



## CHILD SOLDIER IN INDIA

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**Abstract:** *The world is nowadays witnessing a menace of armed conflicts all over the globe for one or the other reasons. And sad is the fact that these conflicts use underage children as soldiers, messengers, porters and cooks and for forced sexual services. Some are abducted or forcibly recruited; others are driven to join by poverty, abuse, discrimination, or to seek revenge for violence perpetrated against them or their families. Children sometimes also participate in warfare responding to financial, cultural, social and political pressures. The situation of girls in conflicts requires further attention. The risk of sexual violence and exploitation of children and women increase manifold during armed conflicts.*

*Our country is facing the problem concerning its children- emergence of children as soldiers in strife -torn states of Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Manipur, Nagaland and Assam. They are being in fighting both with rebel groups as well as security forces.*

*The occurrence of armed conflict in some states exacerbates the risk of the participation of under-18s in state armed forces in hostilities. This risk is particularly high in areas affected by "Naxal violence", where there have been past reports of children in the ranks of the Special Police Officers (SPOs), who have been known to be involved in counter-insurgency operations. Child Soldiers International showed serious concerns about the lack of effective age verification measures in place during recruitment in state armed forces, including paramilitaries and police forces in the country.*

*Bringing to an end the use of child soldiers is extremely daunting task, particularly when children are recruited for combat by armed, non-governmental groups. Also modern conflicts are characterized by governmental breakdown, making it difficult to identify and influence those recruiting and using children as soldiers. Violations of the laws of war that affect children need to be properly monitored and reported, so that offenders can be held accountable before truth and reconciliation mechanisms.*

*Demobilized child soldiers must be provided an environment that can prevent their re-recruitment. It should also lay the groundwork for the eventual return to their families and communities. This includes providing protection to former child soldiers during demobilization and social reintegration programmes -education and vocational training etc.*

**Key Words:** *Child, Combat, Fighter, Soldier, Sexual Abuse, Violence, Volunteer*

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## **INTRODUCTION:**

Child soldier is defined as any child – boy or girl – less than 18 years of age, who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed group in any capacity, including, but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers, and anyone accompanying such groups other than family members. It includes girls and boys recruited for forced sexual purposes and/or forced marriage.

The children most likely to become soldiers are from impoverished and marginalized backgrounds or separated from their families. Children from well-off and educated families are often left undisturbed or are released if their parents can ransom them back. An estimate reveals that some 300,000 children – boys and girls under the age of 18 – are involved in more than 30 conflicts around the world.

Our country is facing a severe the problem concerning its children i.e. emergence of children as soldiers in strife -torn states of Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Manipur, Nagaland and Assam. They are getting drawn into fighting both with rebel groups as well as security forces.

According to human right activists the actual number of children recruited by state or non state groups as soldiers is not as obvious as in other countries but we know there are increasing number of children being drawn into active combat. These children exposed to war and conflicts are one of the most vulnerable groups often forced to become perpetrator or victim of combat atrocities.

Thousands of children are fighting in wars and armed conflicts around the world. This includes both girls and boys in Latin America, Africa and Asia and also in Europe. The largest number of child soldiers, however, is in Africa. According to UN estimates there are over 100.000, particularly in Uganda, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Sudan.

A majority of the children and young people involved in about 20 conflicts around the world are not fighting in government armies, but in other armed groups. Many of them are recruited by force, but others join voluntarily because they have limited options for their livelihood. The reasons for "volunteering" are a shortage of jobs or education opportunities or to escape from domestic violence.

Child soldiers lead a miserable, tough and dangerous life. They are used as messengers, porters and spies. They have to place explosives and learn how to use guns. Children are used as soldiers because it is easier to train them to kill. They are more obedient, do not



question orders and are easier to manipulate than adult soldiers. This easily happens under the influence of drugs and alcohol. Girls are often forced to satisfy the sexual needs of the soldiers in the camp.

Child Soldiers are not only victims in armed conflicts - they are at the same time perpetrators. During their training, they often have to kill friends or members of their own families in order to harden up.

