



INSTITUTIONAL CARE FOR CHILDREN WITH REFERENCE TO SELECTED CHILDREN'S HOME IN CHENNAI CITY: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

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Abstract: Children's homes serve as crucial institutions tasked with providing care, support, and a nurturing environment for children who, for various reasons, were unable to reside with their biological families. Understanding the sociological dynamics within these settings is imperative for designing and implementing effective policies and interventions aimed at improving the overall well-being and life trajectories of the children under their care. A children's home is a physical space where children reside. These facilities vary widely in size, layout, and amenities, ranging from small group homes to large residential complexes. Ideally, they should be designed to accommodate the needs of diverse age groups and ensure safety, comfort, and privacy for each resident. The study has focused on the Social, Psychological, emotional and health statuses of the children from selected Children's home in Chennai city. A holistic observation was made upon the inmates to study their wellbeing. 200 respondents were chosen by using purposive sampling method. The objectives opted for study were Socio-economic, psychological and health related conditions of children of Children's homes. A theoretical application was also made for ensuring the credibility of research. Children's livelihood patterns were examined through institutional care in this study.

Key Words: Children, Children's home, Institutional care, Social status, Economy, health.

1 Introduction

There are many children in the world who are poor, uneducated and unhealthy. About 40% of the world's population comprises children. In the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, there were many children who are starving due to lack of proper food. We find them begging in the streets. They are employed in factories, hotels, restaurants and houses. They are not given proper wages for their works. Such exploitation causes them to become pocket pickers, gamblers, thieves, robbers and criminals when they grow up. Children constitute the most potential human resources of the nation; they represent its development and future. The present status of children in any society is in fact an indication of its direction and destination. If children have a full opportunity for learning, growth, and development of their personality and potential in all dimensions, the society will definitely advance into a higher stage of development. Without developmental conditions, their social and psychological growth will be seriously constrained, and it eventually results in the retardation of the growth of the society as a whole.

Children who live in orphanage unfortunately suffer from malnutrition and environmental deprivation of varying degrees. Children with this deficiency were at risk for suffering from severe anemia and developmental delays. Orphan children do not receive proper physical and emotional care because they were

unaccompanied, displaced, and lacking family support. If this phenomenon is continued unchecked, it still highly affects the country's development. Solutions of this problem have different dimensions. The welfare of children is the concern and responsibility of all. Orphans suffer more vulnerability than non-orphans in terms of education. The children who have become orphans lose emotional and financial support. They must often work to cover essential needs of themselves (Grassley et.al, 2004).

2. Dimensions of Children's Home

2.1 Physical Dimension

At its core, a children's home is a physical space where children reside. These facilities vary widely in size, layout, and amenities, ranging from small group homes to large residential complexes. Ideally, they should be designed to accommodate the needs of diverse age groups and ensure safety, comfort, and privacy for each resident. Adequate infrastructure, including bedrooms, common areas, recreational spaces, and educational facilities, is essential for creating a conducive environment for growth and development (Sloutsky, V. M:1997).

2.2 Social Dimension

Children's homes serve as microcosms of society, where residents interact with peers, caregivers, and community members. Socialization is vital for developing interpersonal skills, empathy, and a sense of belonging. Creating opportunities for group activities, outings, and community engagement fosters social integration and helps children build meaningful relationships outside the confines of the home. Additionally, promoting inclusivity and celebrating diversity cultivates a sense of acceptance and respect among residents.

2.3 Psychological Dimension

Many children entering homes have experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), such as abuse, neglect, or separation from their families. Addressing their psychological needs is paramount for promoting resilience and emotional stability. Psychological support services, including counselling, therapy, and trauma-informed care, were integral components of children's homes. By providing a safe space to process emotions, learn coping mechanisms, and build self-esteem, these services empower children to overcome past traumas and thrive.

2.4 Educational Dimension

Education is a cornerstone of children's development, offering pathways to future success and empowerment. Children's homes should prioritize access to quality education, ensuring that residents receive academic support and enrichment opportunities. Collaborating with schools, tutors, and educational specialists helps address individual learning needs and maximize educational outcomes. Moreover, instilling a love for learning and fostering a growth mindset empowers children to pursue their aspirations and realize their full potential.

2.5 Cultural and Spiritual Dimension

Acknowledging and honoring the cultural and spiritual backgrounds of children is essential for promoting identity formation and a sense of belonging. Children's homes should embrace diversity and provide opportunities for cultural enrichment, including celebrations, traditions, and exposure to different belief systems. Creating a supportive environment where children can explore their heritage and spirituality fosters a sense of pride and connection to their roots.

