

A Comparison among Orphans and Non-Orphans in their Cognitive Styles and Level of Aspiration

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ABSTRACT

Many studies are conducted comparing orphans with non-orphans focusing more on the negative aspects of their mental health, but the motive behind initiating the current study is with positive intention. In the present study orphan children were compared with non-orphans in their cognitive styles and level of aspiration. The sample of the study consisted of 40 orphans and 40 non-orphans from the city of Hyderabad. Story Pictorial Embedded Figure Test and Levels of Aspiration Measure were administered to measure their cognitive style and level of aspiration respectively. The study findings showed that orphan children are more field-independent compared to non-orphans and there is no significant difference their level of aspiration.

Keywords: *Orphans, Non-orphans, Cognitive style, Field-Independency, Field-Dependency, Level of Aspiration*

Childhood is the age of exploring, learning and investigating about various aspects of life. Role of secure family, especially parents and availability of facilitating resources is crucial for overall healthy development in the childhood. Not all the children are fortunate to have parents to provide them safe heaven, journey of childhood would be challenging without a caring family. A child under the age of eighteen who has lost one or both parents or whose parents have abandoned him/her is referred to as an orphan (UNICEF). Many studies focused on the social, psychological and economic problems among institutionalized orphans comparing with non-orphans. The present study is an attempt to understand how the orphans differ from non-orphans while processing the information they encounter in their surroundings and how do they differ in their level of aspiration.

Cognitive style is “individual’s habitual way of organizing and processing information” (Liu, 2008). Different type of classifications are available in cognitive styles, one of those include ‘field dependence-field independence’. These constructs focuses on the way individuals attend

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to, recognize and structure perceptual patterns. They are helpful in analyzing how the pattern recognition is processed and retained in memory.

In the dependent style, individual is strongly dominated in his/her perception by the overall organization of the surrounding field, and part of the field is experienced as fused with the whole. In the independent style, parts are experienced as discrete from organized ground. Individuals who are field independent are more effective in desembedding and analytical tasks and also tend to be socially autonomous and distant in their interpersonal relations (Rangaiah.B, Mewa singh and Gadheri A.R, 2009).

Adults and children described as field independent are highly analytical in their approach to problem (Davis & Cochran, 1989). Field independents are stimulus centered and prefer nonsocial learning. On the other hand individuals characterized as field dependent are especially effective in situations where collaboration and social relationships contribute to success.

Compared to field dependents, field independent children are less likely to be influenced by their peers, teachers or authority figures. They were seen to have a more impersonal orientation and not as sensitive to social undercurrents as field dependent individuals. In studies where participants were asked to do difficult problem solving, field dependent participants tended to look more at the experimenter than did field independents. It has also been found that field dependent people prefer to be physically closer to those with whom they are interacting. Along these same lines of inquiry (social information), field dependent people show better incidental recall for the faces of others with whom they have interacted and tend to recall social aspects of situations more than the nonsocial aspects.

Extensive research have been carried out on children cognitive styles, as they serve as predictors for analyzing children appropriate learning behaviour in the field of education.

Witkin (1973) found that “children from social settings showing less emphasis on conformity would tend to be more field-independent and show other signs of more developed differentiation than children from settings emphasizing conformity”.

Witkin believed that field dependence-independence tendencies result from child rearing practices that emphasize gaining independence from parental controls (Korchin, 1986). The early studies of child rearing done by Witkin showed that when there is strong emphasis on obedience to parental authority and external control of impulses, the child will likely become relatively field dependent. When there is encouragement within the family for the child to develop separate, autonomous functioning, the child will become relatively field independent. In today’s competitive World, children are no exception in setting goals and aspiring to achieve them. Level of aspiration is an individual’s future expectation or ambition. Hoppe (1930) defined

