

## Who will cry for orphans? A review article on orphans' mental health

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Being an orphan is a miserable feeling for children when they don't have their family with them and to survive in this life there is no one to take care of them for their psychological health and need. Mental health is a state of an individual's wellbeing. It helps to attain the ability to enjoy the life and with this balance can be attained in life activities and psychological resilience can be achieved. Therefore, orphan's mental health is also an important aspect to think about. **Objective:** The objective of this review study is to understand the scenario of orphan's mental health. So that some efforts for their mental health can be considered and their life can be improved which they also deserve just like other children and adolescents as orphans are also the important part of this society and should not be neglected. **Methodology:** Through internet, studies conducted for orphan children and adolescent's mental health were being searched. The searched items were orphans, studies on orphans, mental health of orphans, well-being of orphans. For Research papers PubMed, Psych Info, Google Scholar were being used. Out of the searched material, we collected the relevant studies. Case study and unpublished material was not included in this article. **Results:** After screening around 35 research papers only those papers were being reviewed which belonged to our review purpose and for these 29 research papers were being finalized for this present review. It was being found that orphan children and adolescents are more prone to develop psychiatric illnesses. Adoption rate was found to be very low in India which is also a warning sign for orphan children's mental health. **Conclusion:** Studies reported that number of orphans are increasing day by day as population is increasing in the worldwide and around 20% orphans are in India. There are very less children who lost their parents, most of them are abandoned. After reviewing various studies, it was being found that orphans were found to be having more tendency to develop psychiatric illnesses like – depression, anxiety, PTSD, behavioral problems etc.

**Keywords:** Orphans, Mental Health, Psychiatric Illness, Depression, Anxiety, Behavioral Problems

Out of different stages of this life span, childhood is also one of the important and blissful stage but it is never same blissful stage for every child. Some children and adolescents have to face loss and lots of problems in their life and there is no one to

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Received: February 03, 2020; Revision Received: August 04, 2020; Accepted: September 25, 2020

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think about them, to console them, to think about their rights, to help them to exist in their life. It's really required to think about such group's mental health.

A child is a human being who is below 18 years of age and an orphan child is the one who has lost his/her one or both parent or whose parents are unknown or have abandoned him/her. A definition of a maternal orphan is "a child who has lost his/her mother and paternal orphan is who has lost his/her father. Apart from this social orphan are the children who are living their life alone as their parents have abandoned them on account of poverty, imprisonment, alcoholism etc." in other words, orphans are the ones who don't have any surviving parent to care for them.

There is a concept '**Parens patriae**' which means that the state is your parent if you don't have any. When there is no parent or guardian, orphans are the children of the government which work like a parent who save, spend on and motivate their children in their education, business and other aspects of life. Many studies have revealed that materialistic needs sometimes compromised with psychological needs of orphan children. The child friendly approach will remain an untouched dream until care providers could understand the psychological and social needs and coping strategies of orphan children.

In a population estimation by the census of India and a report by **UNICEF (2011)** it was being found that about 20 million children which was 4% of their child population in India were orphans and surprisingly in this figure only 0.3% children lost their parents by death. Rest of them were being abandoned. According to **UNICEF report (2016)** there were 132 million orphans in the worldwide. Everyday more than 5760 children become orphan and in every 2.2 seconds a child loses a parent somewhere in this world [1]. While in a **recent report by UNICEF** there are 140 million orphans in the worldwide and India is having 30 million orphans (around 21%) which is the largest in south Asian region.

**In India, as per the ministry of women and child development**, adoption rate is declined from 6286 to 2762 during 2010 to 2016. Orphan are being kept under Juvenile Justice Act rather than having a separate legislation. Orphans have no one speaking for them. It's too much to expect from government to provide love, affection, to help them with their homework, play cricket or any game, take them for a walk like a parent. But government to take care the very basics of childhood so that child doesn't feel emotionally separated, lost, sleeping on an empty stomach and fighting for their existence and with their basic rights to this life.

**Margoob M A et al** studied-on Kashmir orphan children and it was being found that orphan children are getting breed for psychopathology ground. it was being found that PTSD was the main common psychiatric disorder (40.62%) followed by MDD (25%), conversion disorder (12.5%). In another study **El Koumi et al** found that the prevalence of behavioral disturbances was 64.53% among those who are in institutional homes and high prevalence was found to be of 40.35% of behavioral and emotional disorders among orphan children and adolescents in institutions by **Rahman et al**. In one more study done by **Shanti and Jeryda Gnanaiane Elio in Tiruchirappalli** found that the prevalence of behavioral and emotional problems was found to be 56% among institutionalized street children. In one study it was being found that 7.5% orphan adolescents were at risk of hyperactivity disorder, 37.5% were found to be having the risk of peer problems and 12.5% were found to be having severe peer problems. [19]

### *Adoption rate in India*

As per data presented in **Lok Sabha, 20 December 2017**, mostly girls were being adopted than boys over the last four years. According to data 60% of 12,273 orphan children who were being adopted, were girls over four years to 2017-2018. According to Child **Adoption Resource Authority (CARA)** CEO Maharashtra was having the highest number of adoption agencies and inter country adoption rate was also seen increased in the data from 578 in 2016-2017 to 651 in 2017-2018. In 2016-2017 out of 3210 orphan children Maharashtra (711), Karnataka (252) again took the high positions in adoption followed by west Bengal (203) while for other countries mostly Indian orphan children were being adopted by the US, Italy, France and Spain families.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The present article aimed to collate the studies related to psychological health of orphan's children and adolescents.

