

## A Study on Adjustment of Institutionalized Children\*

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**Abstract:** The present study was conducted to study the social, emotional and educational adjustment of institutionalized children during 2003-05. The sample for the study comprised 148 children in the age group of 10-16 years residing in four juvenile institutions in Belgaum division, Karnataka state. Information about adjustment of children was collected by using Sinha and Singh (1997) adjustment inventory. Results revealed that majority of the institutional children had unsatisfactory social, emotional and educational adjustment and very few of them had good adjustment. Further, their age and academic performance had significant influence on adjustment of them. The adjustment of different types of abused children and their different periods of stay in the institution did not differ significantly.

**Key words :** Adjustment, institutionalized children, neglect, physical abuse, multiple abuse.

### Introduction

Institutionalized children are considered as highly deprived class of society. These children are left helpless, abandoned, neglected due to social, economic and personal reasons by the parents/ caregivers and they are deprived of one or more necessities of life. Early separation from parents, deprivation of parental care, love, affection, warmth, security, acceptance and discipline during childhood disrupts their normal socio-emotional development. So it becomes necessary to know whether institutionalized children who are devoid of family life with the emotional warmth grow up normally and how well they are able to cope with himself and adjust to the demands of the environment/society around them. Therefore the study with the aim to know the level of adjustment of institutionalized children was taken up.

### Material and Methods

The population for the present study comprised children residing in Juvenile Institutions of Belgaum Division, in Karnataka State. Among the 9 institutions in the division four juvenile institutions i.e., two for boys and two for girls nearer to Dharwad were selected for the study. Totally there were 255 children of which 150 children were selected fulfilling following criteria i.e., children between 10-16 years who were neglected, physically and multiple abused were selected for the detailed study. Information about social, emotional and educational adjustment of these children was collected by using Sinha and Singh (1997) adjustment inventory.

### Results and Discussion

The results of the study (Table 1) showed that majority of the institutional children had unsatisfactory social, emotional and educational adjustment and very few of them had good

adjustment. This clearly indicates that institutional children have more social, emotional and educational problems which made them socially more aggressive, emotionally unstable and educationally not interested in studies and these characteristics were responsible for unsatisfactory adjustment of children. Similarly, the earlier studies conducted by Biradar (1992), Hiremani *et al.* (1994), Chaudhary and Bajaj (1995) and Chaudhary and Uppal (1996) also reported that institutional children were emotionally insecure, immature and unstable.

The results of study showed that younger (10-12 years) and older (13-15 years) children differed significantly in the level of social, emotional and educational adjustments. Larger proportion of older children showed average adjustment while younger children showed unsatisfactory adjustment (Table 2). This indicated that younger children had more problems in social, emotional and educational areas compared to older children. This may be due to the fact that adjustment of children improves with advancing age. Their childhood behavior and emotions are replaced by more matured forms of behaviors and their cognitive abilities such as ability to understand, reason, remember and concentrate also improves with advancing age. The findings are in conformity with the earlier studies made by Sujatha *et al.* (1993), Hiremani *et al.* (1994) and Dutta *et al.* (1998).

The results in Table 3 showed that higher proportion of boys had average social, emotional and educational adjustment indicating better level of adjustment as compared to the girls. This clearly indicated that as compared to the girls, boys were socially more friendly with their classmates and with others, like to work with others, extrovert, outgoing, sharing, aggressive, take part in school activities, and emotionally they were quite bold, less worried, depressed, sad, jealous about others, resentful, rationalize their mistakes. Further, educationally

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they were able to understand the lesson taught by the school teachers, able to take notes properly, satisfied with the method of teaching in school, pay attention to studies and make use of library facilities. All these traits were responsible for better adjustment of boys. The study similarly conducted by Jain and Negi (1998) on juvenile children also revealed that male children had better social, educational and overall adjustment than girls.

