



Institutionalised Children Explorations and Beyond

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Number 2



Focused on the South Asian Region



Institutionalised Children Explorations and Beyond

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INSTITUTIONALISED CHILDREN: EXPLORATIONS AND BEYOND

It gives me great pleasure to write the second editorial note for the journal, **“Institutionalised Children: Explorations and Beyond”** which was launched during a Mental Health Conference held in New Delhi, in March 2014. Over three hundred people attended the conference held at Amity University on March 14th and 15th 2014. Dr. Ashok Chauhan, the visionary leader of Amity University lent his unstinting support to the whole endeavour. Mrs. Kushal Singh from National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, India and Mamta Sahai from Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights presided over the opening ceremonies and the launching of the journal and set the tone for the rest of the weekend. While a brief review of this conference is covered in another section in this issue, I will mention just a few highlights.

1. We were fortunate to have Dr. Rinchen Chopel as our opening plenary speaker. Dr. Chopel, who heads SAIVEC (South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children) provided an unique perspective on efforts being made in the region to protect children against violence as well as his concerted efforts to broaden understanding on this topic in the region. In addition, we were pleased to have Dr. Hiranthi Wijemanne of Sri Lanka, who sits on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Dr. Wijemanne is a renowned speaker and advocate for the rights of children and her interview is presented in this issue. There were many others whose contributions were deeply appreciated and while I cannot mention all by name, my gratitude towards them is immense.
2. The organizers of the conference (which included my editorial board working in conjunction with Udayan Care, the principal organisers of this conference) worked hard to obtain presentations from all the eight countries in the SAARC region and I am proud to say that we were able to accomplish just that! The air of professional collegiality and the willingness to share ideas across borders broke down social, cultural and political barriers. Perhaps it can be said that where mental health for children is concerned, we were all on the same page, with similar objectives and common goals.
3. The conference yielded a hefty and sizeable document that details the sessions offered, the objectives achieved and the guidelines of innovative ideas exchanged in the management and care of institutionalised children.
4. The panel discussion with presenters from all the SAARC countries and beyond drew a wide audience who participated actively and with great intellectual zeal. Presentations on various topics related to the care of institutionalised children such as attachment, trauma, developmental concerns, ego-resiliency, best practices and future directions displayed the range of mental health involvement in the region. I along with members of my editorial board were heartened by the efforts of many in the region who devote endless hours working on children’s rights and on issues of mental health in general.

5. Finally, such a conference afforded the opportunity to interact and hear from people on matters of policy and jurisprudence. A lively discussion that ensued regarding the current laws and its long-term impact on caregivers was enlightening and offered much food for thought. Presenting the Government's perspective was Mr. Vivek Joshi, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child, India.

The launching of this journal marked the culmination of a resolve by the core members of the editorial board to pursue an avenue of thinking that would continue to broaden and deepen our understanding of issues related to the care and protection of vulnerable children. The conference also provided us with an opportunity to meet and interact with distinguished mental health professionals from all the eight countries and set the stage for the expansion of our editorial board. One of our primary objectives was to expand our editorial board, gradually and thoughtfully. I along with my editorial board had the pleasure of meeting several distinguished people from the region, whose ongoing work in the area is well known. Dr. Tuhinul Khalil of Bangladesh renowned for his research and ongoing work with institutionalised children provided a compelling presentation on the topic during the conference and his article in the first issue of this journal provides ample evidence of his scholarly knowledge and technical expertise. He graciously accepted our invitation to join the editorial board as a country representative following the conference. We also had the pleasure of meeting Mallika Samaranayake and Praneetha Abeywickrema of Sri Lanka, both active advocates of child rights. We invited them to join our board as country representatives as well. Finally, Rukhsana Choudhury of Pakistan, whose brief paper on her work with empowering girls in an institutional setting in Pakistan is published in the first issue agreed to join us as well. We are continuing to expand our board and invite those who are interested in joining our team to contact us directly.

In addition to our country editors, I am also pleased to announce that Dr. Sonia Parikh will be our new Book Editor as of August 2014. She will be responsible for soliciting articles for the book review section of the journal. Dr. Parikh practices in San Francisco, USA as a psychiatrist and has an article in this issue as well.

In addition to changes in our editorial board we also felt that a section on upcoming events was needed. Beginning with this issue, we will have a section announcing upcoming events such as conferences, publications and mental health events that might be of interest to the reader. These events will be covered on a six-month basis and individuals who are interested in having events promoted in the journal are encouraged to contact us directly.

Finally, I am pleased to announce that an alliance with Indian Journals, a publishing house in New Delhi was also established following the conference. The alliance will strengthen our efforts to market the journal in the region and broaden our reach and depth. I am very grateful for the considerable effort that Dr. Kiran Modi, extended to make this happen.

The second issue of this journal maintains the core structure established in the inaugural issue but introduces a few additional sections and slight deviations. The issue begins with an interview of Dr. Hiranthi Wijemanne, the Vice Chairperson of the Monitoring Committee on the Rights of the Child. I had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Wijemanne during the mental health conference and her vast knowledge, experience and commitment to care and management of orphaned children is impressive. Luis Esponda, conducts his

interview with precision and clarity and in the end presents us with an article that is provides us with an in-depth look into Dr. Wijemanne's thoughts and vision on the topic of child care and institutions. I am very grateful to Mr. Esponda, for his continued involvement with the journal, for his intellectual insights and for the dedication with which he pursues the topic at hand.