**Search Strategy:** studies for the present article were being searched through online using PMC Free Articles, Psych Info, Google Scholar. The keywords for the search were orphans, orphan's Mental Health in India and in the worldwide, wellbeing in orphans, adoption rate in India. The searches were being carried out in November 2019. Except searched studies, in addition studies were being reviewed from the cross references.

### *Study Selection*

The present review article included various studies published in English language journals containing mental health of orphan children and adolescents. Around 35 research papers were being screened and 29 papers were being finalized by the author for this present review. Single case reports and unpublished materials were not being included in this article. All the possible articles related to psychological health of orphans were being included in this present review article.

### *Data Extraction*

All the relevant studies were being reviewed and analyzed independently by the author. After the initial evaluation 29 studies were being reviewed which were related to orphan children and adolescent's mental health. Those orphans' studies which were not having psychological health component, were not included in this article.

## **RESULTS**

This present review article included 27 published articles. The sample size varied in these articles from 41 to 1469 with the age range of 6 years to 20 years. In these studies various methods were being used to collect data like - Strength and difficulties questionnaire, Rand Mental Health and Beck Depression Inventory adapted semi structured questionnaire, Spence Children's anxiety Scale ( SCAS), Mini International Neuropsychiatric Interview for Kids ( MINI- KID) , self-report questionnaire on Depression and anxiety adapted questions with Focused Group Discussion( FGDs) , Modified Ryff scale of Psychological Well-being , Rutter's Children teacher administered behavior questionnaire, Modified Cooper's self-report measure for social adjustment and In depth Interview .

With the review of the articles, it was being found that there was high prevalence of psychological disorders [ 4, 5, 6] behavioral and emotional problems living in institutions. Because of orphan hood children were found to be more vulnerable to develop psychiatric illnesses. [7]. Orphans showed more anger and depression after getting adopted as there

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adopting parents could not understand their problems therefore, they could not provide emotional support to them and their teachers were not able to identify their psychosocial problems [8].

Orphan children have to face various psychological issues. When they need the most support from their parents and siblings to adjust with physical and emotional development and losing their parents at the early stage of life make them more prone to develop psychological disorders [9] and were found to be having communication disorders and impaired mental functions. In spite of providing basic necessity of life orphans suffered more psychological and social problems and more orphans went to bed hungry and around 34% orphans were found to be with suicide contemplation. They were not rewarded for good behavior [10].

If perceived stigmatization, child labor, child abuse, inadequate care for the orphans could be controlled, psychological distress and being an orphan association can be reduced [11] while it was also seen that orphans by AIDS were being bullied by their friends and relatives and were found to be having GAD, conduct and peer relationship problems more in comparison to those orphans because of other reasons [12]. Orphans and other vulnerable children were being provided with their all basic necessity to survive in this life yet they suffered from various psychosocial problems. [20]

The following table is an effort to understand various results of the studies which has been conducted on orphan's psychological wellbeing in worldwide where for review purpose specific studies have been presented in the following table.

### ***Summary Table revealing Results of various studies done on orphan children and adolescents:***

SN	Author and year	Age range	Sample size	Method	Results
1	Sengendo J et al (1997)	6 – 20 years	193	Interview method, Focused Group Discussion	Orphan children were found to be significantly depressed, angry when adopted.
2	Makame V et al (2002)	10 – 14 years	41	Rand mental health inventory and Beck Depression Inventory	Increased internalizing problems in orphans
3	Lucie D et al (2008)	10-19 years	425 aids orphans, 241 non aids orphans, 278 non orphans	Strength and difficulties questionnaire, child depression inventory, child PTSD checklist, children's manifest anxiety scale	Experience of stigma mediated association between AIDS orphaned poor psychological outcomes
4	Nyamukapa et al (2010)	0-18 years	1469	Interview, FGD, questionnaire adapted from WHO self-report questionnaire on depression and anxiety	Association between being an orphan and psychological distress weakened after controlling for perceived stigmatization, inadequate care, child labour and child abuse
5	Prem Kumar SG et al (2014)	11-16 years	396	Spence children's Anxiety scale, Interview, Strength and difficulties	There was high proportion of AIDS orphaned with GAD, Conduct disorder and peer relationship problems

