

Psychological distress and self-esteem of children in need of care and protection: special reference to Kottayam district

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ABSTRACT

This study 'psychological distress and self-esteem of children in need of care and protection' is explained detail about the definition of the child and children in need of care protection by JJ Act and UNICEF. Children are considering vulnerable group, from these children, some are in need of more care and protection. The present study followed quantitative research and explanatory research design. Data was collected from a non-governmental children home with purposive sampling. The study is concluding with identification of the children in need of care and protection is affecting with the high level of psychological signs of anxiety, high worry or oversensitivity, and clinically significant anxiety.

Keywords: *Psychological distress, Self-esteem, Children in need of care and protection*

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act 2000, (Amended in 2006, 2011) covers two categories of children, 'children in need of care and protection' and 'children in conflict with law'. The aim of the study was to understand the psychological distress and self-esteem of the boys and girls in the settings. To understand the psychological distress, there are two factors and that is manifest anxiety and strength and difficulty. The definition of children, definition and category of Children in Need of Care and Protection (CNCP) and the role of child welfare committee to deal with children in need of care and protection are described in the Juvenile Justice Act 2000 and 2015. According to the Juvenile Justice Act 2015, *child means a person who has not completed eighteen years of age* (Section 12).

Children are the most vulnerable group in the society because they are dependent, have the least power and have less control over their own lives. Among the children there are some who are more marginalized and neglected than other children because of their socio-economic and cultural circumstances. These children are considered as children in need of care and protection. All children due to their age considered to be at risk of exploitation, abuse, neglect and violence. But vulnerability cannot be defined simply by age, because age is only one component.

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This study focused on child in need of care and protection and it means a child is found without any home or settled place or abode and without any ostensible means of subsistence. Following figure shows the children in need of care and protection is defined as a child who are,



Figure 1: Children who are need of care and protection

UNICEF and Child Protection in India

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) uses the term 'child protection' to refer to preventing and responding to violence, exploitation and abuse against children. This program also target children who are abused, living without parental care and children in conflict with law. The goal of the program is to prevent violence against children and to strengthen protection services for children in vulnerable situations. Child protection is an issue in every country and a high priority for UNICEF. Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international treaties, all children have the right to be protected from harm (Sen, 1994). It supports the implementation of the Government of India's child protection programs, Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) to create a protective environment for children through the improvement and expansion of services for children in need of care and protection and children in conflict with the law under the provisions of the Juvenile Justice Act and related legislation. UNICEF also supports the government for,

- Reduction of child labor
- Strengthening child protection structure
- Protect child from exploitation and abuse
- Improve the quality of education
- Social protection schemes
- Ensuring implementation of the prohibition of child marriage Act
- Child trafficking and rehabilitation
- Birth registration

UNICEF also works closely with the government of India and the ministry of women and child development and other stakeholders related to the child protection (Child Protection in India, 2013).

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Psychological Distress

Psychological distress is a general term that is used to describe unpleasant feelings or emotions that impact a person's level of functioning and it is a psychological discomfort that interferes with activities and daily living. It can result in negative views of the environment, others and themselves. For studying the psychological distress there is many sub factors such as anxiety and strength and difficulty, sadness, distraction, and symptoms of mental illness (Zhou, 2012). In this study the researcher selected two sub factors such as revised children manifest anxiety and strength and difficulty questionnaire to assess the psychological distress of children in need of care and protection. Anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, fear and physical changes like increased blood pressure. Occasional anxiety is a normal part of life but anxiety disorder involves more than temporary worry or fear. The strength and difficulty questionnaire is a brief behavioral screening that asks about 25 attributes. It addresses five dimensions emotional problems, conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer problems and pro- social behavior (Mevludin, 2005).

