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# Give and Take: The Struggle of Being a Part of the System you Want to Change- Childline: Solving and Perpetuating Child Vulnerability in Bikaner, Rajasthan, India

Angela Soley  
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GIVE AND TAKE:

THE STRUGGLE OF BEING A PART OF THE SYSTEM YOU WANT TO CHANGE-  
CHILDLINE: SOLVING AND PERPETUATING CHILD VULNERABILITY IN BIKANER,  
RAJASTHAN, INDIA

Angela Soley

Academic Director: Tara Dhakal

Project Advisor: Arvind Ojha, URMUL Trust

School for International Training India: Sustainable Development and Social Change Program

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**Abstract:**

*Children are the most vulnerable population in India; they are at risk of human trafficking on the street, corporeal punishment at school, domestic violence at home, and the list continues. There are 12.7 million child laborers in India, the rate of child marriage is 47%, and 69% of children suffer from physical abuse (India.gov, 2011)(Tahir and Hussain, 2012, p.664)(Hello CHILDLINE, 2013, p.7). Unfortunately, much of this abuse is accepted by India's culture: hitting children is a standard form of punishment, child marriage is a norm in rural villages, and child labor is a necessity for impoverished families. One organization attempting to address children's vulnerability is CHILDLINE, a 24-hour, toll-free helpline for children in need. It started in Mumbai in 1996 and has now spread all over India, answering more than 27 million calls since its inception and operating in 280 cities (Hello CHILDLINE, 2014, p.3). While it receives millions of calls a year, few studies have been done to evaluate its effectiveness. This study analyzes CHILDLINE in Bikaner, Rajasthan, a rural area in a state that faces more difficulties than most of India. By interviewing CHILDLINE employees, community members, and professors, as well as surveying the general Bikaner community both in the city and villages, the study will be an exploratory research of CHILDLINE's operations, general successes and challenges, and how it is affecting the Bikaner community. The guiding research question is, how successful is CHILDLINE at addressing child exploitation in Bikaner and how it could it become more effective? This research contributes to the discussion of the many efforts to reduce child vulnerability in India and the power of technology for social change. Overall this study found CHILDLINE's presence in Bikaner has provided children a vital resource of rescue and has the potential for sustainable social change on child issues because of its education efforts, however the lack of public awareness, lack of cooperation from other agencies, and the conservative society with widespread poverty pose great obstacles to CHILDLINE's effectiveness.*

**Introduction: Why CHILDLINE was Created--Child Vulnerability in India**

Childhood can be a beautiful time of exploration and development, a carefree time to learn, laugh, and play. Unfortunately for many children in India, their vulnerability is exploited and childhood is more a time of abuse, labor, and silence. But one organization giving children a voice is CHILDLINE, a 24-hour 7 days a week toll-free telephone helpline for children aged 0-18 years in need of advice, care, and protection.

The most publicized and widespread issue in India is poverty. Estimations range from 37 percent to 77 percent of the population living below the poverty line depending on the criteria, and according to the World Bank India is home to “36 percent of the total poor in the world” (Kumari, 2013, p.68) (Devi, 2013, p.131). Poverty can be extremely detrimental to children’s development, physically, mentally, and emotionally; “Children from low income families appear to have higher levels of depression and anti-social behavior” (Kumari, 2013, p.72). Mental illness is very stigmatized in India, so the inevitable millions of children suffering from poor mental health are hidden and untreated. Similarly, there is an extensive silence around child abuse in India. Impoverished and illiterate parents are also known to be more abusive, “69% suffer some form of physical abuse; 65% of school children face corporeal punishment; 53% have suffered some form of sexual abuse; every second child faces emotional abuse” (*Hello CHILDLINE*, 2013, p.7). Despite this severe prevalence, child abuse is very hidden and misunderstood. Poverty is much more complex than just an economic issue; it creates vulnerability in all parts of life, such as child labor, child marriage, human trafficking, malnutrition, etc.

Child labor is closely tied to poverty because often children of poor families must work to support their family: while “higher levels of household wealth play a fundamental role in

lowering the risk of child work” (Francaville and Giannelli, 2010, p.232). Child labor is defined as “any work by children that interferes with their full physical development, the opportunities for a minimum of education and of their needed recreation” (Jha, 2009, p.206). The Indian Census in 2001 claimed 12.7 million children between 5 and 14 were working (India.gov, 2011). These children work in all sectors of the economy, 42.1 percent are agricultural workers and “urban laborers work is involved in manufacturing, processing, service and repairs” (Jha, 2009, p.208). Many Indians support child labor; a study on child labor revealed only five percent of people believed child labor should be abolished, while 77 percent of people believed child labor was harmful but sometimes necessary for survival and 21 percent believed child labor is beneficial with little harm (Pandey, 2013, p.vi). Unfortunately, child labor is not as simple as children freely working; often their parents are in debt bondage, and “these laborers have no choice but to pledge the labor services of their children (in addition to their own labor services) in order to repay these loans” (Basu, 2013, p.4). In India, child labor is widespread and increasing.

Child marriage is an issue for both girls and boys in India, but the impacts are more severe for the girl child. The legal age of marriage in India is 18 for women and 21 for men. In 2009, UNICEF’s study showed that 40% of the world’s child marriages occur in India, “47% of India's women aged 20–24 were married before the legal age of 18, with 56% in rural areas” (Tahir and Hussain, 2012, p.664). Beginning in the sixth century in India, child marriage combined with the declining status of women, and sadly today this view of women as inferior continues (Tahir and Hussain, 2012, p.654). Child marriage is an oppressive structure in India “encouraged so as to confine girls’ and women's physical mobility” (Salunke and Ambedkar, 2012, p.182). Early marriage can be detrimental to a girl’s health (early pregnancy can be life-

threatening), education (girls are usually pulled out of school after marriage), and freedom (lower education reduces girls' opportunity for independent economic opportunities as well as reduces their awareness of their rights and increases their vulnerability to domestic violence) (Every Woman Every Child et al., 2013) (Salunke and Ambedkar, 2012, p.180).

Because of these widespread child issues, Ms. Jeroo Billimoria founded CHILDLINE in June 1996 in Mumbai. She had a personal connection with street children and interacted “with children staying on railway stations or Mumbai's night shelters. Children started calling her in crisis at her residence at any point of day and night” (History, ChildLine.org). She could not help all these children herself and saw the need for a 24/7 helpline in Mumbai. CHILDLINE is now operational in 280 cities and 30 states across India because the government of India quickly saw its importance and financially supports it through the department Ministry of Women and Children Development; “Child-line is a unique partnership of government-NGO-corporate sector and the largest NGO network in India” (“Emergency child helpline launched in Dimapur, Nagaland”). The significance of CHILDLINE to India's child protection is clear from its numbers: in 1998 the helpline received about 25,000 calls, and in 2010 it received over 2 million calls, meaning “1/5<sup>th</sup> of the 10 million calls received by the world child helplines come to CHILDLINE 1098 in India” (*Hello CHILDLINE*, 2011, p.5). CHILDLINE filled an important gap in Indian society and now takes responsibility for the welfare of children all across the country.

Despite CHILDLINE being the most used child helpline in the world, it has never been evaluated. CHILDLINE claims to help “the most marginalized children and provide interventions of shelter, medical, repatriation, rescue, death related, sponsorships, emotional support and guidance” (*Hello CHILDLINE*. 2011. p.3). Yet, it is very unclear how exactly they

take action to help children. Since CHILDLINE is taking responsibility for millions of children in India, it is necessary to know the details of the organization. This study is an exploratory research of CHILDLINE, asking what is the overall effectiveness of CHILDLINE in Bikaner, Rajasthan? It looks at the efficiency of the call center, most common child issues, how they help, what children aren't being helped, logistics such as infrastructure, funding, details of the various job positions (salary, qualifications, training, hours, responsibilities), etc. It gets the perspective of CHILDLINE employees and community members on its effects on society and child vulnerability, public awareness of the organization and child issues, the successes and challenges of the organization, and how it can be improved.

This study is important because it contributes to the discussion of efforts to end child vulnerability in India and technology's power for social change. The debate is whether technology changes society or society changes technology; CHILDLINE proves both can happen simultaneously (see appendix for literature review of technology for social change). The education efforts of the organization are changing the society's perceptions of appropriate treatment of children. However, the employees are products of this very society they are trying to change, so the actions of CHILDLINE in Bikaner show embedded moral and cultural values of the society.

### **Methods**

I studied CHILDLINE in Bikaner, Rajasthan because it has severe child vulnerability. The state of Rajasthan has the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest rate of child marriage at 57% and the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest rate of child labor with 1,262,570 (UNICEF 2001; India.gov 2001). Furthermore, the situation gets more extreme in rural areas, for example, child marriage is 52.5% in rural India and 28.2% in

urban areas (UNICEF 2001). Thus, I am conducting my study of CHILDLINE in Bikaner, a rural area of Rajasthan, because of the acute child vulnerability in this region.

This study was conducted through qualitative interviews, focused group discussions, and quantitative surveys. To assess the call room effectiveness, I observed the call room for 5 days, taking note of employees' behaviors, infrastructure, power outages, and the surrounding area. During this time, I reviewed CHILDLINE's newsletter, training manual, and published statistics. In terms of intervention, "CHILDLINE at my finger tips: A Resource Book" is a training book for the team members giving step by step directions for each category of call: medical, shelter, repatriation, etc (Seema, 2001). However, the book is written in English and none of the CHILDLINE team members speak English, so it was clear they did not use the resource book and thus personal interviews were necessary to discover the real actions taken in Bikaner.

From these statistics and employee interviews I learned about general trends such as the average age and gender of callers, most common call topics, and how they help. I interviewed 11 out of 12 employees of CHILDLINE Bikaner city center (the 12<sup>th</sup> was out of town) and I interviewed 2 out of 3 coordinators for Bikaner village subcenters (the 3<sup>rd</sup> is in Bajju, which you need a permit to access because it is so close to Pakistan's border). To discover the employees commitment and passion for child rights, I asked about their educational and work background, personal reasons for working at CHILDLINE, and how long they plan to stay (full interview questionnaire in Appendix). Also, to get an insider's perspective of CHILDLINE's effectiveness, I asked the employees their opinion of CHILDLINE's greatest strength and weakness. For an expert opinion on CHILDLINE's role in reducing child vulnerability in Bikaner, I interviewed two Bikaner professors: political science and sociology. On the other hand, to access the common knowledge of Bikaner residents regarding child vulnerability and CHILDLINE, I

surveyed 128 people from four different neighborhoods in Bikaner city and one village. The vast majority of people on the street were men, so to get a female's perspective, I interviewed a young woman who recently got her Masters in Public Administration. Additionally, to further understand the many components involved in CHILDLINE's action, rescue, and outreach, I observed a CHILDLINE coordinator's meeting, I observed the Child Welfare Committee, I toured both the boys' and girls' shelter home, and I toured the Lunkarsar girls' school where they conduct many education and public awareness outreach programs.

