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Institutionalised Children
Explorations and Beyond

Aims and Scope

Institutionalised Children Explorations and Beyond is an international, multi-disciplinary, peer-reviewed academic journal on Family Strengthening and Alternative Care for out-of-home-care (OHC) children and young persons, focused on the Asia region with a global perspective. The journal documents original research papers, good models of care practices, comprehensive desk review papers, editorial and foreword, and interview with experts. Along with addressing issues that can influence policy reforms, decision-making and improve practices and standards of care, the content of the journal aspires to strengthen research, knowledge and practices currently prevalent in the region.

In essence, *Institutionalised Children Explorations and Beyond* sees itself as a forum for studies, discussions, debates and research on issues that would lead to better practices of care, improve mental health, and encourage the integration of OHC children and young persons, including the differently-abled, into the mainstream and thus to their inclusion in civil society. The journal will be of interest to board members, managers, caregivers, psychologists, counsellors, psychiatrists, volunteers, and social workers, in governmental and NGO organisations, as also to policy-makers, and university faculty who are interested in the care and study of children in institutions, as well as in other alternative forms of care. Students in social work, psychology, law and other related disciplines across the South Asian countries, as well as other mental health professionals interested in these studies, will find the journal useful. The scope includes encouraging studies on these issues by universities and hospitals, together with clinics, young professionals and those in the field of caregiving, especially in the non-governmental not-for-profit-sector. The belief is that such education, and sharing of knowledge and experiences would lead to more dynamic prevention as well as rehabilitation models.

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Note from the Editor-in-Chief

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It is with immense pleasure and pride that I write the editorial for this March 2024 issue of the *Institutionalised Children Explorations and Beyond* (ICB). This issue is a turning point for the journal. It marks 10 years of a journey that began in 2014, and at this juncture, it ushers in another decade with new hope, motivation, innovation and a vision that we hope will be transformative for the region, broadening its scope to Asia. In the last decade of our publication, we focused on increasing awareness of the needs of children who are institutionalised and otherwise in need of care and protection. A brief tribute at this time to the issues we covered and how the journal evolved in concept and form is essential. It is only in knowing our history that we can begin to understand our present and future. That is true for the evolution of our world, for our society and culture and eventually for our minds and souls. It is only in knowing our past that we can begin to shape our future.

The initial conceptualising of the journal began as a humble attempt to provide a platform where the needs of institutionalised children could be understood and examined in the South Asia region. Since then, the journal has expanded and broadened its mission and vision to address specific issues of concern, dedicating certain issues to the examination of childhood sexual abuse, trauma and issues of depression. Recognising that children lived and grew in environments that had care staff, the journal addressed concerns related to the caregivers, recognising that their ability to care and nourish the population they worked with would depend a great deal on how they functioned emotionally, physically and socially. The ICB journal, over a decade, also addressed issues related to care leavers and then finally worked with guest editors to craft specific issues pertinent to their area of interest and the need of the hour. Noteworthy was the issue on de-institutionalisation, a global policy that undoubtedly will affect the population that the journal addresses. Along the way, the journal strove to redesign and bring in ideas that we thought were noteworthy. Our mission and vision continue to be unwavering in our dedication to bringing awareness to the mental health concerns of this population, to encourage collaboration and participation in different ventures and to broaden our reach and depth of scientific inquiry and expertise.

For the next 10 years, we continue to be committed to this goal. However, we are making some changes that we feel will be exciting and usher in a whole new genre of research and academic pursuit. While the primary format of our journal remains unchanged, we have decided to remove the book review section to allow for more research articles to be published from across the globe, with focus on Asia. We hope that this move will broaden and deepen our reach and bring in articles from regions that will be valuable to our readership. In addition, we would like to begin an investigation of social and cultural factors that complicate the lives of children without

parental care and contribute to their institutional care and placement, along with taking into account the preventive and reintegrating aspects of family strengthening. This shift is an attempt to cast a wider net regarding factors that exist in society at large that add to the complexity of care and placement of these individuals.

The March 2024 issue begins with an interview of Khadijah Madihi by our very own Dr Gurneet Kalra. Khadijah Madihi is a child rights specialist and the primary visionary behind Asia Family First. She is well known for her collaborations with global organisations, governments and communities that have helped in broadening strategies, advancing family-based care and assisting in de-institutionalisation programs for the region.