Further the results revealed no significant difference in the level of social, emotional, educational adjustments of different categories of abused children (Table 4). However, more number of neglected, physical and multiple abused children were unsatisfactory in social, emotional, educational adjustments. From the child's perspective abuse during childhood disrupts the early process of attachment with the primary caregiver i.e.,

parent(s) and impairs the related developmental processes in social, emotional and intellectual areas.

The findings of the present study (Table 5) also revealed that duration of stay in the institution had no association with social, emotional, educational adjustment of children. This indicates that the level of social, emotional, educational areas of children was almost same irrespective of their duration of stay in the institution. This may be attributed to the fact that institutionalization is a pathological element for the development of children. It is the parental attitude towards child's acceptance or rejection which has a greater impact on the children irrespective of its duration of stay in the institute. Similar results were reported by Hiremani (1991) who found no

Table 1 Distribution of institutionalized children according to their level of adjustment

N=148

| Area of adjustment | Level               | Institutions    |                 |                 |                  | Total         | Mean score obtained |
|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|---------------|---------------------|
|                    |                     | Hubli (n=36)    | Gadag (n=76)    | Khanapur (n=17) | Saundatti (n=19) |               |                     |
| Social             | Good                | 8<br>(22.22)    | 9<br>(11.84)    | 3<br>(17.65)    | 4<br>(21.05)     | 24<br>(16.22) | 7.67                |
|                    | Average             | 12<br>(33.33)   | 26<br>(34.21)   | 6<br>(35.29)    | 6<br>(31.56)     | 50<br>(33.78) |                     |
|                    | Unsatisfactory      | 10<br>(27.78)   | 29<br>(38.16)   | 5<br>(29.41)    | 7<br>(36.84)     | 51<br>(34.45) |                     |
|                    | Very unsatisfactory | 6<br>(16.67)    | 12<br>(15.79)   | 3<br>(17.65)    | 2<br>(10.53)     | 23<br>(15.54) |                     |
|                    | Mean score obtained | 7.58<br>(3.29)  | 7.78<br>(2.30)  | 7.26<br>(2.70)  | 7.88<br>(2.98)   |               |                     |
| Emotional          | Good                | 6<br>(16.67)    | 8<br>(10.53)    | 1<br>(5.88)     | 4<br>(21.05)     | 19<br>(12.84) | 8.22                |
|                    | Average             | 15<br>(41.67)   | 20<br>(26.32)   | 9<br>(52.94)    | 4<br>(21.05)     | 48<br>(32.43) |                     |
|                    | Unsatisfactory      | 8<br>(22.22)    | 34<br>(44.74)   | 4<br>(23.53)    | 9<br>(47.37)     | 55<br>(37.16) |                     |
|                    | Very unsatisfactory | 7<br>(19.44)    | 14<br>(18.42)   | 3<br>(17.65)    | 2<br>(10.53)     | 26<br>(17.57) |                     |
|                    | Mean score obtained | 7.94<br>(3.34)  | 8.49<br>(2.76)  | 7.82<br>(2.81)  | 8.05<br>(2.55)   |               |                     |
| Educational        | Good                | 7<br>(19.44)    | 8<br>(10.53)    | 3<br>(17.65)    | 2<br>(10.53)     | 20<br>(13.51) | 8.19                |
|                    | Average             | 14<br>(38.88)   | 20<br>(26.32)   | 8<br>(47.06)    | 5<br>(26.32)     | 47<br>(31.76) |                     |
|                    | Unsatisfactory      | 11<br>(30.56)   | 32<br>(42.11)   | 3<br>(17.65)    | 8<br>(42.11)     | 54<br>(36.49) |                     |
|                    | Very unsatisfactory | 4<br>(11.11)    | 16<br>(21.05)   | 3<br>(17.65)    | 4<br>(21.05)     | 27<br>(18.24) |                     |
|                    | Mean score obtained | 7.50<br>(2.94)  | 8.55<br>(2.56)  | 8.00<br>(3.12)  | 8.26<br>(2.79)   |               |                     |
| Total              | Good                | 4<br>(11.11)    | 8<br>(10.53)    | 1<br>(5.88)     | 3<br>(15.78)     | 16<br>(10.81) | 24.18               |
|                    | Average             | 13<br>(36.11)   | 21<br>(27.63)   | 8<br>(47.05)    | 5<br>(26.32)     | 47<br>(31.75) |                     |
|                    | Unsatisfactory      | 13<br>(36.11)   | 32<br>(42.10)   | 5<br>(29.41)    | 8<br>(42.11)     | 58<br>(39.19) |                     |
|                    | Very unsatisfactory | 6<br>(16.66)    | 15<br>(19.74)   | 3<br>(17.65)    | 3<br>(15.79)     | 27<br>(18.24) |                     |
|                    | Mean score obtained | 23.08<br>(8.85) | 24.92<br>(7.34) | 23.82<br>(8.21) | 23.63<br>(7.18)  |               |                     |

