

Concept Note
Training Workshops
on
Mental Health and Interventions for Better Care and Management of Institutionalized
Children and Young Adults

Background

India has an enormous child population, with more than 448 million boys and girls under 18 years of age.¹ As per UNICEF's report, The State of the World's Children 2012, there are 31 million orphan children in India. Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) also estimated 180 million vulnerable children in 2009 in India. Many of these children, who are out of family protection network, as well as many who may have family, but are totally dysfunctional, can be found living in the streets or in illegal urban settlements. Inhuman and violent life conditions turn many such children into law offenders, drug abusers and exploiters themselves. Mainstreaming them, by providing them with care and protection, is a big challenge, as not much awareness, evaluation and monitoring mechanisms exist for other alternate systems. So, placing them in institutions, even though considered the last resort, becomes an easy option.

Children in institutions cannot be clubbed as a homogenous group too, as each child can face distinctly different risks and specific vulnerabilities depending on whether the child is a boy or a girl; lived in an urban or rural situation; came from an orphaned background, extended or foster family, an institution or on the street; is HIV-infected, or has disability, and many other issues. Care options must meet certain general standards like meeting the specific needs of each and every child on an individual basis. Added to this is an acute scarcity of adequately trained staff to deal with their emotional and psychological complexities.

The two-day workshops will attempt to train the staff, practitioners and different stakeholders who work with Institutionalized children, in issues related to the mental health of children in institutions. Children who enter institutionalization through the Child Protection system are those who more often than not have been through something grave – loss, abandonment, death of loved ones, violence, betrayal, neglect etc. This is what makes the need for an urgent and immediate focus on mental health because, while it is the direst need of the traumatized child, it is the one that has received absolutely no attention. These are seriously victimized children and training people who care and manage the children is what the Workshops are about. The workshop will offer different sessions dealing with different topics related to the care of institutionalised children. At the end, it will come up with a training module, which can be replicated in institutional care - investing in good practices in mental health care and services.

¹*The Status of the World Children – 2013, UNICEF.*

Rationale: This training workshop specifically focuses on the mental health because people working for children in institutionalized care have time and again suggested that institutionalized children must be assessed for mental health conditions and, whenever needed, they must be offered professional help. Children who enter institutionalization through the Child Protection system are those who more often than not have been through something grave – loss, abandonment, death of loved ones, violence, betrayal, neglect etc. This is what makes the need for an urgent and immediate focus on mental health because, while it is the direst need of the traumatized child, it is the one that has received absolutely no attention. These are seriously victimized children and training people who care and manage the children is what the workshops are about.

Key Objectives of the Workshops

- To train and build capacity in therapeutic techniques of NGOs staff, volunteers and professionals in addressing mental health issues, related to attachment, loss, grief and trauma, faced by institutionalised children, enable them to help develop children's ego resiliency by different techniques.
- To integrate and apply knowledge, as gained from the trainings in the workshops, on mental health issues, in institutionalised settings, in a culturally sensitive way to clinical work in policy and practice.
- To develop a model of trainings, related to mental health, which can be further perpetuated.

Expected Outcomes of the Workshops

- Stakeholders' understanding of impediments facing children in institutions related to such mental health issues as attachment, loss, grief and trauma, enhanced.
- Assessment capabilities of stakeholders towards the mental health needs of children developed.
- An Empowered group of trained cadre of social workers, staff member and volunteers, capable of addressing mental health issues, related to children in institutions, in place.

The two-day workshop on trainings to the practitioners on topics related to the mental health care and management of institutionalised children and young adults will range from ego-resiliency, group therapy, working with care staff, etc. Participants will have a choice of workshops that they can attend.

Sessions Plan for the two days

Numbers of workshops are scheduled to be held across two days. Each day has been divided into two sections, which will offer two workshops in a day, one in the first part of the morning and another workshop in the second half in the afternoon running at approximately two and a

half hours each. As such, a total of four workshops will be available for participants who will represent educational information for working with caregivers, aftercare settings for institutionalised children, as an intervention for children in institutionalised care, ego resiliency as the marker for growth in this population, and group processes as a way of addressing needs on a larger scale.

