

Institutional care and its influence on the cognitive development of the children in need of care and protection

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ABSTRACT

Family plays a pivotal role in the primary socialization of children. However, in some instances, the family becomes functionally incapable or is unavailable to nurture and support the child. In such cases, residential care in the form of Children's Homes plays an integral role in socializing children through rehabilitation and reintegration. These homes provide shelter to children in need by offering standards of care, protection, and training. This was an empirical study conducted in the districts of Patiala, Jalandhar, SAS Nagar, Bathinda, Gurdaspur, and Hoshiarpur in the state of Punjab. The study attempts to offer insights into comparative aspects of vital demographic indicators. The present research paper is based on the profiling of government-run Children's Homes in Punjab, focusing on key indicators such as their locations, staff details, date of inception, legal recognition, and inmate strength. The major parameters on which the functioning of these institutions and their impact on child inmates were analysed included education, nutrition and healthcare, hygiene and sanitation, cultural activities, recreation, and daily routine. The study aimed to explore the scope and significance of Children's Homes and their contribution to shaping the lives of children in need of care and protection. This research paper is a modest attempt to add to the existing theoretical framework within the discipline of sociological assessment and to analyse state interventions in Children's Homes. It highlights the essential need to view the well-being of these children as a shared responsibility—one that demands the active involvement of every individual to ensure a better today and a more secure tomorrow for them.

Key Words : Children, Need of care, Socialization of children, Institutional care

INTRODUCTION

A nation's future hinges on the overall growth, development and welfare of its children. The holistic nourishment of the children is a crucial step towards a developed tomorrow. The patterns of advancement and development can be facilitated as well as hindered by the physical and environmental conditions. As a child advances from one stage to another, the encircling environment, categorically the family plays a significant role in securing the proper growth and advancement of the child.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child (United Nations, 1989) has defined under Article-1 'a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable, majority is attained earlier' (Morrow, 2011).

Chapter 1, Section 2 (12) of The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act 2000 defines a child as "a person who has not completed 18 years of age" (Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015)¹.

Theoretical Insights:

A review of studies carried out and literature

1. Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 [Internet] [Available at:<http://wcd.nic.in/acts/juveniles-justice-care-and-protection-children-act-2015>] [Retrieved on August 11, 2019 at 10:55 am].

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available to the concerned area of research marked importance for the genesis of research design and research process.

Roger discussed that children primarily face changes in the early eight years of their lives; which include their learning abilities, social interaction with peer and other social groups and role expectation. Their capability to acknowledge to such an effectual and evolving environment directly and indirectly effect their sense of identity and position in the society. The psycho analytical development of a child marks the shift from childhood to adulthood (Roger, 1961).

Goffman (1961) in his work 'Total Institutions' explained that re-socialization is the foremost goal of care institutes. Such institutes are set up to look after the needs of those beings who are incapable to handle themselves. The individual at these institutes is always under surveillance and their activities are constantly monitored. It includes orphanages, shelter homes, children's homes, observatory homes and prisons. These institutes focused upon reshaping a different self of an individual and also act as a training and rehabilitating places (Haralambos, 2000).

Andry claimed in his study 'Parental Affection and Delinquency' (1962) that boys who experience unsatisfactory relationship with their father for any reason account for delinquency in the later stages of their life. The delinquent behavior of an individual is mainly because of his less intimacy with the father. This results in deviant behavior of an individual in the family and in the society. Father's relationship is often seen more primarily related to delinquent behavior than that of a mother (Haralambos 2000).

Bowlby (1965) in his study 'Forty-Four Juvenile Thieves' delved upon the importance the mother child bond and held that the mother plays a cardinal role in the primary socialization of a child in the initial years of his life. Children who are separated from their mothers, remain deprived from motherly love and hence resort to deviant behavior. Maternal passivity is identical in effect to maternal neglect (Haralambos, 2000).

Browne discussed that institutional care has an impersonal structure and young inmates usually do not get affection, warmth from the professional staff members because they are not emotionally attached to the young

ones in the institutes. Also, the staff members working in child care institutes are not skilled and properly trained to do their work (Browne, 2008).

Primarily, children were believed to be the sole responsibility of the parents and family; but the perspective has transformed into a postulation that parents guard and direct the interests of their children (Hegar, 1989)². Humans are not genetically organized to develop into social human beings and hence need proper care and ample socialization entirely from the childhood. During the initial phases of the childhood, a child is fully cared for and looked after by his/her parents. The constructive role of the parents during the initial phases of childhood hence assumes to be of essentially significant in the long run growth of the child (Senthil and Shanmughavelayutham, 2008).

