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**EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

# Childcare as Public Infrastructure

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CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator &amp; Content Creator

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# Childcare as Public Infrastructure

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## THE LIFT LINE

A creche is not a perk an employer offers; it is infrastructure a child depends on, and infrastructure without inspection is just a promise waiting to fail.

## WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

The Bengaluru creche abuse case, an FIR registered on June 29, 2026 at HAL Police Station over alleged cruelty to children at a third-party daycare inside a Capgemini campus, exposes a governance vacuum: India has the **statutory** (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/statutory/>) mandate, the schemes and even written standards for childcare, but no single regulator that licenses or inspects private daycares. For the exam this joins child protection, women's workforce participation and the care economy.

**GS Paper 2:** issues relating to the development and management of the social sector, health, education, human resources; welfare schemes for children and their performance; the mechanisms and institutions for the protection of vulnerable sections.

**GS Paper 1:** the role of women; issues relating to society; social empowerment.

For **Prelims**, hold the framework: the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017, the Palna scheme under Mission Shakti (<https://ujyari.com/schemes/mission-shakti/>), the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, and the National Minimum Standards for Creches of January 2024. For **Mains**, argue that regulated childcare is public infrastructure that both protects children and unlocks female labour-force participation.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

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The trigger is a specific incident. On June 29, 2026, an FIR was registered at HAL Police Station in Bengaluru after alleged physical cruelty to children at a creche run by a third-party provider, “Little Scholars”, inside a Capgemini campus in the Whitefield/Brookefield area; the story broke in early July 2026. The caregivers were booked under the **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015**, whose Section 75 penalises cruelty to a child. The alleged acts were physical cruelty and torture, not sexual; the case therefore turns on child-cruelty law, and the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) took suo-motu cognisance.

The deeper issue is structural. India already has the pieces of a childcare system. The **Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017**, effective from July 1, 2017, extended paid maternity leave from 12 to 26 weeks and made a creche mandatory in establishments with 50 or more employees, with mothers allowed four visits a day, but enforcement is weak. The **Palna scheme**, under Mission Shakti’s Samarthya sub-scheme, runs **Anganwadi** (<https://ujjiyari.com/terms/anganwadi/>)-cum-Creches, with roughly 1,761 such centres operational, alongside about 13.9 lakh Anganwadis under the ICDS since 1975. And the **National Minimum Standards for Creches**, released on January 30, 2024 by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, prescribe CCTV, a Creche Administrative Committee, and a ratio of one supervisor and one helper per 25 to 30 children. The gap is that these 2024 standards are advisory, not legally binding, and there is no central licensing or mandatory inspection regime for private daycares.

## THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

### The mandate exists; the machinery does not

India does not lack rules; it lacks a **regulator**. The Maternity Benefit Act mandates creches, the Palna scheme runs them publicly, and the 2024 standards describe what a safe creche looks like, yet no single authority licenses, registers or routinely inspects the private daycares where most working parents actually place their children. That is exactly the void the Bengaluru case fell into: a third-party provider on a corporate campus, accountable to no dedicated childcare inspectorate.

### Childcare is infrastructure, not a benefit

Treating creches as an optional HR benefit produces exactly this fragility. Treated instead as **public infrastructure**, childcare would carry the same expectations as any regulated essential service: licensing, mandatory CCTV, published service standards, staff background checks, a functioning grievance and audit trail, and accountability when it fails.

THE SYSTEM INDIA ALREADY HAS	THE MISSING ENFORCEMENT LAYER
Maternity Benefit Act 2017: creche at 50+ employees	Weak enforcement, no penalty regime
Palna scheme, ~1,761 Anganwadi-cum-Creches	Limited reach vs private demand
National Minimum Standards for Creches (Jan 2024)	Advisory only, not legally binding
JJ Act 2015 Section 75 (cruelty to a child)	Acts after harm, not before
ICDS, ~13.9 lakh Anganwadis	No licensing/inspection of private daycares

## The link to women at work is direct

The stakes are not only the children's. India's female labour-force participation rate has risen to 41.7 per cent (PLFS 2023-24) from 23.3 per cent in 2017-18, and reliable, safe childcare is a **precondition** (<https://ujiyari.com/vocab/precondition/>) for that rise to continue. When care is unsafe or unavailable, women exit paid work first. Regulated childcare is therefore both a **child-protection** measure and a **workforce-participation** measure. (Note that this is the childcare-safety and regulation angle tied to a specific incident, distinct from a broader care-economy argument.) POCSO and the wider child-protection architecture form the backdrop, but the reform this case demands is a licensing-and-inspection regime for daycare.

## HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

Use the **de jure-versus-de facto** gap. A right or standard on paper (de jure) means little without the machinery to make it real (de facto). India's childcare provisions are strong de jure and thin de facto because the enforcement layer, licensing and inspection, is missing. The general rule: when harm recurs despite existing rules, look for the absent enforcement institution rather than assuming the rules are wrong. The fix is rarely a new law; it is the regulator, the inspection cadre and the accountability chain that turn a written standard into a lived one.

## THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Maternity Benefit Act mandate + Palna scheme + National Minimum Standards (2024) [strong on paper] -> BUT no licensing, no mandatory inspection, standards only advisory -> private daycare in a regulatory blind spot -> Bengaluru creche cruelty case (FIR 29 Jun 2026, JJ Act s.75) -> fix: treat childcare as public infrastructure with licensing + CCTV + background checks + audits + accountability -> children protected and women's workforce participation enabled

## WAY FORWARD

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- 1 Create a licensing and inspection regime.** Require every daycare, public or private, to be registered, licensed and routinely inspected by a designated authority.
- 2 Make the 2024 standards binding.** Convert the National Minimum Standards for Creches from advisory to enforceable, with CCTV, staff background checks and the prescribed staffing ratios mandatory.
- 3 Build accountability into the chain.** Mandate (<https://ujivari.com/vocab/mandate/>) grievance mechanisms, audits and clear liability for operators and the establishments that host them.
- 4 Fund and expand public provision.** Scale Palna Anganwadi-cum-Creches so safe, affordable care exists at the demand level, supporting women's labour-force participation.

## PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

UPSC has asked about the care economy, women's workforce participation, and child-protection mechanisms and their effectiveness. This editorial ties those to a concrete regulatory failure.

**Practice question:** "India has the statutory mandate for childcare but not the machinery to make it safe." Examine, with reference to the regulation of daycare, how treating childcare as public infrastructure can protect children and enable women's employment. (250 words, 15 marks)

Sources: *The Indian Express* (<https://indianexpress.com/section/opinion/>)

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## Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator &amp; Content Creator

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)[Read Full Article on Ujiyari →](#)<https://ujiyari.com/editorials/2026/07/ie-childcare-public-infrastructure-2026/>

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