

Psychological and Social Wellbeing of Children: A Comparative Study of Parent-Reared and Residential Care Children

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ABSTRACT

Psychological and social wellbeing are important aspects in understanding the overall development of children. It reflects how children think, feel, behave, and interact within their social environment. In the present changing social conditions, children are brought up in different care settings such as family and residential institutions. These variations in upbringing influence their emotional stability, behaviour, and social relationships. Society often assumes that children living with parents have better wellbeing compared to those in residential care, but this assumption needs to be examined in the present context. Therefore, the present study aims to compare the psychological and social wellbeing of parent-reared children and residential care children. A total of 50 respondents were selected for the study, including children from St. Xavier's Primary School, Pattarivilai and Happy Home for Children, Pattarivilai. The respondents were selected using purposive sampling method. The study is descriptive in nature, and data were collected using a interview schedule. The study focuses on understanding the differences in emotional wellbeing, social interaction, adaptability, and behavioural patterns among the two groups of children.

Keywords: *Psychological wellbeing, Social wellbeing, Social Functioning, Adaptability, Residential Care Children, Parent reared Children.*

Introduction

Children are the foundation of society, and their psychological and social wellbeing plays an important role in shaping their overall development. Psychological wellbeing refers to emotional stability, self-confidence, and the ability to manage stress, while social wellbeing refers to the ability of children to interact, communicate, and maintain relationships with others. These aspects are essential in determining the behaviour, personality, and future life of children.

In the present changing social context, children are brought up in different environments such as family settings and residential care institutions. Parent-reared children grow under the direct care, love, and emotional support of their parents, which helps them develop a sense of security and attachment. In contrast, children in residential care are raised in institutional settings where caregivers provide support and supervision. Though they may

lack consistent parental attachment, they are often exposed to group living, peer interaction, and structured routines, which may influence their social behaviour and adaptability.

Several previous studies have examined the differences between parent-reared and institutionalized children. A study by Margaret F. Keil (2022) found that children who experienced institutional care showed delays in cognitive and behavioural development compared to family-reared children, although significant improvement was observed after receiving proper family support. Another study conducted by O. Kochukhova (2016) showed that institutionalized children displayed higher negative emotional behaviour and lower social engagement compared to family-reared children.

However, some studies also emphasize that a supportive and nurturing environment, whether in family or institutional care, plays a crucial role in improving children's development. Positive caregiver interaction, emotional support, and structured care systems can enhance the social skills and adaptability of children living in residential care.

Objectives

- To identify the demographic profile of the respondents.
- To identify the factors influencing psychological and social wellbeing among children in both groups.
- To compare the psychological and social wellbeing of children in both groups.

Methodology

The nature of the study is descriptive. The Universe of the study comprises children raised in residential care and parental care. The data for the present study were collected from Pattarivilai Village in Kanayakumari District. Selected residential child care institutions and St.Xavier's Primary school within the Pattarivilai village constituted the sampling area for the research. The total population consists of children from both parent-reared and residential care settings. From this population, a total of 50 respondents were selected, including 25 parent-reared children and 25 residential care children using a purposive sampling method. The data collection tools were developed based on a review of existing literature related to psychological and social wellbeing of children. A pilot study was conducted to ensure the clarity and reliability of the tool before the main data collection. The data were collected through Interview Schedule. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS to compare the psychological and social wellbeing of the two groups of children.

Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1 Distribution of respondents by Gender

S.No	Gender	Category of child			
		Residential care child		Parental care child	
		No.	%	No.	%
1	Female	16	32%	17	34%
2	Male	9	18%	8	16%
Total		25	50%	25	50%
Percentage		100%			

Table shows that among the respondents in residential care, 32% were girls and 18% were boys. Among those living with their families, 34% were girls and 16% were boys.

Table 2 Distribution of respondents by good relationship with their surroundings

S.No	Good relationship with surrounding	Category of child			
		Residential care child		Parental care child	
		No.	%	No.	%
1	yes	15	30%	11	22%
2	no	10	20%	14	28%
Total		25	50%	25	50%
Percentage		100%			

Table shows that 30% of children in residential care and 22% of children in parental care stated that they have a good relationship with their surroundings, whereas 20% of children in residential care and 28% of children in parental care reported that they do not.

Table 3 Distribution of respondents by having close friends

S.No	Having close friends	Category of child			
		Residential care child		Parental care child	
		No.	%	No.	%
1	Yes	20	40%	23	46%
2	No	5	10%	2	4%
Total		25	50%	25	50%
Percentage		100%			

Table shows that 40% of children in residential care and 46% of children in parental care reported that they have close friends. On the other hand, 10% of children in residential care and 4% of children in parental care reported that they do not have close friends.

Table 4 Distribution of respondents get involvement in fights or arguments

S.No	Involvement in fights or arguments	Category of child			
		Residential care child		Parental care child	
		No.	%	No.	%
1	Yes	20	40%	12	24%
2	No	5	10%	13	26%
Total		25	50%	25	50%
Percentage		100%			

Table shows that 40% of children in residential care and 24% of children in parental care reported that they get involved in fights or arguments. In contrast, 10% of children in residential care and 26% of children in parental care reported that they do not.

Table 5 Distribution of respondents by able to solve problem peacefully

S.No	Ability to solve problem peacefully	Category of child			
		Residential care child		Parental care child	
		No.	%	No.	%
1	Yes	8	16%	3	6%
2	No	17	34%	22	44%
Total		25	50%	25	50%
Percentage		100%			

Table shows that 16% of children in residential care and 6% of children in parental care stated that they are able to solve problems peacefully. However, 34% of children in residential care and 44% of children in parental care reported that they are not able to do so.

Suggestion

- ❖ Parents should talk openly with students.
- ❖ Parents should avoid high pressure and set realistic expectations.
- ❖ Schools should provide counselling services.
- ❖ Awareness programs should be given to parents.
- ❖ Students should be allowed to choose their own career.
- ❖ Stress management programs should be conducted.

Conclusion

The study reveals clear differences in the demographic, psychological, and social wellbeing of children in residential care and those living with their parents. Children in residential care face more emotional and behavioural challenges, such as higher levels of stress, loneliness, difficulty in expressing feelings, and poor control over anger and anxiety. They also experience more problems in social adjustment, including involvement in fights, lack of confidence, and difficulty adapting to new situations. In contrast, children in parental care show relatively better psychological stability and social wellbeing, as they receive more emotional support, feel more accepted, and have better relationships within their environment. However, some issues such as difficulty in expressing emotions and managing anger are common in both groups. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of a supportive family environment, emotional care, and proper guidance in promoting the healthy development of children. The study emphasizes the need for counselling services, life skills training, and stronger support systems, especially for children in residential care, to improve their overall wellbeing and future outcomes.

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