

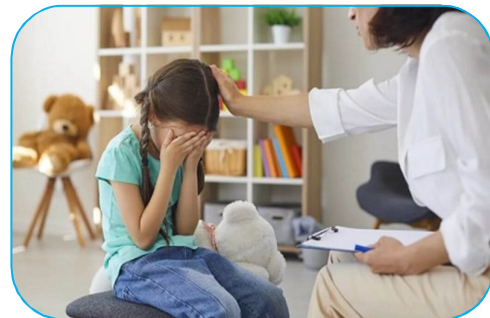


A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MENTAL WELL-BEING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS AMONG WOMEN RAISED IN GOVERNMENT CHILDREN'S HOMES DURING ADOLESCENCE AND THOSE RAISED IN FAMILY SETTINGS

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1. ABSTRACT

The family environment plays a significant role in shaping the psychological development and emotional adjustment of individuals. Adolescence is considered a crucial developmental stage during which emotional security, attachment, social support, and psychological care influence mental well-being in adulthood. Women raised in government children's homes often experience institutional upbringing, parental deprivation, emotional neglect, and limited familial attachment, which may affect their psychological functioning later in life. In contrast, women raised in family settings generally receive emotional bonding, social support, and stable interpersonal relationships that contribute positively to mental health outcomes. The present study aims to compare mental well-being and psychological problems among women raised in government children's homes during adolescence and women raised in family settings. The study adopts a comparative research design using standardized psychological tools to assess mental well-being and psychological problems. A purposive sample of women aged between 20 and 40 years will be selected from institutional and family backgrounds. Statistical techniques such as mean, standard deviation, and independent sample t-test will be used for data analysis. The study is expected to reveal significant differences between the two groups in terms of mental well-being and psychological problems. Women raised in government children's homes may exhibit lower mental well-being and higher psychological problems compared to women raised in family environments. The findings of the study may contribute to understanding the long-term psychological impact of institutional upbringing and help in developing psychosocial intervention programs for women from vulnerable childhood backgrounds.



KEYWORDS: *Mental well-being, psychological problems, institutional upbringing, government children's homes, women, family setting, adolescence.*

2. BACKGROUND

Mental well-being is an important component of overall psychological health and refers to an individual's ability to realize personal potential, cope with normal stresses of life, maintain satisfying relationships, and function productively in society. Psychological well-being includes emotional stability, self-acceptance, positive interpersonal relationships, autonomy, and life satisfaction. Psychological problems, on the other hand, refer to emotional and behavioral difficulties such as anxiety, depression, stress, emotional instability, low self-esteem, social withdrawal, and maladjustment.

Childhood and adolescence are critical developmental stages during which environmental experiences strongly influence mental health outcomes in adulthood. Family plays a major role in providing emotional attachment, security, care, socialization, and psychological support. Children raised in supportive family environments generally develop better emotional regulation, social competence, and psychological resilience. In contrast, children raised in institutional settings such as government children's homes may experience emotional deprivation, inconsistent caregiving, attachment difficulties, and psychosocial stressors.

Government children's homes are established to provide care and protection for children who are orphaned, abandoned, neglected, or vulnerable. Although these institutions fulfill basic physical needs such as food, shelter, and education, many children experience limited emotional bonding and individualized attention. Research indicates that institutional upbringing may negatively affect emotional development, social adjustment, self-concept, and mental health. Institutionalized adolescents often report loneliness, anxiety, depression, behavioral problems, and low psychological well-being.

Women raised in institutional care may face additional psychological vulnerabilities due to gender-related social pressures, stigma, emotional insecurity, and lack of family support. Studies have shown that women with histories of family rejection and institutionalization are at greater risk for mental health difficulties and psychosocial distress.

Despite increasing attention toward child welfare and mental health, limited research has comparatively examined the long-term mental well-being and psychological problems among women raised in government children's homes and those raised in family settings, especially in the Indian context. Therefore, the present study attempts to compare these two groups to understand the psychological impact of institutional upbringing on women.

3. NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Mental health among women has become an important area of psychological research due to increasing emotional stress, social challenges, and psychological vulnerabilities. Women raised in government children's homes represent a psychologically vulnerable population because of experiences such as parental loss, abandonment, emotional neglect, trauma, and institutional living. These experiences may influence their emotional adjustment and mental well-being in adulthood.

