

## **A study on the perception of institutionalized children about the institutional environment**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Present study was conducted on 50 girl children of children homes (Department of Women Development and Child Welfare) at Yousufguda, Telangana. The objective was to know the perception of institutionalized children on institutional environment. It was found that most of them (62%) had been living in the institution from 3.1 to 6 years. No child had any health problem. For 64 per cent children the treatment in the institute was permissive. All had adequate supply of food and materials. Majority (72%) of the children liked their peer group and most (58%) of the children had only few best friends. All of them had adequate personal hygiene. All reported that they rarely used to go for picnics or on tours. The interaction between children and caregivers was perceived as good by 58 per cent of the children and only 38 per cent reported that caretakers frequently listened to their personal and health problems. All the children had monthly health check-ups. Majority of the children (88%) perceived that the facilities in the institution required improvement to a greater extent. For majority (54%) children life in the institution was sometimes good.

**Keywords:** Institution; institutionalized children; environment; perception; orphan

### **INTRODUCTION**

An institution or residential care home for children is defined as a group of more than ten children living without parents under the care and supervision of paid caregivers (Browne 2009). Globally it is estimated that there are approximately 153 million children who have lost a parent; 17.8 million of them have lost both parents (<https://acresoflove.org/the-situation/orphan-crisis/>). UNICEF estimates that at least 2.7 million children in the world live in orphanages (<https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/children-alternative-care/>).

This number is considered by many to be a significant underestimate given that many orphanages around the world are unregistered and the children living within them are not officially counted. Depending on the region, upwards of 50-90 per cent of children living in orphanages have at least one living parent and most children have a family network that could care for them, given the right support (Browne 2017).

The child care institutions are responsible to address all the needs like physical, emotional, psychological, social and moral needs of children in their wholesome development. Features of institutional care like low staff to child ratios/interaction, low levels of staff experience and autonomy, strict routines, poor provision of books and play equipment, children's lack of personal possessions and individuality do not adequately provide the level of positive individual attention from consistent caregivers which is essential for the successful emotional, physical, mental and social development of children.

In our society most of the children are being discriminated and abandoned. The basic nature of the children is that they need to be nurtured with lots of love, affection, care, security, guidance and assurance. These needs can be fulfilled only in a congenial family environment. All these needs are essential for the sound personality development of children. Orphan children staying in the children's home are deprived of family environment as institutions cannot be the

substitute for home environment. Hence it is very essential to study the influence of institutional environment on the development of orphan children.

Sharma (2020) while studying the perception of children towards the institutional environment of Balgrih found that 18.64 per cent children had good, 66.10 per cent had average and 15.25 per cent had below average level of perception towards the institutional environment. Kayal (2015) while studying two orphanages and two schools run by government in Chandigarh revealed resilience among orphans and non-orphans aged 12-18 years. The major reason for living in orphanage was death of parents closely followed by financial problems of single parenthood. There was significant difference in resilience of orphans and non-orphan children; the orphan children having higher resilience than non-orphaned ones.

Hadush (2015) analyzed the level of depression and self-esteem among institutionalized and non-institutionalized orphans. The study found that there was a significant difference between institutionalized and non-institutionalized children in their level of depression. Institutionalized orphan children had higher score on depression scale than non-institutionalized children.

On the other hand, non-institutionalized children obtained higher score on self-esteem scale than their counterparts. Age of respondents had a significant impact on variation of depression level. Orphan children between 10-14 years of age scored higher on depression scale than children who were between 15-18 years. There was also statistically significant interaction effect of age and living arrangement of children on their depression level. Further non-institutionalized children of 10-14 years were more depressed than children between 15-18 years. Orphan children of 15-18 years scored higher on self-esteem scale than children of 10-14 years.

Irshad (2015) found that the orphans residing in different orphanages were entirely dependent on orphanages resources. The material dependence was fulfilled in orphanages but the psychological dependence was a big lacuna. Nyamukapa et al (2009) found that the orphans were found to suffer greater psychological distress than non-orphans. Effects of orphanhood contributing to their increased levels of distress included trauma, being out-of-school, being

cared for by a non-parent, inadequate care, child labour, physical abuse and stigma and discrimination. Increased mobility and separation from siblings did not contribute to greater psychological distress. Over 40 per cent of orphaned children lived in households receiving external assistance. However receipt of assistance was not associated with reduced psychological distress.

## METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted on 50 girl children in the age range of 6-12 years with minimum one year duration of institutionalization. Respondents purposively selected were the inmates of government run orphanage called children homes (Department of Women Development and Child Welfare) at Yousufguda, Telangana.

A list of children within the age range of six to twelve years who were attending primary schools (I to V standard) was prepared with the help of admission register which included their date of birth and date of admission. Finally the sample was selected sequentially from the list to get the required number of respondents. Ex-post facto research design was used in the present investigations. The data from the respondents were collected through pre-tested interview schedule.

