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Institutionalised Children Explorations and Beyond

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INSTITUTIONALISED CHILDREN: EXPLORATIONS AND BEYOND

The journal 'Institutionalised Children: Explorations and Beyond' is now in its second year of publication. This is the first issue for the year 2015 and it is a pleasure to write this editorial and to introduce our most recent editorial board member. Dr. Jaskiran Mathur is the Director of Professional Studies and Professor of Sociology at St. Francis College, Brooklyn, New York, and she has agreed to join us as our Book Editor. I, along with my board, extend her a hearty welcome! As a young and aspiring journal, we are very eager to expand our core editorial board along with our international editors and contributors. I invite you to consider associating with this journal in a broader capacity and hope that you will find in this issue an evidence that our collaborative efforts are in the right direction. At this time, I would also like to correct an error made in a prior issue of this journal. I incorrectly stated that Dr. Sonia Parikh had joined as our book editor. She in fact has joined our editorial board but serves as our movie editor.

The third issue of this journal maintains the core structure established in the previous publications. The issue begins with an interview of Dr. RinChen Chopel, by Luis Aguilar Esponda. I, along with my board, had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Chopel when he gave the key note address in March 2014, when the journal was launched. What could be more befitting than to interview him as he continues in his wide-reaching efforts as Director General of South Asian Initiative to end violence against children or SAIEVAC for short, to create an intergovernmental body in the world to End Violence Against Children. SAIEVAC's aim to prevent and respond to all forms of neglect, abuse, exploitation and violence against children is a comprehensive effort that creates liaisons between governments, provides for shared experiences and strengthens the potential for sharing knowledge and developing important linkages in the management and delivery of services to this population. As usual, Luis Esponda conducts his interview with precision and clarity. His probing questions result in detailed answers that reveal Dr. Chopel's extensive knowledge as well as his dedication and care to a cause that he cares about deeply. It is indeed a stellar contribution and I believe our readers will enjoy and gain a great deal from this initial contribution.

The next section of the issue presents four major research-based articles covering topics of sexual abuse and disability, and the politics and laws that govern aftercare and the factors that affect institutional care and resiliency in the children. Dr. Ferdous's paper was covered in a previous editorial but inadvertently omitted from the September 2014 volume. It is now presented in its entirety. Dr. Ferdous explores in depth the extent of sexual abuse and neglect in children with disabilities in Bangladesh. The care and management of children with disabilities, the discriminatory practices that are often extended towards them and the prevailing attitudes and perceptions held by society at

large impact their mental health. Dr. Ferdous in a scholarly fashion examines this issue and offers thoughtful recommendations at the end.

Mr. Aguilar and his associates make a significant contribution to this issue by their extensive, detailed and very comprehensive review of law and policies related to children in need of care as well as children who are in conflict with the law. These contributors review all child-related policies beginning with the UN Convention on Child Rights, which has been ratified by all the countries in the SAARC region. However, they add that each country brings to the forefront their socio-geo-politically informed interpretations of the law and its implementation. Hence, these countries vary considerably with their own individual interpretations and implementations. Mr. Aguilar and his associates provide an in-depth comparison of these countries and their paper is rich in information for those interested in comparative reviews and research.

Following this extensive review, we have a paper by Jagannath Pati who explores the problems faced by institutionalised children. Drawing attention to what institutionalisation means for the developing child, Mr. Pati proposes early de-institutionalisation as through adoption and foster care placement. This idea is one well-known all around the world as the policy of early childhood adoption is encouraged and far more favourable than placement in an institution. In his paper, Mr. Pati elaborates on the challenges that orphaned children face, once adopted. Early childhood traumas that resurface during their development are often confusing to the adoptive family and the family system, tenuous to begin with needs to be strengthened through understanding, services and early intervention for these children.

Complementing this article is Sajeeva Samaranayake's paper on the social policy context of alternative care in Sri Lanka. Mr. Samaranayake explores the lack of organised family support mechanisms for children who find themselves in three legal forms of alternative care – fostering, residential care and adoption. Mr. Samaranayake's in-depth review of the programs available in Sri Lanka is thoughtful and informative and suggests the imperative need to strengthen our family outreach programs and support services to ensure the healthy adaptation of institutionalised children in the community at large.