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages

Lower mean indicate better adjustment

relation between length of institutionalization and emotional maturity among destitute adolescent girls.

The present study further indicated significant association between academic performance and social, emotional, and educational adjustment of children (Table 6). This clearly indicated that children who were fair in academic performance were average in social, emotional and educational adjustment. This is because of the fact that physical, social, emotional, and intellectual developments are interrelated. High academic performance in school generally develops better self-esteem and self-confidence in the children which leads to the development of desirable social and emotional traits such as boldness, being friendly with classmates and others, enjoy company of other children and working in group, assumes responsibilities, interest in extra curricular activities, helping nature, not become angry on others quite often, do not envy others and feel jealous about others, often do not feel sad, depressed and anxious, rationalize their mistakes and cooperative which leads to better adjustment in society. The results are in conformity with the studies made by Rai (1982) and Dutta *et al.* (1998). Agarwal (1981) found that under-achievers were less emotionally stable, less calm, less placid, prone to getting into difficulties, less able to face reality, less compulsive and had poor self concept. Bharatidevi (1982) reported that high achievers differed from low achievers in

neuroticism, guilt feelings, inferiority feeling, personal warmth, and attitude towards life.

The results of the study revealed that majority of institutional children had unsatisfactory adjustment indicating more problems in social, emotional and educational areas. These children were emotionally unstable, impatient, demanding, disobedient, less accommodating, shy, timid, sensitive, insecure, aggressive, worried, troubling, lack concentration and interest in studies, poor memory which put impediment in their adjustment in the institutional living and in effective utilization of its services. The finding has important practical implication that such traits later are likely to drag them towards anti social behavior. There are theoretical and empirical evidences regarding links between child abuse and delinquency. So, child abuse is only the beginning that sparks off a series of problems that lasts for life time. From the perspective of children, it is not appropriate simply if we focus our attention on the psychological reaction of the child victims but they must be helped to overcome the adverse effects of abuse. So, there is need for tertiary intervention efforts targeting towards victims to restore their optimum level of functioning and preventing them from maladjustment. Under the circumstances where the family atmosphere is unhealthy, institutional care is the best available alternative for these children. In this regard institution/protective agency has high degree of responsibility towards abused