## RESULTS and DISCUSSION

### General profile of children

The personal information of the institutionalized children is given in Table 1. The results show that the distribution of children according to age was unequal. Forty per cent of the children were in the age group of 6-8 years, 34 per cent in the age group of 9-11 years and 26 per cent were 12 years old. According to their class of study 56 per cent were in III and IV standards, 32 per cent in I and II standards and 12 per cent were in V standard. Most of them (62%) had been living in the institution from 3.1 to 6 years and 38 per cent from 1 to 3 years. With respect to health, no child had any health problem. Most of the children (76%) were orphans followed by semi-orphans (14%) and remaining were abandoned (6%) and poor (4%).

About three-fourth of the children (66%) were admitted in the institution by Sisuvihar (Women Development and Child Welfare); some (18%) were admitted by their parents. On the other hand 14 per cent were admitted by guardians and 2 per cent by the child welfare committee.

Table 1. General profile of the respondent children

Component	Category/class	Frequency	(%)
Age (years)	6 - 8	20	40
	9 - 11	17	34
	12	13	26
Education level (standard)	I - II	16	32
	III - IV	28	56
	V	6	12
Duration of stay (years)	1-3	19	38
	>3.1 -6	31	62
Health status	With health problems	-	-
	Without health problems	50	100
Reason for seeking protection	Orphan	38	76
	Semi-orphan	7	14
	Abandoned	3	6
	Poor	2	4
Child admitted by	Parent	9	18
	Guardian	7	14
	Child welfare committee	1	2
	Sisuvihar WD and CW	33	66
Educational aspiration of the child	Primary education	-	-
	Secondary education	-	-
	Higher education	50	100

With respect to educational aspiration, all the children were aspiring for higher education.

### Perception of children about institutional environment

Data given in Table 2 reveal the perception of the children about their institution. It was observed that background information of only 16 per cent the children living in the institution was known and of 84 per cent was not available. For 64 per cent children the treatment in the institute was permissive, for 26 per cent it was authoritative and for 10 per cent it was authoritarian. All the children reported that they had adequate supply of food and materials to maintain personal hygiene.

Majority (72%) of the children liked their peer group, 20 per cent liked it to some extent and 8 per cent did not like it. Most (58%) of the children had only few best friends, 34 per cent had many and 8 per cent had no best friends. All of them had adequate personal hygiene. All reported that they rarely used to go for picnics or on tours. The interaction between children and caregiver was perceived as good by 58 per cent of the children, average by 36 per cent whereas horrible by 6 per cent.

Only 38 per cent children reported that caretakers frequently listened to their personal and health problems whereas 54 per cent listened sometimes and 8 per cent never. It was found that all the children had monthly health check-ups. Majority of the children (88%) perceived that the facilities in the institution required improvement to a greater extent, 10 per cent felt that facilities should be added to some extent and 2 per cent of them were satisfied with the present facilities. For 54 per cent children life in institution was sometimes good, for 40 per cent it was always good and for 6 per cent it was not good.

### CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the study that all the children in the children home at Yousufguda, Telangana were free from health problems. Interestingly all of them aspired for higher studies. For majority of them the treatment in the institution was permissive and sufficient food was also available for them. The children liked to have peer groups. They also had adequate personal hygiene. All of them had monthly health check up. However there was need to take the children on picnics/exposure visits for their personality development. There was also need for the caretakers

Table 2. Perception of respondent children about institutional environment

Component	Category	frequency	(%)
Family background of the child	Available	8	16
	Not available	42	84
Treatment of child in institution	Permissive	32	64
	Authoritative	13	26
	Authoritarian	5	10
Food sufficiency	Adequate	50	100
	Moderately adequate	-	-
	Inadequate	-	-
Child liking for peer group	Likes a lot	36	72
	Likes to some extent	10	20
	Does not like	4	8
Child having best friend	Many	17	34
	Few	29	58
	None	4	8
Material sufficiency to maintain	Adequate personal hygiene	50	100
	Moderate personal hygiene	-	-
	Inadequate personal hygiene	-	-
Picnic/tour facility in institution	Frequent	-	-
	Sometimes	-	-
	Rare	50	100
	Never	-	-
Caretaker's interaction with the child	Good	29	58
	Bad	3	6
	Average	18	36
	Neutral	-	-
Caretaker's interest to listen personal and health problems of the child	Frequent	19	38
	Sometimes	27	54
	Always	0	-
	Never	4	8
Health checkup	Weekly	-	-
	Monthly	50	100
	Once in a year	-	-
Improvement required in institutional facilities	To large extent	44	88
	To some extent	5	10
	Not required	1	2
Life in institution	Always good	20	40
	Sometimes	27	54
	Never	3	6

to listen to the problems of the children with interest to gain their confidence. The life in the institution could be made better with some efforts. The implications of the study can be helpful in improving the overall environment of the institution.

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