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the 'Level of Aspiration' as a person's expectations, goals or claims on his own future achievement in a given task. A given performance is accompanied by a feeling of failure if it falls below the level of aspiration and a given performance is accompanied by a feeling of success if it goes above the level of aspiration. Frank (1935) redefined Hoppe's concept of level of aspiration as, "the level of future performance in a familiar task which an individual, knowing his level of past performance in that task, explicitly undertakes to reach". This definition implies, level of aspiration is a form of self motivation involving competition with one's own past performance. When an individual is actively involved in a task, he sets himself a new standard or goal to achieve. He tries to gain excellence and attempts to do better than he did before, raising his goal in every new attempt. If he succeeds in reaching the level he expected to reach or if he attains a higher level than the expected one's, he experiences success which is not only satisfying him but also serves as a motivating force for further attainment. On the other hand, if he fails to attain his goal, he experiences a sense of failure which is normally followed by a lowering of the goal so that it may be achieved in the subsequent attempts. Thus, this setting of aspiration levels and the consequent feeling of success or failure resulting in either the raising or lowering of the subsequent levels is a common characteristic of behavior in all goal setting situations. Environmental determinants like parental ambitions towards children, social expectations, and cultural background, competition among siblings and peers, and group cohesiveness influence the level of aspiration. Some of these environmental determinants are not available for orphans and this may result in the possibility of low aspiration level compared to non-orphans.

It is widely accepted because of prejudice, negative stereotype, social denigration, and generally lower class membership, economically and socially disadvantaged children have less opportunity to develop feelings of worth and dignity. This lack of self-esteem is carried into the classroom, resulting in negative experiences and consequently a low level of aspiration (John M. Antes, 1972).

People of low socio-economic status or belonging to high deprived group showed low aspiration level which affects their performance badly in all the fields (Kumar, Kamna and Gogia.M, 1987).

Significance of the study

Aspiration levels and cognitive styles are two different independent variables but they equally reserved importance in the development of childhood especially in the school context. Cognitive style refers to individual differences in how we perceive, think, solve problems and learn. Level of aspiration is an individual's future expectation or ambition.

Many researches took place in these two aspects (Level of aspirations and cognitive styles) with related to children. But all children in the society are not equally placed and there is disparity (or) inequality among different sections of the children who includes orphans and non-orphans.

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The present study is conceived so as to gain an insight into the aspiration levels and cognitive styles (Field independency / dependency) of orphanage-reared children and to identify the pattern of differences, if any, between orphans and non-orphans. Thus the study focuses on the aspiration levels and cognitive styles (field independency / dependency) of Orphanage-reared children and compares them with children who are brought up in homely atmosphere. These children were matched in their age, school and socio-economic status.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses for the present study are determined as follows:

- There will be significant difference between orphans and non-orphans in their cognitive styles.
- There will be significant difference between orphans and non-orphans in their level of aspiration.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

80 children volunteered and took part in the study, amongst them 40 were orphans and 40 were non-orphans. Orphan children were selected from orphanages purposively of age range 9 to 12years. Non-orphans were selected from the same schools of orphans. Both the sample includes boys and girls.

Tools

- 1. Story Pictorial Embedded Figure Test:** Developed and standardised by Sinha (1984). The test is like a game, where subjects are required to search for certain hidden figures in a complicated familiar picture of a garden, or a forest, etc. The test was incorporated with stories to make the task interesting and clear to the participant. Originally, the stories were in Hindi, they were translated into Telugu (the Local Language). The test consists of 11 sets of cards. Of those, three sets namely, P1, P2, P3 are for practice. The remaining eight sets make up the actual test. Each set consists of one simple card containing the stimuli and one complex card containing a familiar setting in which the stimuli are hidden. The basic task is to locate the stimuli in the complex card. Each set has a story related to the stimuli. The maximum time limit is 90 seconds for each card.
- 2. Level of Aspiration Measure:** Developed and standardised by Dr. Mahesh Bhargava and Late prof.M. A. Shah. While administering the subject will be given a page containing 50 circles and he/ she have to draw the line in this sequence – Right eye, Left eye, Nose and Mouth. Subject need to work from left to right across the rows and then proceed to next line. For each trail 30 seconds are allotted for work and at the end of this time, subject will be asked to stop the marking and count the number of completed faces and enter it in lower box. This trail will be treated as PRACTICE TRAIL. In the following trails subject have to do the same thing along with to put the number of faces in

