

Research Article

Institutional Child Care Homes: Identifying the Ailments and Rethinking Reforms

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Abstract

This research explores the vital factors that prevent institutional child care homes from ensuring optimal wellbeing to the children, from becoming development friendly for the children and a real alternate to family system in India. Child care homes are socially and legally constructed rather instituted. They are designed not only to provide a roof to the destitute children, but are expected to contribute significantly for their personality and overall development in the absence of a biological family. Very often institutional care homes are criticised for their failure to provide adequate care and support to the children. In this context, the present study aims to unravel the challenges faced by institutional care system which prevent them from performing their core functions and becoming delivering in character. The study is conducted by the authors in five care homes in the state of Odisha, a state in the eastern province of India. Three care homes are government sponsored while two care homes are managed by private trusts. The researchers have used personal interaction and have administered a semi structured interview schedule to collect the information from the five studied care homes. A tripartite objective has guided the study i.e. to probe into the objectives, organisation and operational strategy. The paper notes that institutional child care homes till date though adhere to some common objectives and organisational structure, fail to have a standardised operational strategy which is basically due to the financial crunch and poor financial management and priority fixation. So, the paper recommends the development and administration of a common guidelines to manage the care homes' functioning, to keep a surveillance on their capital use and their goal setting and goal attainment.

Keywords: *Child Care Homes, Objectives, Organisational structure, Operational strategy, Financial status and Expenditure pattern*

Introduction

The United Nations records that there are approximately 8 million children living in institutional care across the globe presently (Das Gupta,2019), but the numbers are often many more. Institutional care homes are unregistered in many countries and their strength often goes uncounted (Petrowski, Cappa, and Gross, 2017, p. 394; UNICEF, 2009, p. 19). However, there is no unanimity of opinion on the effectiveness of the institutional child care homes in ensuring wellbeing to the child inmates. Two counter notions dominate the policy debates on the institutional child care homes. On the one hand, institutional Child Care Homes are conceived worldwide to protect the children from abuse, exploitation, poverty and neglect and to provide them alternate family care in the absence of their original family support and allow them to enjoy their rights (Faith to Action [2014](#) and UNICEF,[2015](#)),. They provide children in need with temporary or permanent substitute care for the biological family. But the counter view suggests that very often institutional care homes for children are not the right institutions or proper substitutes for the family system. are critiqued on the ground that children in institutional care are at risk of attachment disorder and developmental delays (Browne, et.al.2006) and are marked with a high prevalence of depression (Vinnakota and Kaur,2018). These two contrasting observations have led the researchers to have led the researchers to assess the opportunities and the challenges of the care homes.

Contextualising the Study:

The present study is undertaken in five institutional child care homes the state of Odisha, a state in the eastern province of India. Among these five institutional child care homes three are government sponsored while two are run by private trusts. In India a total of 1.8 lakh children are residing in child care institutions without their parental ability to fulfil their basic necessities like food, shelter and clothing (Jena Committee Report, 2018). The same committee has earmarked that there were 9623 institutional child care homes operating in India officially in the year 2017. The state under study i.e., Odisha is a home to 3 care homes. Odisha houses country's second highest orphan children and the number is around 7,326 'distressed' children who have taken shelter in nearly 121 child care centres in the State (Patro,2019). But contrastingly, a report of the NCPCR (2019) reports, when the Juvenile Justice Act provides for minimum standard of care for the children, the institutional care homes in Odisha lack in the minimum basic facility like proper bathrooms, toilets, safe drinking water, air cooler during summer, gas stove for cooking, etc, basic security arrangements for the wellbeing of the child population. Against these startling observations,

the present study was taken up to probe into the reasons which prevent the institutional child care homes in the state to ensure a good quality of life and wellbeing to the children.

Objectives of the study:

The study was launched with the following prefixed objectives. They are:

- To document the origin and nature of the institutional child care homes.
- To identify the objectives, organisational structures and the operational strategy of the institutional care homes.
- To trace out the lacunae if any which make the institutional care homes to deviate from their mandates and bring a gap between their promises and performances.