Dozier reviewed that children in institutional care have significant deficit in all the domains that have been examined, children's social and interpersonal development is impaired and their cognitive development is delayed. A majority of the child inmates lack emotional attachment those are brought up in institutes at the same time children develop indiscriminately sociable behavior. The children brought up in institutional care has lower cognitive ability (Dozier, 2012).

Though there is an increasing realization that home is the perfect place for children to grow and evolve, yet in some cases home turns out to be functionally incapable to cater to the fundamental nurturing needs of the children due to inescapable factors. One may come across instances where the family is undergoing financial strain or may be unable to look after their children; instances where children suffer from acute physical, and at times mental disabilities and where adequate living standards cannot be maintained or sustained, inevitably leading to a huge number of children rendered homeless, physically disabled and mentally deranged and hence abandoned as destitute. Emotionally disturbed, these children become vulnerable to all sorts of peculiarities, unless they are provided care and protection in the shape of residential care in the society.

The guidelines accepted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2009 promoted the efforts to keep children with their families, where possible. But when a family become dysfunctional either due to poverty or any

2. Hegar, R.L. 1989. *The rights and status of children: international concern for social work*. [Internet] [Available at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/002087288903200205?journalCode=iswb>] [Retrieved on August 24, 2019 at 10:50 am].

strain, the need arises for alternate or institutional care. Institutional care can be precisely as an organized arrangement of system for children who are routinized with the assistance of adult care. The children in these child care institutes are better looked after in terms of education, health and nutrition and their overall development take place. These residential care focus at providing the family atmosphere and care to child inmates in these homes. In terms of security, children in the institutional care are protected from all kinds of exploitation and abuse. Institutional care imparts as a safety valve for all those deprived and destitute children who have no one else to care and look after them. These homes provide an escape from the worst casualties that can otherwise take place. Institutional care provides solution to the complex problems of orphaned, abandoned and needy children. The central responsibility of the state is to formulate the policies and implement laws for protecting the children who are in need of care and protection (UNICEF, 2006).

The present study was an attempt to evaluate the impact of children's homes on the child inmates in Punjab. The study was conducted in all the government run Children's Homes situated at different locations in Punjab. The impacts of the Children's Homes on the child inmates residing in them were studied. Children's Homes have affected the lives of the child inmates staying in these homes are influenced by a variety of factors. A wide range of parameters including education, nutrition and medical care, health and hygiene and sanitation, cultural activities, leisure and recreation had an impact on child inmates residing in these children's homes. These key areas had both positive and negative impacts on the child inmates who were residing in the Children's Homes. These Children's Homes had tried to provide deprived children an opportunity to develop and grow as a whole. These Children's Homes help the child inmates to attain quality education, have a nutritious diet, regular medical care and motivation to participate in cultural activities. The prior focus of the Children's Homes is to make child inmates part of the civil society. An overall development of the destitute, orphan and the needy children could not take place without the assistance of Children's Homes. Thus, children's homes provide protection to children who are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse and also provide them with rehabilitative avenues for their overall growth and development besides making them healthier and productive for the society.

Chapter one of the study introduced the fundamental conceptual framework linked with the essence of the study besides highlighting the importance of the need of Children's Homes, their structure and functioning. The chapter also contains a brief profile of children those in need of care and protection as defined under Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015, need of children's homes in state and their contribution in protecting child inmates enrolled in them, initiatives at international and national level by the government and private bodies and their implementation at state level, role of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 and its implementation in the states and then at district levels.

The present study was framed with the following objectives:

1. To prepare an institutional profile of Children's Homes and the socio-economic profile of the child inmates and Superintendent respondents in the area under study.
2. To identify the factors responsible for social exclusion of the child inmates and the causes of their admission to Children's Homes.
3. To understand the functioning of the Children's Homes in the area under study.
4. To assess the gaps between the intended policies and regulations of the government and the actual outcomes in terms of functioning of the Children's Homes.
5. To assess the social impacts of the Children's Homes on the overall well-being of the inmates.
6. To suggest measures so as to strengthen the reach and effectiveness of the Children's Homes.