### **Findings**

#### **Child Vulnerability in Bikaner:**

In 2010, CHILDLINE India Foundation conducted a survey across the country on child labor, child marriage, missing children, and corporeal punishment (Dubey, P. personal interview, April 19, 2014). Finding child vulnerability to be alarmingly widespread, CHILDLINE more than doubled the number of cities it operated in, from 122 cities in 2010 to 280 cities in 2014 (*Hello CHILDLINE*, 2014, p.3). Bikaner was one of the cities with a clear need for intervention, so on August 15, 2011, India's Independence Day, CHILDLINE came to Bikaner (Dubey, P. personal interview, April 19, 2014). Since its inception, the call center in Bikaner has handled 1392 cases (Ojha, *Bikaner CHILDLINE: August 2011-March 2014*. Activity report) (see appendix Table 7).

Noorzhan Quadri said children are more vulnerable in Bihar than in Rajasthan because of the extreme poverty and pollution there, but children are better off than in Delhi, UP, and Uttarakhand (Quadri, N. personal interview, April 28, 2014). Peera Ram also said Rajasthan is getting better and Bihar is getting worse in terms of child labor, but Rajasthan is worse in terms of child marriage (Ram, P. personal interview, April 30, 2014). Pallav Dubey said Bikaner has

more child marriages than the rest of India (Dubey, P. personal interview, April 1, 2014). Peera Ram explains that Western Rajasthan has higher rates of child marriage than the rest of Rajasthan because it has a tradition of believing girls should be married by 13 years and boys by 18 years (Ram, P. personal interview, April 30, 2014). Most cases of child marriage are reported from the villages Nokha and Kolayat, possibly because of underreporting in other villages or maybe more incidents in these villages. (Focused Group Discussion, CHILDLINE-Bikaner coordinators, April 21, 2014).

The general consensus among Bikaner residents is that children are treated well, as seen by the 106 out of 128 survey respondents (see appendix graph 4, 8, 9). Also, the majority of respondents said there was no organization to help children if they were in danger (94 out of 128) but they did not mind (see appendix graph 5, 10, 11). Even Pappu Ram, a CHILDLINE team member, said “I never saw child issues before working here” (Ram, P. personal interview, April 19, 2014). Meenaskhi Swarnakar, a Bikaner resident with a Masters in Public Administration, said women and children are safe and treated fairly, so if she were the head of the government in Bikaner she would “fix the roads, prevent all the electrical failures, and reduce noise pollution” (Swarnakar, M. personal interview, April 26, 2014). On the surface, there seems to be general acceptance of the ways things are and little motivation for social change in Bikaner.

However, with deeper questioning, complex child vulnerability in Bikaner was revealed. From street surveys in the city, residents considered lack of education, poverty, no playgrounds, and abusive parents to be the biggest problems for children (see appendix graph 3). Tobacco was the fifth most common answer in the survey, however most interview respondents denied the existence of drug abuse (Swarnakar, M, personal interview, April 26, 2014) (CHILDLINE team members, personal interviews, April 19, 2014). Neha Rawat has never dealt with a case of drug

abuse, but she did see children smoking at a playground once (Rawat, N, personal interview, April 19, 2014). Also, all CHILDLINE employees said they have never dealt with a case of suicide or depression, but Meenaskhi Swarnakar explained that some of her friends have developed depression because of the pressure of studies (Swarnakar, M, personal interview, April 26, 2014) (CHILDLINE team members, personal interviews, April 19, 2014). This is very interesting because the eighth most common survey response for children's biggest issue was that children hate studying; the survey respondents were joking but clearly studying does reduce many children's quality of life (see appendix graph 3). While there is a range of issues in Bikaner, CHILDLINE focuses mostly on child marriage and child labor.

Child labor is widespread both in Bikaner city and surrounding villages. Meenaskhi Swarnakar said "child labor is very visible," which was validated by personal observation and surveys, 77.7% survey respondents in the city and 75% respondents in Lunkarsar acknowledge child labor was a serious issue (Swarnakar, M. Graduate of Master of Philosophy and Public Administration and Bachelor of Education, female resident of Bikaner, personal interview, Bikaner, April 26, 2014) (see appendix graphs 18, 19). Interviewees said the most common places for child labor are sweets factories, wool factories, restaurants, and tea-shops (CHILDLINE team members, personal interviews, April 19, 2014). Often child labor is connected with family poverty and lack of educational opportunities. Most CHILDLINE employees said that many parents do not have the money for school, so they force the children to work (CHILDLINE employees, personal interviews, Bikaner, April 19, 2014). Pallav Dubey dealt with a case of child rag pickers who worked all day, just to give their money to their dad who spent it all on alcohol (Dubey, P. personal interview, April 19, 2014). Furthermore, Professor Quadri explained that poverty requires mothers to work, and since they cannot leave

their children at home alone, and cannot afford to send children to school, the children come and work with the mothers (Quadri, N. personal interview, April 28, 2014). Deva Ram, a CHILDLINE team member, said, “families wander from place to place, they all work together, and do not have time or interest in education” (Ram, D. Team Member, personal interview, April 19, 2014). Professor Gupta said child labor is increasing because education no longer guarantees employment, so they leave school to start working (Gupta, D. personal interview, April 28, 2014). Deva Ram verifies this, “I got a call from parents who wanted their child to go to school, but the child just wanted to work and get money” (Ram, D. personal interview, April 19, 2014). Sometimes children choose to work because money is more valuable than the low quality education available to them, other times they are forced to work to support their family. Thus child labor is a complex issue related to poor education and poverty perpetuated by family and internal pressures.

Child marriage has a long tradition in Rajasthan, but today exists mostly in the villages. Most survey respondents in the city (84.2%) said child marriage only exists in the village or estimated about 10% of people in the city have child marriages (see appendix graph 20). The village surveys verify this point with 2/3rds of respondents acknowledging child marriage as an issue, and the 1/3<sup>rd</sup> that disagreed were very reluctant to answer the question (see appendix graph 21)(personal observation). Child marriage exists mostly in the villages because it is deeply rooted in Rajasthani culture and rural areas have been less affected by globalization (Gupta, D. personal interview, April 28, 2014). The cultural tie is shown by the majority (35 in 2012) of child marriages in Bikaner happening on Akha Teeja, a festival in April or May considered an auspicious day to get married (CHILDLINE employees, personal interviews, Bikaner, April 19, 2014). Pallav Dubey explains that most child marriages are reported when people have a

problem with the family, want to settle a score and get the family in trouble, not because they actually find child marriage to be a problem (Dubey, P. personal interview, April 19, 2014). Also, poverty is a major cause of child marriage; families save money by marrying multiple children at the same time (Quadri, N. personal interview, April 28, 2014) (CHILDLINE employees, personal interviews, April 19, 2014). Professor Gupta says child marriage is most rampant in scheduled castes, but Peera Ram says it is in all communities in Lunkarsar (Gupta, D. personal interview, April 28, 2014) (Ram, P. personal interview, April 30, 2014).

While child labor and child marriage are the clear focus issues for CHILDLINE in Bikaner, employees also acknowledge missing children, poverty, and poor school conditions as major issues (CHILDLINE employees, personal interviews, April 19, 2014). Child beggars are very visible on the street and indeed all interviewees were concerned for slum children (CHILDLINE employees, personal interviews, April 19, 2014) (personal observation, Bikaner). Issues in the school range from “complaints about teachers hitting them, bad Mid Day Meals, or teachers drinking at school” (Rawat, R. Coordinator, personal interview, May 2, 2014). Peera Ram dealt with a case where a teacher hit a boy and broke his hand (Ram, P. personal interview, April 30, 2014). Missing children are very common in Lunkarsar because the area is on a national highway and has a railway station. Usually they find children who were traveling with their family and got separated; kidnappings and runaways are less common (Ram, P. personal interview, April 30, 2014). However, last year a child was kidnapped from a nearby village and was forced to work in fields in Haryana, and luckily escaped a few months later (Ram, P. personal interview, April 30, 2014). Pallav Dubey also dealt with a rare case of human trafficking, where children were kidnapped from the South of India to work in Bikaner (Dubey, P. personal interview, April 19, 2014).

A largely hidden aspect of child vulnerability in Bikaner is domestic abuse. Child abuse was the fourth most common concern from the street survey, but always with the caveat that it is by uneducated parents only (see appendix graph 3). The survey respondents that claimed children were treated both bad and good said it depended on the education of the parents; Meenaskhi Swarnakar and Peera Ram also stated this (surveys) (Swarnakar, M. personal interview, April 26, 2014) (Ram, P. personal interview, April 30, 2014). Neha Rawat, the CHILDLINE counselor, commonly deals with runaway girls in the city because they were beaten by their family or forced to do a lot of work at home (Rawat, N. personal interview, April 19, 2014). She explained that these runaway girls are forever tainted because leaving the family is very stigmatized in India; the society views them as quick tempered and neglecting their family responsibilities. (Rawat, N. personal interview, April 19, 2014). Sexual abuse is even more stigmatized than physical abuse in India. Rawat Ram, the coordinator at Nokha, explained that sexual abuse is usually by a family member and is rarely reported (Ram, R. personal interview, May 2, 2014). Most of the CHILDLINE employees said they have never dealt with a case of sexual abuse, but Rawat Ram told two stories of 13-year-old girls being raped, one by her teacher and another by an older man in the community (Rawat, R. Coordinator, personal interview, May 2, 2014). Although the girls had the courage to call 1098, the rapists were not prosecuted because one girl's father took a bribe and the head of the panachat told the other girl to drop charges or she would ruin her reputation (appendix story 1 and 2). Thus even when children speak out, the society silences them. Similarly, Rawat Ram explained, "society in Nokha does not like children to ask questions" (Rawat, R. personal interview, May 2, 2014). He acknowledges there are probably many children being hurt but are too afraid to call. The police discourage children to call and perpetuate a culture of silence.