3. The Health-Related Problems of Children

3.1. Malnutrition: One of the primary concerns among children in children's homes is malnutrition. Insufficient access to nutritious food and inadequate dietary supervision can lead to malnutrition, affecting the child's growth and development. Malnutrition not only impacts physical health but also compromises immune function, making children more susceptible to infections and illnesses.

3.2. Infectious Diseases: Children in residential care settings were often at a higher risk of contracting infectious diseases due to close living quarters and limited access to healthcare services. Common infections include respiratory infections, gastrointestinal illnesses, and skin conditions. Poor hygiene practices and

overcrowding exacerbate the spread of infectious diseases among children in children's homes (Browne, 2006).

3.3. Dental Health Issues: Dental problems were prevalent among children in residential care, primarily due to inadequate oral hygiene practices and limited access to dental care services. Untreated dental issues such as cavities, gum disease, and tooth decay can cause pain, discomfort, and long-term complications if left unaddressed.

3.4. Mental Health Impact: While not immediately visible, mental health issues profoundly affect a child's physical well-being. Children in children's homes often experience trauma, neglect, or abuse, leading to psychological distress and emotional instability. Chronic stress and anxiety can manifest as physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach-aches, and fatigue, further exacerbating overall health.

4. Problems of Children in Children's home

Children living in children's homes experience a multitude of health-related changes compared to those in traditional family settings. These changes were influenced by various factors including the quality of care, access to health-care, nutrition, emotional support, and environmental factors. Understanding these changes and their implications is crucial for providing effective support and intervention for these vulnerable populations.

4.1 Emotional and Psychological Well-being

Children in children's homes often face disruptions in familial relationships and adjustments to new living environments, which can impact their emotional and psychological well-being. The absence of stable caregivers and consistent emotional support may lead to higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among these children. Additionally, the lack of nurturing relationships and a sense of belonging can contribute to feelings of loneliness and low self-esteem. Addressing these emotional challenges requires providing children with access to counselling services, supportive caregivers, and opportunities to develop positive relationships with peers and adults (Petrowski et.al 2021).

4.2 Social Development

Social development is another important aspect of a child's overall well-being that may be impacted by living in a children's home. These children may have limited opportunities for social interaction and may struggle to form positive relationships with peers and adults. Building social skills, such as communication, empathy, and cooperation, may require additional support and encouragement from caregivers and educators. Providing opportunities for group activities, community involvement, and mentorship can help foster healthy social development and a sense of belonging among children in children's homes.

4.3 Behavioral Changes

Disruptions in family life and changes in living arrangements can contribute to behavioral issues among children living in children's homes. These children may exhibit challenging behaviour such as aggression, defiance, and withdrawal as a result of their experiences. Consistent discipline, positive reinforcement, and access to behavioral health services were essential for addressing these behavioral challenges and promoting positive behaviour. Creating a supportive and structured environment that emphasizes empathy, communication, and conflict resolution skills can help mitigate behavioral issues and promote healthy adjustment.

4.4 Physical Activity and Recreation

Children in children's homes may have limited access to recreational activities and opportunities for physical exercise compared to those in traditional family settings. Adequate physical activity is essential for promoting physical fitness, motor skills development, and overall well-being. Providing access to sports programs, outdoor activities, and recreational facilities can help children in children's homes engage in active play and maintain a healthy lifestyle. Moreover, participation in recreational activities fosters social interaction, teamwork, and self-confidence, which were important components of holistic development.

5. Review of Literature

Saptaparni Majumdar and Rupaali Andaluri (2023) in their article stated that Child Care Institutions (CCI's) in India were establishments that provide care and support to children who were without parents or were unable to live with their families due to various reasons and children who were either in conflict with the law or were in need of care and protection from the state. These institutions' principal objective is to provide these children a caring, safe atmosphere where they may receive education, medical care, and emotional support. In order to guarantee that these institutions were better suited to care for vulnerable children, this review article will conduct a critical analysis of how child care institutions in India operate, as well as the difficulties they encounter and the changes that may be made. This study also aims to provide suggestions on how to improve the workings of child care institutions in India.