Methods and Materials:

The study is based on an in-depth interview with the functionaries and the management committee members of the institutional care homes under study, a careful browse into their records both establishment and financial. It took around 17 months to collect this information from the care homes.

Box No. A

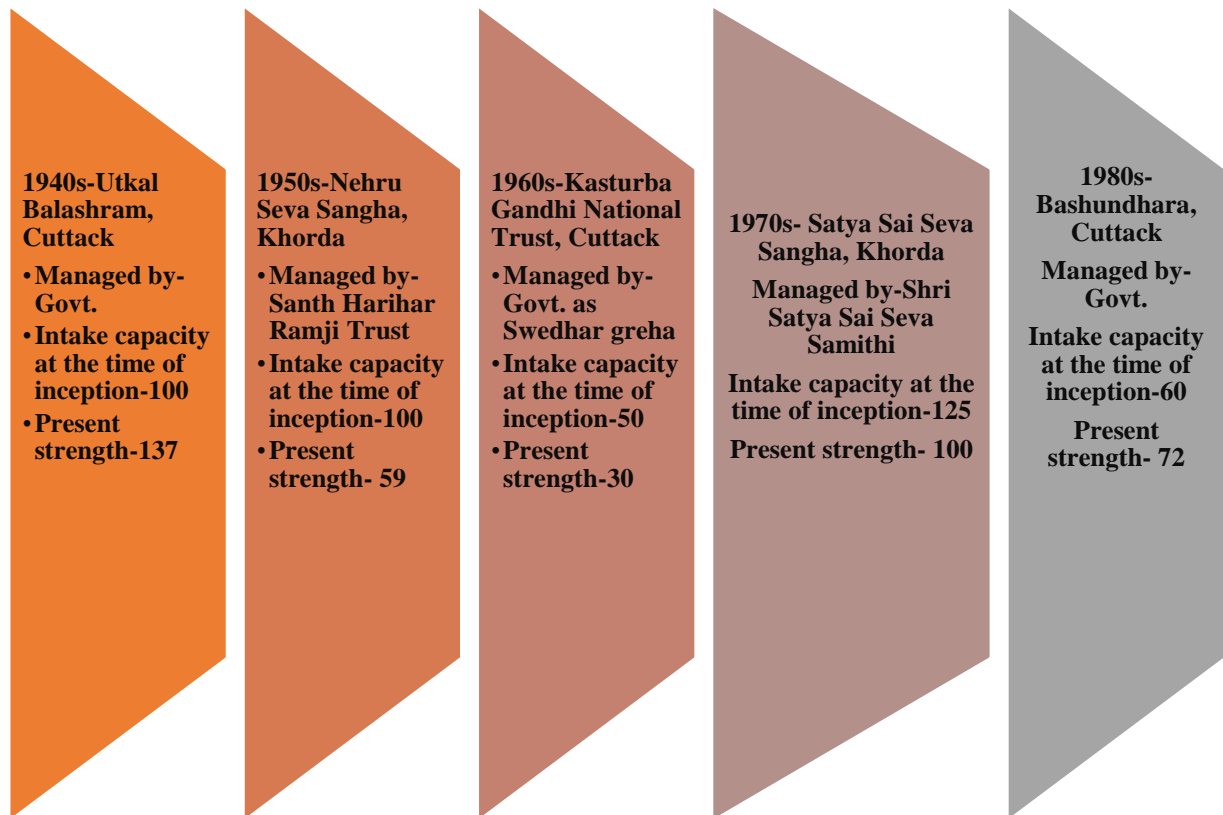
Impressions Derived and Inferences Drawn from the Study:

In its attempt to document the origin and nature of the institutional care homes the study had the following key impressions.