Table 2. Influence of age on adjustment of institutionalized children

N=148

| Age group                       | Level of social adjustment |            |                |                     | Mean SD      | ‘t’ value |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|------------|----------------|---------------------|--------------|-----------|
|                                 | Good                       | Average    | Unsatisfactory | Very unsatisfactory |              |           |
| Younger 10-12 yrs (n=71)        | 7 (9.86)                   | 20 (28.17) | 24 (33.80)     | 20 (28.17)          | 8.71 (±2.78) | 4.87**    |
| Older 13-15 yrs (n=77)          | 17 (22.08)                 | 30 (38.96) | 27 (35.06)     | 3 (3.90)            | 6.71 (±2.17) |           |
| Total ÷2                        | 24                         | 50         | 51 19.38**     | 23                  |              |           |
| Level of emotional adjustment   |                            |            |                |                     |              |           |
| Younger 10-12 yrs (n=71)        | 5 (7.04)                   | 20 (28.17) | 22 (30.99)     | 24 (33.80)          | 9.45 (±3.05) | 5.22**    |
| Older 13-15 yrs (n=77)          | 14 (18.18)                 | 28 (36.36) | 33 (42.86)     | 2 (2.60)            | 7.18 (±2.11) |           |
| Total ÷2                        | 19                         | 48         | 55 26.21**     | 26                  |              |           |
| Level of educational adjustment |                            |            |                |                     |              |           |
| Younger 10-12 yrs (n=71)        | 6 (8.45)                   | 17 (23.94) | 23 (32.39)     | 25 (35.21)          | 9.33 (±2.94) | 5.18**    |
| Older 13-15 yrs (n=77)          | 14 (18.18)                 | 30 (38.96) | 31 (40.26)     | 2 (2.60)            | 7.14 (2.09)  |           |
| Total ÷2                        | 20                         | 47         | 54 27.37**     | 27                  |              |           |

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages

\*\* Significant at 0.01 per cent level

Table 3. Influence of gender on adjustment of institutionalized children

N=148

| Table 5: Influence of gender on adjustment of institutionalized children |                            |            |                |                     |              | N=148     |
|--|----------------------------|------------|----------------|---------------------|--------------|-----------|
| Age group  | Level of social adjustment |            |                |                     | Mean<br>SD   | 't' value |
|  | Good                       | Average    | Unsatisfactory | Very unsatisfactory |              |           |
| Boys (n=53)  | 12 (20.75)                 | 17 (32.08) | 15 (28.30)     | 9 (16.98)           | 7.68 (±3.16) | 0.01NS    |
| Girls (n=95)   | 12 (12.63)                 | 33 (34.74) | 36 (37.89)     | 14 (14.74)          | 7.67 (±2.37) |           |
| Total  | 24                         | 50         | 51             | 23                  |              |           |
| ±2   |                            |            | 2.47           | NS                  |              |           |
| Level of emotional adjustment  |                            |            |                |                     |              |           |
| Boys   | 7 (13.21)                  | 24 (45.28) | 12 (22.64)     | 10 (18.87)          | 7.66 (±2.98) | 3.70 **   |
| Girls  | 12 (12.63)                 | 24 (25.26) | 43 (45.26)     | 16 (16.84)          | 8.49 (±2.59) |           |
| Total  | 19                         | 48         | 55             | 26                  |              |           |
| ±2   |                            |            | 8.97 *         |                     |              |           |
| Level of educational adjustment  |                            |            |                |                     |              |           |
| Boys   | 10 (18.87)                 | 22 (41.51) | 14 (26.42)     | 7 (13.08)           | 7.91 (±3.15) | 1.16NS    |
| Girls  | 10 (10.53)                 | 25 (26.32) | 40 (42.11)     | 20 (21.05)          | 8.47 (±2.64) |           |
| Total  | 20                         | 47         | 54             | 27                  |              |           |
| ±2   |                            |            | 7.67           | NS                  |              |           |

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages \* Significant at 0.05 per cent level \*\* Significant at 0.01 per cent level