Delving upon the objectives of the present study, some hypotheses framed had been mentioned as under:

1. Government run Children's Homes are spread unevenly across the state of Punjab.
2. Economic deprivation, family discords and social factors are responsible for the social exclusion of the child inmates.
3. Children's Homes cater to the fundamental needs of the child inmates.
4. There exists a gap between the intended policies of the government and the actual outcomes.

Collective efforts of the government as well as the civil society are a pre-requisite to effective functioning of the Children's Homes.

METHODOLOGY

The study was exploratory and descriptive in nature, covering all the vital aspects and effectively addressing the research problem. The sample of the study was drawn from the seven Children's Homes that are registered with Directorate of Social Security, Woman and Child Development, Government of Punjab. The information was collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected through observation, interview method and focused group discussions. Interview schedules were prepared to collect the data keeping in alignment with the objectives of the study. A set of questions related to the study were framed for obtaining relevant and reliable information from the child inmates and Superintendent respondents. Two sets of interview schedule were prepared to obtain information from the respondents. Interview Schedule-A dealt with the questions that were asked from the child inmates regarding their social conditions and their basic needs that were catered to by the Children's homes and Interview Schedule-B included questions that were asked from the Superintendent respondents of the Children's Homes. Secondary data was drawn from various sources such as books, theses, journals, newspaper articles, official records and various amended and updated editions of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act, 2015. As per the data obtained from the Department of Social Security & Women and Child Development, there are seven registered government run Children's Homes with 245 child inmates in Punjab state located in different districts, namely: Children's Home Patiala at Rajpura, Children's Home Dusarna, Children's Home Bathinda, Children's Home Gurdaspur, Children's Home for boys Hoshiarpur, Children's Home for girls Jalandhar and Children's Home Jalandhar. The sample for the present study was drawn through census method on the basis of practical considerations and feasibility of the field work. For the present study sample comprised of all the child inmates residing in the aforementioned Children's Homes in the state of Punjab besides Superintendents, staff members, care takers of these the Children's Homes. Information was collected from each and every inmate that was selected through the Census method through Interview Schedules and Focused Group Discussion (FGDs) and the researcher tried to get an insight into the existing functioning of the Children's Homes in the Punjab state under study. Besides the child inmates the views of the administrative staff of each Children's Homes were

interviewed to gain in depth information.

Chapter two of the study dealt with various conceptual orientations and studies on Child Care Institutes, Children's Homes, institutional care, socialization of a child in along with children in need of care and protection and the steps initiated by the Centre and State Government to safeguard the rights of children. A review of studies, carried out and literature available related to the concerned area of research was of utmost importance for the formation of research design and research process. The review of the existing literature directed the researcher to the direction to proceed with. It helped the researcher to define and delimit the research problem. Review of literature included the texts in documentary form, textual form including books, reports, journals and newspapers. Secondary literary sources were used in introducing the review of literature including books, theses, newspapers and articles. The present chapter had been presented in the form of a) Conceptual framework: that dealt with the concepts and theories related to the area of the study and largely focused on concepts like socialisation, child neglect, child care and protection, institutional care and child rights, child development and child well-being, besides vital parameters related to child development viz. physical development, cognitive development, social development, personality development and intellectual development, and b) Research Trends: that included contemporary studies conducted in the domain of institutional care and child development, child rights, childcare and protection.

Area and Respondent Profiling:

Chapter three was categorized in three sections. The *first section* of the chapter discussed detailed demographic and socio-economic details of the state and districts as per Census 2011 and elaborated parameters of importance including area, number of households, tehsils, number of towns, district headquarters, total population composition, scheduled caste population, literate population, child population composition, sex ratio and child sex ratio. The present study was conducted in Patiala, SAS Nagar, Bathinda, Gurdaspur, Hoshiarpur and Jalandhar districts.

The *second section* of the third chapter had a detailed discussion of children's homes in Punjab. There are seven government run children's homes in Punjab which were classified on the basis of their geographical locations. The major vital indicators relating to these

Children's Homes included their locations, staff details, date of inception, legal recognition, funding sources, locality and number of inmates in them. In terms of their area of operations the children's homes that focused upon child care and literacy were Children's Home Patiala, Children's Home Bathinda, Children's Home Dusarna, Children's Home Gurdaspur, Children's Home Hoshiarpur and Children's Home for Girls, Jalandhar. The children's home Jalandhar had prime focus to give protection to the runaway girls till the age of eighteen. Being directed by the state government all the children's homes were running on state funds. Private donations too were accepted. The children's homes in urban locality included Children's Home Patiala, Children's Home Bathinda, Children's Home Gurdaspur, Children's Home Jalandhar and Children's Home for Girls, Jalandhar. The two homes that were in rural locality included Children's Home Dusarna and Children's Home at Hoshiarpur. The least number of child inmates were found in Children's Home Hoshiarpur and the maximum number of child inmates in Children's Home Jalandhar.