**Logistics of CHILDLINE in Bikaner:**

Rajasthan has 32 districts but CHILDLINE is in only 14. Bikaner's main call center in the city is called the Collab Center, and there are 3 subcenters in Lunkarsar, Nokha, and Bajju (Dubey, P. personal interview, Bikaner, April 14, 2014). All Bikaner call centers are 24 hours, the city center has 6 team members (call takers); one coordinator, and one part time counselor (Dubey, P. personal interview, Bikaner, April 14, 2014). The village centers have three usual call takers and a fourth person for office work and to cover for the others when they are sick (Ram, P. personal interview, April 30, 2014).

Being a CHILDLINE team member means you are a call taker and also do outreach 15-20 days a month to create awareness and look for child issues. The requirements for being a CHILDLINE team member are passing 10<sup>th</sup> standard, knowledge of the field, background of social work, and knowledge of regional language-Rajasthani (CHILDLINE employees, personal interviews, Bikaner, April 19, 2014). Peera Ram said all the team members in Lunkarsar already worked for URMUL and were chosen for the position because they had the most affection for children (Ram, P. personal interview, April 30, 2014). The team members are trained for three to five days on "the processes and functioning of CHILDLINE, how to dial, how to record, what actions with whom and when" (Ojha, A. personal interview, April 22, 2014).

All six of the team members are male at the CHILDLINE Bikaner city center. Pallav Dubey, the coordinator, said women have worked in the position before but did not like it for a variety of reasons: "females faced a lot of issues in the field, for example in the slums, so they needed men to escort them; females felt shy approaching people since it is weird for women to talk to strangers in India; and it is not safe for women to work at night" (Dubey, P. personal interview, April 19, 2014). On the other hand, Peera Ram says the female team member in

Lunkarsar is really good; she is both a call receiver and a counselor because she is better at relating to children than the men (Ram, P. personal interview, April 30, 2014). According to Bikaner city center employees, having all men team members has never reduced their effectiveness or hurt children, and no girl has ever called requesting to speak with a woman (CHILDLINE employees, personal interviews, April 19, 2014).

Neha Rawat, the counselor, is the only female employee at CHILDLINE Bikaner city center. She does face to face counseling usually with missing children, gets details from them, and then sends them to the shelter home. She also goes into the field and speaks to children at school, asks about their problems and interaction with teachers. She works part time and thinks that's sufficient, there does not need to be a counselor every day or 24 hours. The only requirement to be a counselor at CHILDLINE is to have graduated with three years in Sociology. Most of her answers were consistent with the male employees, except all the men said they were never emotionally affected by calls, whereas Neha Rawat said she is often emotionally affected and finds it hard to switch off after her shift; she always goes home and talks about cases with her husband, mom, and friends. Despite this, she agreed with the male employees that a counselor for employees to process their day is not necessary.

There are four coordinators at CHILDLINE in Bikaner, one for each call center. CHILDLINE India Foundation trains them initially and every few years to "review the functioning, discuss child issues, and train how to make a team competent" (Ojha, A. personal interview, April 22, 2014). The duties of Pallav Dubey, the Bikaner city coordinator, are to manage the team in the headquarters and subcenters, help the team solve cases, motivate the team, coordinate with other departments (CWC, JJB), coordinate with local authorities, communicate with CHILDLINE India Foundation, and send them monthly reports (Dubey, P.

personal interview, April 14, 2014). In the villages, the CHILDLINE coordinators, Rawat Ram and Peera Ram, are also coordinators for URMUL, the implementing organization. They both have the job of managing the call center and spreading awareness/implementing URMUL and government schemes for women and children.

Many CHILDLINE employees work there because they are passionate about child rights. Pappu Ram, a team member, says he works for CHILDLINE because “I wanted to help society, I like social work” (Ram, P. personal interview, April 19, 2014). Another team member, Rakesh Kumar, said, “I have loved children since I was a child and always wanted to do social work. I plan to work for CHILDLINE permanently and do not care about getting a promotion” (Kumar, R. personal interview, April 19, 2014). Rampal Bishnoi, the administrative officer, says “I get pleasure out of helping the poor, but my salary is only enough to sustain myself. Ultimately though, the most important thing you leave your children is not money, but good teaching” (Bishnoi, R. personal interview, April 27, 2014). Another passionate employee is Rameth Sharon who comes from a business family, “I wanted to help the poor with my expertise, but my family wanted me in business not the social sector; it took a lot of persuading” (Sharon, R. personal interview, April 27, 2014). These employees plan to work at CHILDLINE until retirement, sacrificing a higher salary for social purpose.

On the other hand, many other employees are only staying at CHILDLINE until they get a better job, often a government job. Deva Ram, Punam Chand, Khema Ram are studying for a government job and work at CHILDLINE simply because they needed a job (CHILDLINE employees, personal interviews, April 19, 2014). Neha Rawat is also studying for the government job competition, because she wants to be a sociology teacher (Rawat, N. personal interview, April 19, 2014). Pallav Dubey studied sociology and likes working at CHILDLINE

getting to create awareness about child rights, but he too is preparing for the competitive exams to work for the government or a different, higher paying NGO (Dubey, P. personal interview, April 19, 2014). CHILDLINE's low pay and low job requirements attract many temporary employees.

### **Who Calls and When?**

Pallav Dubey says the majority of callers are from children, “out of 30-40 calls, 25 are children” (Dubey, P. personal interviews, April 19, 2014). However, Deva Ram, a city center team member, says “most calls are made by elders, children report problems to elders who then call CHILDLINE” (Ram, D. personal interview, April 19, 2014). In Lunkarsar, it is about 50/50 calls from children/neighbors, whereas in Nokha the majority of calls are from adults (Ram, P. personal interview, April 30, 2014) (Ram, R. personal interview, May 2, 2014). In the Bikaner city center, from April to September 2013, callers were 51.5% male and 48.5% female. (Ojha, *Bikaner CHILDLINE: Activity report*). In Lunkarsar, from January 2013 to March 2104, callers were 60% male 40% female (Lunkarsar data sheet). Vastly different than the other responses, Rawat Ram for Nokha said callers were 95% boy, 5% girls, but he did not have a data sheet to prove this gender imbalance (Ram, R. Coordinator, personal interview, May 2, 2014). In the Bikaner city center, the most common age of a caller is between 7-13 years, whereas in Lunkarsar the average age is 14-16 years (see appendix graphs 1, 2). The Bikaner city center gets 5-7 calls on an average day, whereas Nokha gets about 15 calls a month. (Dubey, P. personal interview, April 19, 2014) (Ram, R. personal interview, May 2, 2014). All employees, both village and city, said they get the most calls in April-May about child marriage because Akha Teeja is a festival considered to be auspicious day to get married (CHILDLINE employees, personal interviews, April 19, April 30, May 2, 2014).

### **CHILDLINE Interventions:**

CHILDLINE is much more than counseling on the phone, they take action with nearly every call. They pride themselves on this action:

“In fact despite being a helpline, CHILDLINE does not wait for children’s calls. During awareness and outreach also if any team member happens to meet or hear about a child in distress, he or she immediately rushes to assist the child. No doubt CHILDLINE is an emergency helpline and most cases start off on a note of emergency, the mandate is to provide long term intervention, keeping in view long term institutional care and other needs of children in need of care and protection” (Seema, 2003, p.11).

This publication explains that CHILDLINE functions both as an emergency helpline for children and a social change agent through long term rehabilitation, community awareness, and education. From April 2013 to September 2013, CHILDLINE in Bikaner conducted 4 open houses and 26 outreach programs: two programs at the railway station, three at bus stops, five at parks, 15 at schools, and six at slums (Ojha, Activity report: *Bikaner CHILDLINE: April 2013 to Sept. 2013*). URMUL, CHILDLINE’s implementing organization in Bikaner, has youth groups that meet regularly and talk about child issues: Bal Munch (boys and girls young kids 6-11 years), Kishore Munch (boys 15-18 years), Kishori Munch (girls 12-14, 15-18 years), Youth Group (12-14 year, addressing legal point of view), and Child Protection Committee (adults with one male and one female child member) (Field Group Discussion, April 21, 2014). The same report described their methods for awareness as pamphlets, stickers, posters, CHILDLINE flex calendars, and Children newsletter.

Calls generally last between 10 and 20 minutes and then a team member immediately departs to verify the case is genuine, then they notify the necessary officials as soon as possible, usually the Block Officer and then the Child Protection Office (CHILDLINE employees,

personal interviews, Bikaner, April 19, 2014). Confidentiality is guaranteed with every call, but this is an especially important commitment when people call to report a child marriage, because that puts their life in danger.

If alerted of a child marriage in advance, just CHILDLINE goes to the family and tries to convince them to cancel the wedding. Whereas, when CHILDLINE finds out about a child marriage as it is happening, the intervention at the ceremony involves a Child Development Police Officer, the SubDivisional Magistrate, a Police Officer, and a CHILDLINE team member. They face lots of resistance from villagers and need the police there for protection because the villagers might get violent (Focused Group Discussion, CHILDLINE-Bikaner coordinators, Bikaner, April 21, 2014). For example, CHILDLINE stopped a child marriage on the day of the wedding and the father was furious since he had already paid for food, he said he wished they had stopped him sooner. (Focused Group Discussion, CHILDLINE-Bikaner coordinators, Bikaner, April 21, 2014).

Sometimes CHILDLINE gets calls about child labor, but often interventions are initiated because of employees' personal observation. Deva Ram said if he saw a child working at a restaurant he would strike up conversation, find where the child lives, contact their family, and explain why child labor is bad and going to school is better. If the family doesn't listen to them, they get the police's help, however it is legal to work at age 14 but CHILDLINE discourages work under 18 years (Ram, D. personal interview, April 19, 2014). Peera Ram, the Lunkarsar coordinator, said to reduce child labor they started a campaign with police where they rescued children, explained the evils of child labor to the child and parents, and sent them to school—if the family could not afford to educate the child, they encouraged them to send the child to the shelter home in Bikaner because food and education is paid for. To stop child labor, first they do

mapping, go around to identify where kids work, then two or three CHILDLINE team members go with one member of CWC and police to rescue the children. They first take the children to the shelter then back home where they speak to their families. Rescues are very rare though, since 2011, they have only done 3 rescues.