Self-esteem

It is an opinion about a person themselves and high self- esteem is a good opinion about them and low self-esteem is bad opinion about them. It means an individual's subjective evaluation of his or her worth as a person. Self-esteem is very important because it affects how you think, act and even how you live life to your potential (Yasmin, 2009). Low self-esteem means poor confidence and that you are likely to give easily rather than face challenges. Self-esteem is playing an important role in a person's failure and success. It affects a person's confidence, self-image and happiness. If a person doesn't value himself/herself how will he/she able to value others. So, positive self-esteem is an important factor in human life. Here the researcher is studying the psychological distress and self-esteem of children in need of care and protection (Asif, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

In this current scenario the number of children in need of care protection are increased and the Juvenile Justice Act 2015 giving special importance to the children in need of care and protection. The children home run by a voluntary or non-governmental organization must want to register under this act and want to follow the instructions by the Government for avoiding the abuses and crimes against the children in these children's homes. So, this statement is revealing that there is problem such as psychological, physical, emotional among the children in need of care and protection. The researcher is studying about the psychological problems of the children in these homes and this research can identify the present status of psychological problems among the children in Non-Governmental children's home.

Significance of the Study

The laws, services and other initiatives made by the Government of India for the protection of the children prove that the children are one of the important groups of the society. Now the number of children in need of care and protection and other abuses cases related children are increasing and the government is providing more care and schemes in the field. The JJ Act 2015 is providing a special attention in these areas especially in children in need of care and protection and children with conflict law. So this study is helpful to assess the psychological distress and self-esteem of children in need of care and protection (JJ Act, 2015).

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Objectives

- To study the psychological distress and self-esteem of children in need of care and protection.
- To study the socio-demographic profile of children in need of care and protection.
- To study the manifest anxiety among the children in need of care and protection.
- To study the self-esteem of children in need of care and protection.
- To study the strength and difficulty patterns of children in need of care and protection.

METHODOLOGY

The research approach adopted for this study is quantitative and the design used is explanatory research design. Purposive sampling is selected for this study. The researcher selected two non-governmental children home from Kottayam district. Total respondents for the study were 25 adolescent boys and 25 adolescent girls and followed all the ethical considerations. This study used self-administered questionnaire. This questionnaire was formed with the help of following scales. They are,

1. Strength and difficulty questionnaire (SDQ).
2. Self-esteem rating scale.
3. Revised Children's manifest anxiety scale (RCMAS).
4. Self-made socio-demographic questionnaire

Discussion and Findings

This study was paid special emphasis on psychological distress and self-esteem of children in need of care and protection. This section deals with major findings, suggestions and conclusion based on the objectives of the study.

Socio-democratic Profile

- The total population of this study is from the 7th stage of their lifespan (Adolescence). Most of the respondents (20%) and they are belonging to the age 13 years.
- The total sample size of this study is 50 and 25 (50%) are boys and 25 (50%) are girls.
- The education status of the respondents is classified in to three, 5-8, 9-12 and degree/ others. Most of the respondents (54%) are belonging to the educational group 5-8. And there is one degree student.

Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety

- 10 children from the total respondents has high physiological factor score and these children are experiencing high physiological signs of anxiety (stomach ache, hand sweating)
- 1 child has high worry/oversensitivity score and the child internalize their experiences of anxiety and that he or she may feel overwhelmed and withdraw
- children has high concentration anxiety factor score and these children is likely to feel that he or she is unable to meet the expectations of other important people, inadequate and unable to concentrate on tasks
- There is no statistical significant difference between the age and the anxiety of the respondents i.e., there is no relation between the age and anxiety level of the respondents

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- There is no statistical significant difference between the gender and the anxiety of the respondents i.e., there is no difference in the anxiety level of the boys and girls.
- The anxiety level of the respondents is inversely proportional to their educational level, which means the graduate student has low anxiety level comparing with high school and U.P school student. And the children belonging 9-12 class has low anxiety level comparing with the children belonging 5-8 class.
- From the total population of the respondents 40 (80%) children have normal anxiety level and 10 (20%) children have experiencing clinically significant levels of anxiety
- The children experiencing clinically significant levels of anxiety 7 of them are boys.
- One of the major finding from this study is the girls have normal anxiety (44%) level comparing with boys (36%) and 3 girls only have the clinically significant levels of anxiety.