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the upper box which subject intend to complete within 30 seconds time on the basis of last actual performance. Thus subject has to complete 10 trails for actual work. Level of aspiration measure provides three types of scorings; (1) Goal Discrepancy Score (GDS), (2) Attainment Discrepancy Score (ADS), and (3) The Number of Times the Goal Reach Score (NTRS). Goal Discrepancy Score is obtained by subtracting the actual score on a trail from aspiration score (goal set up score) for the next trail. The difference between expected score and actual score results Attainment Discrepancy Score. Number of Times the Goal Reach Score is obtained by noting number of times where the respondent's actual score is equal to or more than expected score.

Procedure

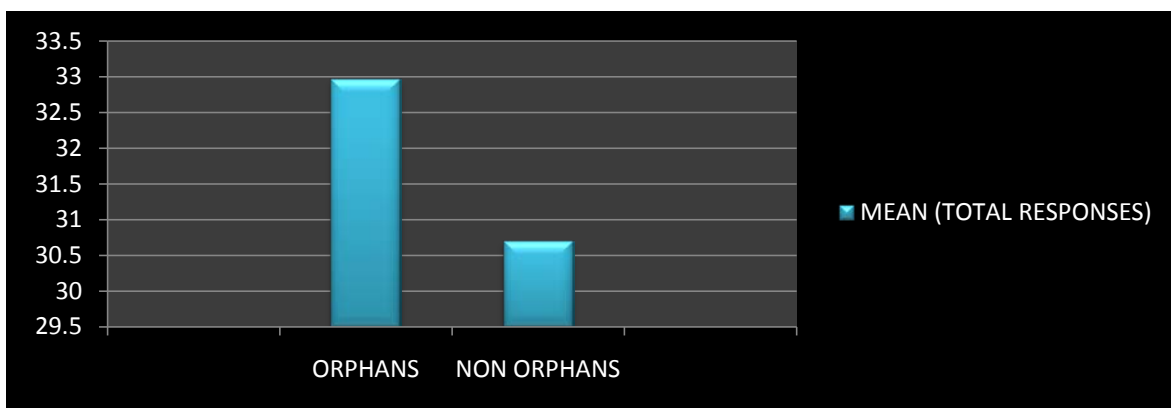
Management of various orphan homes were contacted in the city of Hyderabad, and permission was taken to collect the data. Managements of these institutions also cooperated in the process of making contact and taking permissions from the schools in which orphan children are studying, so that data from the non-orphan children can be gathered. Some of the non-orphan children were contacted at their respective homes with the help of contact details provided by the school and by the permission of the parents. Level of aspiration measure was administered to a group of 4 to 5; while the Story pictorial embedded figure test was conducted individually.

RESULT

Hypotheses 1: There will be significant difference between orphans and non-orphans in their cognitive styles.

Table 1: Showing Mean and T-ratio of Total Responses (cognitive styles) among Orphans and Non-orphans