When CHILDLINE finds a missing child, they first take the child to the police station, then to the Child Welfare Committee, then send pictures of the child on the CHILDLINE national network; they keep the child in the shelter until they are reunited with their family (Pappu Ram, Deva Ram CITATION). CHILDLINE works closely with the Juvenile Justice Board and Child Welfare Committee, “CHILDLINE India is specifically named in the Juvenile Justice Act 2000, as having the authority to directly produce children in front of Child Welfare Committees (CWCs)” (*Hello CHILDLINE*, 2011, p.25). Naha Rawat counsels the missing children to get details from them. Counseling usually takes about an hour and a half in the office or sometimes longer if the child remains silent. She says children have never been angry or violent with her, they are usually silent because they are afraid of strangers, so she comforts them, gives them treats, and eventually they talk (Rawat, N. personal interview, April 19, 2014).

For child abuse, CHILDLINE’s actions depend on the wishes of the child. When a child reports being beaten by a teacher, they usually request 100% anonymity; so CHILDLINE speaks to the headmaster and then the teacher about not hitting students without mentioning a specific child (Ram, D. personal interview, April 19, 2014). When a child runs away from home because of abuse, a CHILDLINE team member picks up the child from the police station and brings them to the call center. Neha Rawat asks them why they ran away and then calls their parents to verify the story (Rawat, N. personal interview, April 19, 2014) (see appendix story 3, 4, and 5).

### **Discussion/Analysis: Strengths, Challenges, and How to Improve**

#### ***Relations with police and other officials:***

The biggest strength of CHILDLINE is being a 24 hour, national resource for children. While the police are available to help children, children feel more comfortable calling CHILDLINE than the police (Kumar, R. personal interview, April 19, 2014). Pallav Dubey told a story about a girl being stalked and CHILDLINE helped her speak to the police, “it is very scary and culturally inappropriate for a girl to approach the police alone. CHILDLINE encouraged the girl to tell her family and eventually helped her speak to them, whereas if the girl had gone straight to the police they won’t ask for consent, they will *always* just call the family” (Dubey, P. personal interview, April 19, 2014). CHILDLINE knows how to interact with children much better than the police, so together they solve the child’s issue. CHILDLINE and the police also combine forces to help missing children, the police finding the child and CHILDLINE counsels them and uses their national network to connect missing children with their families. Thus by being a bridge between children in danger and the police, CHILDLINE fills a vital gap in society.

CHILDLINE is praised for helping children in India anywhere, anytime. However, in actuality, call centers really only have power to help children in their district. CHILDLINE is only in 280 cities in India, 14 out of 33 districts in Rajasthan, and 3 subcenters out of 7 blocks in Bikaner (Dubey, P. Center Co-ordinator, CHILDLINE-Bikaner, personal interview, Bikaner, April 19, 2014). The Bikaner call center takes calls from the Bikaner division, which incorporates four districts, but they cannot do much to help children outside the Bikaner district. CHILDLINE employees hate getting calls from children in distress that are out of their jurisdiction and being powerless to help (CHILDLINE employees, personal interviews, April 19,

2014). CHILDLINE should have a center in each district and a subcenter in each block to reduce child vulnerability.

Even with cases in their jurisdiction, CHILDLINE employees complain of lacking agency. CHILDLINE cannot take action directly; they need to use the police and other agencies which slows them down (CHILDLINE employees, personal interviews, April 19, 2014). For example, “if they get calls about lack of schools or lack of teachers, they cannot open schools themselves, they can only inform the District Education Officer and hope he does something” (Ram, D., personal interview, April 19, 2014). Rawat Ram said “CHILDLINE feels only like a scarecrow sometimes,” hoping to prevent atrocities against children simply by their presence, but has no actual power to stop atrocities (Ram, R. personal interview, May 2, 2014). Sometimes the other agencies (police, health department, ICDS, etc) ignore CHILDLINE, so they report the issue to the District center and hope they take action (Dubey, P. personal interview, April 19, 2014). CHILDLINE employees all mentioned this frustration with powerlessness and lack of independence.

A recommendation to improve CHILDLINE’s effectiveness is to give the organization more power and freedom. Rawat Ram from Nokha says CHILDLINE employees should be given the same power as Beat Officers, so they can write down peoples’ names and ensure they are arrested (Ram, R. personal interview, May 2, 2014). Many CHILDLINE team members recommended the Bikaner center should have their own vehicle, which will increase their agency and enable them to do more rescues (CHILDLINE employees, personal interviews, April 19, 2014). Rather than just being informants, CHILDLINE should have tools to act independently.

This lack of power becomes detrimental when the other agencies do not cooperate. Rawat Ram says the issue is not awareness of laws, “90% of the people know child marriage and child

labor are illegal, but they don't care because no action is taken against them. Officials eat in restaurants with child waiters and don't care" (Ram, R. personal interview, May 2, 2014). Many officials are lazy and complacent about child issues, and this weak law enforcement perpetuates issues. According to Rawat Ram, the government does not even like children to call about the Palanhar scheme, which gives orphans 1000 rupees a month for education, because "it is too much paper work for Gram Sevak, panchayat secretary, who needs to provide the documents" (Ram, R. Coordinator, personal interview, May 2, 2014). Rawat Ram argues that the government resents CHILDLINE because they make the authorities and police do more work.

Sometimes it is more severe than complacency, sometimes officials sabotage child marriage interventions by warning the family beforehand (see appendix story 6 and 7). To overcome the corruption that prevents successful child marriage interventions, Pallav Dubey explains that they "report the case to the higher officials first and the police station last, that way the police cannot get bribes from the family under the table, because the higher ups follow up and would know" (Dubey, P. personal interview, April 19, 2014). Rawat Ram explains that government and police do not cooperate with CHILDLINE now because it is "a headache, extra work and an argument that makes them unpopular in villages; politicians tell officers not to interfere because they need votes from those villagers" (Ram, R. personal interview, May 2, 2014). Unfortunately, higher officials can be corrupt as well and care more about the political game than the welfare of children. Professor Quadri of Political Science acknowledges the challenge of government schemes, "each new political party removes the schemes of the past party so they do not get credit for success. Instead policy should be formed of the basis of feedback from genuine sources (ex. universities) rather than prejudices" (Quadri, N. personal interview, April 28, 2014). Child vulnerability in Bikaner would be significantly reduced if

CHILDLINE, NGOs, the police, and the government could combine forces without hidden agendas.

***Logistical Recommendations:***

Rakesh Kumar recommends the Child Welfare Officer to not dress in uniforms for rescues because it provokes fear in children, instead they should instead dress in regular clothes to make the child more comfortable (Kumar, R. personal interview, April 19, 2014). Pappu Ram recommends the team members have uniforms and ID cards to look more official in the field (Ram, P. personal interview, April 19, 2014). Deva Ram and Pallav Dubey recommend there be a CHILDLINE office in every district and a subcenter in each block (Ram, D. and Dubey, P. personal interview, April 19, 2014). CHILDLINE employees disagree on satisfaction with infrastructure and funding. Peera Ram, the coordinator at Lunkarsar, and Rameth Sharon, the city office finance manager, say the government is very timely with their grants and the funds, and that infrastructure is sufficient (Ram, P. personal interview, April 30, 2014) (Sharon, R. personal interview, April 27, 2014). Rawat Ram said Nokha gets funding on time, but he wants more funds to hire more workers; currently all the workers have to multitask and feel overloaded (Ram, R. personal interview, May 2, 2014). Pallav Dubey, the Bikaner city coordinator said they need more funding for a vehicle, for protection of team members, and for higher salaries to attract better applicants and keep their current employees (Dubey, P. personal interview, April 19, 2014).

The minimal education and training of CHILDLINE team members may reduce their effectiveness. CHILDLINE team members only need to have passed 10<sup>th</sup> standard and only have three days of training, whereas in other countries counselors have tertiary education, have at least three years of experience in child protection, and have continuing training (Butler et al., 2010,

p.269) (Hepburn and Potter, 2011, p.220). Counseling children on the phone is not a simple task; small shifts in language can completely alter the success of a call, phone counselors need intensive training to “develop a sense of *when* and *how* particular types of questions are used” (Butler et al. 284). Both young males and females “said they wanted helplines to offer the sort of help that would remove the young person from the violent situation” but counseling is also necessary because “some may wish to explore their feelings” (Franks and Medforth 80, 84). Currently, CHILDLINE claims to offer both counseling and intervention, but the emphasis is much more on intervention. Appropriate emotional counseling requires trained, sensitive, and clever counselors, so CHILDLINE needs more funding to attract higher educated applicants.

***Protecting Children and Shifting Cultural Norms: Need Awareness and Accessibility***

Another strength of CHILDLINE is its combination of rescue and education. After stopping a child marriage or rescuing a child from child labor, they educate on the evils of both and the economic, health, and social benefits of schooling (CHILDLINE employees, personal interviews, April 19, 2014). Interventions get people’s attention and raise awareness of child rights; they also clearly instill fear in people who commit crimes against children. For example, people change the location of child marriages and do not dress the groom in a turban because they know about CHILDLINE and are afraid they will be caught (Ram, P. personal interview, April 30, 2014) (Ram, R. personal interview, May 2, 2014). Professor Gupta of Sociology says the only way for child marriage to end would be to teach the evils of it in school for prevention, which is exactly what CHILDLINE is doing (Gupta, D. personal interview, April 28, 2014). In Lunkarsar, they educate people in both formal and informal settings, formally at Bal Munch (children’s group), Kishore Munch (adolescent girl’s group), Self Help Groups (women’s groups), and schools; and informally gather community members and screen films on the evils of

child marriage (Ram, P. personal interview, April 30, 2014). CHILDLINE helps children today with interventions and educating parents on how to treat children better. Educating is also a sustainable approach that can help children of the future by improving the societal norms of child treatment.

