

In a Home with No Home Feeling: Psycho-Social Encounters of Female Children Living under Institutional Care

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Most of the literal history witnesses that the institutional care is best only as the last resort of child care due to adverse impacts institutionalization causes on child's life. Yet, it is visible that the number of alternative care providing institutions remain high in Sri Lanka. In this backdrop, this study aimed at examining the psycho-social experiences of Female Children living under institutional care. The objectives were understanding the conditions of the institutional environment that impacts on the psycho-social experiences and their consequences on female children in particular. A sample of twenty females between 13 -16 years and five of the care taking staff were purposively selected from a female children's home located in the heart of an urban area. Data collected through in-depth interviews and observation were analyzed using narrative analysis method. According to the findings, it was evident that the institutional structure including location, infrastructural facilities, institutional procedure, need-response mechanism and nature of social relationships within and out of the institutions have resulted in a number of negative psycho-social experiences of female children. Emotional complications were mainly found to be common in pervasiveness and variety in character. Outbursts, withdrawal, reluctance to seek support and loneliness are the most prevailing emotional encounters of female children while lack of self-regulation, maladjustment, poor social interactions, poor attachments and conduct problems along with low well-being and disorganized life patterns are socially defied experiences they face. A culture in which such aggressive, emotionally reserved behaviours of boys are normalized in terms of masculinity, such behaviours in girls are strongly condemned. It would lead them to face negative social responses challenging their reintegration to society. Therefore, while admiring progressive steps already taken in the institutional setting, the study posits that the female children under institutional care are in a dire need of a gender-sensitive professional intervention that would empower them with a strength based resilient approach.

Keywords: *institutional care, psycho-social encounters, social work intervention*