination and communication between District Child Protection Units (DCPUs) across different regions. Since the identification, verification, and matching of foster families with children are largely handled at the district level, the absence of a centralized or interlinked database and real-time communication mechanisms leads to severe delays and missed opportunities. For instance, a child in need of care in one district may not be matched with a willing foster family in another district simply due to bureaucratic silos and lack of inter-district collaboration. This fragmentation not only prolongs the child's stay in institutional settings but also discourages families who are genuinely interested in fostering, as they are kept waiting indefinitely due to administrative inefficiencies. Moreover, the absence of a robust digital infrastructure for sharing records, verifying backgrounds, and tracking foster placements across districts further complicates the process. The resultant gap in service delivery and coordination reflects the urgent need for an integrated national system that enables effective collaboration between DCPUs and other child welfare agencies to ensure timely and suitable placements.

7. Communication Gap Between Foster Parents and Children

In addition to institutional inefficiencies, one of the more intimate challenges faced in foster care settings is the communication gap between the child and the foster parents. This gap often arises from a lack of mutual understanding, differing expectations, cultural or linguistic differences, and the emotional baggage carried by children who may have experienced neglect, trauma, or multiple displacements. Foster parents, who are untrained in handling such sensitivities, may struggle to initiate open and trust-based conversations with the child, while the child may find it difficult to express their fears, needs, or feelings due to unfamiliarity and fear of rejection. This lack of effective communication hampers the development of a nurturing relationship, which is crucial for the child's emotional healing and development. In many cases, unresolved communication issues can lead to strained relations, behavioral issues, or even the premature breakdown of the placement. The problem is exacerbated by the lack of professional

mediation, counselling support, or structured bonding activities facilitated by child welfare agencies. Therefore, building communication bridges through training modules, counselling support, and facilitated family sessions is critical to the success of foster care placements, yet remains a neglected area in the current framework.

PROBABLE SOLUTION FOR THE MANAGING THE SYSTEMIC GAP IN FOSTER CARE IMPLEMENTATION

1. Overcoming Barriers to Effective Foster Care Implementation

The successful operation of foster care systems is frequently obstructed by challenges at both administrative and operational levels. Delays in obtaining approvals, weak monitoring frameworks, ineffective inter-agency coordination, and excessive bureaucracy all contribute to inadequate and untimely service delivery. Addressing these systemic obstacles calls for the adoption of comprehensive strategies that focus on reducing procedural inefficiencies. Introducing an effective monitoring mechanism that enables real-time assessment and enforces accountability can contribute to meaningful improvements. It is also crucial for all stakeholders to collaborate in simplifying procedures and accelerating workflows. Regular evaluations and feedback-driven reviews can further help in pinpointing persistent problem areas and refining the system accordingly.

2. Clarifying Public Perception of Foster Care and Differentiating It from Adoption

Widespread confusion and misinformation about foster care, particularly its distinction from adoption, remain significant issues in public understanding. Many people mistakenly view foster care as synonymous with adoption, which limits their willingness to engage with the system. To counter this, educational efforts such as outreach initiatives, awareness drives, and informational programs are necessary to clarify the temporary and supportive nature of foster care arrangements. These initiatives should emphasize that, unlike adoption—which involves a permanent legal shift—foster care is generally a provisional setup designed to ensure the safety and well-being of children during vulnerable periods. Increased public understanding could lead to greater participation by families willing to serve as foster caregivers.

3. Strengthening Budgetary Support for Foster Families

Providing adequate financial backing is essential to sustain and enhance the functioning of foster care programs. Government bodies must prioritize higher budget allocations exclusively for foster care-related activities. Beyond basic financial assistance, it is vital to implement

systematic aid options that include monthly allowances, reimbursement for children's healthcare and educational expenses, and easy access to necessary support services. Offering additional financial benefits such as tax exemptions and caregiver incentives can further motivate potential foster families. Reliable and continuous monetary support not only improves the quality of care provided to children but also encourages broader participation, thereby reinforcing the overall system.

4. Developing Mentorship Networks and Support Systems for Foster Caregivers

Foster caregivers often navigate a range of challenges, particularly while dealing with children who may have endured trauma or instability. In response, setting up mentorship initiatives that connect new caregivers with experienced foster parents can offer invaluable support. These programs should deliver guidance, emotional reinforcement, and practical advice to help address day-to-day caregiving difficulties. Moreover, consistent training in areas such as emotional development, behavioral management, and legal responsibilities should be provided. Establishing a comprehensive support network—including counselors, legal experts, and social workers—will equip foster parents to handle complex caregiving situations effectively. Such structured mentorship efforts ultimately benefit not only the caregivers but also the children they support.