While CHILDLINE has the potential to shift the society's conception of appropriate treatment to children, its main obstacle is lack of public awareness. Meenaskhi Swarnakar, a young woman very educated and involved in society, says "CHILDLINE has not changed child vulnerability in Bikaner because no one knows CHILDLINE exists!" (Swarnakar, M. personal interview, April 26, 2014). Professor Quadri of Political Science, says CHILDLINE needs to be advertised wider because now it is only known to the educated elite class, not known to the masses (Quadri, N. personal interview, April 28, 2014). In the city, 7.8% of respondents had heard of 1098, 23.3% had heard of CHILDLINE, and only 40.7% of those that had heard of CHILDLINE understood its function (see appendix graphs 12, 14, 16). In Lunkarsar, 8.3% had heard of 1098 or CHILDLINE, and 0% of the people understand the function of CHILDLINE (see appendix graphs 13, 15, 17). However, most CHILDLINE employees are blind to this lack of public awareness. Deva Ram and Rakesh Kumar both said almost all people in Bikaner know about CHILDLINE, and Pallav Dubey estimated 95% in the city and 80% in rural areas are aware (CHILDLINE employees, personal interviews, Bikaner, April 19, 2014). These exaggerations come from the Mumbai headquarters as well, "You can dial 100 for Police, 101 for Fire, and 1098 for CHILDLINE. All are category 1 numbers" (*Hello CHILDLINE*, 2011, p.25). CHILDLINE's false confidence in public awareness decreases the urgency for advertising and therefore perpetuates this lack of awareness. CHILDLINE should do periodic surveys of awareness in all parts of Bikaner so they can strategically advertise.

Public awareness is essential for an effective helpline. Currently, CHILDLINE puts 1098 posters inside and outside every school, distributes pamphlets and stickers around town, publishes in the newspaper, puts signs in public meeting places, Panchayat buildings, and Aganwadi centers (CHILDLINE employees, personal interviews, Bikaner, April 19, 2014). Most of the survey respondents that had heard of CHILDLINE said it was from the newspaper, so that seems to be the most effective advertisement (surveys). CHILDLINE could benefit from taking some advertising ideas from other hotlines, for example Anderson and Huerta advertised the telephone hotline on the radio and a Dutch child helpline combines telephone conversations and online chat (Anderson and Huerta, 2000, p.346) (Fukkink and Hermanns, 2009, p.939). Professor Gupta recommends including an advertisement of CHILDLINE in school curriculum (Gupta, D. personal interview, April 28, 2014). Pallav Dubey recommends doing a candle march to spread awareness, because when they last did a large march they got lots of calls (Dubey, P. personal interview, April 19, 2014). Rawat Ram recommends spreading awareness by telling everyone they meet about it, hiring a tuktuk and speaking about CHILDLINE on the microphone, distributing more bills, increasing school visits, and going to the playground to educate children (Ram, R. personal interview, May 2, 2014). CHILDLINE should adopt these creative advertising approaches to spread awareness.

Even if people are aware of the hotline, they still might not call because of various barriers to access. Public Call Offices (PCOs) have almost disappeared because of cell phones, there are no PCOs in rural areas and the number in the city is negligible (CHILDLINE employees, personal interviews, April 19, 2014). But this does not concern CHILDLINE employees who say children have no trouble accessing a phone, they can use a family member's phone or their own, but "technically you have to be 18 to have a cellphone in India, but 10 year

olds have them” (Ram, D. personal interview, April 19, 2014). However, this confidence of access forgets about children who have been kidnapped, children who have been beaten by their parent, children in extreme poverty, etc. Also, a study of hotlines found that children wanted to be able to choose the age and gender of their counselor (Franks and Medforth 81). CHILDLINE in Bikaner lacks this diversity, since there are only young men team members, but they say a child has never asked to speak to a woman (CHILDLINE employees, personal interviews, April 19, 2014). An apparent barrier to access is the stigma of the hotline in Bikaner. In India, it is rare to go outside the family for problems, and some people think 1098 is only for complainers (Ram, R. personal interview, May 20, 2014). Shrivastava et al.’s study showed how the stigma of mental health in India prevented people from reaching out to hotlines (Shrivastava et al. 5).

CHILDLINE must think critically about why children are not calling and how to overcome their barriers to access. Currently, employees are very unaware of caller figures; the employees all disagreed on statistics ranging from the gender ratio being 80/20 or 50/50 (CHILDLINE employees, personal interviews, April 19, 2014). Barriers to access may be revealed by analyzing data regarding who is calling, from what ages, for what issues—and they need to look at the flipside: see who is not calling, is not being reach, and what more can be done.

In addition to being a barrier to access, the stigma of mental health is reducing the effectiveness of CHILDLINE in terms of employee qualifications, treatment of children, and treatment of themselves. In India, people do not get mental health treatment unless they are “running down the street naked pulling their hair out” (Rawat, N. personal interview, April 19, 2014). The requirement to be a counselor is a degree in sociology, but a degree in psychology may be more relevant because the counselor needs to know how to relate to children on an

individual level not a societal level. Also, Neha Rawat admitted being emotionally affected by the calls, but the translator literally laughed out loud at the question of whether the call center should have a counselor for them to process their day.

***Continued Vulnerability and Solutions:***

Bikaner residents identified education and poverty as the biggest issues for children (see appendix graph 3). Bikaner residents complain of poor quality schools or lack of schools in certain areas. When CHILDLINE is called about these issues there is little they can do other than forward the message to the Block Officer (surveys) (Dubey, P. personal interview, April 19, 2014). The poor quality of schooling and lack of adult employment opportunities in Bikaner encourage child labor. Since child labor will not go away until poverty is alleviated and education improves (which will take a long time), Pandey recommends offering schooling that is tailored to work schedules (Pandey vi). Child labor is tough to stop because it benefits so many people: “employees, parents, and children want child labor to continue” (Ram, P. personal interview, April 19, 2014). CHILDLINE cannot stop child labor on its own with the whole society against them.

Pallav Dubey admits CHILDLINE is still not addressing child vulnerability from poverty, slums and backward classes (Dubey, P. personal interview, April 19, 2014). Pappu Ram says when they try to take slum children to school, they always go back to the street because they live with their parents who do not care about education (Ram, P. personal observation, April 19, 2014). Likewise, many survey respondents and Meenaskhi Swarnakar said uneducated families treat children worse (all surveys) (Swarnakar, M. personal interview, April 26, 2014). Francaville & Giannelli also found that as the education of parents (stronger correlation with mothers) increases, the likelihood their children will work decreases (Francaville and Giannelli,

2010, p.232). Kumari explains that poverty “diminishes the ability of parents to provide supportive, consistent behaviour and may render parents more vulnerable to debilitating effects of life events. Parental mental health and behaviour in turn influences well-being of the child” (Kumari, 2013, p.72).

Poverty is at the root of most child issues in Bikaner, especially child labor and child marriages, so CHILDLINE needs to be combined with poverty alleviation to be effective. Families continue child marriage because they save money marrying all their daughters at the same time. When they stop child labor, they are depriving a family of a source of income, and they need to replace this money for a sustainable solution to child labor (Dubey, P. personal interview, April 19, 2014). Professor Gupta said child labor and child marriage would only be solved when poverty is alleviated. (Gupta, D. personal interview, April 28, 2014). While they can rescue children from the workplace, they can do little when the family sends the child back to work (Dubey, P. personal interview, April 19, 2014).

Sexual abuse is very related to child abuse because both women and children are silenced by society. Bikaner is a very traditional, conservative society with strict gender norms, which strongly influences child vulnerability. This gender imbalance was very clear from the surveys where 13 out of 129 respondents were female; one female survey respondent answered, “I don’t know, I don’t leave the house” to every question (surveys). My interpreter explained that “women leave to go to the market or work, and come straight home, no hanging around on the street like men” (Quadri, S. personal interview, April 25, 2014). It is standard for extended families to live together in India, and most sexual abuse is committed by a family member (Ram, R. personal interview, May 2, 2014). In India, “the basic assumption is that girls are inferior, physically and mentally weak, and above all sexually vulnerable... In girl child cases the sexual

vulnerability is not only in and around her home but also of a social climate which encourages her violation.” (Salunke and Ambedkar, 2012, p.182). There is a tradition of silence in Bikaner around domestic issues. Meenaskhi Swarnakar explained, “Traditionally if women reported being hit by their husband to the police, they’d say she had no right to complain, its internal matters. Still today it is settled in the family to keep things amicable, if police arrest the husband, he will be angrier. Real victims do not report, only women who want to dominate their husbands” (Swarnakar, M. personal interview, April 26, 2014). So today domestic violence is very unreported because of the cultural norm (perpetuated by the police) to diminish its severity.

***CHILDLINE Perpetuating Child Vulnerability:***

Although CHILDLINE claims to be defending the girl child, various aspects of the organization may in fact perpetuate gender violence. First of all, there is an extreme gender imbalance of employees; in the city center, there is one female part time employee and nine full time male employees. In the meeting of all Bikaner CHILDLINE leaders, there were eight men and only one woman (Focused Group Discussion, CHILDLINE-Bikaner coordinators, April 21, 2014). Although the organization claims to be defending the issues of the girl-child, I worry it is only on a superficial level since they do not have enough women’s perspectives and instead perpetuate the male dominated society which increases children’s vulnerability.

Some CHILDLINE employees are ignorant of the child issues themselves. For example, many of the counselor Neha Rawat’s views are concerning. She says “40% of the children I counsel are lying and 100% of runaways are naughty. I’ve never dealt with a genuine case of abuse, or neglect, etc. A child has never been visibly bruised. Child abuse doesn’t exist in India. Children can’t distinguish between touches out of love and lust. Children are confused. If an elderly uncle makes a grown up girl sit on his lap, is it love or lust?” (Rawat, N. personal

interview, April 19, 2014). This is a very concerning perspective because if a girl were to call about being sexually abused she would think the child was lying or confused, rather than giving her the necessary treatment. Just because they are not getting calls about child abuse does not mean it is not happening. CHILDLINE India Foundation published “69% suffer some form of physical abuse; 65% of school children face corporeal punishment; 53% have suffered some form of sexual abuse; every second child faces emotional abuse” (*Hello CHILDLINE*, 2013, p.7). With such large percentages of children being abused, this means it is definitely happening to children in Bikaner. Rather than goofing off at work, employees should be reading publications and taking surveys to get an accurate picture of child issues in the area. CHILDLINE employees need to be trained on the seriousness and prevalence of these issues, so they know it *does* exist and it *needs* to be addressed.

Along these same lines, CHILDLINE coordinators need to periodically assess the knowledge of employees on child rights. Rawat Ram, the coordinator at Nokha, says “all CHILDLINE employees are educated and aware of child rights, child abuse statistics, etc. Children never lie, only grown ups tell lies” (Ram, R. personal interview, May 2, 2014). He clearly has no idea that employees like Neha have polar opposite perceptions of child issues and honesty. If CHILDLINE is trying to shift this culture and raise awareness, they first need to educate their own employees and make sure they are aware of the full truth.