	N	Mean	SD	T ratio
Orphans	40	32.975	3.198	3.023* **
Non orphans	40	30.7	3.524	



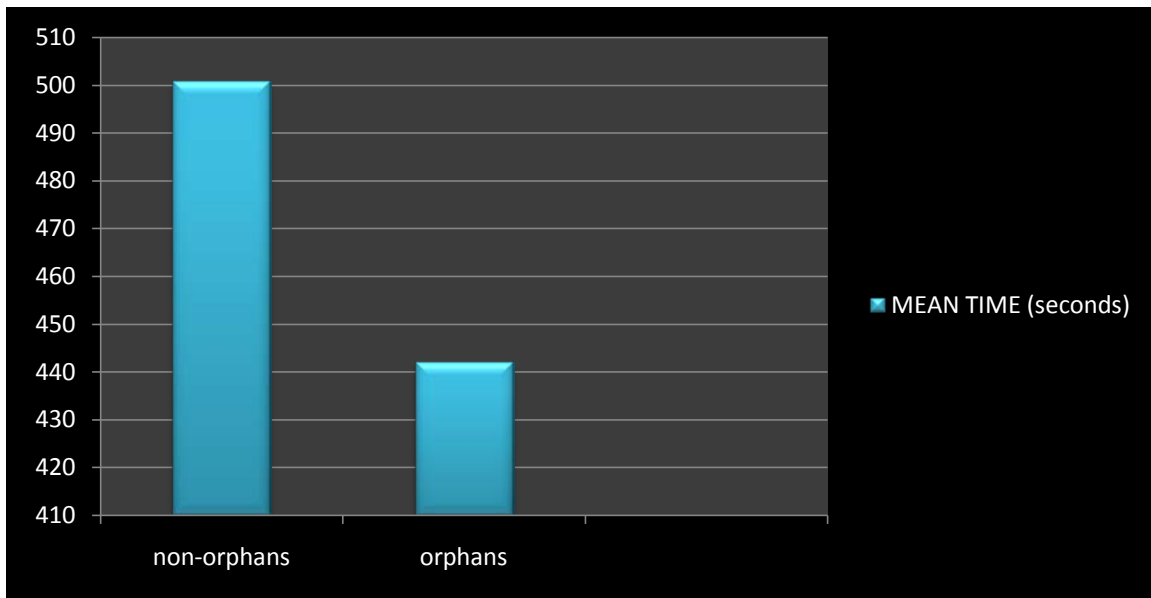
Graph 1: Showing difference between the means of total responses (cognitive styles) among orphans and non-orphans.

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From table 1, it can be noticed that that the T ratio (3.023) for total responses is significant at 0.01 and as well at 0.05. This indicates that there is a significant difference between the means of total responses given by orphan and non-orphans. From the above table it is evident that the total means scores of orphans is 32.975, which is greater when compare to the total mean scores of non-orphans i.e., 30.7. Greater mean score indicates *Field-Independy*, Hence orphans are found to be more field independent than non-orphans.

Table 2: Showing Mean and T-ratio of Time taken in seconds (cognitive styles) among Orphans and Non-orphans

	N	Mean	SD	T ratio
Orphans	40	441.95	103.504	2.701*
Non orphans	40	500.9	91.324	



Graph 2: Showing difference between the means of time taken (cognitive styles) among orphans and non-orphans.

From table 2, it can be noticed that the T-ratio (2.701) for time taken is significant at 0.05. This indicates that there is a significant difference between the means of time taken by orphan and non-orphans. It can also be observed that the time (441.95 sec) taken by orphans is comparatively less than time (500.9 sec) taken by non-orphans. From both table 1 and 2, it can be said that Field Independents (orphans) took less time to complete the task.

Hence it can be concluded that, our first hypotheses is in according to our above finding.

Hypotheses 2: There will be significant difference between orphans and non-orphans in their level of aspiration.

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Table 3.1: Showing Mean and T-ratio of GDS (Goal Discrepancy Score) of level of aspiration among Orphans and Non-orphans