The *third section* of the third chapter had detailed discussions on socio-economic profile of the child respondents. A sample of 245 child respondents was drawn for the study. The child respondents drawn from the study comprised of 41 per cent males and 59 per cent females. The distribution of respondents according to their age revealed that 69.3 per cent belonged to the 15-18 years of age group. Of the selected sample 48.16 per cent of respondents were from the scheduled castes. 8.5 per cent of the total respondents were studying in private school and 79.5 per cent in government schools. Of the selected sample 82.8 per cent of respondents belonged to Punjab state, 13.06 per cent of respondents belonged to other states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Delhi. In terms of family type 27.7 per cent of respondents belonged to joint families, 48.16 per cent of respondents belonged to nuclear families and 24.08 per cent did not mention their family type and hence were classified as unreported. In terms of their religious affiliation 49.3 per cent of respondents belonged to Sikh

religion. In terms of category of child inmates in children's homes, it was revealed that 19.5 per cent of child inmates were abandoned, 16.3 per cent were orphan, 12.2 per cent of child inmates were from families run by single parent, 46.2 per cent of child inmates had run-away from their families, 1.6 per cent of child inmates had surrendered, 4 per cent of child inmates were unreported.

The findings arrived upon at from the child inmates and Superintendents have been categorized into four key areas including role of institutional care in cognitive development, provisions for physical development, behavioural development and social and cultural development. These key areas are based on the Individual Care Plan as mentioned in the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015. It is a holistic plan based on age, gender and case history of child inmates. The standards of care for child inmates include education, nutrition, health and hygiene, medical care, recreation, sports and vocational training.

Cognitive Development:

Cognition refers to the process of reception, processing and responding to external stimulus, situation or information. Attention, memory, executive functioning, convergent and divergent thinking are some of the cognitive processes that have been studied in the children. According to Piaget, cognitive development is a combination of maturation and non-linguistic experiences during the early childhood that shape an individual's overall personality³. Cognitive skill involves the way children observe, compare, classify and categorize, deduce and predict. Basic education is the first step in attempting to attenuate the enormous disparities affecting many groups—women, rural population, urban poor, marginalized ethnic minorities and the millions of children who are not attending school and working⁴. The concept of basic education has led to the broadening of magnitude of the right to education: extending from basic education to lifelong learning⁵.

Cognitive development is critical not only for academic achievement but also for effective decision-

3. Cognitive Development [Internet] [Available at: <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/teachereducationx92x1/chapter/Piaget's-theory-of-cognitive-development/>] [Retrieved on June 22, 2019 at 5:55pm].
4. The International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first century: The Report of the Commission presented to UNESCO "Learning: The Treasure Within", UNESCO, 1996 (p. 118).
5. The World Education Report 2000, *The Right to Education: towards education for all throughout life* 'UNESCO Publishing, 2000.

making, problem-solving, and social adaptability in later life. A nurturing and stimulating environment—one that includes access to age-appropriate learning materials, trained educators, and consistent emotional support—can significantly enhance cognitive growth. In institutional settings, where familial bonds are often absent or disrupted, the need for structured cognitive stimulation becomes even more crucial. Therefore, bridging the gap between institutional care and enriched cognitive input is essential for promoting holistic development and equipping children with the tools needed to thrive in society.

Section 36 of Chapter VI of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Model Rules, 2016 lays down the guidelines for education of child inmates in the Children's Homes. As per the model rules, child inmates shall attain education according to age and ability inside Children's Home and outside, a range of educational opportunities like mainstream school, bridge school, open school and non-formal education, Children's Homes shall arrange specialized trainers and experts for child inmates and extra coaching for child inmates according to their needs⁶. The study revealed certain significant positive as well as negative impacts of institutional care on cognitive development of children residing in children's homes in the state of Punjab.

As per the Superintendents and child inmates in majority of the Children's Homes, the child inmates were enrolled in various grades for attaining education. A majority of the children's homes provided for a tutor. The child inmates were time and again counselled to focus on career prospects. As per the views obtained from the Superintendents, not even a single children's home was availing any scholarship aid for higher studies of child inmates. The lack of adequate number of tutors and their irregular availability were reported to be a major problem which further doubled the work responsibilities of the Superintendents and staff members. As per the child inmates they shared healthy interaction with their teachers in the schools. The child inmates gave a satisfactory response to the quality of education they were attaining from schools.