CHILDLINE employees’ viewpoints are ingrained in the culture and therefore perpetuate some of the problems CHILDLINE is aiming to reduce. CHILDLINE’s child abuse interventions uphold the family at almost all costs because of the Indian context, potentially putting children in danger. When CHILDLINE hears of child abuse, they tell the parent not to hurt the child anymore, then they restore the child to their home and follow up three times to make sure things

are good (see appendix story 3,4,5,8). Physical abuse is standard in India, thus Neha was not concerned hearing of parents hitting children, and in fact, thought a girl was short tempered for running away because of it (see appendix story 3,5). The CHILDLINE employees were all born and raised in Bikaner, so these cultural norms are engrained in them. So while CHILDLINE claims to work to stop child abuse, the employees are products of a society where child abuse is a cultural norm, so their intervention perpetuates the problem. Salunke and Ambedkar explain the Indian context of child abuse:

“Apart from the physical burden of working before the body is ready for it, children are often enough subjected to beatings and lashings in a range of situations. It is seen that punishment per se does not constitute violence; however, when an act of punishment involves substantial injury, it is no longer legitimate punishment but violence against a defenseless child. Many times parents punished their children, but most parents, irrespective of their background, felt that there were positive consequences associated with beating. On the other hand, routinely abused children started hating their parents, became more obstinate and a few even ran away from home”  
(Salunke and Ambedkar, 2012, p.182).

This explains that physical punishment that borders on physical abuse is a cultural norm in India. Also, they explain that children run away from home when these punishments become too extreme. Thus, this would suggest that CHILDLINE should take the run away children’s stories of abuse more seriously rather than assuming they are lying. The safety and health of the child is more important the maintaining the family structure.

***Forgotten issues:***

There are many widespread issues in India that most interviewees and survey respondents neglected to mention. Human trafficking is very closely related to poverty, child labor, and child marriage. The Ministry of Women and Child Development estimates there are “about three

million females in forced prostitution” (Pandey, Tewari, and Bhowmick, 2013, p.48).

Globalization has increased human trafficking between India, Nepal, and Bangladesh; “over 200,000 girls have been trafficked to India’s red light areas alone” (Banerjee, 2003, p.4) (Deane, 2010, p.494). This is an issue for children because “between 7,000 and 10,000 girls, between the ages of 9 to 16 years, are trafficked each month from Nepal to India” (Pandey, Tewari, and Bhowmick, 2013, p.48). Another not discussed issue is the widespread child malnutrition in India. About 50% of children in India are malnourish and experience stunted growth; unfortunately this is much more prevalent in rural areas (Svedberg, 2006, p.1339). Professor Quadri explained that children are born weak in Bikaner because mothers are malnourished from lack of green vegetables in the area (Quadri, N. personal interview, April 28, 2014). Malnutrition at an early age is detrimental to development, “iron deficiency and lead poisoning during childhood can permanently impair cognition and intelligence” (Zimmerman et al., 2006, p.2020). Along these same lines, Bikaner is subject to many environmental issues; “Rajasthan alone accounts for about 61.9 % of the total arid area of the country” and Western Rajasthan (where Bikaner is located) is already showing climate change (an average of 0.5C) (Singh and Kumar, 2012, p.62, p.72). Water scarcity is a huge issue, “Tribal people perceived that water scarcity is the main reason for their physical, mental and social health problems” (Nerkar et al., 2013, n.p.). Also, Rajasthan districts such as Bikaner “have soil and groundwater pockets with heavy fluoride concentrations. Excessive fluoride in the domestic water supply is reported in at least 10 % villages in Rajasthan” (Vikas, 2013, p.290). Unfortunately, flourosis (higher concentration of F<sup>-</sup> in the drinking water) can cause many health disorders (Rao, et al. 2013, p.575). These social, environmental, and health issues affect the well being of all Bikaner citizens, but children are

especially vulnerable as they develop physically, mentally, and emotionally, thus these issues need to be addressed to reduce child vulnerability in Bikaner.

### **Conclusions & Way Forward:**

CHILDLINE's presence in Bikaner both reduces and increases child vulnerability because of the complex influence of culture. The employees were raised in a culture that does not recognize the significance of physical and sexual abuse, so CHILDLINE's interventions in these cases may put children in more danger. This is not to say the employees should not be from Bikaner, the organization just needs to do continuous training so all employees know the prevalence and severity of various child issues. Also, CHILDLINE is underutilized because of lack of public awareness and various barriers to access. Being aware of what is not being addressed (environment, human trafficking, sexual abuse, child malnutrition) is important for expansion in the future or to encourage another NGOs to take responsibility of these issues. CHILDLINE needs to do periodic surveys around all neighborhoods of Bikaner to strategically plan outreach programs. These outreach programs have potential to sustainably reduce child vulnerability by explaining the evils of child labor and child marriage and shifting culture norms about proper treatment of children; however, overcoming the deeply rooted cultural traditions and economic benefits of these issues will not be easy. CHILDLINE is just one organization, so it obviously cannot tackle all child issues on its own; working cooperatively with the government, police, and other agencies will allow CHILDLINE to effectively reduce child vulnerability in Bikaner.

### **Recommendation for further study:**

This study can be expanded upon in many ways. It would be valuable to do a parallel study of CHILDLINE in a different city to better show the impact of the local environment on

effectiveness. Studying CHILDLINE in Mumbai would be enlightening because all calls to 1098 process through this center, therefore this center influences the effectiveness of CHILDLINE nationally. More in depth research could be done on specific aspects of CHILDLINE's approach, such as outreach program, training, follow ups, etc. Also, a study of CHILDLINE's relationship with the government would be important because this study showed it is a huge obstacle to effectiveness.

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**Key contacts:**

- Arvind Ojha, Chief Executive and Secretary at URMUL TRUST, ojhaarvind@gmail.com, 91-941-4137-093
- Samiul Hassan Quadri, Translator, phone: +91-941-442-6182, email: samiulquadri@yahoo.in
- Pallav Dubey, Center Co-ordinator, CHILDLINE- Bikaner, Urmul Trust, 0151-2250503 / 2250203, urmulchildlinebikaner@gmail.com

**Appendices**

Interview Questions: (General Guideline-not including follow questions)

*All CHILDLINE employees:*

What are your job duties?

How long have you worked for CHILDLINE?

What time and days do you work?

Why do you work for CHILDLINE?

How long will you stay at CHILDLINE?

What is your salary?

How does that compare to other jobs?

What is your education/work background?

How long do the calls usually last?

Do the calls ever affect you emotionally?

Do you find it hard to switch off after shift?

Is there a counselor you can go to if you are personally affected by a call?

What issues do children face in Bikaner?

What issues do callers call for?

How do you help Child abuse?

How do you help Child marriage?

How do you help Child labor?

How do you help Suicide?

How do you help Drug abuse?

What are some successes of CHILDLINE in Bikaner?

What are the major challenges of CHILDLINE in Bikaner?

How often are outreach activities?

How often are rescues?

What is the average age of a caller?

What is the gender ratio of children calling for help?

Average calls a day?

Time of day/week/year with most calls?

How does confidentiality work on the calls?

*Just for Counselor:*

How long does counseling last?  
Should there be more than 1 counselor?

*CHILDLINE supervisor:*

What is the age of caller takers?  
How many caller takers are there? Men? Women?  
What languages do the callers speak?  
How are call takers recruited? What are the requirements?  
What is the requirement for a counselor?  
How are CHILDLINE employees trained?  
Who funds CHILDLINE?  
Can callers choose the age and gender of who they talk to?  
How many caller takers are on shift at once?  
Is it 24 hours?  
Are there supervisors?  
Is there a supervisor in the call center 24 hours?  
How many calls do they get a year?  
How many Public Call Offices (PCOs) are there in Bikaner?  
If you must be 18 to own a cellphone in India, how can the kids access a phone if they need help?  
How do people know about CHILDLINE?  
Where are signs posted for the helpline? Are they in every village?  
When and why did CHILDLINE come to Bikaner?  
Is the infrastructure here adequate?  
Is calling CHILDLINE stigmatized?

Street Survey Questionnaire:

Age:  
Gender:  
Education:  
Number of Children:  
How are children treated in Bikaner? Good, Bad, Depends/Both  
Are there any organizations to help children in danger? Yes, No  
    If yes, what are their names?  
Have you heard of 1098? Yes, No  
    If yes, what is it? What does it do? Where did you hear of it?  
Have you heard of CHILDLINE? Yes, No  
    If yes, what is it? What does it do? Where did you hear of it?  
Is child labor an issue in Bikaner? Yes, No  
Is child marriage an issue in Bikaner? Yes, No  
What is the biggest issue for Children in Bikaner? (free response)

Survey Results:**Table 1**

treatment of children	good	both	bad	no ide
Old City	20	2	0	0
KAM Road	14	4	1	0
Markets	45	3	5	1
Girl's College	18	1	1	1
City TOTAL	97	10	7	2
Lunkarsar	9	2	1	0
TOTAL	106	12	8	2

**Table 2**

organizations to help?	yes	no
Old City	7	15
KAM Road	8	11
Markets	9	45
Girl's College	8	13
City TOTAL	32	84
Lunkarsar	2	10
TOTAL	34	94

**Table 3**

Recognize 1098?	yes	no
Old City	2	20
KAM Road	0	19
Markets	3	51
Girl's College	4	17
City TOTAL	9	107
Lunkarsar	1	11
TOTAL	10	118

**Table 4**

Childline	yes	no
Old City	7	15
KAM Road	4	15
Markets	9	45
Girl's College	7	14
City TOTAL	27	89
Lunkarsar	1	11
TOTAL	28	100

**Table 5**

Child Labor	yes	no	doesn't know
Old City	16	2	
KAM Road	18	1	
Markets	38	16	
Girl's College	15	5	1
City TOTAL	87	24	1
Lunkarsar	9	3	
TOTAL	96	27	1

**Table 6**

Child Marriage	yes	no	doesn't know
Old City	3	17	
KAM Road	3	16	
Markets	4	50	
Girl's College	7	13	1
City TOTAL	17	96	1
Lunkarsar	8	4	
TOTAL	25	100	1