Understanding the mental well-being and psychological problems of women raised in institutional settings is essential for developing effective psychological interventions, rehabilitation programs, and policy reforms. The findings of the study may help psychologists, counselors, social workers, and child welfare agencies to design support systems for institutionalized children and women with vulnerable childhood experiences.

The study also contributes to the existing literature by comparing women raised in institutional and family settings, thereby providing deeper insight into the role of family environment in psychological development.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of literature helps in understanding previous research findings related to the study variables and identifying research gaps.

S. Kanougiya et al. (2021) investigated the association between economic abuse and symptoms of common mental disorders among women in Mumbai, India. The findings revealed that women exposed to emotional neglect, financial dependency, and social deprivation experienced higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. Lack of emotional and social support negatively affected their psychological adjustment and overall mental well-being.

Nathan A. Fox et al. (2021) conducted a longitudinal study on adolescents and young adults with histories of institutional upbringing. The findings showed that prolonged institutional care negatively

affected emotional regulation, social adjustment, and psychological well-being. Individuals raised in institutional settings demonstrated greater emotional and behavioral difficulties compared to those raised in family environments.

Mary Dozier et al. (2021) examined the influence of caregiving environments on emotional development among institutionalized children and adolescents. The study indicated that lack of stable attachment relationships contributed to emotional insecurity, low self-esteem, anxiety, and social difficulties. Supportive caregiving interventions improved emotional functioning and psychological adjustment.

Michael Rutter et al. (2022) studied the long-term psychological outcomes of institutional deprivation among adolescents and young adults. The findings revealed that prolonged institutional care increased the risk of depression, anxiety, emotional instability, and social maladjustment. Individuals who later experienced supportive family environments showed better emotional resilience and psychological well-being.

Bessel van der Kolk (2022) discussed the impact of childhood trauma and emotional neglect on adult mental health. The study highlighted that adverse childhood experiences such as abandonment, institutional upbringing, and emotional deprivation contributed significantly to anxiety, depression, emotional dysregulation, and interpersonal difficulties in adulthood.

Megan R. Gunnar and Charles A. Nelson (2023) examined stress regulation and emotional functioning among individuals raised in institutional care. The findings indicated that institutionalized adolescents experienced chronic stress, emotional insecurity, and increased vulnerability to psychological disorders. Lack of consistent caregiving and emotional bonding negatively affected mental well-being and emotional adjustment.

S. Kanougiya et al. (2024) carried out a community-based cross-sectional study among women in urban informal settlements in India to examine mental well-being and common mental disorders. The findings indicated that stressful life experiences, poor social support, and adverse childhood experiences were strongly associated with anxiety, depression, and low mental well-being. The study highlighted that supportive social relationships and emotional security act as protective factors for women's mental health.

Febna Moorkath, Mysore Narasimha Vrandha, and C. Naveenkumar (2024) examined sociocultural factors influencing institutionalization among women with mental illness in India. The findings showed that women who lacked emotional and family support experienced greater psychological distress, emotional isolation, social stigma, and poor psychosocial adjustment. Institutional living conditions negatively affected emotional well-being and mental health.

Charles H. Zeanah et al. (2025) investigated emotional and behavioral adjustment among young adults raised in institutional environments. The findings revealed that institutional upbringing was associated with attachment difficulties, emotional withdrawal, low self-esteem, and poor interpersonal relationships. Individuals raised in family environments demonstrated better psychological adjustment and emotional stability.

Recent applications of John Bowlby's attachment theory (2025) emphasized that secure emotional attachment during childhood and adolescence plays a crucial role in adult mental well-being. The findings highlighted that lack of parental care, emotional neglect, and institutional upbringing increased vulnerability to depression, anxiety, emotional insecurity, and psychosocial maladjustment.

The reviewed studies indicate that institutional upbringing has a significant impact on emotional development, psychological well-being, attachment security, and social adjustment. Individuals raised in institutional settings are more vulnerable to anxiety, depression, emotional insecurity, and psychosocial stress. In contrast, family environments provide emotional support, attachment, and stability that positively contribute to mental well-being. However, limited studies have specifically focused on adult women raised in government children's homes and compared them with women raised in family settings, particularly in the Indian context. Therefore, the present study

attempts to address this research gap by comparatively examining mental well-being and psychological problems among these two groups.