Sonam Rohta (2021) has examined and mentioned that A large number of children in India were exposed to vulnerabilities and difficult circumstances for the sake of their survival. A total of 1.8 lakh children were residing in child care institutions in India as their parents were found incapable to fulfil their basic necessities like food, shelter and clothing (Jena Committee Report, 2017). In low-income countries, a very little is known about the care givers who work in child care institutions and play a significant role in the lives of institutionalised children. The study aims to unravel the role of the institutional care system through in-depth semi structured interviews with 20 caregivers working in four different child care institutions in two regions of Northern India. The present study found out that due to poverty, lack of access to education and other basic necessities, children in care have better opportunities for their future than living with their biological parents. The study also highlights the financial issues and the problems faced by children with disabilities living in care institutions. Therefore, the findings of the study focus on the significance of the institutional care system in the lives of vulnerable children in India.

Diwakar Kumar et. al., (2021) have observed and estimated that there were around 140 million children were orphans worldwide. These children suffer from physical neglect, poor hygiene, and a lack of nutrition, which result in various health problems among children. They were more prone to malnutrition, respiratory tract infection, skin diseases, and dental caries. A cross-sectional study was conducted at Kanyana residential ashrams or orphanages. The data were collected using pretested semi-structured questionnaire which includes sociodemographic profile, personal hygiene, anthropometric measurement, clinical examination, and investigation. Body mass index and anemia were classified as per the WHO criteria. Data were analyzed using appropriate statistical software. The study showed that the maximum children had skin disease and dental caries because of poor personal hygiene. Even the prevalence of anemia among children was slightly lower than the national data.

Irfan Ahmad Hajam (2023) has explored the effective strategies and practices that can foster social adaptation and resilience in children residing in Care institutions. The review analyzes three main aspects of the Care institutions: enrichment activities, programs and practices, and care giving relationship. The findings suggest that enrichment activities can enhance the children's social and emotional competence, socialization and identity formation, life skills and purpose, teamwork and communication, and cultural relevance and expression. The programs and practices can facilitate the children's rites of passage and mental strength, socio-emotional behaviour and resilience, life skills and adjustment, participatory socialization and inclusion, and educational space and family values. The care giving relationship can influence the care givers' mental health and well-being, and their training and education. The review concludes that the care institutions can play a vital role in promoting social adaptation and resilience in institutionalized children, and provides recommendations for future research and practice.

Pinaz Parbeen Hazarika (2021) has found that Orphan and vulnerable children were one of the most fragile sections of society. These sections of society were greatly in need of care and protection. In every country of the world children were sent to children's home or other types of child care institution for various reasons. Every child's circumstance and cause were different which force them to admit in child care institution. The major problems faced by the children were like poverty, orphan, broken family, child trafficking, child abuse, child labor etc which force them to admit in child care institution. Children in institutional care refer to care, protection and social reintegration of children in institutional settings where care and guidance were provided under the juvenile justice act. 2015.

Jayaraj K.P (2025) in his article an attempt was made to review the available literature on the genesis of 'street children' in India. It synthesises the key research findings and examines the frameworks followed by empirical studies to understand the prevalence and origin of this cohort. This review, based on academic as well as grey literature generated by civil society organisations in the country, reveals that research studies and reports generally adhere to the popular definition proposed by UNICEF in the 1980s to define a 'street child', even in the contemporary era. Therefore, this approach disregards the diverse and distinct experiences of 'street children' and their agency in constructing their everyday lives. The article further explores how the quantitative methodology adopted by the studies limits the exploration of complex social realities, especially in unveiling the underlying structural factors of this phenomenon. Based on the review and analysis, the article argues for the necessity of conducting qualitative research studies by utilising the concept of children in street situations and adopting a framework of structural analysis that considers the interface of institutions as well as the interactions of human actors to provide context-specific explanations.

Uyiosa Osarumen Ugiagbe (2024) has examined the influence of Orphanage homes on the Social and Cognitive Development of Children in STEM Education. Three research question were raised to guide the study, while one was hypothesized. A sample of 100 Orphanage home children were purposively selected from 4 Orphanage Homes in the south-south region of Nigeria. The mean and standard deviation were employed for data analysis, and the findings of this study reveal that the orphanage homes influence the cognitive skills development of the child to a high degree. Most difficulties encountered by children in orphanage homes are restricted movement, lack of inadequate workers, clothing, freedom of choice, parental care, feeding, accommodation, and poor educational background. However, financial problem, child abuse, isolation from the society, child slavery, low self-esteem, emotional trauma, and discrimination were rated as the least difficulties encountered. It was found that there's no significant difference in the Social and Cognitive skills development of children in the orphanage home in terms of sex.

