CHAPTER - IV

OVERVIEW AND SUGGESTIONS
“Childhood is the period when mind and bodies and personalities are being formed, and when even temporary deprivation is capable of inflicting lifelong damage and distortion on human development, and these vital, vulnerable years of childhood should as far is humanly possible be protected from the worst mistakes and malignancies of the adult world. A child has only one chance to develop normally. And the protection of that one chance should be given a first call on society’s concern and capacities. There will always be something more immediate, there will never be anything more important.”

UNICEF (1995)

(The State of the World Children)

Children represent the most vulnerable section of the society. They lack control over their lives and are mostly dependent on others for the fulfillment of almost all of their needs. This vulnerability increases manifolds when children undergo traumatic experiences in childhood, along with lack of stable and secure relationships. Today lot many children are living in difficult circumstances. Unlike other children these children living in difficult circumstances remain devoid of physical, as well as, emotional supplies. What they get most is ignorance, neglect, abuse and rejection not only from their own parents but also from the society.

The sad state of these children gives rise to a number of issues which need immediate attention. Be it National Education Policy or National Mental Health, they all advocate fulfillment of their basic needs, as well as, reinforcement of researches on these children. The present research is a step in this direction and focuses on the children living in Protective Homes.

The purpose of the present research is to explore the mental health, self image and self – other relatedness of children living in Protective Homes. For this an expost facto research design with an exploratory orientation was used. Initially a survey of the Protective Homes in Lucknow was made by the researcher. After this on the basis of the inclusion criterion, two Protective Homes in Lucknow were picked up. The total sample comprised of 102 children who fulfilled the inclusion criterion. Out of these 102 children
52 were boys taken from Rajkiya Bal Greh (Balak), Mohan road, Lucknow and 50 were girls taken from Rajkiya Bal Greh (Balika), Motinagar, Lucknow.

Gender was the major variable and gender differences were explored across Mental Health, Self image and Self- other relatedness.

Mental health was assessed at two levels-

- For felt states and perceptions an interview schedule (developed by the researcher) was used.
- The intellectual functioning of children was assessed with Standard Progressive Matrices (Raven, 1988).

Further the variable of self image was explored through House – Tree- Person Test (Buck, 1948) and Circle Technique (Thrower, Bruce & Walton, 1982) was used as a supportive tool.

For exploring self – other relatedness of children Circle Technique (Thrower, Bruce & Walton, 1982) was used and House – Tree- Person Test (Buck, 1948) was used as a supportive test.

Keeping in mind the purpose of the research the major findings are given in the following three sections-

SECTION-ONE- MENTAL HEALTH

1. Felt States and Perceptions
   - Section- I- Life at one’s own home
   - Section – II- Life at Protective Home
   - Section – III- Mental health

2. Intellectual Functioning

SECTION-TWO - SELF IMAGE

SECTION-THREE- SELF – OTHER RELATEDNESS
Major findings pertaining to the variables of Mental health, Self image and Self – other relatedness are being discussed here one by one-

SECTION – ONE MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health was explored at two levels, that is in terms of felt states and perceptions and in terms of intellectual functioning. First of all findings related to felt states and perceptions are being discussed.

1. Felt States and Perceptions-

Findings related to felt states and perceptions are divided into three dimensions. These are as follows-

I) Life at one’s own home

Major observations on this dimension are as follows-

- Children predominantly had experienced both mother and father.
- Most of the children reported liking for their parents. More girls than boys reported their liking for their fathers.
- Parents of most of the children as reported by them were at home.
- Predominantly children perceived their home environment to be good. Girls predominantly perceived their home environment to be good whereas boys predominantly perceived it as bad. Further, more boys than girls reported their home environment to be bad. Interestingly more boys reported that they do not know about their home environment than their counterparts.
- Fathers of majority of the sample were semi-skilled labourers or were employed in farms. On the other hand children were largely unaware of their mother’s occupation. Across gender also similar trend emerged.
- ‘Activities’ like playing, roaming etc. were in the comfort zone of most of the children. In terms of gender similar picture emerged. However in comparison to A1 more A2 gave place to ‘persons’ in their comfort zone. In addition to this boys were more unaware of what they liked in their families than girls.
‘Violence in families’ emerged as a major discomfort zone in the lives of most of the children. With reference to gender boys predominantly reported domestic violence in their discomfort zone whereas girls predominantly denied of any discomfort zone in their homes. Further in comparison to boys more girls included ‘persons’ in their families in their discomfort zone. More boys than girls reported that they do not know about any discomfort zone in their homes.