- Three of the studied care homes are government aided while two are trust managed. Utkal Balasram, Cuttack is the oldest care home under study having its inception in the late 1940s and Basundhara, Cuttack is the youngest institutional child care home having its institution in the late 1980s. The trust managed homes i.e. Nehru Seva Sangha, Khorda and Satya Sai Seva Sangha, Khorda have their birth in the late years of the 1960s and 1970s. Kasturba Gandhi National Trust, Cuttack had its birth in the early years of the 1960s.
- The inmate position of the care homes since their inception has a rise in case of Utkal Balasram and Basundhara while it has dipped down in case of Kasturba Gandhi National Trust, the government taken over home and Nehru Seva Sangha, and Satya Sai Seva Sangha. The study could discover that Kasturba Gandhi National Trust being converted into a swedhar greha has lost its focus on accommodating more children as a child care home while paucity of funds to manage children properly has prevented the two trust managed homes to have a good intake.

The flow chart below indicates the origin and nature of the institutional care homes under study.

Fig.1: Origin And Nature of The Institutional Care Homes



In exploring the objectives, organisational structures and the operational strategy of the institutional care homes under study, the study has made the following important revelations.

- Institutional child care homes under study move ahead with stereotypical objectives, organisational structure and operational strategies. They lack innovativeness in these three aspects.
 - Child care homes need to ensure a loving, stable parental relationship which is as critical to the young child's survival and health as is food and health care (Bowlby,1951). For this the functionaries of such homes need to be loving, motivated, spirited and stimulating. The functionaries who are the care givers were found to be untrained, unskilled for the purpose of childcare and they were found to be lacking voluntarism and motivation to provide the best possible care to the children. An interview and a close interaction with these functionaries could reveal out that they take this as a profession, but not a mission and the meagre salary they clearly proposed is a demotivating factor for them. Box No. A captures the voice of a functionary which substantiate the observation.

The care homes under analysis fail to provide the four typical requirements suggested by the Bradshaw et. al. 2012. These 4 requirements are:

- ❖ Promoting acceptance and adaptation
- ❖ Ensuring connectedness with others
- ❖ Generating home life environment
- ❖ Promoting good caring practices

These four typical requirements are vital for creating positive life experiences among children. The researchers thus conclude that the care homes create “a roof without a root for the children” and till date they are not the real substitute to family care.

- The organisational structure of the government aided institutional child care homes represent a capitalist structure mediated by a strong distancing between the office bearers that includes President, Vice-president, Secretary and Treasurers on one hand and the workers like the Superintendent, Counselor, Office assistant, Store keeper and the Care givers on the other. On the other hand, Trust like Santh Harihar Ramji Trust, Shri Satya Sai Seva Samithi still go with a missionary spirit to provide better care and their model of operation is more socialistic in character without having a strongly demarcated class structure.
- The operational strategy of the institutional child care homes was found to be having many commonalities and noted to be very poor in character. Maintenance of child care plan which has been mandated through the JJ Act,2015 and proctorial caregiving seems missing elements in all the five institutions.
- The operational procedures of these care homes still lack in a perfect design of, curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities for the children and are very much routine bound. The major cause of these lapses have been attributed to the poor financial status of these institutions as mentioned unequivocally the management of all the care homes.
- The financial situation of the studied child care homes was judged through the analysis of the following facts which is presented in the flow chart below.

Fig No.2: Child Care Home Analysis

Table no. 1 represents the financial positions of the care homes under study.