A sizeable number of child inmates mentioned that tutors had an irregular visit to the children's homes. The tutors focused upon group studies and consequently the inmates were not getting personal attention. The child

inmates described their tutors as less-attentive to their learning needs besides lacking commitment to teach. It was also observed that the children's homes focused on theoretical learning compared to practical one and across all the children's homes rote learning was promoted.

As per the provisions enshrined in Chapter VI Section 37 of Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Model Rules, 2016 the facilities for skill development include gainful vocational training to child inmates in children's homes under which the child inmates according to their age, aptitude, interest and ability shall be given training either inside children's home or in collaboration with external institutes. It also covers occupational therapy, interest and skill based training for placement of child inmates further after their stay⁷.

The Superintendents and child inmates of children's homes mentioned that no vocational training, as per the guidelines of the Act, was being given to child inmates. The Superintendents reported that vocational training was offered to child inmates in 'State After-Care' located at Ludhiana and Amritsar where the children were sent after completing their stay at the respective children's homes. The child inmates also reported that there was no regular or visiting skill trainer and or any skill training courses in the children's homes. The child inmates were also not in favour of obtaining vocational training since they found it time consuming and interfering with their studies.

The impacts of Institutional Care on the Cognitive Development of the child inmates have been appended in Table 1.

Table 1 : Table showing impacts of Institutional Care on the Cognitive Development of the child inmates

Cognitive Development	
Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts
Opportunity to attain education	Unequal access to digital technology
Improvement in intellectual skills	Limited access to private schools
Career orientation	Lack of confidence boosting
Competitiveness	More emphasis on theoretical as compared to practical, cramming
Focus on collective learning	
Learning tools like use of computers, library has increased knowledge	Overall decline in the grades due to inadequate tutors

6. Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of children) Act, 2015.

7. Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Model Rules, 2016.

In terms of cognitive development, the positive impacts of institutional care revealed during the study included an opportunity to child inmates to attain education, an improvement in their intellectual skills, child inmates become career oriented, spirit of competition and doing well in examinations, inculcate the habit of collective learning, the use of computers and library visits had led to an increase in knowledge of child inmates. The negative impacts included limited access to private schools. Out of the total 245 child respondents, 21 child inmates of Children's Home for Girls Jalandhar-II were enrolled in private school. Child inmates had an unequal access to digital technology. A majority of the Children's Homes had no access to computers and internet. The child inmates reported to have lacked confidence as more emphasis was laid on theoretical learning compared to practical knowledge and they had to resort to cramming to fare well during the examinations. A majority of the Children's Homes had an inadequate number of tutors which led to decline of the overall grades of child inmates. In terms of cognitive development, there were significant positive impacts of institutional care although some interventions are required to enhance these positive impacts and minimise the negative fallouts.

Multifarious Impacts:

The present research paper has also focused on the role of institutional care and its impacts on the overall development of children residing in Children's Homes. Children's Homes looked after the educational, nutritional, medical care, and recreational needs of child inmates. Those impacts are broadly discussed in terms of education, health, economic, socio-cultural, and

psychological. The findings highlighted that, while institutional care cannot fully replicate a familial environment, it significantly contributes to stabilizing and enhancing children's well-being. These homes play a crucial role in integrating marginalized children into mainstream society by fostering a sense of identity, discipline, and belonging. However, continued efforts are needed to address structural gaps, improve quality of care, and ensure long-term developmental outcomes. The impacts of Institutional Care on the Cognitive Development of the child inmates have been appended in Table 2.

Health is the level of functional and metabolic efficiency of a living being. It is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing. Social environment plays a major role in an individual's health. Health of an individual is affected by unbalanced diet, infections, diseases, overcrowded houses, poverty and uncleanliness. Therefore, ensuring cleanliness can enhance productivity of an individual. In terms of cognitive development, institutional care has considerable health impacts on the children enrolled under such care. Children's homes essentially contribute to the healthy upbringing of the child inmates which otherwise would have been impossible under desolation and poverty ridden circumstances from which these children often come. Regular lessons on hygiene and nutrition create awareness among child inmates. Healthy body leads to healthy mind and enhance productivity and capacity building of child inmates.