On the issues related to physical supplies largely children approached their mothers. With reference to gender girls predominantly reach out to their mothers whereas boys were predominantly either unaware of whom they approached or they did not reach out (except in the situation when having the problem and for sleeping with). For sleeping and when having problems even boys reach out to their mothers.

On the issues related to emotional supplies, children predominantly approach their mothers when unhappy and scared whereas when angry children predominantly approach no one. Interestingly majority of children approach others when happy. With reference to gender girls predominantly reach out to their mothers whereas boys predominantly reach out to no one.

II) Life at Protective Home

Major observations on this dimension are as follows-

Runaway and being lost emerged as major triggering events behind entry of most of the children into Protective Homes. In terms of gender more girls were lost than boys. Further, more boys resorted to running away from their homes than girls.

Most of the children were brought to the protective home by the persons of other rehabilitation units. Across gender also similar trend was observed. However
more A2 than A1 were brought by police and other law officials to the protective home.

- Most of the sample perceived people, elder people and children at protective home as good. **Girls** predominantly perceived them as **good** whereas **boys** predominantly perceived **people at protective home as some good and some bad**, elders as good and children in protective home as bad.

Children largely **do not feel good** at protective home. **Boys are more expressive of their feelings than girls.**

Most of the children reported ‘**fun activities**’ like singing, dancing, playing in their comfort zone in Protective Home. More girls reported ‘studies’ and ‘persons’ in their comfort zone than boys.

Largely children reported ‘**abuse**’ in their **discomfort zone**. In terms of gender similar picture emerged.

- For the **satisfaction of physical needs** most of the **children reach out to other children** or inmates at Protective Home. In terms of gender **girls predominantly reach out to other children whereas when in need boys predominantly reach out to staff or teachers.**

Further due to lack of space majority of **children reported sleeping with other children.** This is an issue of concern.

When faced with aroused negative emotions **sample predominantly approach no one** except when scared. When scared children reach out to other children. **When unhappy and fearful girls predominantly approach other inmates whereas boys do not reach out.** When angry both the groups approach no one.

- Majority of the sample **missed their homes.** In comparison to boys **more girls miss their homes.**
Further half of the sample denied feeling lonely at protective home. Those who felt lonely among them most of them felt lonely when left out or rejected by other children.

III) Mental health

Major observations on this dimension are as follows-

- Most of the children understood happiness in terms of synonyms, though interestingly almost similar percentage of children were not aware of the meaning of happiness. A1 predominantly understood happiness in terms of synonyms whereas girls were largely unaware of it.

  For semantic of sadness, most of the children were unaware of the meaning of sadness. An equal percentage of children reported sadness in terms of negative states like rejection, loneliness etc. In terms of gender boys predominantly understood sadness as negative states whereas girls predominantly reported that they do not know the semantic of sadness.

  Further children were largely unaware of the semantic of fear and anger. Boys predominantly understood fear as specific fears like fear of animals etc., and anger in terms of reaction to anger like beating, fighting etc. whereas girls were largely unaware.

  On the whole more girls were unaware of the semantics than boys.

- In home most of the sample used negative passive coping mechanisms when unhappy, when scared and at the time of conflict between elders but when angry they used negative active coping mechanisms. More girls than boys use negative passive copings when scared.

  When happy and sick children largely used positive coping mechanisms.

In Protective Home, except when happy children largely use negative passive ways of coping when unhappy, scared and angry. More girls than boys reported
negative passive coping when fearful and sad. When happy and sick children largely use positive active coping mechanisms.

- Most of the sample likes to stay with other children or inmates because of the care and nurturance provided by them. More girls than boys reported liking for staying with other children and more boys than girls reported that they like to stay with family members and other relatives.

- Most of the children were unaware of any happy event in their lives. Children largely reported abuse by others as a sad event and an almost equal percentage of children were unaware of any such event. Girls predominantly reported abuse by others as a sad event and boys were predominantly unaware.

  On the event related to fear most of the children reported that they do not know any such event. In terms of gender boys were predominantly unaware and girls predominantly reported personalized experiences at protective home as fearful events. More girls than boys reported personalized experiences at protective home as fearful events.

  Children largely reported seeing violence as an event of anger. Girls predominantly reported personalized experiences at protective home as events of anger whereas boys predominantly reported seeing violence as an anger provoking event.

- Largely children reported adequate hunger and good quality sleep. More boys than girls had good quality sleep. Further children largely saw parent and family related dreams.

