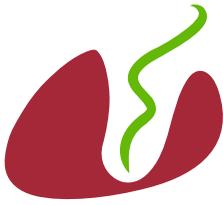


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# Institutionalised Children Explorations and Beyond

An International Journal on Alternative Care

Volume 6

September 2019

Number 2



**SPECIAL FOCUS ON 'CAREGIVERS'**

**Focused on the South Asian Region**



# Institutionalised Children Explorations and Beyond

An International Journal on Alternative Care

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## ***Editorial***

The September 2019 issue of the journal exemplifies our commitment to staying relevant with issues that pertain to orphaned children and those in need of care and protection. In this issue, we expand our scope of inquiry and explore the role of caregivers, their mental health, the adequacy of their training, and the potential for burnout that exists in any care giving group. In addition, we are pleased to introduce another opinion piece as a counterpoint to an existing section. This section will draw upon and represent the emerging voices of those individuals who have been part of the institutional setting, perhaps now in aftercare, and/or represent a perspective that reflects the views and sentiments of a new generation. We hope this will enhance the opinion piece and add colour and depth to this section of the journal.

As the editor-in-chief, it gives me a great pride to write the foreword for this issue. Drawing upon my training as a psychologist/psychoanalyst, I delve into the ubiquity of mental health concerns that can emerge in a caregiver and the imperative need to provide adequate training and evaluations for proper placement. The caregiver provides a vital role in any agency and one that is complicated by their personal narratives, especially of trauma. With a brief exploration of the early attachment literature, I expand on ideas presented by prominent child analysts to capture the exquisite relationship that exists between a mother and her child. In an institutional setting, these early bonds often appear in a complex and confusing manner. The role of the caregiver in such settings is far more nuanced. Some findings pertinent to the mental health of the caregiver are presented as is the need for adequate cultural training when examining issues pertinent to orphaned children in the SAARC region.

For the next section, we departed from our customary format of interviewing one prominent individual in the field to choosing three caregivers occupying roles at different levels of the care spectrum of alternative care in India. The interview conducted by Ms. Leena Prasad, captures the sentiments of Caregiver Ms. Sunita Gupta and the care giving team comprising of Social Worker Ms. Jayabala, Counsellor Ms. Banashree Hati, and Director Mr. Vishwajeet Ghoshal at Prayas Children's Home. The second interview was conducted with Mr. Premoday Khakha,

Superintendent/Person-in-Charge at Juvenile Justice Board (JJB) I & III and Observation Home for Boys II, Delhi. The third interview was conducted with Mr. Deepak Sharma, Honorary Director and Mentor Father of Udayan Care's Jagshanti Udayan Ghar in Greater Noida. The end result is a compilation of these three interviews that weaves in the various and diverse commentaries in a comprehensive and cogent manner. It elucidates the carers' vision, concerns, and in-person experiences of ongoing issues. Coming from three different perspectives, it gives us a 360-degree view on the delivery of care services in an organisational setting.

Moving onto our research section, we begin with a paper, which expands on the critical issues of hiring and retaining caregivers in institutional settings with special needs children. Submitted by Ms. Hena Prathibha and Mr. Ian Forber-Pratt, the paper elucidates on the challenging needs of this particular population and the essential competency requirements for caregivers, which range from how to position a child in a wheelchair to feeding and other interactive experiences. Recognising the broad range of competency requirements for caregivers, Dr. Alexandra Harrison and her colleagues, Ms. Pregna Neelgund, Ms. Alayne Stieglitz, and Ms. Ginger Gregory, explore how the childhood experiences of child caregivers can influence their behaviour when working with children and mothers. Using a semi-structured interview process, the authors examined what they call the 'hidden factors' in caregivers in residential settings in a home in South India. The theme of improving care giving functions continues in the next paper. Ms. Ratna Saxena and Mr. Shashank Shekhar examine the nature of communication between caregivers, children and other staff in organisational settings. They assert that these communications play a significant role in a child's development. In addition to extensive literature review, the authors also use a series of Focused Group Discussions with caregivers working with children in Alternative Care in child care institutions, group foster care, and aftercare settings.