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SN	Author and year	Age range	Sample size	Method	Results
				questionnaire	as compared to other orphans
6	Tadesse S et al (2014)	10 – 17 years	6 males 6 females 08 caregivers	Focused Group Discussion, In depth Interview	Psychosocial problems were the least addressed in orphanages
7	S G Prem Kumar et al (2014)	12-16 years	400	Centre for epidemiologic studies – depression scale (CES-DS)	Orphaned by AIDS showed higher level of depression than other orphans
8	Katharin H et al (2015)	Mean age (11 years)	89 Orphans 89 Non-Orphans	Strength and difficulties questionnaire	Orphans experienced neglect but not abuse and orphans showed more depressive, post traumatic and aggressive behaviour
9	Kaur N et al (2017)	13-18 years	120	Ryff scale of psychological wellbeing, structured checklist for physical health	Most of the orphans had various physical health problems and moderate level of psychological well being
10	Kaur R et al (2018)	4-17 years	292 orphans	Strength and difficulties questionnaire and sociodemographic data	Orphans are more vulnerable to behavioural and emotional problems and age, sex, reason for being in institute, age of admission and years of stay in the home were significantly associated
11	Muluken T H et al (2018)	10-18 Years	370 (185 orphans and 185 Non orphans)	Ryff psychological well-being scale	Psychological well-being of orphans is significantly lower than their non orphaned peers
12	Bhat A et al (2015)	11 -17 years	80	MINI – KID, Kapuswaour's scale	Orphans were found to be more vulnerable for dysthymic symptoms, panic disorder, agoraphobic, separation anxiety disorder, ADHD, ODD, GAD, conduct disorder
13	Hussein HS et al (2015)	10 – 13 years	50 orphans (28 males and 22 females)	Psychological distress scale, questionnaire ware being designed by the researcher for study purpose	Most orphans who had primary level of education, vast majority of orphans who were deficient in both parents and residents in orphanages

### DISCUSSION

The present review suggests that there have been very less studies in India which is creating a big gap. According to **one UNICEF report (2012)** as population is increasing in India, the number of orphans and abandoned children is also increasing. Orphans are deprived from their primary caregivers therefore they are having more tendency to develop physical health and emotional and behavioral problems. They suffer physical, emotional, social and economic development issues than non-orphan children as there is a lack of concern and basic needs, facilities, lack of adequate care which further deteriorates every aspect of health of orphans. Orphan children seems to be socially deprived and more prone to hopelessness,

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emotional problems, depression, anger than non-orphans. Children and adolescent's mental health have always been a favorite topic for study by mental health researchers. Studies have shown various types of behavioral and emotional problems like depression, anxiety, conduct and hyperactivity problems in children and adolescents.

It's not necessary that every orphan child will develop psychological problems after the death of a parent [16]. In various states of India there are some specific reasons that orphans are more prone to develop psychological illnesses like in Kashmir state conflict was the main reason for the increased number of orphans. Orphan children faced many psychological issues and they accepted that their adjustment in society will be difficult if they are out of the institutions. [17] and orphan children were found to be having stress (80%), depression (100%), anxiety (100%), and lack of comprehension (100%) which showed that these psychological issues primarily were the result of traumatic situations which orphans had to face due to the armed conflicts. [15]

Most of the orphans were had lost their both parents and most of them were having primary level of education [26] and experienced depressive symptoms, post-traumatic stress symptoms and aggressive behavior. Neglect, abuse and stigmatization were being significantly correlated with orphan children's internalizing and externalizing problems. Neglect and stigmatization for orphans relate with their depression severity while perceived stigmatization moderated the relationship between neglect and depression. [21] on the other hand children orphaned by AIDS significantly reported being bullied by their friends and relatives (50.3%) and reported discrimination (12.6%) than those orphan children who orphaned due to some other reason. Those children who orphaned by AIDS reported significantly higher degree of depression than the other orphan children. [22] and with depression, anxiety and PTSD their negative mental health gets worsen over a period of time [27]

Age of the orphan children, period of stay in orphanages and BMI significant impact on their physical health problems and psychological well-being. [23] apart from this reason for being in institute, age of admission and years of stay in the orphanages significantly affect their them emotionally and behaviorally and mostly common problems in orphans can be seen like conduct disorder, peer problems, emotional problems, hyperactivity and low prosocial behavior. [24]

It was also seen that orphan and vulnerable children were found to be having depressive and other psychiatric disorders symptoms in comparison to non-orphaned group and caregiver's rating was very high for children's externalizing problems and low for their internalizing problems and same kind of results were being showed by the children's self-reports as well. [28] mental health of orphan children is significantly low in comparison to non-orphan children. [29]

Very few studies have been done by the researchers on the orphan's psychological health and a major gap can be seen in this regard in India. Orphan children and adolescents should be considered as an important group of this society as they also deserve the same kind of affection, facilities, positive environment, care just like other children do which orphans could not get from their life.

Most of the studies talk about the psychological and social problems of orphans but no study could be found regarding the intervening aspect of the orphans in India.

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### **Acknowledgments**

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declared no conflict of interest.

**How to cite this article:** Ms. Kalpana (2020). Who will cry for orphans? A review article on orphans' mental health. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 8(3), 433-440. DIP:18.01.053/20200803, DOI:10.25215/0803.053