**Table No. 1: The Detailed of The Financial Status of Care Homes Under Study
(in Rs.)**

Name of the care home	Total fixed capital of the care home	Total Working Capital of the care home	Running Human Resource Development Cost	Running Cost for Maintenance	Total Expenditure	Balance
Kasturba Gandhi National Trust, Cuttack	80,00,00/-	8,22,000/-	1,98,000/-	5,24,000/-	7,22,000/-	1,00,000/-
Utkal Balashram, Cuttack	75,00,00/-	7,47,000/-	3,42,000/-	3,64,000/-	7,06,000/-	41,000/-
Bashundhara, Cuttack	1,70,00,000/-	11,56,000/-	7,25,000/-	4,05,000/-	11,30,000/-	26,000/-
Satya Sai Seva Sangha, Khorda	65,00,000/-	16,80,000/-	9,58,000/-	6,36,000/-	15,94,000/-	86,000/-
Nehru Seva Sangha, Khorda	50,00,000/-	6,36,000/-	4,12,000/-	2,05,000/-	6,17,000/-	19,000/-

Note:

- The financial status has been retrieved from the records of the care homes by the researcher for the year 2019-2020, the year of visit to their office.
- The costs have been recorded for annum as per the statement and the cashbook, passbook and audit statement of the care homes visited.
 - As it becomes indicative from the foregoing table, the Govt. sponsored organizations that are Bashundhara, Cuttack, Kasturba Gandhi National Trust, Cuttack, Utkal Balashram, Cuttack have better fixed capital vis-vis the privately trust managed care homes.

- An intra-govt. sponsored care homes suggest that Bashundhara, Cuttack has the highest fixed capital because it has been sponsored by the Govt. since its beginning whereas Kasturba Gandhi National Trust, Cuttack came under Govt. sponsorship from 2016.
- However, it was disheartening to note that Utkal Balashram, Cuttack being introduced by the Government since its inception does not have much fixed capital. As the financial support for this child care home started since 1949, the amount was less as per prevailing the values of that time. The Government has not taken any step nor there is any effort from the side of the care homes to demand more financial aid. So, both the demand and the supply side are weak for Utkal Balashram, Cuttack.
- Among the private trust instituted care homes, the Satya Sai Seva Sangha, Khorda has a better fixed capital in comparison to Nehru Seva Sangha, Khorda because of the better donations it receives from the public.

But so far as the working capital of the care homes are concerned the study noted the following key points.

- Working capital is better for Satya Sai Seva Sangha, Khorda being a private trust owned child care home followed by Bashundhara, Cuttack a Govt. owned child care home, followed by Kasturba Gandhi National Trust, Cuttack, followed by Utkal Balashram, Cuttack and Nehru Seva Sangha, Khorda.
- The working capital of Satya Sai Seva Sangha, Khorda is better because of the flooding of donations to the child care home by private donors. The Govt. sponsored child care homes hardly receive any private donations but thrive with public funding remitted to them by the Government.

So far as the Human Resource Development cost of the child care homes are concerned the total amount of expenditure on Human Resource is

- Perceptibly high in Satya Sai Seva Sangha, Khorda followed by Bashundhara, Cuttack. It is moderately high for Nehru Seva Sangha, Khorda, the private child care home and the Utkal Balashram, Cuttack the public child care home. It is abysmally low for Kasturba Gandhi National Trust, Cuttack the public run child care home.
- The Human Resource expenditure of the child care homes establish that the Satya Sai Seva Sangha, Khorda which actually takes up the causes of the children and makes a hefty allotment towards their development. The other child care homes make a very low investment on it, which needs to be prioritised.

The study noted that the bulk of the working capital is spent towards running cost. Maintenance costs is phenomenally high in all the studied care homes. Institutional care homes have the minimal balance with them which speak of their miserable financial condition and their inability to face the odd situations. This is liable to risk the lives of the children in those homes.