Insurgent armies in India's restive Northeast region are exploiting the area's poverty to recruit, train and use, underage fighters as per their convenience; and the problem has dramatically worsened in recent years

To stop the recruitment and use of children by armed opposition groups, the government has not put in place any systematic monitoring of the issue. As a result, the government has failed to develop comprehensive strategies to protect and prevent the recruitment and use of children by armed opposition groups. Instead, it has relied on emergency and security legislation, including detention of children suspected of association with armed groups.

The ACHR findings suggest that the problem is particularly severe in India's long-running Maoist insurgency, but children have also been recruited by insurgent groups in Jammu and Kashmir and parts of northeast. In certain areas in eastern India, it is mandatory for families to give at least one of their children to Maoist rebels.

The recruitment of children by various non-State armed groups and their use in hostilities in Northeast India and in Jammu and Kashmir is a matter of deeper concern. The CRC noted that there is the lack of effective mechanisms to verify the age of new recruits to the armed forces, police forces and other paramilitary forces.

One of the most alarming trends relating to children and armed conflicts is their active participation as combatants. Children as young as 8 years of age are being forcibly recruited, coerced and induced to become fighters. Manipulated by adults, children have been drawn into violence that they are too young to resist.

Child Soldiers International conducted a research in August 2013 identifying the risk of recruitment of children in the ranks of the Special Police Officers (SPOs) who have been used in counter-insurgency operations in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. Village defence militias, village guards and SPOs have also been deployed



in Maharashtra, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura and Jammu & Kashmir. Regulations for the appointment of SPOs do not specify minimum age.

Based on its research, Child Soldiers International expressed serious concerns about the absence of effective age verification mechanism during recruitment in state armed forces, including paramilitaries, police forces and village defense militias.

## **2. OBJECTIVES:**

The main objectives of the study are as follows:-

- To find out causes of child becoming child soldiers
- To trace to find out how child soldiers get recruited
- Finding out why children are used as soldiers
- To find out the effects on children

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

This research is a theoretical study based on secondary data basically through the study of Reports, articles, journals, magazines and the Inter-net. Additionally some parents and academicians were interviewed through unstructured questionnaire to cultivate deeper insight into the subject matter of the study.

## **4. LITERATURE REVIEW**

"The saddest sight these days is the image of hundreds of thousands of children kidnapped and lured into being child soldiers from the age of eight."-- Sir Roger Moore

Child soldier is any person below the age of 18 who is a member of or associated with government armed forces or any other regular or irregular armed group or armed political group, notwithstanding an armed conflict. Child soldiers perform a range of tasks including participation in combat; laying mines and explosives, scouting, spying, acting as decoys, couriers or guards, training, drill, logistics and support functions, portering, cooking and domestic labor. It is erroneous to believe that child soldiers are mostly boys. In fact, 30% of armed organizations using children have girls. Girl soldiers are not just at risk for long-lasting physical and psychological wounds, they are almost always at risk of brutal sexual violence as well.

The fallacy is that the issue of child soldiers is isolated to armed militias in parts of Africa. Child soldiers have been used by armed groups in recent and ongoing conflicts in South Asia,



Southeast Asia, the Middle East and South America. Moreover, some governments also recruit and use children under the age of 18 in their armed forces. Some Governments killed, tortured and arbitrarily detained children suspected of being opposition combatants or supporters. In Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Israeli forces shot Palestinian children if they threw stones or joined demonstrations, and denied them protection and rights in detention that are allowed to Israeli children. Coalition supported research found that Palestinian children detained by Israeli forces were tortured or threatened in attempts to coerce them to become informants.

The recurring incidences of armed conflict or intensive armed violence in some states in the country heightens the risk of the participation of under-18s in state armed forces in hostilities or otherwise being exposed to the risk associated with conflict. There are credible reports that children have been recruited by armed groups active in the states of Jammu & Kashmir, areas affected by Naxal violence and the northeastern states of Manipur and Meghalaya and used in a variety of roles. Children are also recruited in the ranks of the Special Police Officers (SPOs) who have been used in counter-insurgency operations in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra.