- Most of the children cry sometimes only. Boys predominantly cry sometimes whereas girls predominantly cry daily. More girls than boys cry daily. Further children largely cry because of abuse, beatings and fights. With reference to gender boys predominantly cry when they have negative
thoughts and miss home whereas girls predominantly cry because of abuse, beatings and fights.

- Most of the children reported that they like to do ‘positive active things’ like playing, cleaning in their leisure time.

- Largely children want to take rebirth in the same home. Further majority of the children want to go in specific job or helping profession in their next birth. Boys predominantly want to become a celebrity or a person with reputed power and position whereas girls predominantly want to go in specific job or helping profession like doctor, teacher etc.

- Children predominantly have growth oriented wishes. In terms of gender A1 predominantly had family reunion and welfare wishes whereas A2 had growth oriented wishes.

- Majority of children watch television. Comedy and fun programs were liked predominantly by children.

2. Intellectual Functioning

Major observations related to the intellectual functioning of children are as follows-

- Most of the children’s intellectual capacity is impaired as they fall in the intellectually impaired category. Across gender also similar trend emerged.

- Children largely approached the problems on Standard Progressive Matrices in a sequential manner and errors increased with the increase in the complexity of the task.

Thus on the whole following findings reflect poor mental health of children in protective homes-
Abuse in the past and in the present, that is in their own home, as well as, in protective home.

Runaway and being lost as major triggering events behind their entry into protective home indicating conflict with significant others and in family.

Felt loneliness, and homesickness.

Lack of the awareness of the mental health semantics.

Predominant use of negative passive coping mechanisms like crying, doing nothing etc both at home and in protective home.

Evident need for care and affection.

Lack of awareness of mental health semantics.

Memory deficits for emotional events.

Crying spells and sleeping with other children.

Impaired intellectual functioning.

This provides support for the assumption that the “Mental health of children living in Protective Homes would be poor.”

In terms of gender, more girls than boys fear abuse. Further more girls reported inadequate sleep and crying daily because of abuse, beatings and fights than their counterparts. In comparison to boys more girls used negative passive copings mechanisms, lacked awareness of semantics pertaining to different emotions. These findings partially support the assumption that “In comparison to boys, girls living in Protective Homes would show poor mental health.”

SECTION – TWO SELF IMAGE

Major findings that were obtained through House – Tree- Person Test pertaining to the self image of children are as follows-

I) HOUSE

Major observations related to the drawing of the house are as follows-

- Majority of children are capable of feeling emotions. No differences were found in terms of gender.
Most of the children possess moderate level of energy. With reference to gender similar results were obtained.

High anxiety and excess use of fantasy were evident in the drawings of house of most of the children. With reference to gender no differences were found related to size and dimension of roof. However drawings of A2 reflected more anxiety in girls than boys.

Most of the children have ego strength in their personality. In terms of gender boys appear to have greater instability and disintegrating egos than girls.

Most of the children are largely accessible to the outside world but do not want to reach out to others. With reference to gender boys do not want to make contact with the outside world whereas girls apply control in their interaction with the environment.

In terms of general perspective negative attitude towards parents, siblings and home situation was observed. In addition desertion, emptiness were also evident.

Drawings also suggest passivity and lack of affection and warmth in the home life of children.

**II) TREE**

Major observations related to the drawing of the tree are as follows

- Again most of the children feel emotions strongly.
- Children have moderate level of energy. Further, more girls have moderate level of energy than boys.
- Though most of the children made trunks of the tree, they made it disproportionately, which is suggestive of inadequate and weak self image. With reference to gender no differences were found.
- Most of the children do not want to reach out or mingle with others.
- In terms of theme children largely show regressive yearning for intrauterine existence and a need to withdraw within self.

**III-A) PERSON**

Major observations related to the drawing of the person are as follows-
Similar to the findings of the drawn House and Tree, majority of the children made chromatic drawing of a person, which suggests that children are capable of feeling emotions.

Again majority of children showed moderate level of energy. Across gender no differences were found.

Most of the children made complete figures but the overall quality of the figure drawn was poor. This suggests weak, inferior, and inadequate self image.

Most of the children made person of the same gender. In comparison to girls more boys made person of the same gender. In other words fewer girls identify with the person of the same gender.

Although children are largely capable of feeling emotions but both the groups lack the expression of the same.

Most of the children think about their own self and also show drive to move ahead on their own. Similar pattern was observed in the drawing of girls but in the drawing of boys physical needs seem to dominate.

Children largely have the ability to control impulses. This could be at the base of their lack of expression.

III-B) Drawings of Person were also analyzed in terms of DAP Indicators of maladjustment (Maloney & Glasser, 1982). The major observations on this are as follows-

Most of the children show anxiety, withdrawal tendencies with an associated reduction of energy. With reference to gender no differences were found.