- Child care homes are expected to meet the needs of survival, growth and development of the children. They need to spend adequately for the physical and intellectual development of the child inmates. But it was startling to note that the child care homes spend a very meagre amount on the human resource development head. Against this backdrop, the researchers calculated per head monthly and annually expenditure on Human Resource Development incurred by the child care homes under the study and also tried to capture how this per head income is distributed among various heads for the fulfilment of varied needs of the children. this per head expenditure on Human Resource Development and the heads of expenditure are presented in Table No. 2 and Table No.3

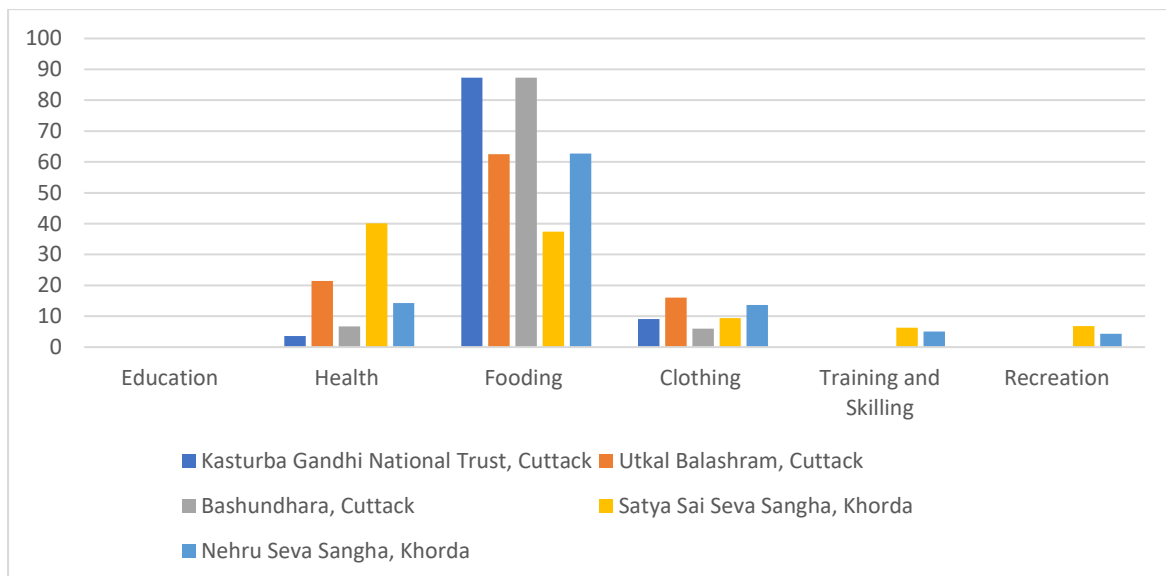
Table No.2: Per Head Expenditure for The Development of The Child As A Human Resource (In Rs.)

Name of the care homes	Annual expenditure on Human Resource Development	Total No. of Inmates	Per head expenditure (Annual)	Per head expenditure (Monthly)
Kasturba Gandhi National Trust, Cuttack	1,98,000/-	30	6,600/-	550/-
Utkal Balashram, Cuttack	3,42,000/-	137	2496.35/-	208/-
Bashundhara, Cuttack	7,25,000/-	72	10,069.44/-	839/-
Satya Sai Seva Sangha, Khorda	9,58,000/-	100	9,580/-	798/-
Nehru Seva Sangha, Khorda	4,12,000/-	59	6,983.05/-	581/-

Table No.3: Percentage of Expenditure of the Care Homes on Various Facets of Human Development

Name of the care home	Education	Health	Fooding	Clothing	Training and Skilling	Recreation
Kasturba Gandhi National Trust, Cuttack	0	3.63	87.3	9.1	0	0
Utkal Balashram, Cuttack	0	21.48	62.5	16.02	0	0
Bashundhara, Cuttack	0	6.73	87.3	6	0	0
Satya Sai Seva Sangha, Khorda	0	40.1	37.4	9.4	6.3	6.8
Nehru Seva Sangha, Khorda	0	14.3	62.7	13.7	5	4.3

Fig No.3: Percentage of Expenditure of the Care Homes on Various Facets of Human Development



- With regard to the expenditure of the care homes on human resource development, the researchers could delve out that the per head monthly expenditure is very nominal being much less than Rs.1000/-, the lowest being for Utkal Balashram i.e. only Rs.208/-. This gives a clear impression that care homes suffer from resource crunch and give least priority to human resource development expenditure which needs to be a priority area in their operational agenda.