5.STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The present study focuses on understanding the differences in mental well-being and psychological problems among women raised in government children's homes during adolescence and those raised in family settings. Adolescence is a crucial developmental stage in which emotional attachment, care, security, and social support play an important role in shaping personality and mental health. Women raised in institutional settings may experience emotional deprivation, lack of parental attachment, social stigma, and inadequate psychological support, which can negatively influence their emotional adjustment and psychological functioning in adulthood. In contrast, women raised in family environments are more likely to receive emotional bonding, guidance, and social support that contribute positively to mental well-being. Although several studies have examined the psychological impact of institutional care among children and adolescents, limited research has comparatively explored the long-term mental well-being and psychological problems among adult women from institutional and family backgrounds, particularly in the Indian context. Therefore, the present study attempts to examine and compare mental well-being and psychological problems among these two groups of women.

6.RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Is there a significant difference in mental well-being between women raised in government children's homes and women raised in family settings?
2. Is there a significant difference in psychological problems between women raised in government children's homes and women raised in family settings?
3. How does type of upbringing influence the psychological well-being of women in adulthood?

7.OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To assess the level of mental well-being among women raised in government children's homes during adolescence.
2. To assess psychological problems among women raised in government children's homes during adolescence.
3. To assess the level of mental well-being among women raised in family settings.
4. To assess psychological problems among women raised in family settings.
5. To compare mental well-being among women raised in government children's homes and family settings.
6. To compare psychological problems among women raised in government children's homes and family settings.

8.HYPOTHESIS

- H1: There is a significant difference in mental well-being between women raised in government children's homes and women raised in family settings.
- H2: There is a significant difference in psychological problems between women raised in government children's homes and women raised in family settings.

9.VARIABLES

Independent Variables

- Government children's home
- Family setting

Dependent Variables

- Mental well-being
- Psychological problems

10.METHODOLOGY

10.1 Research Design

Comparative research design.

10.2 Participants

The sample consists of women aged 20–40 years selected from:

- Government children's homes
- Family settings

10.3 Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling method.

10.4 Inclusion Criteria

1. Women aged between 20 and 40 years.
2. Women who lived, studied and spent their childhood and adolescent period in Government Children's Homes in Kerala for a minimum period of 5 years or more.
3. Participants with different educational backgrounds, including those who studied up to 10th standard, completed Plus Two, or completed professional courses such as Nursing, Teaching and other professional/vocational courses and are currently employed.
4. Women raised in family settings with continuous parental or family care during adolescent
5. Participants who are able to read and understand the language of questionnaire
6. Participants who are willing to provide informed consent for participation in the study

10.5 Tools Used

1. Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale

2. Depression Anxiety Stress Scale

1. Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS) developed by Sarah Stewart-Brown and Jan Mohamed is used to assess mental well-being. The scale consists of 14 positively worded items measuring positive affect, emotional functioning, and interpersonal relationships. Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "None of the time" to "All of the time." Higher scores indicate higher levels of mental well-being.

2. Depression Anxiety Stress Scale

The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21) developed by Sydney H. Lovibond and Peter F. Lovibond is used to assess psychological problems. The scale measures symptoms related to depression, anxiety, and stress. It consists of 21 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale. Higher scores indicate higher psychological distress.

10.6 Procedure

Permission for data collection will be obtained from the concerned authorities of government children's homes and related institutions. Participants from institutional and family settings will be selected using purposive sampling based on the inclusion criteria. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, and confidentiality of responses will be ensured. The purpose of the study and instructions for responding to the questionnaires will be explained clearly. The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale and Depression Anxiety Stress Scale will be administered individually or in small groups, and the collected responses will be scored according to the respective manual guidelines.

10.7 Statistical Analysis

- Mean
- Standard deviation
- Independent sample t-test

11. RESULTS

Table 1
Comparison of Mental Well-Being among Women Raised in Government Children's Homes During Adolescence and Those Raised in Family Settings

Variables	Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Significance
Mental Well-Being	Government Children's Home	100	41.28	6.75	-6.02	p < 0.01
Mental Well-Being	Family Setting	100	50.84	6.12		Significant

Interpretation

The above table presents the comparison of mental well-being between women raised in government children's homes during adolescence and women raised in family settings. The mean score of mental well-being among women raised in family settings (M = 50.84, SD = 6.12) was found to be higher than the mean score of women raised in government children's homes (M = 41.28, SD = 6.75).

