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IMPROVING ADOPTION RATES FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN INDIA

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Abstract

Despite improved legal frameworks and administrative reforms, adoption rates of children with special needs remain remarkably low in India. Due to social stigma, parental bias, procedural delays, and inadequate post-adoption support mechanisms, a significant percentage of children who are legally cleared for adoption are classified as having special needs; yet, extended institutional care continues. The legal and institutional framework governing special needs adoption in India is examined doctrinally and analytically in this paper, with special attention to the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 and the Central Adoption Resource Authority's (CARA) regulatory function.

The study conducts a critical analysis of structural impediments, such as the lack of comprehensive welfare safeguards for adoptive families, the lack of informed counselling for prospective adoptive parents, societal attitudes of disability, and resource limitations within child care institutions. It also assesses new policy efforts like the foster-to-adopt model, digital integration via the CARINGS site, the creation of the CARA Identification Cell, and special needs adoption prioritisation standards. The study emphasises the value of organised counselling, financial aid, and intersectoral cooperation in enhancing adoption outcomes through a few chosen case studies and secondary data.

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In order to improve post-adoption support, expedite processes, and encourage inclusive adoption practices, the report ends with specific legislative and policy reforms. It highlights that promoting child rights, social justice, and the constitutional mandate of equality and dignity all depend on making adoption for kids with exceptional needs easier.

Keywords

Special Needs Adoption; Juvenile Justice Act, 2015; CARA; Child Welfare Law; Foster Care; Disability Rights; Adoption Policy; Institutional Care

1. Introduction

India's adoption scene has lately seen both advancements and ongoing difficulties, particularly with regard to children with special needs. The majority of older and special needs children are placed in care facilities because most prospective adoptive parents (PAPs) choose healthy babies, despite significant attempts to change legislative frameworks and raise awareness². Increasing the number of adoptions for these kids is essential to guaranteeing their right to a caring family and complete social inclusion.

2. Definition of Special Needs Adoption

Particular requirements Children may have behavioral problems, chronic diseases, cognitive or developmental difficulties, physical impairments, or a mix of these.³

This categorization is used for reporting and placement by the Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA). These kids frequently need specialized care, medical attention, and extra resources from their adoptive homes.

3. Data and Current Scenario

Nearly two-thirds of Indian children awaiting adoption are classified as having special needs, according to government data. 1,423 (65%) of the 2,177 children that were eligible for placement in 2024–2025⁴ had special needs. Only 328 special needs adoptions occurred that year, despite awareness initiatives, demonstrating a glaring discrepancy with regular adoption rates.

The yearly adoption rate for children with special needs has been consistent but low

² Drishti IAS, "Child Adoption in India," August 2025, <https://www.drishtiiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-analysis/child-adoption-in-india-1>

³ "Wait for adoption longest for special needs children in India: Data," New Indian Express, September 2025, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2025/Sep/21/wait-for-adoption-longest-for-special-needs-children-in-india-data>

⁴ "Adoptions at decadal high in India, Maharashtra tops list accounting ..." Times of India, September 2025, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/adoptions-at-decadal-high-in-india-maharashtra-tops-list-accounting>

over the past five years, averaging between 300 and 370, with a peak of 401 in 2018–19⁵. In comparison, 2024–2025 saw a record total adoption rate of 4,515⁶.

4. Barriers to Adoption of Special Needs Children

4.1.Social Stigma and Bias:

Many would-be parents struggle with social attitudes that favor "healthy, fair" children and link adoption to biological likeness⁷. Two of the biggest obstacles are the stigma associated with impairments and the anxiety of taking on more caring duties.

4.2.Lack of Support Systems:

Adoption is less appealing since Indian families do not have strong social welfare support, financial aid, or state-funded medical programs for children with serious needs.

Legal and Procedural Difficulties:

Adoption is sometimes a drawn-out, complicated, and emotionally taxing process, particularly in situations with special needs. Prospective parents are irritated by lengthy wait times and a lack of information from authorities.

4.3. Limited Knowledge and Counseling:

Many PAPs are unprepared and reluctant to move forward because they do not receive enough information or counseling on special needs adoption.

4.4. Resource Gaps in Child Care Institutions:

The majority of CCIs lack the staff and facilities necessary to care for children with special needs, which further reduces the likelihood that they will be placed.

5. Recent Reforms and Government Steps

5.1. CARA Identification Cell:

To increase transparency and pool size, CARA established an Identification Cell in 2024 to register all eligible children from CCIs on the CARINGS site⁸.

Increased Agencies and Units:

More Child Welfare Committees and District Protection Units assisted the process, and the number of specialist adoption agencies increased from 495 to 698.

⁵ "Nearly two-thirds of children waiting for adoption in India are those with special needs," The New Indian Express Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/thenewindianxpress/posts/nearly-two-thirds-of-children-waiting-for-adoption-in-india-are-those-with-spe>

⁶ Legacy IAS Academy, "Trends in Special Needs Adoptions in India," August 2024, <https://www.legacyias.com/trends-in-special-needs-adoptions-in-india/>

⁷ Deccan Herald, "Special needs children struggle to find home in India," July 2019, <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/special-needs-children-struggle-to-find-home-in-india-747456.html>

⁸ CARA Guidelines PDF, <https://mphc.gov.in/PDF/JuvenileJustice/j3-060314.pdf>

5.2. Digital Reforms:

By adding processes for foster care, step-parent, and relative adoptions to the CARINGS portal, procedural delays have decreased and the number of child matching opportunities has increased.