6. Statement of the Problem

In contemporary society, the well-being and development of children hold paramount importance, reflecting the values and priorities of any civilized community. However, diverse family structures and social circumstances, some children find themselves residing in children's homes or institutional care settings. These environments, intended to provide a safe haven for children who cannot be cared for by their biological families, vary widely in their structures, practices, and outcomes. While children's homes aim to offer stability, support, and opportunities for growth, they also present unique challenges and complexities that necessitate careful examination.

The overarching problem addressed by this research is the intricate social dynamics within children's homes and their impact on the holistic development and well-being of the children residing therein. One of the primary facets of this problem revolves around the interpersonal relationships within children's homes. These relationships, forged a backdrop of diversity in backgrounds, experiences, and personalities, play a pivotal role in shaping the social climate within these environments. Understanding the dynamics of peer interactions, friendships, conflicts, and social hierarchy sheds light on the socio-emotional development of children and their sense of belonging within the institutional community. Moreover, the quality of relationships between children and caregivers significantly impacts the level of care, support, and guidance available to the children, thereby influencing their overall well-being and adjustment. Another dimension of the problem pertains to the institutional practices, policies, and organizational culture prevalent within children's homes. These elements, often shaped by regulatory frameworks, funding constraints, and organizational philosophies, exert a profound influence on the daily lives of children and the efficacy of care provision. Examining the implementation of policies, the enforcement of rules, and the availability of resources within children's homes elucidates the extent to which these institutions prioritize the needs and rights of the children under their care. Additionally, exploring the organizational culture, leadership dynamics, and staff morale provides insights into the overall functioning of children's homes and their capacity to foster a nurturing and supportive environment.

7. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to shed light on the intricate social dynamics within children's homes and its implications for the well-being and development of the children residing therein. This

study is significant in its capacity to enhance professional practices and capacity-building initiatives within children's homes. By illuminating best practices, identifying areas for improvement, and offering recommendations for enhancement, this research can empower caregivers, administrators, and other stakeholders to optimize their roles in supporting the holistic development of children. Training programs, professional development initiatives, and peer-learning networks may benefit from the insights generated by this study, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and innovation within the field of child welfare.

8. Objectives of the Study

1. To study the Socio-economic background of children of selected children's home.
3. To analyse the socio-psychological and health statuses of children from selected Children's home in study area.
4. To assess the problems faced by inmates and Provisions of Institutional Care in children's homes.

9. Research Design

Descriptive research design is a methodology where a researcher is solely interested in describing a situation or case under his and her research study. It is a theory-based research design which is created to analyse and to present the data by the researcher. It describes the institutional care and livelihood pattern of children chosen from selected children's homes in Chennai city.

9.1 Sampling

The method of sampling used for this study was purposive sampling. As per the statement of WHO, below 18 years of age are considered as children. Therefore, the age group of below 6 and more than 18 were excluded and purposively between the age of 6 and 18 were chosen for the study. There were 100 respondents each from male and female categories (total No. of respondents: 200) were chosen for the study.

9.2 Primary Data

Primary data were crucial for ensuring the well-being of the children in the home by facilitating appropriate support services and maintaining records for legal and administrative purposes etc. They were typically stored securely and handled with confidentiality to protect the privacy and rights of the children.

9.3 Secondary Data Collection

Secondary data were the sources for strengthening the study and they were essential to assess the suitability of respondents and finalising the options for each question in the interview schedule. The sources of secondary data were articles, essays, journals, research papers published earlier.