The ACHR findings suggest that the problem is particularly severe in India's long-running Maoist insurgency, but the children have also been recruited by insurgent groups in Jammu and Kashmir and parts of northeast India like Manipur, where separatist groups have clashed with Indian forces for decades.

To stop the recruitment and use of children by armed opposition groups, the government has not been able to put in place any systematic monitoring of the issue resulting in its failure to protect and prevent the recruitment and use of children by armed opposition groups. Conversely it has relied on emergency and security legislation, and detention of children suspected of having association with armed opposition groups. Poverty plays its role and costs heavily on poor children. The seven states of Northeast India rank lowest in terms of infrastructure development, and most of the child soldiers are recruited from very poor families.

## **REFUGEE AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN**

Armed conflict has always caused population movements. Children who are forced to flee to neighboring countries as refugees or who become internally displaced within their own



countries is in need of special attention during armed conflict. People are brutally uprooted and forced to flee their homes, exposing them to danger and insecurity. Of the world's estimated 27 million refugees and 30 million displaced people, 80 per cent are women and children.

As children make up the majority demographic in many conflict-affected countries, there's a constant supply of potential recruits. Due to their size and 'expendability', children are often sent into battle as scouts or decoys, or sent in the first wave to draw the enemy's fire.



### **GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

In times of war, the disintegration of families and communities leave women and girls especially vulnerable to violence. Rape is a continual threat, as are other forms of gender-based violence, including prostitution, sexual exploitation and mutilation, trafficking and domestic abuse. Women and girls are at risk of violence in all settings, whether in the home, during conflicts or in camps to which they have fled for safety. Gender-based violence, particularly rape committed during armed conflicts, constitutes a violation of international humanitarian law.

Although it is not possible to accurately calculate the number of children involved in armed forces and groups, it is clear that there are many tens of thousands of child soldiers. Child soldiers exist in all regions of the world and, almost inevitably, wherever there is armed conflict. There are at least 30 militant outfits spread over the hills and valleys of Manipur. Many have training camps in Burma. And there are conflicts that have been dragging on for at least five decades in Northeast India. To contain them, New Delhi enforces the Armed Forces Special Powers Act that allows security forces to arrest detain and kill, without fear of prosecution

A UNICEF estimate suggests about 2.50 lakhs children have been recruited as soldiers in various capacities worldwide. The main reasons the children take to guns being extreme poverty and they see rebels leading well-off lives. When the child soldier learns the tricks of the trade and starts getting money, the parents also enjoy a better life style. While the government doesn't give enough support and compensation for victims, rebel groups step in to act as guardians.



The NGO workers believe the government needs to network with village bodies and activists for holistic development that reaches the interiors. Development of traditional skills and emphasis on natural resource management is essential with improved infrastructure like roads etc.

According to a report from the Conflict Study Center, child soldiers are used in Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Jammu and Kashmir; and that children were used by both the state and insurgents. Child soldiers also serve in the Indian armed forces. The use of child soldiers by the state and by non state actors is a violation of the Geneva Convention and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In Chhattisgarh state, it is estimated that up to 90,000 children are involved in the ongoing Naxalite insurgency. The majority of children is used by militants; though government supported militias also use them. The Asian Legal Resource Centre has stated that human rights groups have voiced concerns over the use of child soldiers by the state and the Naxalites. According to them, up to 118 districts in India are facing armed insurrection and that child soldiers were used by both sides in these conflicts.

International efforts are on to protect children from involvement in armed forces and groups have been reinforced and efforts have focused increasingly on field-level implementation. The first important steps towards establishing individual criminal responsibility for those who recruit and use children in hostilities have been taken.

## **DEMOBILIZATION AND REINTEGRATION OF CHILD SOLDIERS**

An urgent priority is to demobilize everyone under 18 years of age from the armed forces. The participation of children must be recognized in all peace agreements so that effective planning can be made for reintegration programmes.