Again conflict and anxiety was evident in most of the children on the indicator of distortion.

Overall quality of the drawing of most of the children was poor.

Thus on the whole it can be concluded that though the children’s perception of their self is complete, the overall quality of the figure drawn is poor. This suggests inadequate and weak self image. Further most of the children do feel emotions intensely but they do not express it. Along with this children also experience
moderate energy levels, conflict and anxiety. All these findings suggest weak, inadequate, inferior and frail self image in children. This provides support for the assumption that the “Self image of children living in Protective Homes would be inadequate.”

Further in terms of gender, more boys identify with the person of the same gender than their counterparts. This gives indication of conflicts with mother in girls and subsequently weak, inadequate and inferior self image. In addition to this more girls than boys have moderate energy level and experience high anxiety. These findings partially support the assumption that the “Self image of girls living in Protective Homes would be more inadequate than their counterparts.”

Findings obtained through Circle Technique corroborate these findings.

SECTION – THREE SELF – OTHER RELATEDNESS

Major observations pertaining to self – other relatedness are as follows:

- Children **predominantly do not have their self in their life space**. Similar trend emerged with reference to gender too. However **self is present in the life space of more A1 than A2**.
- Those who had their self in their life space, among them **most of the children made their self at periphery**. This shows the dominance of others in the life space of children.
- Children largely perceive their self as equal to others in their life space. In terms of gender **girls predominantly made their self smaller than others** whereas **boys made their self equal to others**.
- Children **predominantly depicted their self as emotionally divorced from others**. Similar picture emerged with reference to gender too.
- Children largely **depicted 6 to 10 people in their relational world**. In terms of gender **boys predominantly depicted 1 to 5 people** in their relational network and **girls 6 to 10 people**.
- **Siblings** emerged as the predominant significant other in the life space of children. Further **in the life space of boys siblings dominated** and **in the life space of girls parents dominated**.

Thus on the whole it can be inferred that the self is absent in the life space of most of the children. Further those who have their self in their life space it’s a kind of cut off, at periphery, and emotionally divorced.

In terms of gender self is absent in the life space of more girls than boys. In addition more girls perceive their self as weak, inferior, inadequate and subservient to others than their counterparts.

All this provide support for the assumptions that the “**Self – other relatedness of children living in Protective Homes would be conflictual**” and “**Self- other relatedness would be more conflictual in girls living in Protective Homes than boys.**”

Although the researcher made sincere efforts and took utmost care in the planning, designing and conduction of the present research yet a humble admission of the limitations of the present research is being made here, along with implications and suggestions for further exploration in this area.

**IMPLICATIONS**

Major implications arising out of the main findings are as follows-

- The findings strongly suggest the need to **provide intervention in the form of psychosocial support to these children**.
- There is a need to **sensitize and train the staff of Protective Homes** so that they can understand the psyche of these children and subsequently provide them with the much needed care and support of an adult in the absence of families.
- Policies and initiatives are framed for providing the physical supplies to families in adverse and difficult circumstances, some **inputs of psycho social support for the family** is also the need of the hour.
- Need for counseling services was essentially felt. Counseling services by trained mental health professionals should be enforced in all homes, both public and private.
- **Infrastructural facilities in homes needs to be improved** as the homes are overcrowded and the living conditions of children are poor.

- Efforts must be made to ensure **that child grows up in his or her family in a safe, nurturing and caring environment.**

- At a preventive level **efforts must be made to maintain the family intactness** as this would lead to a fall in children’s destitution and will provide them with opportunities for overall development.

- Efforts should be made to **bring these children into the mainstream.**

- The various Acts and laws made by the Government for the children in need of care and protection, needs to be implemented more strictly keeping in mind the interest of children.

**SUGGESTIONS**

The present research has focused only on the children living in Protective Homes. Other homes like shishu greh, observation homes, shelter homes, day care centers could also be taken up for further research.

- Children living in slums, prisons, HIV infected children, child prostitutes could also be studied in order to broaden the understanding of the psyche of these children, for planning intervention programs and for increasing researches in this area.

- The present research has primarily focused on the children belonging to 10 to 14 years of age group. Therefore other age groups in terms of critical points in development could also be explored.

- A comparative study could also be taken up between these children and children living with their parents in their homes.

- The present study has explored the mental health, self image and self- other relatedness of children. Other variables like quality of life, resiliency, adjustment, emotional intelligence etc. could also be taken up.

- Effect of intervention programs on these children could also be studied.