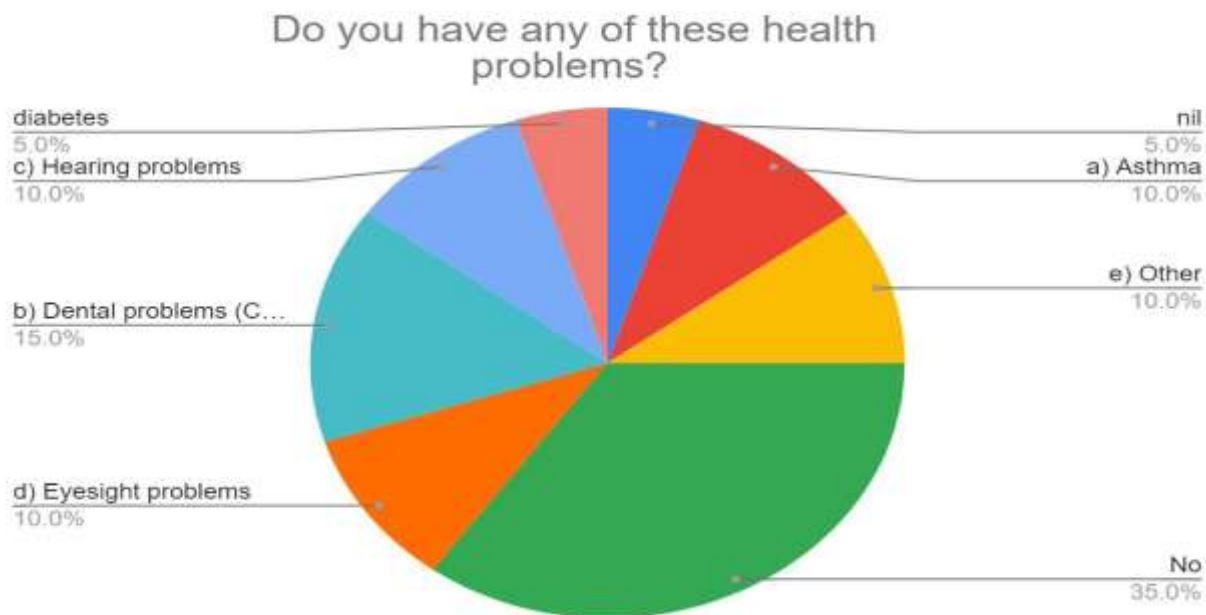
9.4 Interview Schedule

The sample of the study composed of the children of Selected Children's home consists of both 100 Male and 100 female children from the charitable and private children's homes in Chennai city. Interview was one of the most reliable and commonly used method for obtaining information.

10. Discussion

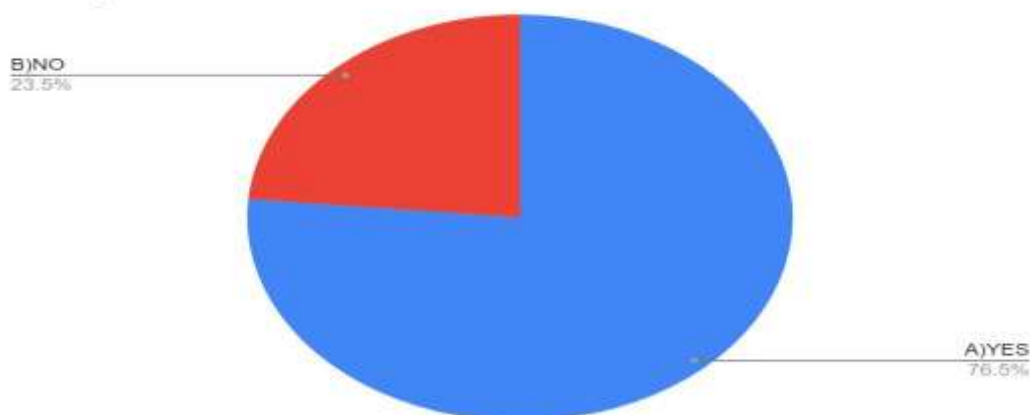
By using purposive sampling method, the 200 respondents were chosen, they were used as the sources of data and the semi-structured interview schedule was employed for collecting primary data. It is evident that 37% of the respondents were female and 63% of the respondents were male. Out of 200 respondents, 44.1% of them were in the age group of 6 to 10 whereas 38.2% of respondents belong to the age group of 11 to 15. The remaining 17.6% of the respondents belong to 16 and below 18 age group. Further, the primary data reveal that the majority of (88.2%) of the respondents were from urban whereas 11.8% of the respondents were from rural whereas. Out of total number of the respondents, 47.1% of them were in the category of primary school 32.4% of the respondents were from middle school and 11.8% of the respondents were in the category of secondary school and the remaining 8.8% of the respondents were from higher secondary school. This is good sign that such home were supportive for pursuing their studies. 52.9% of the respondents were from corporation school, 32.4% were from government schools 11.8% were from private school whereas 2.9% from government aided. It is clear that majority of the fund which (72.7%) is provided by the children's home, 15.2% of the fund is provided by the government scholarships and only 9.1% of the fund is provided

by the Family members or relatives for the children’s benefits. From this, it is clear that Children’s home were the major funding resources for their welfare. The primary data reveal that 38.3% of the respondents were staying in the children’s home for more than 1-2 years, 32.4% respondents were staying about 2-3 years and 14.7% of the respondents were staying for more than 4 years whereas 8.8% of the respondents receive studies 3-4 years. it is evident that the majority of (82.4%) of the respondents said that the quality of food provided by the children’s home is sufficiently good whereas 17.6% of the respondents were not okay with the food provided by the children’s home. The study symbolizes that the majority (75.8%) of the respondents have a caretaker in children’s home whereas 24.2% of the respondents do not have a caretaker in children’s home.