5. Introducing a Standardized Legal Framework for Foster Care Arrangements

A clearly defined, legally enforceable foster care agreement is essential to ensure transparency and mutual understanding between foster families and responsible authorities. In the absence of standardized legal documentation, misunderstandings and conflicts may arise, particularly in times of disagreement. A detailed agreement should lay out the roles, obligations, and rights of all involved parties—covering aspects such as duration of placement, available support systems, expectations for child-rearing, and mechanisms for resolving disputes. Legal certainty strengthens trust among stakeholders, reinforces the child's emotional security, and helps prevent situations involving neglect or abuse. Ultimately, such a framework protects the best interests of the child while supporting those responsible for their care.

6. Strengthening Government Involvement and Oversight

Government involvement is crucial in ensuring that foster care systems function effectively and ethically. The state must play an active role in establishing regulatory frameworks, monitoring the performance of foster care institutions, and ensuring that policies are

implemented uniformly across regions. Government agencies should be responsible for regular inspections, licensing of foster care providers, and maintaining a database of eligible foster families. Moreover, the government must act as a facilitator, providing necessary training, resources, and financial support to foster parents while also safeguarding the rights of children. A centralized approach with coordination between different departments such as child welfare, education, and health can lead to more integrated services. By increasing its involvement, the government can ensure accountability, promote transparency, and reinforce public confidence in the foster care system.

7. Breaking Myths and Reducing Social Stigma Around Foster Care

One of the major barriers to the growth of foster care in India is the persistence of myths and societal stigma surrounding it. There are widespread misconceptions related to foster children's attachment issues, their integration into families, and fears of negative community judgment. These concerns often discourage families from coming forward to foster a child. Therefore, there is an urgent need to launch awareness campaigns aimed at breaking these myths and sensitizing the public. Such efforts should focus on dispelling fears about long-term emotional bonds, highlighting the positive impact foster care has on both children and families, and emphasizing the societal responsibility of child welfare. By reducing stigma, more potential caregivers would be encouraged to participate in foster care programmes, ensuring better opportunities for children in need.

8. Promotion of Foster Care Through Media and Government Advertising

The promotion of foster care requires active advocacy and visibility across different platforms. Government-led advertisements, coupled with campaigns on electronic and social media, can significantly raise awareness about the importance and benefits of foster care. Publicity efforts should include success stories of foster care, informational content about the process, and government support available to foster families. Mainstreaming such messages will help normalize foster care in the public eye, remove hesitations, and attract more volunteers willing to open their homes to children. Furthermore, utilizing social media channels enables targeting of specific audiences, such as young couples or retirees, who may be potential foster parents.

9. Promoting Inter-District Foster Care Placement

Often, children in need of foster care are not placed in a timely manner due to the unavailability of suitable foster homes within their own district. This highlights the need to strengthen and

promote inter-district foster care placement mechanisms. By facilitating the smooth transfer of children to foster homes in neighboring districts without unnecessary bureaucratic delays, the system can ensure timely protection and care. This also requires the development of a centralized, digital database of certified foster families and children awaiting placement, which would enhance coordination between districts. Promoting inter-district placement widens the network of care, reduces waiting times, and upholds the child's best interest.

10. Establishing Post-Placement Support and Monitoring of Foster Child

Foster care does not end with the placement of a child into a foster family; in fact, it marks the beginning of a crucial phase that requires continued oversight and assistance. Establishing a strong system for post-placement support and monitoring is essential to ensure the emotional, psychological, and physical well-being of the foster child. This includes regular visits by child welfare officers, counseling services, feedback mechanisms for both foster families and children, and timely intervention in case of issues. Ongoing support helps in early identification of adjustment problems, ensures that the child's developmental needs are being met, and strengthens the bond between the child and the foster family. Such a framework also builds confidence among foster families and contributes to the long-term success of the foster care system.

11. Formulation of State-Level Policies for Foster Care

A key recommendation for strengthening the foster care system in India is the formulation and implementation of comprehensive state-level policies dedicated to promoting foster care. Uniform guidelines across states are essential to ensure consistency in planning, execution, monitoring, and funding. These policies should address issues like procedural delays, funding allocation, and criteria for foster family selection. Clear policy frameworks would empower local authorities, streamline interdepartmental coordination, and ensure legal protection for foster children and families. Policies must also include a mechanism for regular assessment and feedback to remain responsive to ground realities.