Dr. Alexandra Harrison's work with orphans in Ecuador and some parts of India is presented in her paper for our International Perspective section. The paper highlights psychoanalytically informed principles that guide Dr. Harrison who approaches her work with care, precision and humility. Dr. Harrison reminds us of the relationship between the caregiver and the child and the small interactions that form the basis of cohesive human bonds. She is profoundly cognizant of the cultural nuances of the different countries that she works with and integrates it skillfully in both her understanding and her work in the two countries. Dr. Harrison's work is guided by her psychoanalytically informed mind that both guides her in her methodology as well as helps her in developing models that are geared towards working with children and their caregivers in developing countries.

The expanding role of one's work with caregivers is echoed in our Good Practice paper, contributed by Niels Peter Rygaard, a child psychologist based in Denmark. Niels Rygaard

along with Morten Jac is the founder of Fairstart Global, a social organisation that addresses the needs of orphans and children in need from all around the world. His contribution for this journal examines essential research and technology, child policies that are involved in the education of caregivers. His paper is geared towards training ‘frontline’ caregivers and is an essential read for those who wish to pursue research-based practices actively in their professional lives.

In our book review section, Dr. Jaskiran K. Mathur provides a poignant look at ‘A Child Called “It”: One Child’s Courage to Survive’. Written by Dave Pelzer it is the story of a young child and the abuse he endures from his mother. Written in 1995, the book is part of a trilogy and biographical in nature. The author chronicles the horrific abuse and the betrayals he encounters from the hands of those he trusts the most. The book is a testimony to the indomitable human spirit and to the power of resiliency. The author’s account of his painful journey will undoubtedly resonate with the stories of many of the children in our region of concern. In sharing his story, the author reminds us of the healing and reparative power that one derives from writing and through narration of one’s painful journey in life.

In our movie review section, Dr. Minu Mathur, a sociologist professor at College of San Mateo, San Mateo, California, provides us with an interesting look at the academy award nominated documentary, ‘Children Underground’ by Director Edet Belzberg. The movie is the story of the lives of five homeless Romanian children and the desperate strategies that they resort to survive in a hostile and unpredictable world. The poignant and disturbing account of their survival in a world impacted by societal and political strife is heart wrenching and illustrative of the global concern and growing awareness for early and prompt intervention in such matters. Dr. Mathur’s crisp and eloquent portrayal of the struggle in the lives of these five boys resonates brings life to the movie in our minds as well as in our hearts.

The Brief Communications section showcases several brief articles that illustrate different aspects of institutional work and mental health programs. A prominent theme of care for the vulnerable child, locally and internationally, is evident. In addition, there is extended coverage of two major programs held in New Delhi that addressed the needs of institutionalised children. The focus on aftercare services along with rising concern for the prevention of violence and exploitation of children in institutionalised children gives evidence of our desire to broaden coverage of concerns and outreach in the community.

In our Upcoming Events section we list the conferences coming up for the year 2015. You will find an interesting array of regional and international conferences all referencing the Vulnerable Child. We encourage you to send us information on scheduled conferences for the year 2016 that you would like to see included in our upcoming events section for the September issue of this journal. If they are received in advance we are happy to promote these conferences to our readership and to the larger community.

As usual, I am grateful to my core editorial board that continues to engage in the vision and mission of this journal. In addition, Dr. Karabi Majumdar’s contributions for key

mental health projects and input during various phases of our issue development are profoundly appreciated. In addition, I would like to thank Mr. Aguilar for his outstanding commitment to the progress of this journal. Despite his recent relocation to his country of origin (Mexico) Mr. Aguilar's commitment to our vision and purpose inspires him to conduct his interviews and research projects albeit long distance, with integrity and depth.

The journal continues to be committed to exploring emerging research and encourages others to initiate and submit papers that examine issues related to the care and protection of vulnerable children. The SAARC region is unique in the number of children who need such care, and it is our desire that this journal continues to provide a platform for identifying, researching and exploring the growing needs of this population.

Monisha C. Nayar-Akhtar, Ph.D.

Editor-in-Chief

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