Children in Conflict: Institutionalization as a Rehabilitative Mechanism in Jammu and Kashmir

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Abstract: The proponents of deinstitutionalization, including Goffman and others, in their works, have regarded institutions (orphanages to be specific) as regulated social arrangements that negatively impinge upon a resident’s development. They, therefore, propose alternative forms of care. However, even after five decades of this critique institutionalization remains the only hope for children with social, physical and mental disabilities in larger parts of the developing world such as the conflict affected state of Jammu and Kashmir in India. This paper is based on the experiences of children who lost their parents to insurgency and counter-insurgency operations and the rehabilitation process. This study is qualitative in nature and adopts descriptive-cum-exploratory research design. Using theoretical sampling, six orphanages and thirty one child residents who lost their parent(s) in the course of the armed conflict in the state of Jammu and Kashmir in India were studied in the year 2009-2010. It included interviews, observation, life histories and introspective accounts of the orphans and the management. The results were drawn through the qualitative examination, understanding, and interpretation of the primary and secondary data. The findings suggested that rehabilitation of these conflict-affected children is taking place mainly through residential child care facilities run by non-governmental bodies. Alternative forms of rehabilitation are not functional in the state because of various geopolitical and socio-cultural complexities. Even after five years of arriving at these conclusions and more, the state of Jammu and Kashmir still lacks a comprehensive rehabilitation plan for these children. This has further encouraged a mushroomed growth of legal and illegal institutions. Some of these institutions compromise the standard norms of functioning and yet remain the only hope for thousands rendered orphan. These institutions, therefore, are there to stay as other alternative forms of care are not available in the state. A comprehensive intervention policy is needed based on the cultural specifics of the state and incorporation of views of institutions offering aid, the state and the children. The paper introduces Small Group Residential Care Model through which it is expected that the restoration process can be made smooth and effective.

Keywords: armed conflict, children’s rights, institutionalization, orphanages, rehabilitation

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