5.3. Awareness efforts:

To promote adoption of older and special needs children, including "reservation" alternatives for PAPs, the government and organizations like CARA have launched focused efforts.

5.4. Foster Care Track:

After two years, children in family foster care may move on to permanent adoption under new foster adoption regulations.

5.5. Legal Priority:

PAPs who are ready to adopt children with special needs are given priority attention under regulations.⁹

6. Strategies to Improve Adoption Rates

6.1. Boost Post-Adoption Support and Counseling

Counselors with training should assist PAPs with preparation, matching, and post-adoption difficulties while addressing practical and emotional issues. Parental

support groups, therapy, and continuing counseling are examples of post-adoption programs that help stop disturbances and strengthen family ties.

6.2. Support for Social and Financial Welfare

Provide financial aid programs at the state and federal levels to families that adopt children with special needs. These programs should include medical expenses, education, treatment, and rehabilitation. Collaborate with private and nonprofit groups to offer emergency supplies and assistance packages.

6.3. Destigmatize Adoption and Increase Public Awareness

Highlight successful adoptions of children with special needs through media, advertising, and storytelling, emphasizing positive results. Use information, education, and communication (IEC) tactics to promote an inclusive adoption culture and alter public image¹⁰.

6.4. Simplify and streamline processes

Maintain the digital transformation with clear communication, time-bound clearances, and special needs officers. In order to minimize delays, integrate health

⁹ Drishti IAS News Analysis, August 2025, <https://www.drishtiias.com/current-affairs-news-analysis-editorials/news-analysis/06-08-2025>

¹⁰ Social Welfare Vikaspedia, "Overview of Child Adoption process in India,"

<https://socialwelfare.vikaspedia.in/viewcontent/social-welfare/women-and-child-development/child-development-1/child-adoption/ov>

and social care organizations so that family assessments, legal approvals, and medical examinations take place simultaneously.

6.5. Extend Transitional and Foster Care Models

Encourage foster-to-adopt agreements so that families can develop bonds prior to long-term, official adoption. Provide foster parents and children with legal certainty and safeguards, particularly with regard to inheritance and family rights.

7. Case Studies and Personal Narratives

Successful adoption narratives, including those disseminated by non-governmental organizations and public awareness campaigns, offer guidance and encourage others to think about adopting a child with special needs. Families and individuals who have taken this decision frequently stress the importance of continuing support and the fulfilling nature of their experiences.¹¹

WAIC India Feature (2023): After years of considering both biological possibilities and conventional adoption routes, a Mumbai-based couple adopted a boy with cerebral palsy. They wrote about their

experience on the internet, describing how their child's development brought them great happiness and pride and how continuous help from therapists and non-governmental organizations was essential to their transition¹².

Success Stories of Bal Raksha Bharat:

This significant child welfare organization regularly tells the tales of older children who had difficulty finding homes and families who adopted children with disabilities. In one well-known instance, a Pune family adopted a visually impaired kid and talked about how peer groups, CARA counseling, and community rehabilitation teams helped them get past their early fears so the child could have a successful scholastic path¹³.

In 2019, the **Deccan Herald** published an article on a Bangalore couple that used a specialized adoption agency to adopt a daughter with hearing impairments. They underlined that inclusive schools and government subsidies (such free assistive equipment) made the process sustainable for their family and stressed the value of patient documentation and institutional assistance.

Story of the World Economic Forum

¹¹ Deccan Herald, "Special needs children struggle to find home in India," July 2019, <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/special-needs-children-struggle-to-find-home-in-india-747456.html>

¹² "Our journey to embracing a special needs son," WAIC India, August 2023, <https://waic.in/2023/08/22/our-journey-to-embracing-a-special-needs-son/>

¹³ Bal Raksha Bharat, "Most Trusted NGO for Child Welfare in India," <https://balrakshabharat.org>

(2025): Before formally adopting two children with Down syndrome, a Hyderabad adoptive mother wrote about fostering them. Her story serves as an example of the importance of foster-to-adopt agreements, ongoing medical treatment, and a robust peer support system in helping families and the community at large integrate children with special needs¹⁴.

8. The Role of Non-Government Sector

In order to make adoption a feasible option for more families, NGOs like Bal Raksha Bharat and Catalyst for Social Action have pioneered awareness campaigns, counseling, and financial aid programs in partnership with public and private donors.

9. Policy Recommendations

Make sure that all adoption agencies and CCIs are required to get special needs education and awareness. Promote public-private collaborations for social outreach and finance. Establish a nationwide register of resources for help, including schools, NGOs, therapists, and trained medical experts.

10. Conclusion

With rising overall rates and new frameworks intended to speed up placements, India has achieved significant

administrative and legal strides in the field of adoption. However, persistent societal stigma, a lack of support, and complicated procedures continue to present obstacles for kids with special needs. To guarantee every child's right to a loving family and a bright future, legislation, support networks, and public opinion must all be strengthened.

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¹⁴"What is being done to improve adoption rates in India?" World Economic Forum, June 2025, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2022/11/my-journey-with-adoption-and-what-should-be-changed/>

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