

School Student Helpline: A Mechanism to Ensure Rights of a Child in Odisha

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Abstract:- Grievance Redressal is a mechanism commonly used to receive complaints or grievances reported by stakeholders of private or public institutions, enabling prompt actions on any issue raises by them and to avail services more effectively. The School Student Helpline is a mechanism introduced for the grievance Redressal of the school children in the state of Odisha to achieve one of the major goals of RTE. The paper explores the need of the system, its functioning mechanism, its impact on the education system and last but not least some suggestions for betterment of its functionalism.

Keywords:- Helpline, Child Right, Grievance, RTE.

I. INTRODUCTION

A Grievance or Complaint can be defined, as any kind of communication that expresses discontent with an action or lack of action, standard of service or absence of service of an institution or person and the remedial action can be asked for. Redressal of grievances is required to find out the reasons of dissatisfaction of client and to obtain a speedy solution of the problem. According to the United Nations Conventions on Child Rights are minimum entitlements and freedoms that should be afforded to all persons below 18 regardless of race, color, gender, language, caste, religion, birth, status or ability and therefore apply to all people everywhere. The addition of the Right to Education (RTE) in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 was the beginning of a remarkable expansion of educational opportunities around the world. The parliament of India enacted the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act or Right to Education Act (RTE) on August 2009. The same got enforced on April 1st 2010. As per the act, education is a fundamental right of every child who is between 6 and 14 years old. The act also states that until the completion of elementary education, no child shall be held back, expelled or required to pass a board examination. There is also a provision for special training of school drop-outs to bring them up to par with students of the same age. One of the most crucial challenges facing future of the act is the establishment of an effective Grievance Redressal System. As per the Act the local authorities are the grievance redress agencies and the SCPCRs the appellate bodies at State level. Apart from this a well-defined institutional mechanism has to be developed for registering, investigating and responding the grievances of the children within a well-appointed time frame. In order to achieve the said goal of RTE as well as to ensure educational right of the children, S & ME department of Odisha has set up

“School Student Helpline” a grievance Redressal mechanism, in the October 2010 by reaching out to the beneficiaries directly through the toll free No 1800-3456722.

II. BACK DROP OF THE SYSTEM

Since independence education has given importance in five year plans and subsequently a no of programmes have been implemented for its development in the country with an aim to achieve 100% enrollment, retention as well as qualitative improvement through introducing different flagship programmes from time to time. In spite of continuous efforts through different plans and programmes we are yet to reach all the unreached across the State. There were still a good number of children who are unable to avail the benefits of the government schemes and facilities towards education. Besides this, many cases of child rights violation do not get reported to appropriate forums or authority. Often issues like poor teaching, discrimination in classroom, child sexual abuse, physical punishment, deprived from government entitlements etc remain untold and unreported. Such incidents in school lead to exclusion, drop out, psychological trauma etc. Considering all such factors and issues, the School Student Helpline comes across as an easily accessible means for the children, parents and communities to reach out to the department directly to put forth their problems.

III. FUNCTIONING OF THE SYSTEM

The Helpline system functions from 8 A.M to 8 P.M in two shifts. Calls are received both offline through a toll free no (1800-3456722) and online site (studenthelplineodisha.nic.in). All the received calls are registered with proper categorization and forwarded to the competent authority at district point for necessary enquiry. After due enquiry if the allegation is found true, deemed action is taken depending on the gravity of the offence such as retrenched from service, suspension, salary held up, show cause notice, warning etc. The analysis shows that about 60% of the received cases are found true. It is to be mentioned here that in sensitive cases such as corporal punishment, harassment, accident etc. the issues are resolved immediately through continuous follow up over phone. Besides the helpline cell not only received the grievances but also act as a counseling center for parents and children as and when required. Since January 2015 grievances are also received through online (studenthelplineodisha.nic.in).