The obtained t-value (-6.02) was significant at the 0.01 level, indicating that there exists a statistically significant difference in mental well-being between the two groups. Therefore, the hypothesis stating that women raised in family settings possess better mental well-being than women raised in institutional settings is accepted.

Table 2
Comparison of Psychological Problems among Women Raised in Government Children's Homes During Adolescence and Those Raised in Family Settings

Variables	Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Significance
Psychological Problems	Government Children's Home	100	30.12	7.42	5.36	p < 0.01
Psychological Problems	Family Setting	100	21.45	6.95		Significant

Interpretation

The table shows the comparison of psychological problems among women raised in government children's homes during adolescence and those raised in family settings. Women raised in

government children's homes obtained a higher mean score ($M = 30.12$, $SD = 7.42$) in psychological problems compared to women raised in family settings ($M = 21.45$, $SD = 6.95$).

The calculated t-value (5.36) was significant at the 0.01 level, which indicates a statistically significant difference between the groups. Hence, women raised in government children's homes experience more psychological problems compared to women raised in family settings.

12. DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study clearly indicate that upbringing environment plays a crucial role in determining the mental well-being and psychological adjustment of women. Women raised in family settings demonstrated significantly higher mental well-being scores. Family environments generally provide emotional security, parental attachment, social support, and healthy interpersonal relationships, which contribute positively to emotional stability and psychological health.

In contrast, women raised in government children's homes during adolescence reported higher psychological problems. Institutional upbringing may expose children to emotional deprivation, lack of individual attention, attachment difficulties, social stigma, and inadequate emotional support, which may negatively affect their mental health.

The findings are consistent with previous psychological studies which suggest that supportive family relationships act as protective factors against stress, anxiety, depression, and emotional maladjustment. Therefore, the study highlights the importance of psychosocial support systems and mental health interventions for children growing up in institutional care settings.

13. IMPLICATION

The findings of the study may help psychologists, counselors, social workers, and child welfare institutions understand the long-term psychological impact of institutional upbringing on women. The study highlights the importance of emotional support, secure attachment, and family care in promoting mental well-being. The results may contribute to developing psychological intervention programs, counseling services, rehabilitation strategies, and policy reforms for women raised in government children's homes. The study may also create awareness about the mental health needs of individuals from vulnerable childhood backgrounds and encourage supportive community and family-based care systems.

14. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that there is a significant difference in mental well-being and psychological problems between women raised in government children's homes during adolescence and those raised in family settings. Women raised in family environments showed better mental well-being, whereas women raised in institutional settings exhibited greater psychological problems.

The study emphasizes the need for psychological counseling, emotional care, and rehabilitation programs for children living in government children's homes to improve their mental health outcomes and overall well-being.

15. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

1. Future studies may include a larger sample from different districts and states to improve the generalizability of the findings.
2. The present study focuses only on women; future research may compare both male and female participants raised in institutional and family settings.
3. Longitudinal studies can be conducted to understand the long-term psychological impact of institutional upbringing across different stages of life.

4. Future research may examine additional psychological variables such as self-esteem, resilience, emotional intelligence, coping strategies, social support, and quality of life among institutionalized individuals.
5. Comparative studies can be conducted between government children's homes and private childcare institutions to identify differences in emotional and psychological outcomes.
6. Future studies may use qualitative methods such as interviews and case studies to gain deeper understanding of personal experiences, emotional struggles, and coping patterns of women raised in institutional settings.
7. Research may also focus on the effectiveness of counseling, psychosocial interventions, and rehabilitation programs in improving mental well-being among women from institutional backgrounds.
8. Future investigations can explore the role of family reintegration, peer support, and community acceptance in enhancing psychological adjustment among women raised in children's homes.
9. Cross-cultural studies may be conducted to compare institutional upbringing and mental health outcomes across different cultural and social contexts.
10. Future research may examine the influence of educational opportunities, employment status, and socioeconomic conditions on the mental well-being of women raised in institutional care.

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