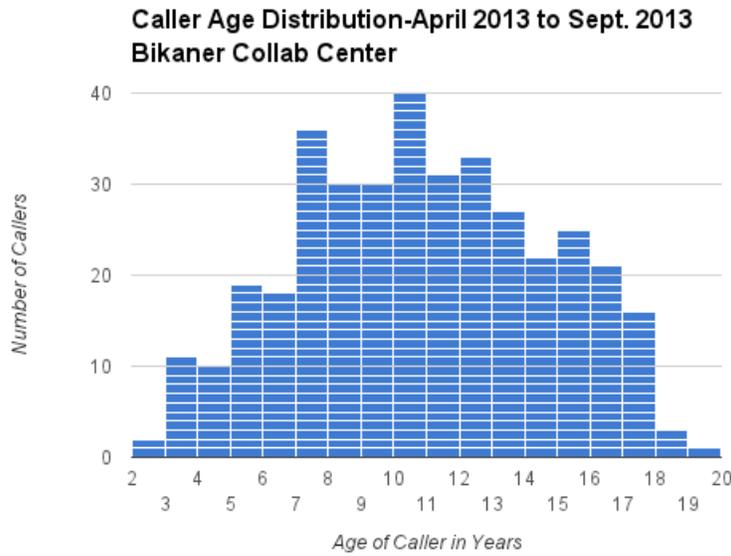
**Table 7**

Data from Bikaner main call center: <i>August 2011-March 2014</i>	
Medical Help	40
Shelter	22
Rehabilitation	28
Protection from Exploitation	277
Related to Death	0
Sponsorship	791
Missing Children	79
Help Sought by Family of Missing Child	48
Emotional Support and Guidance	48
Total Cases	1392

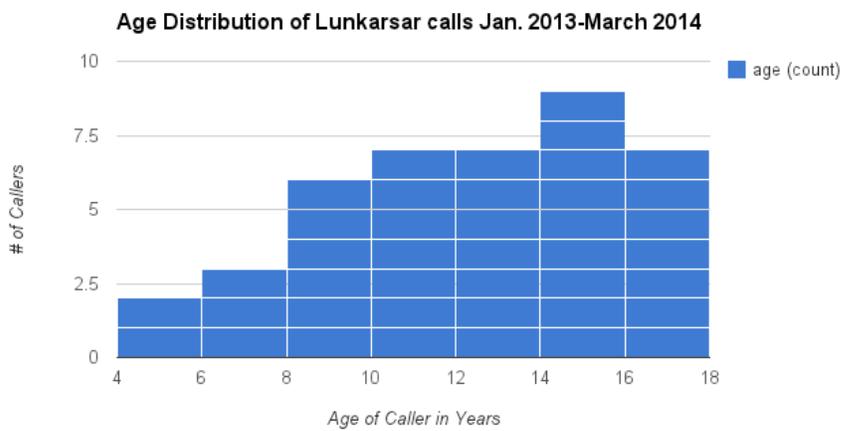
**Table 8**

Data from Lunkarsar: <i>Jan 2013-March 2014</i>	
Emotional Support and Guidance	13
Child Marriage	7
Missing Children	7
Shelter	4
Educational Support	3
Palanhar	2
Medical Support	1
Miscellaneous Support	4