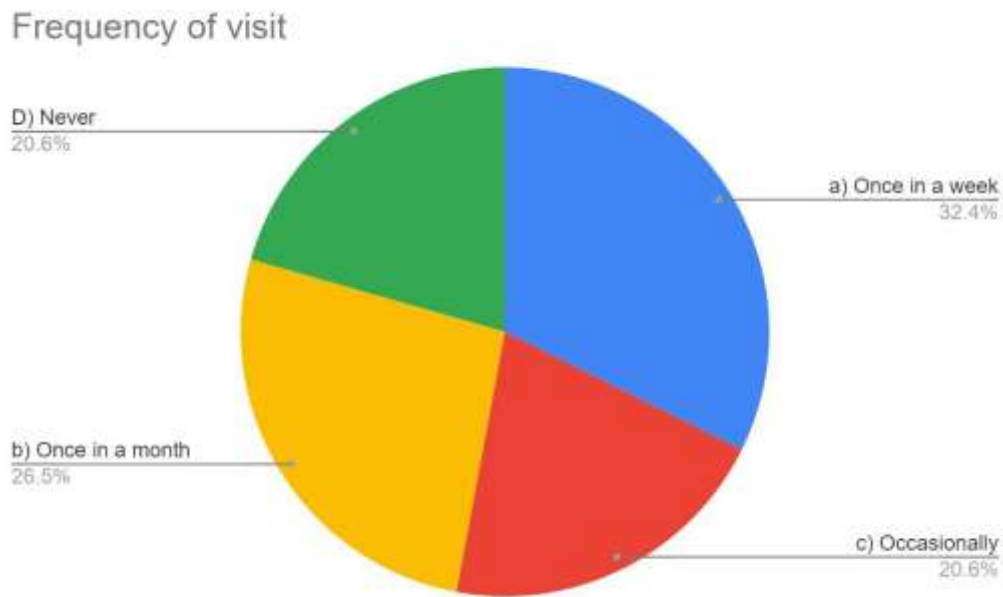
From the above pie chart, it’s clear that the majority 35.0% of the children don’t have any health problems whereas 15% of the respondents have dental problems and 10.0% of them have eyesight problems,10% of the respondents have hearing problem, 10.0% of them have asthma and 10.0% of the respondents have other issues. It’s understood that 91.2% of the responds of study were sought Allopathy treatment, 2.9% of the respondents seek Ayurveda treatment and 5.9% of the respondents seek other Treatments. 91.1% of the respondents go for outings whereas 8.9% of the respondents were not going for outing from the children’s home. 82.2% of the respondents have reported that they have cultural activities in their homes whereas 11.8% of the respondents says that they don’t have cultural activities. 67.6% of the respondents have reported that they have additional classes in children’s home whereas 32.4% of the respondents says that they don’t have any additional classes. Out of total No. of respondents, 79.4% of the respondents were participating in sports activities whereas 20.6% of the respondents were not having such issues. It is evident that 32.4% of the respondents spend leisure time by watching television, 29.4% of the respondents read books, 23.5% of the respondents gossip with inmates, 14.7 % of the respondents play games during their leisure time.

Family visit

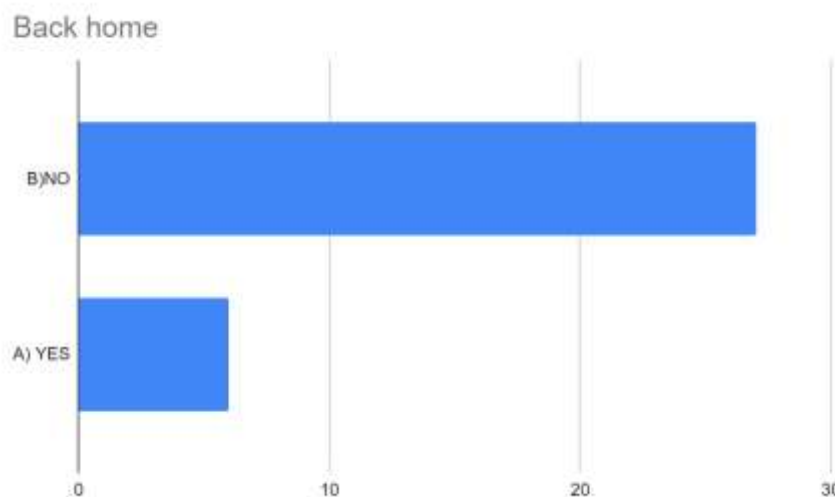


Source: Primary data

From the above table it is evident that the majority 76.5% of the respondents have reported that their family members were visiting them while 23.5% of the respondents reported that their family members were not visiting them at their respective homes.