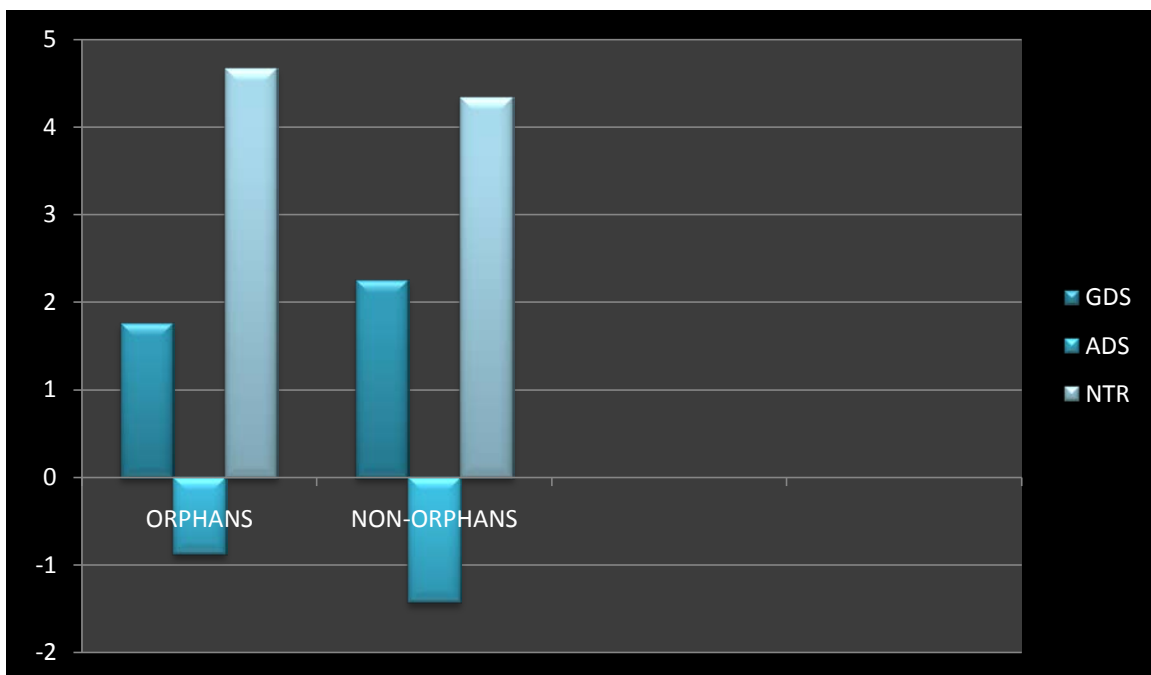
	N	Mean	SD	T ratio
Orphans	40	1.76	2.272	0.75
Non orphans	40	2.25	3.445	

Table 3.2: Showing Mean and T-ratio of ADS (Attainment Discrepancy Score) of level of aspiration among Orphans and Non-orphans

	N	Mean	SD	T ratio
Orphans	40	-0.877	2.239	0.837
Non orphans	40	-1.43	3.522	

Table 3.3: Showing Mean and T-ratio of NTR (Number of Times the Goal Reach Score) of level of aspiration among Orphans and Non-orphans

	N	Mean	SD	T ratio
Orphans	40	4.675	2.545	0.529
Non orphans	40	4.35	2.931	



Graph 3: Showing the difference between the means of GDS, ADS & NTR scores of level of aspiration among orphans and non-orphans.

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From the tables 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 it is evident that there is no significant difference in all the three scores (Goal Discrepancy Score, Attainment Discrepancy Score and Number of Times the Goal Reach Score) of level of aspiration in between orphans and non-orphans. This finding is contrast to our second hypotheses. This finding indicates that there is no difference in the level of aspiration among orphans and non-orphans.

DISCUSSION

The study revealed a surprising fact that orphans are field-independent compared to non-orphans. This could be because of the absence of parents who may strongly emphasis on obedience to parental authority. Situational factors mould orphan children to take decisions by themselves independently and act accordingly, on the other hand interpersonal relations are more for non-orphans compared to orphans and hence non-orphans may depend on others for perceiving and understanding the field than orphans. The other finding in this study is that, both the groups were almost the same on their level of aspiration; this could be because both the groups were matched in their socio-economic status. Also the orphanages which were chosen to conduct the study were proactive towards child's overall development. These institutes were conducting various bridge courses and vocational programmes which might be contributing to orphan children level of aspiration similar to that of non-orphans.

The present study is successful in presenting interesting findings, and there are many implications from the present study. According to the experts, there is no good or bad cognitive style and both have their unique features. It is recommended that the educational programmes should be designed to match the cognitive style and design activities which facilitate their style (field-independent or field-dependent). Many empirical studies have shown that cognitive styles can be a better predictor of people's performance in particular situations than general abilities or situational factors, and that difference in cognitive sstyles influence learning, problem solving, decision making, ccommunication, interpersonal functioning, and creativity in multiple and important ways (Cools, 2007). Supportive environment helps orphan children to have higher levels of aspirations, in spite of absence of parental care.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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