Table 4 Influence of types of abuse on adjustment of institutionalized children

N=148

| Types of<br>abuse               | Level of social adjustment |            |                |                     | Mean         | 'F' value |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|------------|----------------|---------------------|--------------|-----------|
|                                 | Good                       | Average    | Unsatisfactory | Very unsatisfactory |              |           |
| Neglect                         | 9 (12.33)                  | 26 (35.62) | 28 (38.36)     | 10 (13.70)          | 8.67 (±2.78) | 0.54NS    |
| Physical abuse                  | 8 (22.86)                  | 13 (37.14) | 11 (31.42)     | 3 (8.57)            | 8.03 (±3.33) |           |
| Multiple abuse                  | 7 (17.50)                  | 11 (27.50) | 12 (30.00)     | 10 (25.00)          | 7.65 (±2.38) |           |
| Total                           | 24                         | 50         | 51             | 23                  |              |           |
| ∓2                              |                            |            | 6.28           | NS                  |              |           |
| Level of emotional adjustment   |                            |            |                |                     |              |           |
| Neglect                         | 13 (17.81)                 | 20 (27.40) | 23 (31.51)     | 17 (23.29)          | 7.87 (±2.52) | 1.81NS    |
| Physical abuse                  | 3 (8.57)                   | 13 (37.14) | 15 (42.86)     | 4 (11.43)           | 7.69 (±3.33) |           |
| Multiple abuse                  | 3 (7.5)                    | 15 (37.50) | 17 (42.50)     | 5 (12.50)           | 7.33 (±2.32) |           |
| Total                           | 19                         | 48         | 55             | 26                  |              |           |
| ∓2                              |                            |            | 7.85           | NS                  |              |           |
| Level of educational adjustment |                            |            |                |                     |              |           |
| Neglect                         | 9 (12.33)                  | 22 (30.14) | 26 (35.62)     | 16 (21.92)          | 8.59 (±2.81) | 1.55NS    |
| Physical abuse                  | 7 (20.00)                  | 11 (31.43) | 13 (37.14)     | 4 (11.43)           | 7.71 (±2.92) |           |
| Multiple abuse                  | 4 (10.00)                  | 14 (35.00) | 15 (37.50)     | 7 (17.50)           | 7.88 (±2.43) |           |
| Total                           | 20                         | 47         | 54             | 27                  |              |           |
| ∓2                              |                            |            | 3.18           | NS                  |              |           |

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages

NS- Non significant

Table 5 Influence of duration of stay in institution on adjustment of children

N=148

| Duration<br>of stay             | Level of social adjustment |            |                |                     | Mean       | ‘t’ value |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|------------|----------------|---------------------|------------|-----------|
|                                 | Good                       | Average    | Unsatisfactory | Very unsatisfactory |            |           |
| 2-5 years n=91                  | 16 (17.58)                 | 35 (38.46) | 30 (32.97)     | 10 (10.99)          | 7.43 ±2.57 | 1.35NS    |
| >6 years n=57                   | 8 (14.04)                  | 15 (26.32) | 21 (36.84)     | 13 (22.81)          | 8.07 ±2.82 |           |
| Total                           | 24                         | 50         | 51             | 23                  |            |           |
| ±2                              |                            |            | 0.16 NS        |                     |            |           |
| Level of emotional adjustment   |                            |            |                |                     |            |           |
| 2-5 years n=91                  | 13 (14.29)                 | 32 (35.16) | 33 (36.26)     | 13 (14.28)          | 7.93 ±2.65 | 1.64 NS   |
| >6 years n=57                   | 6 (10.53)                  | 16 (28.07) | 22 (38.60)     | 13 (22.80)          | 8.74 ±3.07 |           |
| Total                           | 19                         | 48         | 55             | 26                  |            |           |
| ±2                              |                            |            | 0.48 NS        |                     |            |           |
| Level of educational adjustment |                            |            |                |                     |            |           |
| 2-5 years n=91                  | 14 (15.38)                 | 32 (35.16) | 32 (35.16)     | 13 (14.29)          | 7.87 ±2.64 | 1.76 NS   |
| >6 years n=57                   | 6 (10.53)                  | 15 (26.32) | 22 (38.60)     | 14 (24.56)          | 8.70 ±2.87 |           |
| Total                           | 20                         | 47         | 54             | 27                  |            |           |
| ±2                              |                            |            | 0.31 NS        |                     |            |           |