A stellar contribution from our research associates Ms. Radhika Srivastava, Ms. Deepti Agnihotri, Ms. Shagun Vashisth, and Dr. Sumedha Gupta Ariely from Duke University follows with a focus on the mental health factors that caregivers of orphaned and separated children often demonstrate in their personal and professional lives. As part of a longitudinal research study, the students continue to study factors that impinge on development and mental health concerns of orphaned children as well as their caregivers. Using psychometric measures of anxiety, depression, and trauma, the study draws attention to the significant percentage of caregivers who suffer from potentially traumatic life events. This resonates with the findings from an earlier paper, which illustrates the imperative need to attend to the caregivers' mind and mental health, if we are to have optimal results from such settings.

The final paper in the research section focusses on the socialisation process of female children in institutional settings. The move towards transitioning orphaned children into foster care placements and home-like environments requires an assessment of their preparedness with different social settings. Using semi-structured interviews and gathering data through case studies of children living in institutional settings in Sri Lanka, the author Ms. Subodini Herath emphasises the need to strengthen socialisation needs for these young girls, especially in preparation for their transitioning into foster care placement.

Following the research section of this issue is a paper on good models for practice of care. Mr. Niels Peter Rygaard needs no introduction. As the director of Fairstart, he has devoted his life to strengthening the care of institutionalised children. In this paper, he presents a model to train large number of foster and kinship families who often do not have access to reliable services. Financing of this training and using standards to ensure quality care are discussed. Our international section further reiterates the need for paying attention to caregivers and their mental health. The authors, Ms. Anna Gerasimenko and Ms. Anna Resnikovski-Kuras, describe a residential care facility in Israel and stress a framework of care for the caregivers that ensures the optimal delivery of services in the facility. They pay attention to the overwhelming levels of burnout in the caregiver population and advocate for adequate training and support, so that they can attend to the sometimes overwhelming needs of the children.

The complex and nuanced relationships between caregivers and their young charges are brought to light in the movie *Short Term 12*. Reviewed by Ms. Lakshmi Madhavan, the movie is based on the real-life experiences of director Destin Cretton, who worked at a residential care facility for several years. Capturing the nuanced narratives of engagement that exists between a young group-home employee Grace, and a group of at-risk teens, the movie explores the heartaches and sorrows that engulf the residential community. Lakshmi's succinct yet eloquent portrayal of the movie's primary objectives captures the essence of the role of the caregiver in the life of young teens who struggle to find a place in their world. For the book review, Dr. Kakul Hai's selection of a book that provides a moving account of an adoption of a Russian orphaned child by a couple, sheds light on life beyond adoption, and is pertinent to our theme for this issue. When parents move beyond the initial exhilaration of knowing that they will have a child to call their own, they face the realities of living with a child who faces serious mental health and, sometimes, physical challenges of their own. In the book, 'Rescuing Julia Twice' by Tina Traster, the author provides a personal account of her journey as she struggles with her adopted child's diagnosis of Reactive Formation Disorder. Dr. Hai elaborates on the complex dynamics that

emerge when a family comes to grips with the realities of raising a child with this diagnosis and informs us of what the diagnosis actually entails. The book is a reminder that caregivers are not always prepared and informed as to what they will encounter in a caretaking situation. Education, support, and a holding environment that recognises this, benefits all in the long run. That children come with mental (and sometimes physical) challenges cannot be overlooked and must be a part of our ongoing dialogue, as we engage in strengthening our caregivers and move towards adoption and foster care placements in the community.

The focus on caregivers continues in our opinion section. Dr. Kiran Modi expands on the role of the caregiver in the Alternative Care setting. As the Managing Trustee of Udayan Care, she is uniquely positioned to observe, comment on, and implement change when needed. Her commentary on the mind of the caregiver, the challenges that they face, their personal financial needs, and the work they do reveals her deep compassion, her commitment, and ultimately her desire to better the life of all individuals who undertake the work of caring for orphaned children. Following her commentary, Mr. Manoj Udayan, a Care Leaver, makes his debut as the first to provide a youth-oriented perspective on this important topic. His eloquent piece on what a caregiver actually means to an orphaned child is heartfelt, and a first-hand account of the indeed ‘Unique Relationship’ that can develop between two individuals. That caregivers often function as surrogate parents is echoed in the warm feelings that children develop and retain long after they have left the institutional care. This suggests that aftercare plans should include this as an essential component for any young adult who moves into the community and begins a life of their own.

**Monisha C. Nayar-Akhtar, Ph.D.**  
*Editor-in-Chief*