



## Mission Vatsalya and the Changing Architecture of Child Protection in India

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### Abstract

The subsuming of the Integrated Child Protection Scheme into Mission Vatsalya (MV) further accelerated the policy shift from institutional care towards family strengthening, prevention, convergence, and community participation in India. While contemporary scholarly focus is largely on implementation challenges, juvenile justice, or institutional care, the way MV redefines the institutional practice of child protection by reorganising the relationship among children, family, state, and experts remains underexplored. This paper examines the way MV conceptualises childhood, family responsibility and protection, and, in doing so, it analyses the way these understandings become institutionalised within India's child protection framework. The paper is based on a qualitative textual analysis of MS policy documents, operational guidelines, and child protection legislation and uses a governmentality lens. It argues that MV institutionalises family-based, expert-led, and risk-oriented approaches to protection through mechanisms of assessment, case management, and convergence. While this framework expands preventive and rights-based care, it undervalues culturally diverse caring practices and the structural conditions shaping childhood vulnerability, including caste, indigeneity, migration, labour, and social exclusion. This paper reconceptualises child protection as a mode of governance that redistributes care responsibility across families, expertise, state and community by underplaying the structural production of vulnerability in postcolonial India.

**Keywords:** Mission Vatsalya, Child protection, Childhood studies, Childhood, Family-based care, Governmentality, India