- It was startling to note that care homes make zero expense on the education of the children which is quite vital. They admit the inmates in the government run early childhood care and education system through the AWCs and the schools which reduce their cost of expenditure on education to zero.
- The researcher could gather an impression that in exclusion to Utkal Balashram, Cuttack, the Govt. run child care homes hardly care for the health of the inmates while health adores a priority position in the private trust owned child care homes like the Satya Sai Seva Sangh and the Nehru Seva Sangha.
- Th bulk of the expenditure goes to the fooding of the children across the care homes.
- In exception to the two privately managed care homes, no care homes make any expenditure on skilling, training and recreation of the children.

We are struggling here with the children without getting a proper emolument. We are underpaid, deferred paid and sometimes unpaid. We continue with the hope of getting our dues collected. These situations do not bring an urge in us to take the children as our resourse, but as a responsibility imposed on us.”

Thus, the major impressions that were derived from the study are as follows:

- The institutional care homes under study are more than three decades old.
- Their inmate positions of the government sponsored care homes are increasing while the privately managed care homes are declining. Financial crunch and credibility are responsible for this.
- Child care homes have stereotypical objectives, organisational structures and operational strategies.
- They are under staffed. Caregivers lack the skill, training spirit and motivation to provide the real care to the destitute children. They are poorly paid for the services they render. A class structure is created between the managerial group and the group of care givers which becomes detrimental for the children’s care.

- The care homes lack child care plans, the records are poorly maintained and the vision plan for children's development is blurred.
- All the care homes suffer from financial stringency. This becomes a major hurdle to spend adequately for the human development of the child.
- Bulk of the Child care homes' expenditure goes on fooding and least on education, recreation, health and skilling. Thus, child care homes focus more on the survival needs and least on the needs for protection, participation and development.
- The privately managed child care homes are better delivering than the government aided child care homes.

Recommendations

The major recommendations that the study proposes are the following:

- Institutional Child Care homes need to include new innovations in their objectives. They need to shed with their stereotypical objectives and include new ones to provide better services to the children nurtured by them.
- They need to bring reforms in their organisational structure. Distance between management and workers need to be wiped out. Management need to have a changed mindset that they are parenting children and they need to recruit functionaries with skill, training and proper caregiving spirit to ensure better care and a quality life to the children for their future growth and development.
- Care homes need to be supported by benevolent donors, be they are the individuals, institutions or industries. The CSR wing of the industries, hospitals, privately run schools need to support the child care homes as a part of their social responsibility and bring adoption of Child Care Homes into their development agenda. When donations in terms of services and finance reach the care homes, they can perform better for raising the child inmates.
- Donations to Child Care Homes need to be incentivised through cent percent tax relaxation. This will encourage taxpayers to strengthen the financial status of the care homes through hefty donations which will make a steady flow of finance to the se care homes and the adversities and the special needs of the children can be met with.
- The Government need to increase the support to the care homes and look into their expenditure pattern. Stringent rules need to be made to make a sizable expense on human resource development along with the survival needs by the care homes. Financing needs to be for the care homes to look into the recreational and skilling aspects of the children.

When all major heads of human resource development can be given proper justice through expenditures, Institutional child care homes can defeat the often-alleged idea that they are not the right place for the emotional and all-round development of the children.

- The ambience, the expenditure, the situation of children and their progress physical, intellectual and emotional need to be brought under third party review and on the basis of the review the government need to continue or suspend the licenses of the care homes. Better performing care homes need incentivisation from the government and the Non-government organisations through recognition and aid which will increase their capability, credibility and morale to perform still better. All these will bring competition among the institutional care homes to become better delivering and the child reared therein will be getting a better care and service needed for growth and development.

With these reforms in the policies and practices the institutional child care homes can be strengthened and the gap between their promises and performances can be avoided. They can become effective agents to ensure optimal wellbeing to the children in the out of family environment.

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