

INSTITUTIONAL CHILD CARE PROGRAMMES IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Child welfare is an investment in human capital. The need for providing Child Welfare Services as an essential prerequisite for the development of a better nation is universally recognised; and it has become one of the most important priorities in the field of social welfare in India.

This paper covers the nature and scope of the institutional child care services at various levels, it also deals with the pros and cons of institutional care for the children.

THE old saying that "Child is the Father of Man" is true in more than one sense. The health and welfare of the community, prospects for better civilization of a country and the fulfilment of the aspirations of the society largely depend on the child welfare and satisfaction of the children. Therefore, the expenditure on institutional and non-institutional child care programmes is an investment rather than consumption.

When we look into the problems of many children we see a disappointing picture because millions of children are living in miserable conditions. In a way many are very weak-physically, intellectually, mentally and emotionally; hence it is the indispensable social responsibility of today's citizen to help and mould our growing children. This paper is an attempt to take stock of the existing institutional child care services in India.

As early as 1951 Jawahar Lal Nehru observed that, "Ultimately it is the human being that counts, and if the human being counts, well, he counts much more as a child than as a grown up". Child Welfare programmes

in many countries—particularly in a developing country like India with 42% of its population comprising of children—should have integrated and comprehensive services in health, education, nutrition, recreation and general welfare designed to meet the total needs of the children. In this period, when the world is celebrating this International Year of Child, it will be all the more relevant to examine what the existing conditions are in regard to the welfare of the children in India.

The major operational agencies in India, at various levels in the implementation of the child welfare programmes are given below:—

1. **CENTRAL:** Central Social Welfare Board, Planning Commission, Department of Community Development and Panchayat Raj, Ministry of Health and Family Planning, Ministry of Education and UNICEF.
2. **STATE LEVEL:** State Social Welfare Board; Department of Social Welfare, Health Department, Development and Panchayat Department, Education Department and State Level Voluntary Welfare Agencies.
3. **BLOCK LEVEL:** Functional committees: Panchayat Samiti, Block Development Office, Primary Health Centre, Educational Institutions, Applied Nutrition Programme and Local Agencies.

The child welfare activities are of many types. Some are governmental and some voluntary. In some instances financial assistance is extended to the parents of the children; in some others, it is rendered directly to the child by providing him with foster care. The acti-

vities include professional and non-professional also. The description in this paper is mainly to bring out the existing institutional child welfare programmes in India.

MATERNITY AND INFANT CARE

Maternity and infant care is an integral part of the child care services in India. It consists of (a) antenatal care, (b) domiciliary and institutional midwifery service, (c) post-natal care, (d) Well-baby clinic, (e) teaching of mother craft, nutrition etc. (f) maintenance of records.

SERVICE FOR THE PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

In all communities there may be children in need of care. Perhaps their parents are ill, or in trouble, perhaps they are dead. Some of the children are deserted, some others are orphans. Any how all such children are unfortunate ones and may form the most susceptible group to fall in the hands of the exploitation. They need special care, and quite often institutional care.

The provision of an integrated service covering all aspects of child care is an immediate requirement for developing countries like India. The crucial importance of the formative years and infant period need not be over emphasised. Health, nutrition, protection and recreation are essential components of such programmes for the infants. Lack of opportunities for harmonious growth of mind and personality at this stage can adversely affect the future life and behaviour of the growing mind. Therefore, neglect of pre-school

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child can have far reaching consequences for the country.

HEALTH & NUTRITION PROGRAMMES

The proverb "Health is Wealth" comes true in the life of every individual, community and nation. Institutional care in this aspect can include material health services, infant health services, public health education, services for the handicapped children, and mental hygiene programmes.

Malnutrition in its worst form is seen among many children in India. The nutritional level of the expectant mother is also generally low. Nutritional deficiency is a wide spread problem among the children in this country. Though the Applied Nutrition Programme, Special Nutrition Programmes and other measures are adopted, the nutritional level of the mother and the child in India is still very low.

EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

Though basic education has been accepted as the pattern of the educational system in India, only 50% of the children are actually attending primary schools; only 24% of them complete the VIIth class. This is an appalling fact in a democratic country like India.

Under the various five year plans emphasis was given to the field of post elementary education to provide a large variety of vocational courses for children, who do not intend to continue their general education beyond the elementary stage.

DAY CARE

There are many types of day care centres for Children in India. They are known by different names like Nursery School, Pre-basic School, Bal Mandir, Creche, Kindergarten etc.

Various recreational programmes are arranged institutionally, and non-institutionally, for the physical, creative, mental and

social development of the attitudes and aptitudes of the children. Bal Bhavans, Holiday Homes, Youth Hostels, Play Centres etc. are physical centres.

SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK CENTRES

In addition to the family, most of the learning of the child takes place in the school. The problems of the school going children are increasing all over the world, and India is not an exception to that. There may be children who are backward in studies, truant, who suffer from various emotional problems and so on. There is a need to have trained social workers in school to look after the needs of the children other than educational. A trained worker may be able to deal with various aspects like backwardness in studies, health needs, economic aids, home visits, vocational counselling, recreational and cultural activities and other social service programmes.

CHILD GUIDANCE CLINIC

The aim of the Child Guidance Clinic is to help in the understanding of the children and to enable them to make satisfactory psycho-social adjustments. There are very few child guidance clinics in India so far, even those which are existing are far away from the perfect functioning. Cases are generally referred to Child Guidance Clinic from Schools, juvenile courts, hospitals and clinics, and other social services institutions and agencies for children.

FOSTER CARE

Though the ideal place for the growth of the child is the family, all children are not benefited by that, because of many reasons. Foster care centres—Free Homes, Work Houses, Boarding Homes and Adoptive Homes, are the better agencies for such children.

There are many advantages and disadvantages in institutional

child care in India which are precisely enlisted here:

ADVANTAGES

- Regularity of personal habit and better discipline.
- Regularity of means, and supply of balanced diet.
- Better medical facilities and closer observation on physical care.
- Opportunities for educational and vocational training.
- Opportunities for learning to live together in a group.
- Recreational facilities and chances for developing hidden abilities.

DISADVANTAGES

- Executive routinisation and rigid type of discipline and regimentation.
- Artificial institutional atmosphere.
- Limited chances for economic experience and handling money.
- Limitation of choice in the individual enterprise.
- Restriction of social contacts.
- High cost of institutional care.

A service of institutional care is one of the oldest service in India. An essential precondition for developing minimum in a children's institution is to create there in conditions as close to a healthy home like atmosphere as possible.

In India, the welfare of the children has not so far received the deserving priority. A comprehensive policy on which child welfare solidly can be based on has yet to be evolved. It is essential that the work and programmes with the family and the community should be based upon clear concepts.