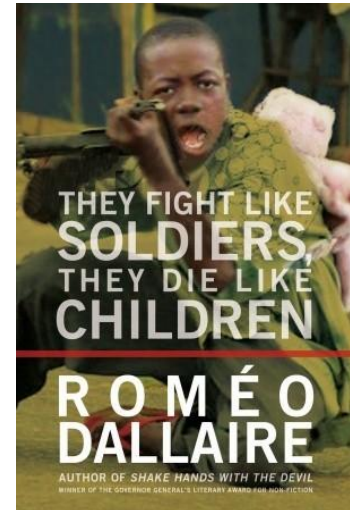
The process of reintegration must help children establish new foundations in life. Re-establishing contact with the family and the community is important for former child soldiers who have grown up away from their families and who have been deprived of many of the normal opportunities for physical, emotional and intellectual development. Providing educational and vocational opportunities for former child combatants may prevent them from rejoining military units, and at the same time improve the economic security of their families.



## 5. FINDINGS

“Compelled to become instruments of war, to kill and be killed, child soldiers are forced to give violent expression to the hatreds of adults” -- Olara Otunnu

A great majority of children and young people involved in about 20 conflict around the world are not fighting in government armies, but in other armed groups. Many of them are recruited by force, but others join voluntarily because they see no other alternative to their livelihood. The reasons for "volunteering" are a shortage of jobs or education opportunities or to escape from domestic violence.



The child soldiers lead a tough and dangerous life. Girls are often forced to satisfy the sexual needs of the soldiers in the camp. Child Soldiers are not only victims in armed conflicts - they are at the same time perpetrators. During their training, they often have to kill friends or members of their own families in order to "harden up". Children have to struggle for the rest of their life to come to terms with the effects of physical and psychological acts of cruelty.

Representatives of insurgent groups have asked campaigners in Manipur to lie low on the issue of child soldiers. Despite India's attempt to fence part of its border with Burma in Manipur, to prevent the free movement of militants, not much has changed. Other than, No one, except their families, really cares about the children who go missing only to reappear in uniform, armed, and at the same time piteously vulnerable.

In 2012, three boys, all in their early teens, left their village in Manipur on an allurement of unspecified employment and an assurance that, in exchange for their labors, their parents would be taken care of.

The job, as it turned out, was one of killing. The boys were taken by a recruiting agent deep into the jungles of Myanmar, for military training, for waging a war against India for a banned rebel outfit, the 'People's Revolutionary Party'- an insurgent group fighting for a separate homeland in Manipur.

In March 2013, a 15-year-old girl from Manipur, Sanahanbi Khaidem, went missing. Within days of her disappearance, her mother received a call from the Revolutionary People's Front





— the political arm of the banned militant group People's Liberation Army of Manipur informing her that Sanahanbi was in their training camp in Burma.

## **IMPORTANT OUTCOMES ON CHILD SOLDIERS**

Here are some very important outcomes about child soldiers:

1. The organization Child Soldiers International reports that “since 2000, the participation of child soldiers has been reported in most armed conflicts and in almost every region of the world.” Countries where child soldiers can be found include Afghanistan, Burma, Iraq, the Philippines, Colombia, Thailand, India, Somalia, and Yemen.
2. Child soldiers not only fight on the front lines, but they also serve as runners, spies, and in some cases human shields. Many of them are also sexually abused and exploited.
3. Girls under 18 are also recruited or captured during conflicts, and most often they suffer sexual abuse and exploitation. An estimated 40% of child soldiers are girls.
4. Many children are kidnapped and forced to serve in armies and in armed groups. Others are drawn in because of poverty and deprivation on the promise of money, food, and clothing if they take up arms. For still others desperation proves to be a powerful motivation.
5. Children were actively involved in armed conflict in government forces or non-state armed groups in 19 countries or territories between April 2004 and October 2007. These were: Afghanistan, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, the DRC, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Thailand and Uganda
6. A great majority of child soldiers are in the ranks of non-state armed groups. Dozens of armed groups in at least 24 countries have recruited under-18s and have used them in hostilities. Armed groups such as the National Liberation Army (ELN) in Colombia, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda are well known for recruiting and using children over many years.