Self-esteem

- There is no statistical significant difference between the age and self –esteem of respondents. There is no relation between the age and self-esteem of the respondents.
- There is no statistical significant difference between the gender and the self-esteem of the respondents i.e., there is no difference in the self-esteem of the boys and girls.
- The self-esteem of the respondents is inversely proportional to their educational level, which means the graduate student has high self-esteem comparing with high school and U.P school student. And the children belonging 9-12 has high self-esteem comparing with children belonging 5-8 classes.
- The level of the self-esteem is divided in to three categories such as low, medium and high and 17 children has low self-esteem from the total population and they are belonging 5-12 classes. 18 children from the total population has medium level of self-esteem and they are also from the same classes and 15 children has high self-esteem and only three children from 5-8 classes and 11 children from 9-12 classes and in this study only one student from degree class and he has high self-esteem.
- The self-esteem level difference is in the boys and girls, 8 males and 9 females have low self-esteem. The medium self-esteem is equal in both genders, 9 are male and 9 are female. And 8 male children have high self-esteem and 7 females have high self-esteem.

Strength and Difficulty

- The strength and difficulty questionnaire is a brief behavioral screening questionnaire that asks about 25 attribute and this 25 items are divided between five scales of five items and each item score is classified normal, borderline and abnormal
- From the total population of the respondents 9 children having abnormal emotional problem, 23 children having abnormal conduct problems, 9 children having abnormal hyperactivity, 7 children having abnormal peer-problem and 6 children having abnormal pro-social behavior problems
- Most of the children (23, 46%) having abnormal conduct problem while comparing other 4 factors. And 8 (16%) children are border line in the conduct problem
- 19 (38%) children are border line of the peer-problem score
- 38 children having good pro-social behavior and 6 children are border line of the pro-social behavior problem
- 35 children having normal hyperactivity and emotional problem. 6 children are borderline of emotional and hyperactivity problem

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- There is no statistical significant difference between the age and strength and difficulty of the respondent that means there is no relation between the age and their emotional problems, conduct problems, hyperactivity, and peer problems and pro-social behavior
- There is no statistical significant difference between the boys and girls in their emotional problem, conduct problem, hyperactivity, peer-problem and pro-social behavior
- The determinants of the strength and difficulty questionnaire is inversely proportional to the educational level of the respondents, which means the graduate student has low emotional problem, conduct problem, hyperactivity, peer problem and pro-social behavior problem comparing with high school and U.P school student. And the children belonging 9-12 class low emotional problem, conduct problem, hyperactivity, peer problem and pro-social behavior problem comparing with the children from 5-8 class

Suggestions

The major suggestions include:

- The children are experiencing high psychological signs of anxiety, worry and clinically significant anxiety level. Through the proper care, treatment and therapies may help the children to maintain normal anxiety level.
- Providing more personality development classes, motivational classes and leadership building trainings and etc. will help the children to improve their self-esteem.
- Another significant suggestion is, there are more children in the borderline of the emotional, conduct, hyperactivity, peer-problems and pro-social behavior problem. Through the proper care and treatment, we can save the children from abnormal emotional, conduct, hyperactivity, peer-problems and pro-social behavior problem.

CONCLUSION

Children are the most vulnerable group in the society and all children have the right to be protected from harm. The UNICEF, the JJ Act by the Government of India and other provisions, acts, projects and schemes implemented to ensure the protect and care of the children. The study is concluding here with identification of the children in need of care and protection is affecting with the high psychological signs of anxiety, high worry/oversensitivity, clinically significant anxiety and the problems and these high levels of anxiety is seeing more in the boys comparing with the girls. Some of the children from each gender having low self-esteem and most of the children having abnormal emotional, conduct, hyperactivity, peer-problems and pro-social behavior problems and some of them are in the borderline of these problems.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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