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The State Politics of Subjugation and Regulation of Rescued Adolescent Children: Foucault's Biopolitics Revisited

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Abstract

After intensely engaging with adolescent children over a two-year qualitative study for my doctoral thesis, I argue that the agency of working children is severely undermined within the existing child welfare regulations in India. These children, who mostly come from deprived communities, are purely seen as 'exploited victims of trafficking' by the state that believes children's 'best interests' lie in getting restored to their parental homes in underdeveloped villages. However, my study reveals that these rescued children perceive their lives differently. They visualize themselves as rational persons who are constantly and successfully negotiating their agency in an adult-dominated environment in their own interest and that of their families. In sum, the near absence of the children's perspectives or active participation while making or adjudicating child welfare policies renders migrant working children more vulnerable and aggravates their suffering and exploitation. Findings from this research are located within the larger context of the state-controlled child welfare mechanisms using Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics to subjugate and regulate lives of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Keywords: agency, child participation, child welfare, the best interest of children, trafficked children