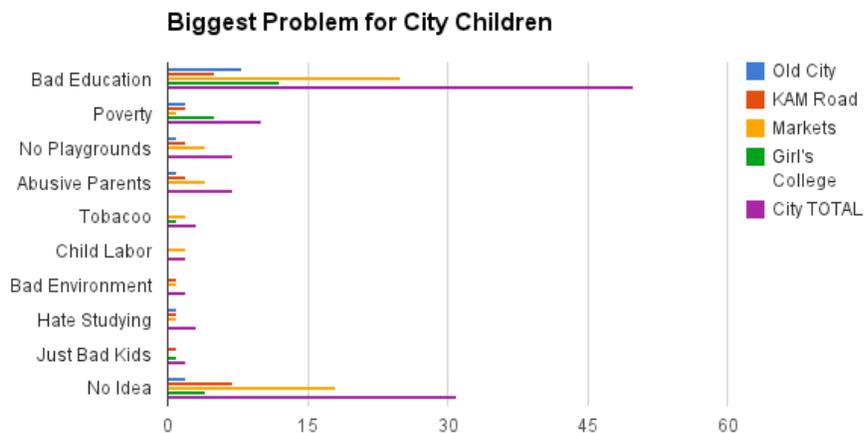
**Graph 1**



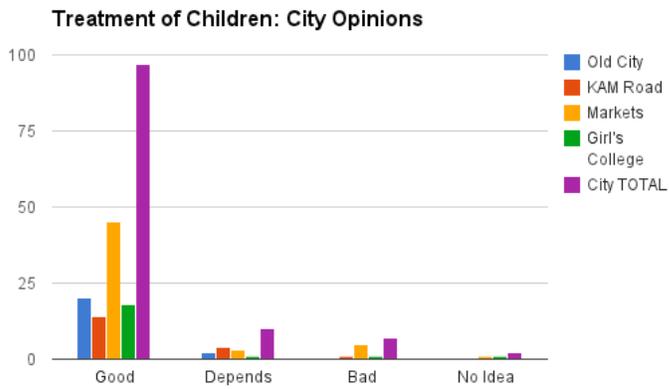
**Graph 2**



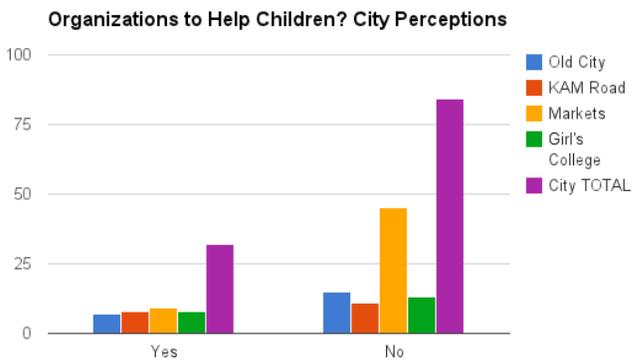
**Graph 3**



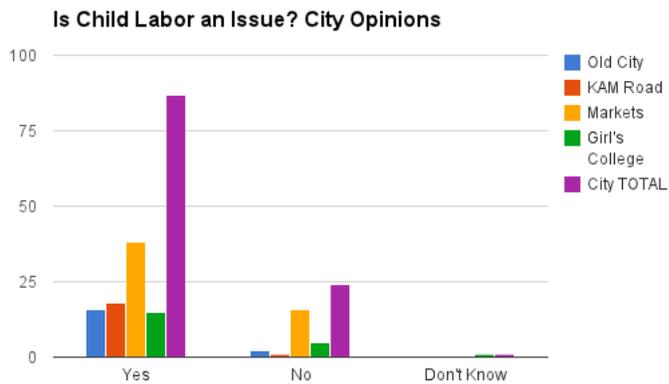
**Graph 4**



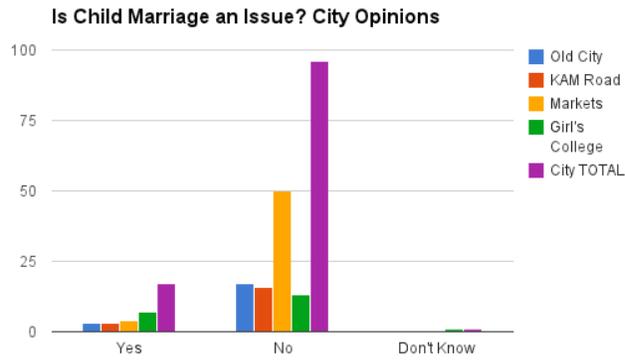
**Graph 5**



**Graph 6**

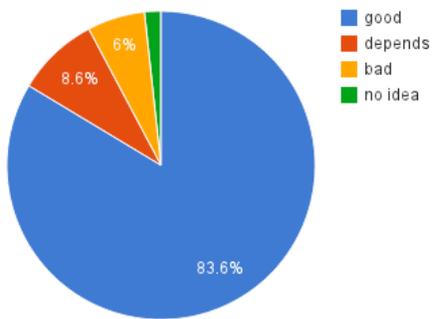


**Graph 7**



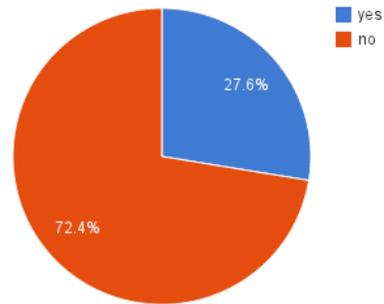
**Graph 8**

**Treatment of Children: City Total**



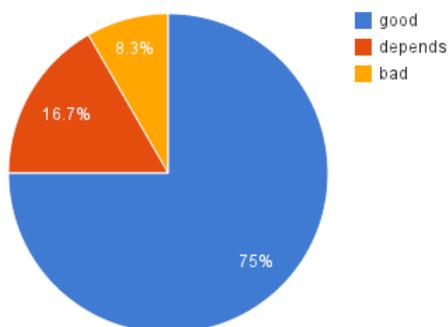
**Graph 10**

**Organization to Help? City Total**



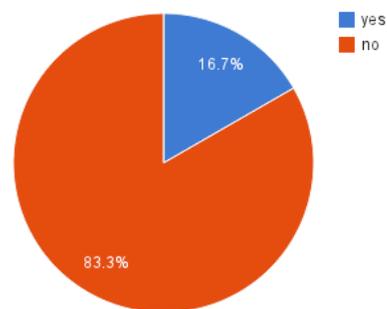
**Graph 9**

**Treatment of Children: Lunkarsar**



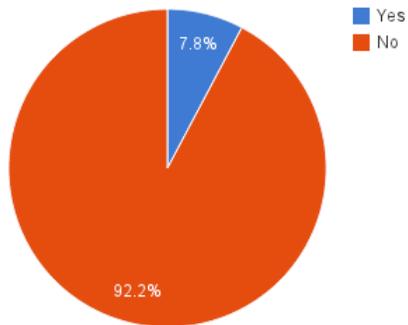
**Graph 11**

**Organization to Help? Lunkarsar**



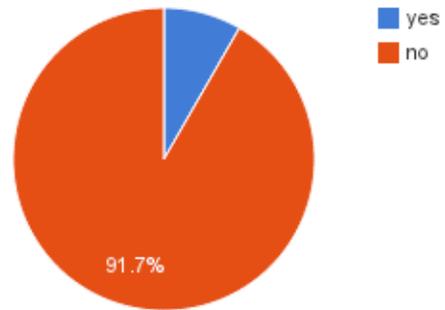
**Graph 12**

1098? City Total



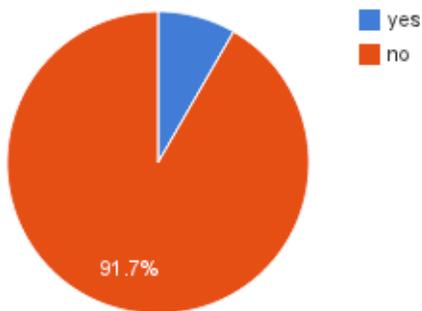
**Graph 15**

CHILDLINE Recognition: Lunkarsar



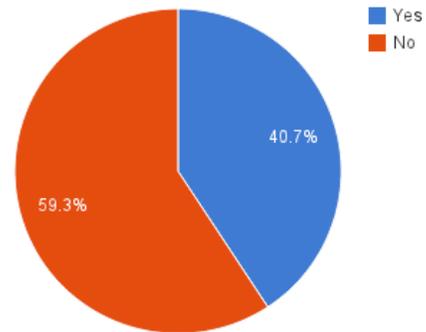
**Graph 13**

1098? Lunkarsar



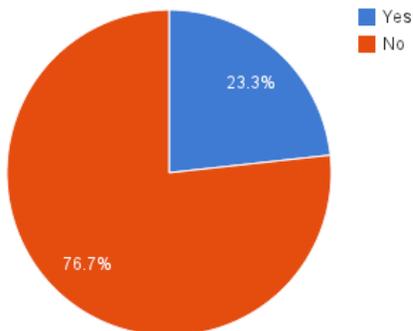
**Graph 16**

CHILDLINE Understanding: City Total



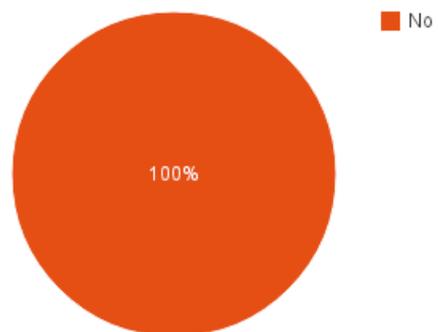
**Graph 14**

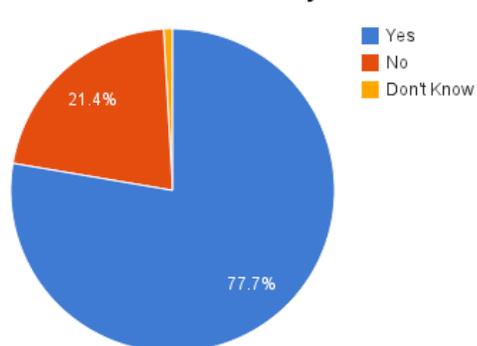
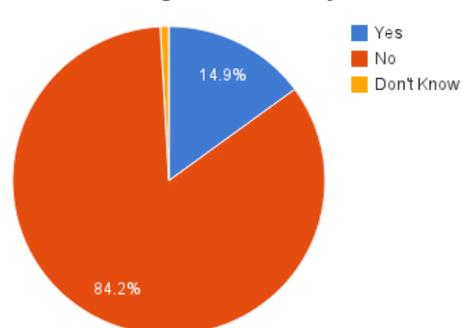
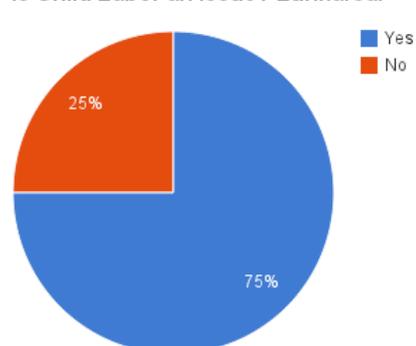
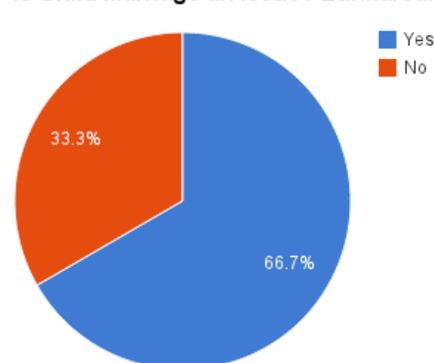
CHILDLINE Recognition: City Total



**Graph 17**

CHILDLINE Understanding: Lunkarsar



**Graph 18****Is Child Labor an Issue? City TOTAL****Is Child Marriage an Issue? City TOTAL****Graph 19****Is Child Labor an Issue? Lunkarsar****Graph 21****Is Child Marriage an Issue? Lunkarsar****Graph 20**

Stories:

1. "A 13 year old girl who was raped by her teacher, she had the courage to call CHILDLINE and they got the teacher suspended, but the head of the panchayat pressured family to compromise and drop charges, saying it will give bad name to the girl" (Rawat, R. Coordinator, personal interview, May 2, 2014).
2. "A 13 year old girl who was raped by an older man and called 1098, CHILDLINE helped the girl register the case with the police and was going to prosecute the man, but unfortunately the girl's father took a bribe from the rapist and didn't allow the girl to identify the man and say 'yes that's the man that raped me' so now the man walks free" (Ram, R, personal interview, May 2, 2014).
3. "Once a twelve year old girl ran away from Jaipur with her ten year old younger brother because their mother died. The father remarried and the step mom beat the children and forced them to work, so the children ran away on a train to Bikaner. The police found the girl and I picked her up the station, to bring her back for counseling. When I called the

father and step mom, they both denied any abuse and said the kids were just naughty. I believed the parents because the girl was a liar with a short temper who threatened to run away whenever the family hit her. So CHILDLINE restored the children to their home and followed up with the family to verify that the children were fine.” (Rawat, N. personal interview, April 19, 2014).

4. “A nine/ten year old boy ran away from home because his father was having an affair so his mother left and then the father neglected the boy. I called the father who said this was false information, the boy was naughty, he ran away after being yelled at for stealing.” (Rawat, N. personal interview, April 19, 2014).
5. “A ten/eleven year old boy who ran away from his village because his mother had sent him to a shop to buy her something, but instead the boy used the money for himself and refused to give her the change, she was furious and scolded and hit the child. So the family let the boy live at the shelter for a few days and see how hard life really is, and then they picked him up and CHILDLINE saw no problems since on their follow up visits.” (Rawat, N. personal interview, April 19, 2014).
6. “On April 19<sup>th</sup> 2014, we went to stop a child marriage but they location was changed and no one was there. Before the intervention, we are required to report it to the police and SubDivisional Magistrate’s office, so we know someone leaked the information” (Focused Group Discussion, CHILDLINE-Bikaner coordinators, April 21, 2014).
7. “Once CHILDLINE went to stop a child marriage, but the family said they were just having a big party because a baby was born and no outsiders were allowed to see the baby” (Focused Group Discussion, CHILDLINE-Bikaner coordinators, Bikaner, April 21, 2014).
8. “We recently got a call about three children whose mother left and dad beat them, so the police went to the house, told the dad to stop, and the children called and said the dad stopped beating them” (Ram, D. personal interview, April 19, 2014).
9. “A women had six children, all were being severely beaten by their alcoholic father, she went to the police but they wouldn’t help saying its just internal matters. Then she got CHILDLINE involved, but the village police still wouldn’t help, the police were annoyed at CHILDLINE for interfering. Luckily, the woman went to Bikaner city and the police there helped, now the husband is in jail.” (Ram, R. personal interview, May 2, 2014).

### ***Technology for Social Change:***

Since this study evaluates a telephone helpline’s effectiveness at reducing child vulnerability and changing societal norms of child mistreatment, it contributes to the larger discussion of technology’s impact on social change. Some scholars argue technology can affect society on a macro and micro level. In Kirkpatrick’s article “Revolutions in military technology, and their consequences,” he details centuries of changes in military technology and how profoundly those changes shifted society’s hierarchy (Kirkpatrick, 2001, p.67). Kakepoto, Kumar, and Ahsan explain how technology has created a global village, empowered women, and helped the economy, “technology is the main source of providing the best social betterment and development” (Kakepoto, Kumar, and Ahsan, 2012, p.2). An example of micro level change is in India where reproductive technologies are saving women from the social stigma of infertilization (Unnithan, 2010, p.8).

As the Internet spread and gained power at the turn of the century, many scholars wrote in fear that it would change society. For example, Ahmed writes about extreme effects of information technology, he fears addiction to computers is limiting human interaction and might

degrade psychological development for children (Ahmed, 2002, p.103). Similarly, Raines and Leather argue telecommuting has the potential to change “child care and educational institutions, revolutionize family relationships, radically alter the wage bargain, shift the distribution of income to the technologically literate, affect marital relations, and foster a social consciousness that is centered in individual independence and freedom” (Raines and Leathers, 2001, p.307). Even today, Dykman and George explain that offshore online tutoring, could completely change America’s demographics and public system (Dykman and George, 2009, p. 58). These scholars explain how technology could change every aspect of society, from the family to the government.

Common contemporary discussions of technology for social change involve social media for political revolutions. Barakovic states “the role of the social media in the protests against absolutist and anti-democratic regimes in the Arab world in 2011 has been indisputably significant” (Barakovic, 2011, p.195). Using Arab countries and Croatia as case studies, Barakovic argues social media has profoundly changed communication patterns and activism. Similarly, Vasiliev explains how TV and the internet showed people in Tunisia and Egypt the possibility of life without political tyranny and Islamic fundamentalism and how the educated youth utilized Facebook and Twitter to overthrow their rulers (Vasiliev, 2011, p.121).

However, some scholars doubt the power of technology in social protests. William Ogburn pioneered this field of study, rejecting technological determinism for social construction of technology and science (Ogburn, 1936, p.3). Today, Fuchs rejects the hype about Twitter’s impact on London riots, stating “Social media determinism is an expression of the digital sublime – the development that ‘cyberspace has become the latest icon of the technological and electronic sublime, praised for its epochal and transcendent characteristics and demonized for the depth of the evil it can conjure’ (Mosco, 2004: 24)” (Fuchs, 2012, p.386). Fuchs and Ogburn argue technology shapes society in complex, unpredictable ways that shouldn’t be overestimated. Technology is embedded in society and therefore they mutually influence each other. This study of CHILDLINE contributes to this discussion, and will analyze the effects of the helpline on society and vice-versa.