- Workshops on Assessment and early Intervention
- Ego Resiliency to help improve coping skills in children
- Group therapy Trainings
- Working with Caregivers and training them

1. Workshops on Assessment and early Intervention

Assessment and Early Interventions, session, which will touch upon the areas of identifying high risk behavior, emotional regulation, behaviour management, bio psycho social perspective, etc. This session will also cover the following areas:

- a) Assessment of a child when they enter a home. This should include a background history, developmental history, history of trauma, relationships with others, developmental delays if noted, losses experienced;
- b) Strengths and weaknesses including emotional functioning, assessment of ego-resiliency, cognitive functioning, social functioning;
- c) Assessment of coping style;
- d) Physical health and functioning including history of diseases, hospitalizations, etc;
- e) From this a treatment plan will emerge that highlights how to bring the child back to their developmental trajectory. The treatment plan itself may include individual and/or group psychotherapy depending on the skills that are required, level of pathology and the immediate concerns of the child.

2. Ego-resiliency and Institutionalised Children

Ego resiliency will discuss and describe contemporary concepts regarding the nature of ego resiliency in children and discuss how to recognize signs of ego resiliency in child clients. Furthermore, participants will learn different methods for fostering ego resiliency in child clients.

Ego-resiliency refers to an individual's capacity to bounce back and deal with various challenges presented from childhood to older age. Vulnerable children often face significant challenges in their lives, from the reasons for being orphaned (loss of one or both parents, traumatic living situations, sexual and physical abuse, loss of extended family that often lead to adverse living situations) to difficulties encountered in their daily lives when institutionalized. Coming from environmental and family situations that are severely traumatizing and facing adverse circumstances as they are placed in different homes, these children are at high risk for developing psychological problems that require mental health interventions. Their difficulties can range from acting out behaviors such as running away, cutting themselves, lying and stealing to severe depression and anxieties sometimes even bordering on suicidal ideation and gestures.

Assessing and developing ego-resiliency is integral to the work with this population. What constitutes and helps an individual become resilient is of clinical and theoretical interest.

3. Group Process (group therapy)

Group therapy is a process that can be therapeutically beneficial for children to learn appropriate interpersonal skills and relating, but it is a technique that is difficult to learn as there are many dynamics to manage. Group therapy can be very effective, especially in certain situations. Studies have shown that group therapy can be an effective treatment choice for depression and traumatic stress as children participating in the group are able to see that there are others going through the same thing, which can help them feel less alone. Since the therapy is conducted in group, clients are fairly comfortable and less conscious about disclosures of their personal issues. Moreover, by seeing someone who is successfully coping with a problem, other members of the group can see that there is hope and recovery is possible. As each person progresses, they can in turn serve as a role model and support figure for others. This can help foster feelings of success and accomplishment.

In this workshop, participants will be taught to identify the basic therapeutic factors guiding group dynamics, begin to understand how to create an effective setting for facilitating the group process, and how to plan for the expected and flow with the unexpected in group process dynamics.

4. Working with Caregivers

Finally, the session on working with caregivers will address specifically the different kinds of caregivers and will teach participants how to exercise a collaborative, engaged, and healthy relationship with a caregiver and give fundamental knowledge of how to change therapeutic language so that it is caregiver friendly and accessible.

The workshops will give rise to heightened impetus to the rights of children in institutional care vis-a-vis best practices in mental healthcare. The purpose of the seminar and the journal is to

stimulate ongoing interest in issues pertaining to institutionalized children and develop a dialogue around standards of care with special emphasis to mental health issues of children, such as trauma and attachment concerns.

Resource Persons for the workshops

We are in the process of finalizing and getting confirmation from the other resource persons to conduct the workshops. Following are the confirmed resource persons who would be conducting the workshops on Ego Resiliency, Group Therapy and Aftercare.

- **Dr. MonishaNayar-Akhtar:** Psychologist/Psychoanalyst, USA; Director, Indian Institute of Psychotherapy Training
- **Dr. Achal Bhagat:** Senior Consultant Psychiatrist and Psychotherapist, Saarthak, New Delhi, India
- **Dr. Deepak Gupta:** Adolescent and Child Psychiatrist, Founder director of “Centre for Child & Adolescent Wellbeing (CCAW)”, New Delhi, India
- **Dr. Neetu Sarin:** Asst Professor, Psychology Dept., Ambedkar University
- **Dr. Kiran Modi:** Founder Managing Trustee, Udayan Care, New Delhi.
- **Gloria Buffet:** Psychotherapist, New Delhi

Some other Mental Health Specialists and Life Skills Trainers are in discussion with us.

Participants in the Workshop

The participants for the workshops will be from Delhi and the training sessions have been conceived as a venue primarily for individuals working as social workers, volunteers, counsellors, therapists and mental health professionals, affiliated with Delhi (primarily) NGOs to discuss issues related to the management and care of emotional well being of Institutionalised Children. These training workshops will have participants from NGOs working on the areas of child rights, child protection and alternative care of children, out of family net; volunteers, counsellors, Government functionaries; media and academia.