



# Ryan International murder: Beyond kneejerk reactions, Pradyuman's death must spur a culture of child safety

By: Puja Marwaha / September 20, 2017 / [The Times of India](#)

With time tears will dry up, fear will fade away and Pradyuman's grief stricken parents will be forgotten. But the fact that our children live under constant threat will not change unless we wake up to this truth and take decisive action now. Crime against children is reported every 5 minutes in India and it has increased by more than 500% in the past decade.

What is more disturbing is that crimes like the Ryan International case as well as incidents of corporal punishment, accidental drowning and electrocution resulting out of open live wires take place frequently, not only in schools across rural and urban India but also in crèches, day care centres, private preschools and anganwadis. This is clearly indicative of how child protection in our country has continued to remain severely ignored and compromised.

We as a society have a very myopic and fragmented understanding of child protection. Just consider a couple of examples of how our mitigation measures fall short of the solutions. First, the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE) banned corporal punishment and so did the Juvenile Justice Act. However, fear is still the preferred way of disciplining and surprisingly a large number of teachers as well as parents consider slapping or beating a normal part of disciplining.

And this is a result of not investing enough in educational training, which equips teachers in the skills of positive disciplining. Having a legislation or guidelines will not by itself change the way we see, treat or protect our children. Change has to come with systematic investment in training, building accountabilities and inculcating a culture of zero tolerance to any violence against children.

Secondly, most of the child safety guidelines mandate police verification of staff, which includes verification of residence and criminal records of the person. It is very likely that a large number of



abusers do not have a criminal case filed against them. Also, the residential proof is a mechanism for tracking in case a crime has been committed. It is not inherently preventive in nature. So, apart from police verification, we need to do background checks from previous employers, monitor employees' interaction with children during probation, and make child protection sensitivity a part of their performance appraisal.

Child protection is not just about a plethora of guidelines, each recommending actions to be taken. A comprehensive child protection policy framework should include periodic risk and vulnerability assessment with regard to people, programmes and infrastructure, robust reporting and redressal of complaints, training and empowerment of children, teachers and other stakeholders, and a monitoring system of the state along with self-evaluation of schools.

It has to widen to involve empowering children themselves, establishing clear accountabilities of duty bearers and the community at large, and building a culture of comprehensive holistic child protection. Conceptually, child protection is over and above physical safety and includes all measures taken to protect children from intentional and unintentional harm.

The possibility of harm of any kind can be minimised only if we are able to identify the areas of risk that could manifest as harm. Risks to a child in any setting can arise from people (adults as well as other children), from infrastructure, and from the activities and interactions of children in the surrounding areas. Continuous risk assessment and risk mitigation are at the core of developing a protection system. In reality protection is integrated across processes, making it a way of life rather than standalone processes.

Child protection is not a onetime investment but a recurring one. Just kneejerk reactions or quick fixes for improving school safety would be a terrible disservice to the children of our country. It is not just about having female staff, biometrics and microchips or seeing everyone with an eye of suspicion and mistrust. It is about building a world for children where protection is deeply intertwined in every action, decision and process related to children.

Yes, we need comprehensive guidelines to be implemented by the book. At the same time we need to invest in building accountability and developing zero tolerance to any compromise on protection of children.



Sources: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/toi-edit-page/ryan-international-murder-beyond-kneejerk-reactions-pradyumans-death-must-spur-a-culture-of-child-safety/>