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Prevalence of depression among children living in orphanage

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ABSTRACT

Background: The children who are placed in orphanages especially during very young age, for long duration are found to be at increased risk of developing psychiatric problems like depression, behavioural and emotional disorders later in life. The objective of the study was to assess the prevalence and severity of depression among children living in orphanage.

Methods: A cross sectional descriptive study, involving 180 children in the age group of 12-18 years living in orphanage was conducted. After obtaining permission and informed consent, demographic details were noted and hamilton depression scale was administered to assess depression. Scoring was done, severity of depression was classified and results were tabulated.

Results: 53% were age group of 12-14 years and 46% were 15-17 years, 52% females and 48% males, 35% had depression, most of them who had depression were in the age group of 15-17 years and majority were females. According to severity of depression 52% had mild depression, 23% had moderate depression, 14% had severe depression, 9% had very severe depression and 38% of depressed children had suicidal intentions.

Conclusions: Depression is one of the most common psychiatric disorder prevalent among children living in orphanages especially adolescent females so early identification and intervention is necessary for the children living orphanages to prevent further consequences.

Keywords: Depression, Orphan, Psychiatry

INTRODUCTION

Childhood is a stage of development in which the reciprocal emotional bonding between child and his/her caregiver should be there for healthy physical, psychological and social development which has been known for centuries.1

Children who experience early deprivation and neglect from parents or caregivers have a significantly increased risk of a range of psychiatric disorders like emotional and behaviour disorder, depression, etc. as per many researchers.2,3

Orphanages are institutions for the care of a child bereaved of both father and mother and also sometimes a

child living with single parent. Orphans are one of the most serious socio-economic and developmental challenges in developing countries worldwide.

Many studies have shown children placed in orphanages very significantly during early years of age and for long duration experience serious psychopathology later in life as compared to children living with families. This is because like adults, children are grieved by the loss of their parents, but unlike adults children do not feel the full impact of the loss because they may not be able to understand immediately the finality of death, preventing them from going through the grieving process which is very necessary to recover. So children therefore are at risk of growing up with unresolved negative emotions which are often expressed with anger and depression.⁴

Children are not given the required support and encouragement to express their emotions nor are they guided to deal with them. Emotional support needs to be constantly looked at and improved because children will continue to suffer across the world.⁵

Early diagnosis and timely intervention is needed to ameliorate their sufferings and improve the quality of their lives. So this study was under taken, to determine the prevalence and severity of depression among the children in orphanage, to take appropriate steps accordingly for managing the problems identified.

METHODS

A cross sectional descriptive study was conducted with 180 children from orphanage with inclusion criteria being children in the age of 12 to 18 years of both sexes living in orphanage and exclusion criteria was children with mental retardation ,with chronic medical illness and not willing to participate. Tool used was hamilton depression rating scale (HAM-D) to assess depression.

After institutional ethical committee clearance, permission was taken from the head of orphanage. Children satisfying the inclusion criteria were included in the study and their demographic status were noted HAM D scale was then administered to assess depression. The scores were calculated and classified as 0-7 = normal, 8-13 = mild depression, 14-18 = moderate depression, 19-22 = severe depression, >23 very severe depression. Results were then tabulated.

RESULTS

Among 180 children ,53% were age group of 12-14 years (Table 1) and 46% were 15-17 years, 52% females and 48% males (Table 2), 35% had depression, most of them who had depression were in the age group of 15-17 years and majority were females (Table 3).

Table 1: Age wise distribution of children.

Age	No of children	Percentage
12-14 years	96	53.3
15-17 years	84	46.7

Table 2: Sex wise distribution of children.

Sex	No of children	Percentage
Male	87	48
Female	93	52

Table 3: Prevalence of depression.

Sex	No of children	Percentage
Male	27	42
Female	36	58
Total	63	100

According to severity of depression 52% had mild depression, 23% had moderate depression, 14% had severe depression, 9% had very severe depression and 38% of depressed children had suicidal intentions (Table 4).

Table 4: Severity of depression.

Parameter	No of children	Percentage
Depression (total)	63	43.8
Mild	33	52.4
Moderate	15	23.8
Severe	9	14.2
Very severe	6	3.3
Suicidal intentions	24	38.1

DISCUSSION

In present study, depression was prevalent among 35% of children living in orphanage, most of them were females, age group of 15-17 years and mean duration of stay was 5.2 years and majority of them had single parent especially mother with father being expired due to medical illness or accident.

Segendo J et al studied the psychological effect of orphanhood where 193 orphans were assessed for depression using depression scale and found that 49.2% of children had depression and more common in children with loss of both parents.⁷

Mushtaq et al conducted a study in an orphanage for girls with the help of psychiatrists where initial screening was done and using DSM IV guidelines screened children were evaluated for psychopathology. Children were in the age group of 5-12 years. PTSD was the commonest psychiatric disorder (40.62%) followed by MDD (25%) and conversion disorder (12.5%).

Ibrahim A et al conducted a cross-sectional descriptive study including 200 orphans using structure interview for personal data and the arabic version of the multidimensional child and adolescent depression scale (MCADS). The study revealed that 20% of orphans had depression and Girls were about 46 times more likely to have depression than boys. 9

Asfawesen S et al conducted institution based crosssectional study where two hundred and ninety three subjects were included in the study between 10-19 age groups. Data was collected using a pretested intervieweradministered structured questionnaire and scales including hamilton-anxiety depression and Rosenberg's rating scale were used to measure the orphans' level of depression, anxiety and self-esteem. Among the study participants, 74 (25.3%) orphan adolescents were depressed. Mohammed N et al conducted a study using becks depression inventory among 131 orphans and 39 non orphans in the age group of 13-17 years and found depression was more prevalent among the orphan group, more so in females. ¹⁰

Maqbool M et al conducted a cross sectional descriptive study with 348 children aged 6-18 years using development and well-being assessment scale for one stage structured assessment of psychopathology. The prevalence of psychiatric morbidity was 40.52% among the study sample with separation anxiety disorder (12.93%) being the most common followed by Depression (7.76%).¹¹

CONCLUSION

Depression is one of the most common psychiatric disorders prevalent among children living in orphanages especially adolescent females so we recommend regular psychiatric surveillance for the orphanages for early detection and treatment of psychiatric disorders can ameliorate their sufferings and improve the quality of their lives.

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Institutional Ethics Committee

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