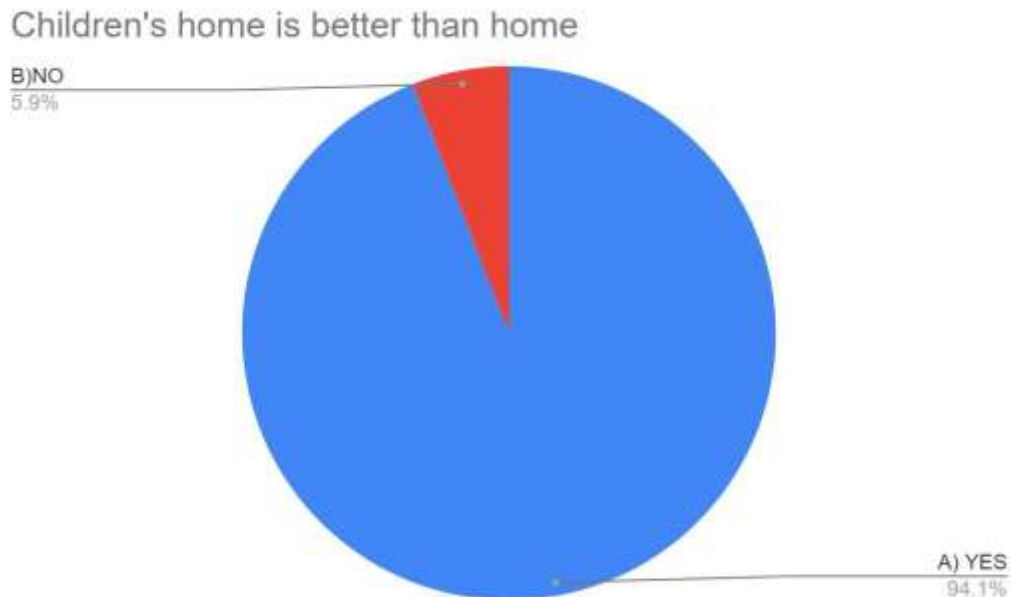


From the above pie chart, it's seen that 32.4% of the respondent's family members visit them once in a week, 26.5% of the respondent's family members visit once in a month and 20.6 % were visiting occasionally whereas 20.6% of the respondent's family members don't visit them.

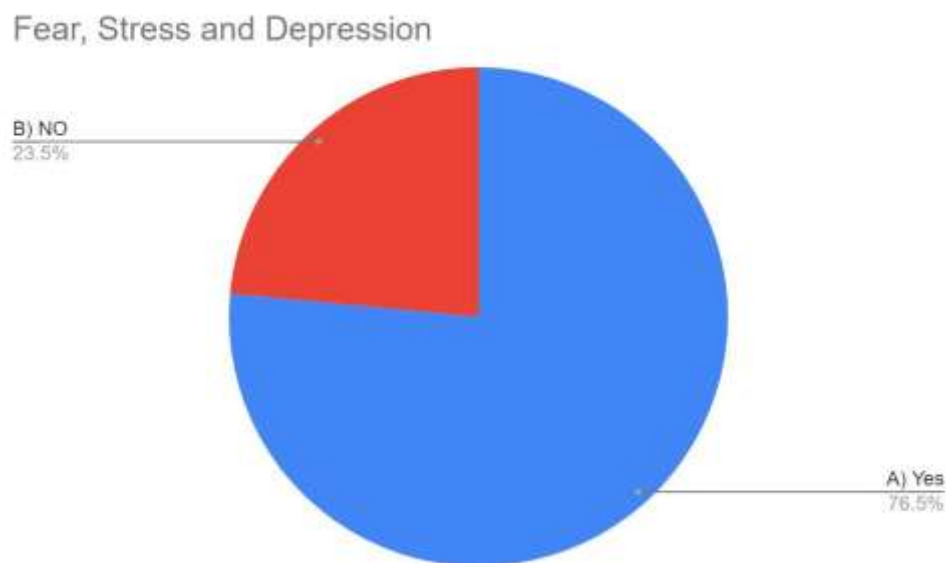


Source: Primary data

From the above bar diagram, it is evident that the majority 88.9% of the respondents don't want to go back to their homes while 11.1 % of the respondents want to go back to their homes.