The research section begins with an article that explores the mental health experiences of children who are orphaned and live in institutions. Conducting an in-depth interview of 25 orphan menstruators, the author, Kavita Gupta, identifies four themes that are prominent: menstrual experiences, access to menstrual products, social support and coping behaviours. She suggests that policy changes to meet the needs of these young girls will benefit long-term empowerment and subsequent care for them as they move forward through the system.

As government policies move towards foster care and adoption, the next article by Myrna McNitt is quite timely. Elucidating upon the future of foster care and child protection in India and Sri Lanka, the author highlights the legislative action taken in India to amend its Children's Act in 2015 (Care & Protection of Children Act, 2015), where foster care was identified as a service area. This policy was also enacted in Sri Lanka, where they passed the National Alternative Care Policy for Children in 2019. These policies define and expand on all forms of alternative care for institutionalised children. The author further elucidates on the development of foster care as depending on three critical elements: collaboration, training and exchange of practices.

In the next article, the author, Varathagowry Vasudevan, revisits the devastating impact of the recent pandemic (COVID-19) on the social and emotional lives of care leavers in Sri Lanka. The recurring impact of the damage is felt in their socioeconomic status, subsequently lasting to long-term consequences in their adjustment and emotional lives. Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), the author examined the profiles of care leavers, their employment, education, physical health, hygienic practices, psychosocial and emotional health, as well as the coping strategies that they adopted. The author recommends a planned and properly managed transition step, which includes providing for a network of social support.

This theme reappears in the next article, in which the author, Ronald Yesudhas, investigates specific aspects of positive youth development (PYD). This aspect of emotional health is quintessential to care leavers being well-adjusted in their adult and independent lives. The author examines the role of family, community and other change agents such as NGOs and educational institutions that are instrumental in creating services, opportunities and support systems for young people to excel in and provided several recommendations that can be utilised in meaningful ways.

Our final article for the research section is a contribution to a topic that we hope to expand upon in the coming years. In this article, the author, Mithila Mithi, explores aspects of social injustice that exist in the population of child labourers, especially those who work in dangerous environments. By conducting a series of field studies in Barishal City, Bangladesh, the author illustrates how child labourers

are exploited both at home and at work. The lack of education and social relationships contribute to the ongoing exploitation of such children. The author also highlights how both poverty and social attitudes can be addressed by increasing public awareness and working with specific organisations to establish children's rights.

For our In Focus section, we have an interesting account of how cultural factors interact with child care individuals in a European setting. Prayathna Kowitz critically examines the encounters between an Indian child and the 'Youth Office' in Germany. The tension that emerges when the child is removed from its natural cultural home raises issues of individual rights and the progression of care in accordance with UN-mandated guidelines. The article concludes that without examining the role of power and privilege dynamics of the institutions in charge, children of ethnic communities will continue to be at risk of being separated from their families and run the risk of losing their cultural and religious identities, including the right to their cultural and religious identity.

In our Good Model section, we present an article by Rachna Mishra, who examines the essential need to develop resiliency in children and youth, especially given the momentum in contemporary times to move to more family-based models of care, that is, adoption and foster care. Emphasising the need to see the development of resiliency from an ecological perspective, the article outlines how stakeholders, by developing a climate of trust and support, can foster healthy adjustment in institutional settings, which will help in their adjustment in other settings as well.

We conclude this issue of the journal with an article that provides an international perspective on how young people transition into independent living from institutional settings. It is a well-known fact that this group, also known as care leavers, often experience significant mental health concerns. Examining the mental health care needs and outcomes of care leavers in Australia from 2015 to 2021, the author, Philip Mendes, identifies several common concerns pertaining to high levels of poor mental health and psychosocial complexity. These concerns were attributed to a number of factors, including placement instability, inadequate access to specialist mental health support services and limited workforce skills and training. Some sub-groups of care leavers were seen to be at higher risk, such as young parents, those leaving residential care, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander care leavers and an older cohort who had an experience of institutional out-of-home care (OOHC) in earlier decades. The author identifies specific strategies that could improve their transition from more planned approaches, extending the OOHC to 21 and providing additional supports for specific needs.

I offer my thanks and sincere gratitude to all who have been part of this journey for the last 10 years and look forward to the next decade of our ongoing contributions. I am particularly grateful to the staff at Udayan Care, who make my job so much easier, and of course to the peer reviewers and to the authors who continue to offer their expertise and wisdom as we continue to march on in our professional quest.

Monisha C. Nayar-Akhtar

Editor-in-Chief