



RESEARCH ARTICLE

VOICES, VULNERABILITIES AND CARE EXPERIENCES OF GIRLS IN RESIDENTIAL CHILD CARE INSTITUTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF VIZIANAGARAM CITY, ANDHRA PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

In the present social context, girl children in residential care settings represent a particularly vulnerable group whose voices and everyday realities often remain unnoticed. They deserve focused attention to ensure their well-being, dignity, and healthy development at their growing age. This study attempts to listen and present those voices of young girls residing in government residential care institutions through case studies. The study has included girl children between the ages of 6 and 10 years living in 3 government children's homes in Vizianagaram District, Andhra Pradesh. Researcher used qualitative case study approach to understand their family situations, reasons for admission, daily life experiences, emotional needs, and feelings of safety within the institutions. The findings indicate that most of the girls were placed in residential care is mainly due to financial instability at the family level, where parents or guardians were unable to provide consistent care, education, and basic necessities. Many families viewed this government institutional care as a supportive option so that they could offer their children a safer environment and better educational opportunities. While the residential homes have fulfilled to address the physical, educational, and emotional needs of the girls while also offering personal care and attention. Thus the study highlights the importance of ensuring safety and dignity for the girl child in inclusive care environments. The study also suggests social work based practices are recommended to strengthen psychosocial support, promote child participation, and improve the overall quality of care in government residential care settings.

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INTRODUCTION

Childhood is one of the most critical phases of human development, during which care, protection, and emotional security play an important role in shaping an individual's future. For many children, especially girls from disadvantaged backgrounds, family circumstances often fail to provide the stability and resources necessary for healthy and nurturing growth. In such situations, the importance of residential child care institutions emerge as an alternative care arrangement, aiming to safeguard children's basic needs while supporting their education and overall development. However, life within institutional settings is complex and deeply personal for particularly some young girls who had faced trauma experiences, emotions, and vulnerabilities. Gender sensitive care becomes essential in institutional settings where young girls require not only protection for the well-being but also nurturing environments that respect their dignity and individuality. In India, government residential care institutions plays a significant role in number of children who are placed outside their family environment due to poverty, neglect, family disruption, or lack of access to education. Girl children in these institutions face unique challenges shaped by age,

gender, establishing identity and social expectations. Their everyday experiences, sense of safety, emotional well being, and opportunities for participation are central to understanding the effectiveness of institutional care. Yet, this research confined on the lived experiences and voices of young girls in government residential settings at Vizianagaram District of Andhra Pradesh. Although some studies discuss child care institutions, but very few focuses on listening to the voices and everyday experiences of young girls living in government residential homes, especially at an early age, and this study aims to fill that gap. So the study seeks to address this gap by exploring the voices, vulnerabilities, and care experiences of girls living in government residential child care institutions. By using a qualitative case study approach, the research highlights the personal narratives of young girls, offering insight into their family backgrounds, reasons for institutional placement, daily routines, emotional needs, and perceptions of care and safety. Listening to these voices is essential not only for understanding their realities but also for informing child sensitive and gender responsive care practices within residential institutions. The study also highlights the application of social work interventions in residential care institutions by offering practical suggestions to address

psychosocial needs, encourage child participation, and promote child friendly care practices.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Tjempaka and Stephanie Christy (2024) discuss the protection of abandoned children by emphasizing that these children remain full citizens with constitutional rights. Their work highlights the important role of orphanages as substitute care institutions that provide safety, emotional support, and opportunities for personal development when parental care is absent. The authors also stress that effective child welfare cannot rely solely on orphanages, but requires active government involvement; particularly through accessible social security and welfare programs to ensure abandoned children can grow into independent and dignified individuals.

The Times of India (2011) news report documents a significant gender disparity in child abandonment in India, noting that the vast majority of abandoned children are girls. The report draws on official data and expert commentary to highlight how social norms, economic pressures, and a strong preference for male children contribute to this trend. It also points to structural issues within the child welfare and adoption systems, including delays and limited access to permanent care, which further affect abandoned children's well-being. Raval et al. (2005) investigate the experiences of adolescent girls from rural India who run away from their homes and seek refuge in protective shelters. Their study reveals that these girls often flee not just because of immediate conflict but due to ongoing neglect, abuse, and restrictive social norms that limit their freedom and opportunities. The study also highlights that running away does not necessarily lead to safety or acceptance, as the girls continue to face stigma and uncertainty even after leaving home.

Billiat and Pushpam (2020) analyze the socio cultural conditions that contribute to children's vulnerability through their study of Don Bosco Sneha Bhavan Society in Kochi, Kerala. They explain that children admitted to care institutions often come from unstable family environments shaped by poverty, parental neglect, substance abuse, and breakdown of family relationships. The authors emphasize that such vulnerabilities are not caused by individual behavior alone but are strongly influenced by social structures and cultural pressures that weaken family support systems. Their findings show that care homes play an important protective role by providing safety, guidance, and basic needs. Thanglen (2025) highlights the significant impact of poverty on girl's education in rural Senapati, Manipur. The study shows that low household income, traditional gender roles, and inadequate school infrastructure contribute to high dropout rates, as girls are often tasked with household responsibilities. Families with limited resources tend to prioritize boys' education, leaving girls at a disadvantage. The research also emphasizes that the poor quality of local schools further restricts access to learning. The study concludes that providing financial support to families and improving educational facilities are essential to ensure equitable educational opportunities for girls in the region. Sonam Rohta (2021) found that caregivers perceive institutional care in India as an important option for vulnerable children, offering them safety, education, and basic needs that many lacked in their family environments. Caregivers reported that children entering care often come from impoverished backgrounds, and while institutions can improve the child's

immediate circumstances and future prospects, limited resources and a shortage of trained staff restrict the ability to support children's emotional and developmental needs, particularly for the children with disabilities.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to explore the voices, vulnerabilities, and care experiences of girl children living in government residential child care institutions at Vizianagaram District.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- To know the family background of girl children living in government residential care institutions.
- To understand the living experiences of the girls in these institutions.
- To learn about the quality of care provided to them.
- To suggest social work measures to improve their care and well being.

