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## **INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF CHILDREN AND THEIR PSYCHOSOCIAL PROBLEMS**

**Anjali U S**, Full time Ph.D Scholar(UGC-JRF),  
Department of Research (M.Phil&Ph.D) in Social Work,  
Madras School of Social Work, Chennai- 08

**Dr.K.Sathyamurthi**, Ph.D, Controller of Examinations  
Madras School of Social Work, Chennai- 08

### **Abstract**

Children are the future of our world. Society plays an important role in moulding children's future, especially for those who are in institutions. In 2015, UNICEF classified 140 million children as orphans. According to report on care home survey 2013-14, 2260 child care institutions are working in Kerala to provide care and protection for 29666 children. The present study intended to understand the issues faced by children of child care institutions. In-depth interview method is used to collect data from 4 staffs of a particular institution running under Government of Kerala. The study focuses on psychosocial issues of children in institution and suggests action points for the better functioning of such institutions.

**Keywords:**Institutionalization, children, psychosocial problems, orphanages,  
Institutionalized children

### **Introduction**

Children in Institutions fall under different category including orphans, neglected child, and abused child and so on. Institutionalization has become a solution for all sorts of problems such as poverty, disability, social exclusion, lackof services in the community, parents'inability to reconcile family and work,neglect and abuse. It gradually became the responsibility of state where the state publically encourages parents to place their children in institutions since they are in difficult situation to care

for their children. How the institutional culture affects children's psychological functioning is an important aspect to be considered. There are surveys and studies which reveals the physical conditions of child care institutions.

Children placed in an institution who has been separated from their parents leaves a deep mark on their development and may affect them up to adulthood. In addition, Children is been manifesting several adverse impact due to institutionalization. Institutions' seclusion from the community, their organization and their often inadequately trained staff mean that many of the children's basic needs are not satisfied. Many children who have grown up in isolated institutions have difficulty in becoming integrated members of society in adulthood, and this may result in their continuing to live in institutions as adults.

### **Literature Review**

One randomized clinical trial, the Bucharest Early Intervention Project (BEIP), has been conducted in which children in institutional care in Romania were comprehensively assessed and then randomly assigned to continued institutional care or to quality foster care (Zeanah et al., 2003). The BEIP is especially important because randomized design allows causal inferences about the role of continued institutional care on children's functioning. In fact, the children placed in foster care performed better than the children with continued institutional care on almost every measure, thus supporting the conclusions reached in correlational studies regarding the power of foster and adoptive care in remediating the effects of institutional care. The findings of the randomized clinical trial, combined with findings from correlational studies of institutional care, underscore the importance of reducing reliance on institutional care.

From the study of van IJzendoorn, Schuengel, and Bakerman-Kranenburg's meta-analysis (1999) among children who have never been institutionalized, it was found that the majority (62%) develop secure attachments to their caregivers, with a minority (about 24%) of children developing insecure attachments, and a smaller proportion (about 15%) developing disorganized attachments to caregivers. Disorganized

attachment is most indicative of risk (Fearon, Bakermans-Kranenburg, van IJzendoorn, Lapsley, & Roisman, 2010) and is characterized by odd behaviors that appear to reflect a breakdown in strategy to obtain proximity. Among children who are institutionalized, disorganized attachments and other aberrant forms of attachment quality (i.e., disorganized, unclassifiable, and insecure other) predominate (Smyke, Zeanah, Fox, Nelson, & Guthrie, 2010; Vorria, Rutter, Pickles, Wolkind, & Hobsbaum, 1998; Vorria et al., 2006; Zeanah et al., 2005). For example, Zeanah et al. (2005) found that only 22% of institutionalized children were classified as having organized attachments (secure or insecure), whereas 65% were classified as having disorganized attachments and 13% were unclassifiable.

### **Research Methodology**

The main objective of the study is to understand psychosocial issues of children nurtured in institutions and to suggest social work implication for better functioning. It employs a qualitative study in which in-depth interview method is used for data collection. Purposive sampling was used in the study. Four staffs from an institution in Trivandrum which is functioning under Social Justice Department of Govt. of Kerala were taken as sample for the study.

### **Results and Discussion**

The strength of the institution at the time of data collection was 210 consists of 154 girls and 56 boys. There were only four caretakers for 210 residents. Here the resident-caretaker ratio is 53:1. From the information given by a staff, it was found that all the caretakers and majority of the staffs are working on daily wages and contract basis. Staffs might change accordingly to their convenience. So, the attachment between the caretaker and residents seemed to be very less. Due to the change in staff and lesser number of caretakers in the institution, children are not able to build up an emotional attachment with their caregiver. Earlier research studies found that children who have never been institutionalized are more securely attached with their caregivers (van IJzendoorn MH, 1999) and majority of children being in institution develops

disorganized attachment to the caregiver (Zeanah CH, 2005). Staffs in the institution claims that such institutions are not profitable for government rather it is expensive for them to run. So, government is not taking any action to appoint permanent staffs, who plays very important role in child care. Since there is less attachment with the caregiver, children used to share their emotions among themselves. Emotional support for their own problems was given by their co-residents. To a certain extent, it is not a good practice. Proper suggestion or help might not be received for their problems as they rely on other children having similar or worse issues than theirs. Appropriate regular guidance on time and emotional support as received for children living in homes was not experienced by children in institutions. There are studies which show that parent's or teacher's emotional support to children promotes their working memory and executive functioning (Vandenbroucke, L, Spilt, J., Verschueren, K, & Baeyens, D, 2017)

Emotional and Behavioral aspects of children in institutions were figured out from the information given by staffs. It was found that those children have courage to do anything as they have a mindset that no one is there to question them for their mistakes. Since they are in institutions parental fear is not there as it is with those children living in homes. It made them disobedient and arrogant. Defensive behavior because of the feeling of abandonment reflects in their personality. Emotional competence of institutionalized adolescents is moderate which reflects their lesser ability to know and understand one's feelings and emotions, to identify its reasons and to manage disruptive emotions effectively. It is one's ability to successfully lead and express. (Anjali & Sathyamurthi, 2018) Due to the prevailing legislations favoring child rights, the staffs are not able to punish the residents for their mistakes. Staffs have the fear that even scolding towards the children for their mischief was considered as violation of child rights.

### **Suggestions**

According to Sanjay Battacharya, the prime function of social work is to give assistance to individuals in regard to the difficulties that they face in their life situations.

Here, the changes in an organizational structure or minor changes in the organizational function can bring a lot of changes in lives of institutionalized children.

- Appointing at least 2 social workers in Institution is found to be essential. Because rapport between the social worker and children in institutions and professional approach of social worker could make differences in the behavior of children.
- Make a report and address the issue of caretaker – resident ratio by highlighting the consequences reflecting in children's emotional and behavioral patterns.
- Social case work and social group work intervention among children will help them to solve their issues which they encounter in their life and it will make them capable to handle their problems by themselves in future too.
- Proper rehabilitation of children after resolving their emotional disturbances can make change in their attitude and perception towards life.

### **Conclusion**

Institutionalization is earlier considered as a boon for children who do not have any one to take care of. But in the other hand, it has its own consequences which reflect in the personality development of those children. The study tried to understand the psychosocial issues of children in an institution which adversely affect their psychosocial competence and further development in future. It enables to understand the issues such as lack of attachment, emotional support, and decreased number in caretaker-resident ration and so on. The action points explained in the study could bring out certain changes in the institution and it would be helpful for those children in institution.

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