7. In India, child recruitment by Maoist groups is reported to have increased since 2005 and there were persistent reports of child soldier use by groups in Jammu and Kashmir and northeastern states.
8. Their emotional and physical immaturity make children uniquely vulnerable to military recruitment. They are easily manipulated and can be drawn into violence that they are too young to resist or understand.
9. Technological advances in weaponry and the proliferation of small arms have contributed to the increased use of child soldiers. Lightweight automatic weapons are simple to operate, often easily accessible, and can be used by children as easily as adults.
10. Children are most likely to become child soldiers if they are poor, separated from their families, displaced from their homes, living in a combat zone or have limited access to education.
11. Many children join armed groups because of economic or social pressure, or because children believe that the group will offer food and security. Others are forcibly recruited, or abducted by armed groups.
12. Once recruited, child soldiers may serve as porters or cooks, guards, messengers or spies. Many are pressed into combat, where they may be forced to the front lines or sent into minefields ahead of older troops. Some children have been used for suicide missions.
13. Children are sometimes forced to commit atrocities against their own family or neighbors. Such practices help ensure that the child is "stigmatized" and unable to return to his or her home community.
14. In some countries, former child soldiers have access to rehabilitation programs to help them locate their families, get back into school, receive vocational training, and re-enter civilian life.
15. In 2000, the United Nations adopted an Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The protocol prohibits the forced recruitment of children under the age of 18 or their use in hostilities. To date, it has been ratified by more than 110 countries.



16. Children who are not forced to be soldiers volunteer themselves because they feel societal pressure and are under the impression that volunteering will provide a form of income, food, or security, and willingly join the group.

17. In the last 15 years, the use of child soldiers has spread to almost every region of the world and every armed conflict.

The political goodwill of states is important, but the pressure from non-governmental organizations plays an equally important role. Ending the use of child soldiers can be extremely challenging, particularly when children are enlisted for combat by armed, non-governmental groups. In addition, modern conflicts are characterized by governmental breakdown, making it difficult to identify and influence those recruiting and using children as soldiers.

## **6. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

At the end of the study it is concluded that an urgent priority is to demobilize everyone under 18 years of age from the armed forces. The participation of children must be recognized in all peace agreements so that effective planning can be made for reintegration programmes.

The process of reintegration must help children establish new foundations in life. Re-establishing contact with the family and the community is important for former child soldiers who have grown up away from their families and who have been deprived of many of the normal opportunities for physical, emotional and intellectual development. Providing educational and vocational opportunities for former child combatants may prevent them from rejoining military units, and at the same time improve the economic security of their families.

Demobilized child soldiers must be provided with an environment that can prevent their re-recruitment. It should also lay the groundwork for the eventual return to their families. Wherever possible, unaccompanied children should be cared for by their extended family, and when this is not possible, by neighbors, friends or other substitute families, rather than in institutions.

Effective procedures should be adopted to ensure the survival and protection of unaccompanied children in the emergency situations. Family tracing programmes should be established at the outset of assistance programmes.



Practical protection measures to prevent sexual violence, discrimination in delivery of relief materials, and the recruitment of children into armed forces must be a priority in all assistance programmes in refugee and displaced persons camps. Such measures should involve women and youth fully in their design, delivery and monitoring.

## SUGGESTIONS

Following suggestion would go along way in arresting the menace of child soldiers if government comes with heavy hands to prevent unlawful recruitment of children and to effectively investigate credible reports of its occurrence. Government must now take the problem head on and must act promptly to:

- Minimum age of voluntary recruitment into the armed forces raised to 18 years;
- The unlawful recruitment and use of children in hostilities by all armed forces and non-state armed groups must be prohibited through legislation, and the forcible recruitment of children be incorporated as an offence under the Indian Penal Code;
- Ensure consistent and effective verification of the age of individual recruits to effectively prevent the unlawful recruitment of children into the armed forces;
- Peace agreements must include measures for the release and rehabilitation of child soldiers.
- There must be an immediate demobilization of all child soldiers.
- More money must be provided within the framework of development co-operation for the integration of former child soldiers into society.

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