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages

NS – Non significant

Table 6. Influence of academic performance on adjustment of institutionalized children

| Academic performance            | Level of social adjustment |           |                |                     | Mean  |         | 'F' value |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------|----------------|---------------------|-------|---------|-----------|
|                                 | Good                       | Average   | Unsatisfactory | Very unsatisfactory |       |         |           |
| Good (60-74%) n=23              | 13 (61.9)                  | 3 (14.3)  | 3 (13.04)      | 4 (17.39)           | 5.85  | (±3.49) | 5.04**    |
| Fair (50-59%) n=50              | 5 (10.0)                   | 28 (56.0) | 12 (24.0)      | 5 (5.0)             | 7.38  | (±2.36) |           |
| Poor (30-49%) n=64              | 5 (7.8)                    | 18 (28.1) | 31 (48.4)      | 10 (15.6)           | 8.17  | (±2.25) |           |
| Very poor(< 30) n=11            | 1 (9.1)                    | 1 (9.1)   | 5 (45.5)       | 4 (36.4)            | 9.18  | (±2.75) |           |
| Total                           | 24                         | 50        | 51             | 23                  |       |         |           |
| ÷2                              |                            |           | 59.75 **       |                     |       |         |           |
| Level of emotional adjustment   |                            |           |                |                     |       |         |           |
| Good (60-74%) n=23              | 10 (47.6)                  | 7 (33.3)  | 3 (13.04)      | 3 (13.04)           | 6.09  | ±2.27   | 6.79**    |
| Fair (50-59%) n=50              | 4 (8.0)                    | 28 (56.0) | 11 (22.0)      | 7 (14.0)            | 7.76  | ±2.59   |           |
| Poor (30-49%) n=64              | 4 (8.0)                    | 12 (18.8) | 37 (57.8)      | 11 (17.2)           | 8.92  | ±2.45   |           |
| Very poor(<30%) n=11            | 1 (9.1)                    | 1 (9.1)   | 4 (36.4)       | 5 (45.5)            | 10.27 | ±3.16   |           |
| Total                           | 19                         | 48        | 55             | 26                  |       |         |           |
| ÷2                              |                            |           | 60.20**        |                     |       |         |           |
| Level of educational adjustment |                            |           |                |                     |       |         |           |
| Good (60-74%) n=23              | 10 (47.6)                  | 9 (39.13) | 2 (8.70)       | 2 (9.5)             | 6.04  | (±2.92) | 7.02**    |
| Fair (50-59%) n=50              | 4 (8.0)                    | 27 (54.0) | 13 (26.0)      | 6 (12.0)            | 7.70  | (±2.44) |           |
| Poor (30-49%) n=64              | 5 (7.8)                    | 10 (15.6) | 36 (56.3)      | 13 (20.3)           | 8.96  | (±2.51) |           |
| Very poor (< 30%) n=11          | 1 (9.1)                    | 1 (9.1)   | 3 (27.3)       | 6 (54.3)            | 10.00 | (±2.60) |           |
| Total                           | 20                         | 47        | 54             | 27                  |       |         |           |
| ÷2                              |                            |           | 61.37**        |                     |       |         |           |

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages

\*\* Significant at 0.01 per cent level

children who are experiencing great stress and safeguard children from further detrimental experiences in their immediate environment and prevent further neglect or abuse. Abused children need help to overcome pain, fear, confusion which they may not be able to voice or even show in their behaviors. Institutional children may be protected from harm if they get an opportunity to develop stable emotional relationship with at least one important and consistent person in their lives who can provide support and protection. So the mechanical type of care must be replaced with personal concern by the staffs who are in charge of the children particularly the house mothers whom they consider as a substitute parent. However a stable, reliable and understanding relationship does not depend primarily on

words but on consistent response to child's feelings which gradually develops foundations of trust, confidence, and sense of security. This provides strong base from which they develop self identity, self respect, a sense of confidence and work. These tasks must be partly accomplished before the child adjusts his/her behaviors reasonably to the day's events in the institution and before they are ready to explore opportunities to learn. The Department of social welfare should pay attention to social, emotional, educational problems of children either by providing special training to in-service teachers or through guidance and counseling services in the institution by the counselor.

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