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

A total 23136 no of cases have been received from the inception of the system till end of December 2018. The received cases are categorized under 54 different categories out of which most of them are RTE related. 18027 no of cases are RTE related which includes admission, civil

work, incentives, shortage of teacher, unauthorized collection etc. The School Student Helpline mechanism has brought a remarkable improvement in the education system of the state. The impact can be clearly visible in the comparative analysis of the base year data with the present year data. The comparative diagram of some major RTE cases is given below:

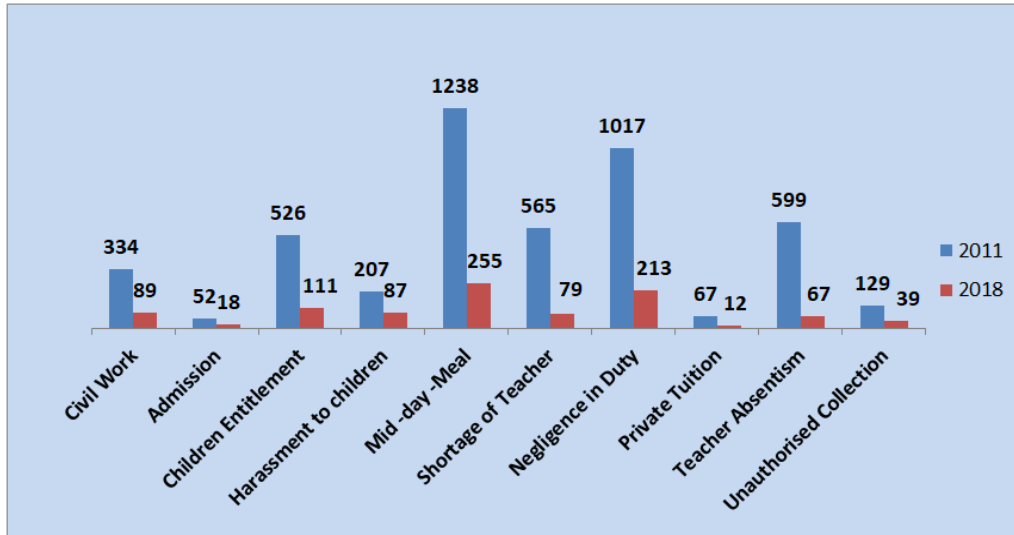


Fig 1:- Comparison of Received Cases Base year with Present Year
Source: School Student Helpline, S & ME department, Govt of Odisha.

Figure 1 reflects that in all most all categories there is a huge difference in calls received in the base year and present year. It is to be mentioned here that though the grievance system launched during last part of 2010, for comparison 2011 and 2018 are taken as base year and target year respectively. The reduction in no of calls is due to the timely action taken by the administration which reflects the positive impact of the mechanism on the education system of the state. Some reformation in the existing system has been observed by taking this initiative and some of them are mentioned below:

- The teachers have become very particular to their teaching as well as school timings.
- It has been improved sense of duty among the field functionaries.
- Timely and regular distribution of incentives has been ensured.
- The no of sensitive cases related to harassment which includes corporal punishments, discrimination, abuse etc. have been reduced due to proper action.

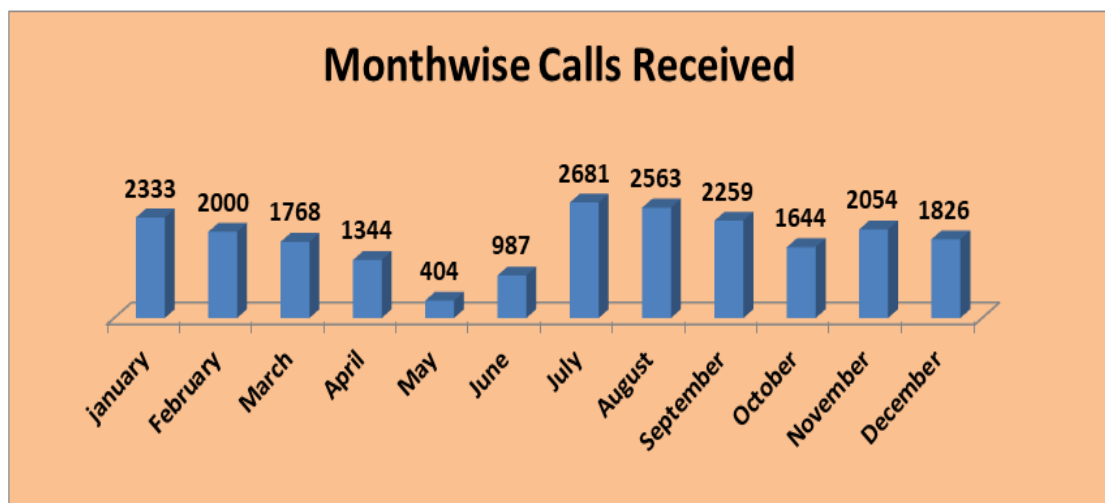


Fig- 2
Source: School Student Helpline, S & ME department, Govt of Odisha.