12. Involvement of Community-Based Structures and Panchayats

The active participation of local governance institutions such as panchayats and other community-based structures is crucial in the effective promotion of foster care. These institutions are well-positioned to identify potential foster families, assess community needs, and disseminate information at the grassroots level. Their involvement can help reduce stigma

associated with foster care and ensure greater social acceptance and monitoring. Engaging panchayats in awareness campaigns, decision-making, and local support networks can bridge the gap between government initiatives and community implementation, making foster care a shared responsibility.

13. Psychological Integration of Institutionalized Children into Families

Children transitioning from institutional settings to foster families often face psychological challenges such as trauma, attachment issues, or adjustment difficulties. It is imperative that this shift is not abrupt but supported with psychological counseling and social work intervention. The integration should focus on creating emotional security and a nurturing environment, helping the child develop a sense of belonging in the foster home. Trained counselors and child welfare professionals should be involved throughout the transition to ensure it is child-centric and trauma-informed.

14. Replication of the Chhattisgarh Foster Care Model

The foster care model implemented in Chhattisgarh stands out as a robust example worth replicating across the country. This model emphasizes regular monitoring, community participation, administrative involvement, and a trained workforce to ensure the well-being of children. The system in Chhattisgarh integrates local governance with child welfare services, ensuring that children are placed in caring homes and continuously supported through institutional mechanisms. Replicating such a model can provide a proven framework for states lacking structured foster care programs, thereby boosting nationwide implementation.

15. Equal Distribution of Foster Care Resources in Rural and Urban Areas

Another vital suggestion is the equitable distribution of foster care resources across both rural and urban areas. Currently, there is often a concentration of awareness, facilities, and trained personnel in urban centers, which leaves rural areas under-served. To ensure that all children in need, regardless of geography, have access to quality foster care, there should be targeted investment in rural infrastructure, capacity building, and sensitization programs. Rural foster families should be identified, trained, and supported through financial assistance, counseling services, and regular supervision to maintain care standards.

16. Making Training Programs more Practical Driven

One of the most critical suggestions arising from this study is the need to enhance the quality and practical relevance of training programs conducted by organizations such as the Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA). At present, most training modules remain heavily theory-based, offering limited exposure to the ground realities of foster care administration. Officers and stakeholders interviewed during the study expressed that while they are routinely made to attend mandatory training, these sessions often fail to prepare them for handling the emotional, legal, and logistical challenges they face on the ground. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that these programs be restructured to incorporate hands-on case studies, interactive simulations, exposure visits to foster homes, and situational role-play exercises. Such practical exposure will significantly improve the competence and confidence of officials in managing foster placements, ensuring better protection and care for the children involved.

17. Extending Comprehensive Incentives to Foster Families

Another critical area that demands urgent reform is the incentive structure for foster families. While the current framework provides for basic financial support, it is often insufficient and inconsistent across states, discouraging families from participating in the foster care system. This study suggests the introduction of a more comprehensive package of benefits to address this gap. Apart from regular financial incentives, foster families should be entitled to medical expense reimbursements, education-related grants for foster children, and tax exemptions or deductions. These additional incentives will serve to reduce the financial burden on foster parents and recognize their service to child welfare. Moreover, such an expanded support system can play a decisive role in encouraging more middle-class and lower-income families to consider foster care as a viable and noble responsibility, thereby expanding the pool of available homes for children in need.

18. Incorporating Global Best Practices Tailored to Indian Needs

The study also recommends that India draw lessons from successful foster care models implemented in other jurisdictions, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom. These countries have developed robust foster care systems supported by well-defined legal frameworks, active public awareness campaigns, adequate financial assistance, and professional training for both foster families and officials. A comparative analysis reveals that these nations have achieved considerable success in placing vulnerable children in safe and nurturing homes. Adopting such best practices—after suitably modifying them to suit India's

socio-cultural and administrative context—can greatly enhance the Indian foster care system. Strategies such as regular public sensitization drives, the development of a professional cadre of social workers, and efficient grievance redressal mechanisms should be considered. Such integration would bring Indian child welfare efforts on par with global standards while ensuring contextual appropriateness.

19. Leveraging Technology Across All Stages of Foster Care

The integration of digital technology into the foster care system is essential for increasing transparency, efficiency, and accountability. Currently, the absence of a centralized, real-time digital platform hampers the smooth functioning of various aspects of foster care—from identifying eligible foster families to monitoring the well-being of children placed under care. The study suggests that modern technological tools should be employed at every stage, including the registration and background verification of foster families, case management, placement tracking, and performance assessment of child welfare officers. Furthermore, digital dashboards can be developed to allow continuous monitoring, quick redressal of complaints, and easy access to support services for both children and caregivers. With appropriate safeguards to protect the privacy of children and families, technology can be a game-changer in making the foster care ecosystem more streamlined, responsive, and effective.

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