The next section of the issue presents five major research based articles covering topics of sexual abuse, disability, aftercare and the factors that affect institutional care and resiliency in the children. Srinivasa Murthy and Shamim Ferdous present papers examining the prevalence of childhood sexual abuse and its lifetime impact. Srinivasa Murthy provides an interesting review covering the prevalence of child abuse and neglect in the SAARC countries, its lifetime impact and subsequent biological changes on the child. In addition, he explores the implications of such findings for research and interventions with individuals, families and the community. As for Shamim Ferdous, she explores in depth the extent of sexual abuse and neglect in children with disabilities in Bangladesh. The care and management of children with disabilities, the discriminatory practices that are often extended towards them and the prevailing attitudes and perceptions held by society at large impact their mental health. Dr. Ferdous in a scholarly fashion examines this issue and offers thoughtful recommendations at the end. In a similar vein, Vibhavari Kavle provides an interesting account on the mental health of adolescents institutionalised in the state of Maharashtra, India. Her perceptive account of the kinds of psychological issues that arise in this population and the interventions that are possible is encouraging for many who work in the field.

From a slightly different angle, Kate Robertson and Martin Punaks, along with his co-author Katie Feit, present us with papers that provide another perspective on institutional care. They present papers that explore the subtle factors that impact the mental health of institutionalised children. In his paper, Martin Punaks and Katie Feit explore of role of orphanage voluntourism in fueling displacement and the trafficking of children in Nepal and their subsequent unnecessary institutionalisation. They go on to provide suggestions for conducting such volunteerism in an ethical and responsible manner. As for Kate Robertson; her dissertation work conducted in an all-girls orphanage in Jaipur served as the impetus for this paper. While her primary research questions and methodology are quite extensive, Kate manages to present us with an abridged version of some of the central concepts. One of these is the significance of sisterhood that fuels a sense of belonging in girls. It fosters intimacy and establishes the essential parameters for love, acceptance and long-term relationships later in life. Her paper emerging from her extensive research, suggests a unique way of fostering a sense of well-being in children and caregivers.

For our international piece, Dr. Sumedha Ariely of Duke University provides a stimulating account of her work in Uganda, a country that is plagued with increasing numbers of orphans with significant public health ramifications. Working with Counseling Orphans, Promoting Empowerment (COPE), Ariely explores the barriers that such organizations face in their ongoing work. Her paper is informative, and educational with several guidelines for working with social, organizational and cultural obstacles.

For our Good Practice section I have chosen a paper by Tyler Gray who provides an extensive review of aftercare practices in the region. The choice of this paper exemplifies

two emerging trends: a) a growing and imperative need to provide aftercare solutions for institutionalised children and b) a recognition on our part as the editors of this journal that long term care as displayed in after care programs is necessary and inevitable if we are sustain the gains made during institutional care.

Finally, we have our book and movie reviews. Dr. Jaskiran Grewal reviews the book **“House of Hope”** by Elisabeth Gifford in which the care of terminally ill children in China is explored. The review is succinct, and evocative in its expression and description. This is followed by Praneetha Abeywickrema, who examines the true story of Michael Oher, a football player, who grew up in an alternative care setting. Michael’s life is portrayed in the Hollywood film, ‘Blind Side.’ Praneetha who has a professional degree in law and extensive experience as a Coordinator for Child Protection in Crisis, deftly examines the cultural, social and familial issues that arise in foster care arrangements as illustrated in the Academy Award movie.

The Brief Communications section show cases several brief articles that illustrate different aspects of institutional work and mental health programs. The introductory paper is by Dr. Sonia Parikh, a psychiatrist who works in San Francisco. In her paper she introduces Nilima Sabharwal, a dynamic and visionary woman who with her creative zeal and immense fortitude spearheaded the mental health program in Udayan Care in its initial stages. Several articles that provide brief accounts of working with institutional children and the innovative approaches that have been generated in the process follow this article.

Finally, the Upcoming Events, as a new addition to the journal, provides brief descriptions of conferences being held in the region.

I would like to end the editorial note by thanking the core members of my editorial board as well as the country editors. Our weekly meetings on Skype speak of their dedication and to our commitment to this journal. In addition, I would like to thank Ksera Dyette whose presence in my life as my research and editorial assistant is invaluable. I would also like to thank Karabi Majumdar and Rajgunjan Dwivedee for their input for this issue of the journal. Though Karabi joined us later in the year, their dedication and willingness to be part of the team added to the spirit of collegiality and comradery that continues to identify us as a team.

The journal is committed to exploring emerging research and encourages others to initiate and submit papers that examine issues related to the care and protection of vulnerable children. The SAARC region is unique in the number of children who need such care, and it is our desire that this journal provides a platform for identifying, researching and exploring the growing needs of this population.

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

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