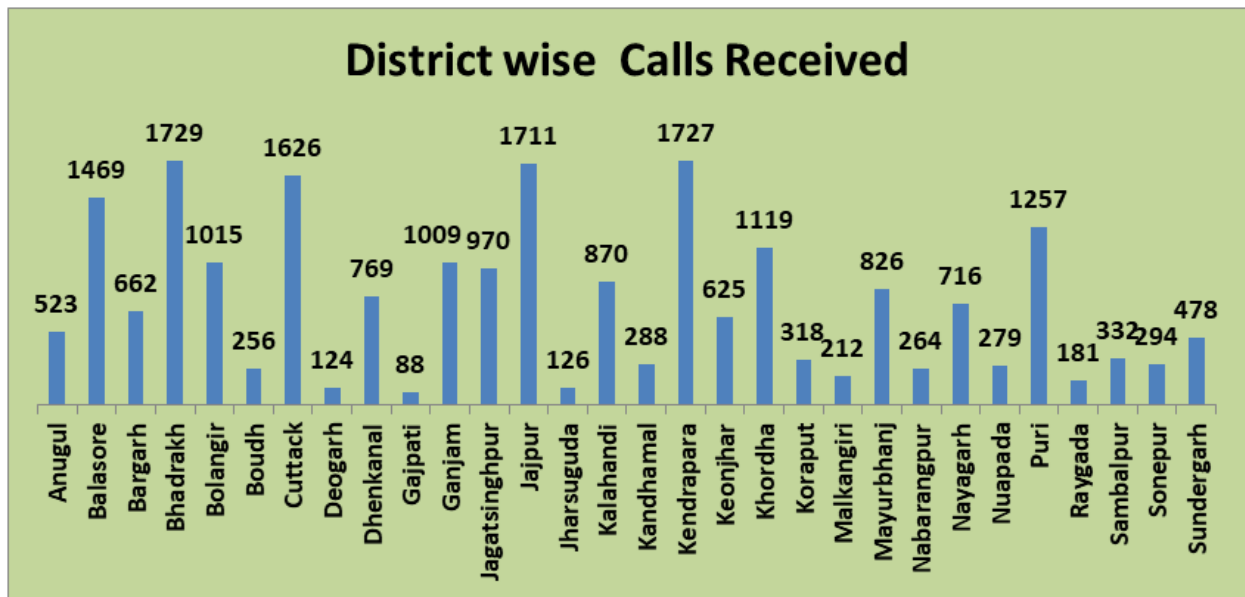


Fig 3

Source: School Student Helpline, S & ME department, Govt of Odisha

Figure 2 & Figure 3 reflects call received status month wise and district wise respectively from January 2011 to December 2018. In Figure 2 the no of calls received is less in April, May, June, October and December. In those months schools are remained closed most of the days due to summer vacation, puja holidays and Christmas vacations. Similarly in figure 3 the call received status in coastal district is good in comparison to the noncoastal area.

REFERENCES

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V. INTERVENTIONS TAKEN UP

The received cases are analysed and a no of issues identified such corporal punishment, sexual abuse, caste discrimination, etc which has a negative impact on the educational status of the state. In order to address such issues orientation programme of teachers on positive discipline, awareness programme for children and mother on safety measures to prevent sexual abuse, training of children on safe use of social network, orientation of children on traffic rule etc. have been organised at school point.

VI. CONCLUSION

The School Student Helpline has become a medium for the students to ventilate their needs as well as a means to protect the rights of the children pertaining to education. No doubt the system works for redressing the grievances of the children but at the same time steps to be taken to create awareness among the public on usefulness of the mechanism so that a large no of hidden problems can come to the fore front. Further the issue based programmes should not be one time programme. As the said programmes are related to attitudinal issue it should be conducted time and again with certain interval.