From the above pie chart, it is evident that 94.1% of the respondents replied that children's home is better than their home (own residence) while 5.9% of the respondents answered that their home (residence) was better than children's home.



Source: Primary data

From the above pie chart, it is evident that the majority 76.5% of the respondents have fear, stress and depression while 23.5% of the respondents didn't have such psychological problems.

11 Theoretical Application

'AGIL' framework was developed by Talcott Parsons to analyse the functional requirements of the system. As per this approach, Adaptation, Goal Attainment, Integration and Latency have been compared with functional attributes of Children's home on their role and responsibilities. The children (inmates) were beneficiaries in this systemic growth. In based on the observation and structural growth of the collection of homes and the way how the inmates have affiliation were obviously reflecting the suitability of application of this AGIL model. In which children (inmates) were adapting (norms / values) themselves structurally and functionally. Goal attainment is the ultimate aim to be achieved. There is the network between home and inmates in the form of integration. Latency is the result received out of the commitments and being with accumulations of previously mentioned processes and it becomes final outcome since it led to the results and high-level benefits. Therefore, Parsons theoretical contribution has been applied suitably to understand the functional development of these firms.

12 Major Findings

The following findings are listed out as per the primary data collected from the field

- Majority of the respondents 88.2% of them were from urban whereas.
- Majority of the respondents 47.1% of them were studying primary school.
- 72.7% of children's fund is provided by children's home.
- 38.3% were staying in the children's home more than 1-2 years.
- 82.4% of them reported that the quality of the food in children's home was good.
- 75.8% of them have a caretaker in children's home.
- 84% of them reported that the children's home conduct regular health checkups.
- 91.2% of the respondents in children's home undergo allopathy treatment when they were at sick.
- 88.2% of the respondents have reported that the children's home conduct cultural programme.
- 67.7% of the respondents have reported that they have additional classes in children's home.
- 79.4% of the respondents were participating in sports activities.
- 53.1 % of the respondents were satisfied with the current level of scores in their studies.
- 88.9% of the respondents don't want to go back to their home.
- 94.1% of the respondents felt that children's home is better than their home.
- 91.2% of the respondents experienced that they feel happy in children's home.
- 72% of the respondents share their problems and feelings with their inmates.
- 76.5% of the respondents were affected by depression, fear and stress.
- 97.1% of the respondents don't have any suggestion about the children's home since all the facilities were satisfactory for them and some children feel that they were happier and more comfortable in children's home than their home.

13. Conclusion

This study aims to learn the conditions of children's home through the lens of livelihood pattern of children who stay there. Financial crisis and homelessness were the major reasons for joining the children's home. The study identified several challenges faced by children's homes, such as limited resources, staff turnover, overcrowding, and the difficulty of providing individual care to each child. These challenges can hinder the ability of children's homes to meet the diverse needs of their residents effectively. In children's home there is the availability of many of the facilities but children individually do face problems and difficulties due to lack of socialization, improper guidance etc. Some of the children don't share their problems with others. Children individually make new friends around. As an individual, they have promoted transition and transformation setups in the positive way. Majority of the respondents were ensured themselves that they were on the right path towards their listed goal. The Study likely underscores the need for further research in this area to deepen understanding, address the gaps in knowledge and continually improve the quality of care provided to children in institutional settings. It is evident from the study that, all the facilities provided in children's home were good they were satisfied within home environment. The children in children's home live a happy and satisfactory life and care takers were available for them to do all the necessary things. The study has proven that Children's home can impact various aspects of children's development, including cognitive, emotional, social, and physical aspects. In toto, institutional care can provide comfort zone, offers long term effects on a child's emotional and psychological development while compared to family-based care.

Suggestions

- Outings, cultural programs, sports activities, and additional classes have to be provided for enriching the children's experiences and promoting holistic development.
- Extra classes can be conducted to the children in the home for their educational development. Proper quality education should be provided to children.
- Osmosis system (RO) can be implemented in the children's home for the quality and hygienic water. Children's home can improve with the infrastructure and basic amenities.

- The provision of regular health checkups and allopathy treatment indicates a commitment to the physical well-being of the children. However, a notable percentage report experiencing depression, fear, and stress, suggesting the need for comprehensive mental health support. They should be addressed properly.
- Many of respondents do not use mobile phones, suggesting limited access to technology and potentially impacting their ability to stay connected with the outside world.
- While many children share their problems and feelings with their peers, a substantial percentage experience depression, fear, and stress without receiving psychological treatment. This highlights the importance of fostering a supportive environment and providing access to mental health services within the children's home.

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