Institutional care caters to the educational, nutritional, medical care and recreational needs of child inmates. It is an aid to economically backward and excluded sections of the society. The children who otherwise are victims

Table 2 : Table showing the impacts of Institutional Care on the Cognitive Development of the child inmates

Cognitive Development		
Health Impacts	Economic Impacts	Socio Cultural Impacts
Educational Impacts	Psychological Impacts	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy upbringing • Awareness about hygiene • Awareness about nutrition • Healthy body leads to healthy mind • Increases productivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No burden of educational expenses • Access to education and learning tools • No burden on marginalized towards meeting the cost of educational tools 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to education • Enhance learning outcome • Fall in school drop-outs • Tutorial and coaching aids • Enhances knowledge and productivity • Integration in knowledge sphere 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevents stress, anxiety and depression • Development of coping mechanism • Cognitive enhancement improves learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective socialization • Norms directed behavior • Curtailment of participation in child labor • Prevention from abuse • Inculcation of values, norms and conduct • Reduces inequality • Sense of belongingness

of illness, malnourishment, illiteracy are getting an opportunity to develop in healthy environs. In terms of cognitive development, institutional care has considerable economic impacts on children enrolled under such care. Children's homes indicate access to education and learning tools. The marginalized section has no burden on meeting the cost of educational tools of their children. Children's homes cater to the educational expenses of the child inmates residing in them which otherwise would have been impossible for poverty stricken families.

Literacy as a condition to education is an indicator of empowerment. The more literate individuals imply the sizeable participation in knowledge economy. Literacy can further contribute to health awareness and fuller participation in knowledge society. Literacy rate varies across social groups in a society. Illiterate parents are at a critical disadvantage in ensuring that their children are well educated, thus sustaining existing inequalities. In terms of cognitive development, institutional care has considerable educational impacts on children enrolled under such care. Children's homes indicate access to education to the children of socially excluded families. An access to education has considerably decreased school drop-out rates. Tutorial and coaching aids enhance knowledge and productivity of child inmates. Institutional care as a mediator to bridge the educational gap between the excluded ones and the mainstream.

Children with poverty experience deficiencies in housing, food, safe environment and access to healthcare and are at greater risk of being exposed to trauma and stressful life events. Children suffering with chronic physical illness can experience more behavioural and emotional problems including anxiety and stress disorders. The healthcare services which otherwise are difficult to approach, are provided to children in children's homes. In terms of cognitive development, institutional care has considerable psychological impacts on children enrolled under such care. Children's homes indicate development of coping mechanism against stress, anxiety disorders and depression among child inmates. Stress free mind enhances learning abilities of child inmates.

Children develop a personality which is determined by their experiences. Children belonging to poor socio-cultural background lack decision making power as well as confidence. Children growing up in unhealthy family environment find it difficult to learn new things. In terms of cognitive development, institutional care has considerable socio-cultural impacts on children enrolled

under such care. Children's homes indicate an effective socialisation of child inmates, which otherwise they were deprived of. In an institutional care child inmates have norms directed behaviour. Child inmates follow disciplinary routine in the children's homes that shapes up their personality. Institutional care prevents and curtail participation in child labour and related activities as children from the weaker sections are involved in labour activities to support their family. Children who are vulnerable to abuse, experiences safety and sense of security in the homes. Children's homes irrespective of a child's caste, social category and social background provides shelter, care and protection. Child inmates have a sense of belongingness with the peer mates and caretakers.

Concluding Thoughts:

This study explored how institutional care affects the cognitive development of children living in Punjab's government-run Children's Homes. While such care cannot replace a family, it has proven essential in providing education, healthcare, nutrition and emotional support to children who lack a stable home environment. Notable positive outcomes include enhanced intellectual abilities, career awareness, access to formal education, and better hygiene practices. However, several challenges persist - such as unequal access to digital learning, insufficient numbers of trained tutors, and a heavy reliance on theoretical rather than practical learning methods.

Beyond academics, these institutions play an important role in promoting psychological well-being and social development. They foster a sense of safety, structure, and belonging while shielding children from abuse and exploitation. Economically, they reduce the burden on disadvantaged families by covering educational expenses.

Still, a gap remains between the promises of policy and the realities on the ground. To truly empower these children, there is a pressing need for better resources, trained staff, and more personalized care. With ongoing reforms and collective effort, institutional care can become a more nurturing and effective pathway for these children to thrive and contribute meaningfully to society.

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