UNIVERSE AND SAMPLE OF STUDY

The universe of the study includes all the three government children's homes located in Vizianagaram District, i.e., Vizianagaram, Bobbili, and Gajapathinagaram.

Sample of the Study: The study is concentrated on six girl children selected through a case study approach, with two children from each of three residential homes located in Vizianagaram, Gajapathinagaram, and Bobbili.

TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES OF DATA COLLECTION:

Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with the six children and the caregivers of the residential homes. Observations of daily routines were also conducted to gain a deeper insight into the children's living conditions and care experiences. Secondary data was obtained from CWC Care Sheets, institutional records, and relevant literature.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS: The study has followed strict ethical guidelines. Informed consent was obtained from the institution authorities, and the children's assent was taken in a child-friendly manner. The researcher also ensured confidentiality, privacy, and emotional safety throughout the study.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY: The study is limited to three government children's homes in Vizianagaram District and only six children were included. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all residential care institutions. The study also relies on qualitative data, reflecting the personal experiences and perceptions of the participants only which cannot be generalized to every children.

CASE STUDIES

VIZIANAGARAM

Case 1: A 6-year-old girl from a marginalized tribal community was admitted to the government children's home in Vizianagaram in August 2025 for temporary shelter of two years. Her placement was recommended by the Child Development Project Officer and ordered by the Child Welfare Committee to ensure her safety and well-being, as her family

faced extreme financial hardship and was unable to provide adequate care or supervision. The family's limited resources meant that basic necessities, proper nutrition, and access to education were inconsistent, creating a risk to the child's health and development. She is currently enrolled in the first grade and is gradually adjusting to the structured routines of the residential home, which include schooling, regular meals, personal care, and recreational activities like yoga, craft etc. Despite the supportive environment, the child exhibits emotional vulnerability, often expressing longing for her family and showing signs of attachment to her caregivers. The institution provides opportunities for learning, social interaction, and personal development, which help address both her developmental and psychosocial needs, while ensuring safety, stability, and protection from neglect.

Case 2: A 9-year-old girl from a neighboring district was placed in the same government children's home in July 2024 for temporary shelter, also for a period of two years. Her placement was recommended due to her only caregiver single mother's inability to provide full-time care, as the mother's work commitments and challenging circumstances limited her to ensure consistent protection and supervision. The Child Welfare Committee determined that placement in the residential home was in the child's best interest to guarantee access to education, nutrition, and emotional support. The child is currently enrolled in the fourth grade and was reported to be in good physical health at the time of admission, with prior medical treatment provided as needed. She enjoys participating in classroom activities and interacting with peers, but she also experiences emotional stress and occasional anxiety due to separation from her family. The residential home provides structured daily routines, educational opportunities, recreational activities, and psychosocial support. These services not only ensure her physical well-being but also help her gradually develop resilience, confidence, and evolve a sense of security, while addressing her protection and promoting overall holistic development.

GAJAPATHINAGARAM

Case 1: A 6-year-old girl was admitted to a government children's home in Gajapathinagaram in July 2025 for temporary shelter. Her mother works as a domestic helper and, due to financial constraints, is unable to support her daughter's education or provide consistent care at home. The child was brought to the home by a helper associated with the institution to ensure she would have access to food, education, and protection. At the time of admission, she was in good physical health and ready to begin her schooling at the home. Life in the residential home has been a major change for her; she often misses her mother and the comfort of her familiar surroundings. The home provides structured routines, meals, education, and personal care, which help her gradually adapt to the new environment.

Case 2: This case relates to a six-year-old girl from a Scheduled Tribe community who was admitted to a government residential children's home in Gajapathinagaram of Vizianagaram District through the Child Welfare Committee. The child was produced by a helper from the children's home due to concerns regarding her care and supervision. The parents live under severe economic hardship and are required to travel to another village for work, leaving no one at home to look after the child during the day. Owing to

these circumstances, the parents expressed their inability to ensure regular supervision, proper care, and educational support, and therefore requested admission to the residential institution so that their daughter could remain safe and continue her schooling. The CWC ordered for a period of two years to provide care, stability, and educational support in a protected environment. The parents frequently visits their child and the child is living comfortably at the children home.

BOBBILI

Case 1: A 6-year-old girl was admitted to the same government children's home in August 2025 at Bobbili government balasadhanam. Her parents requested her placement in the home as they are required to travel to another village for work and have no one at home to take care of her during their absence. Due to financial hardship and lack of supervision at home, the parents felt that the residential home would provide a safer and more stable environment for their daughter. At the time of admission, the child was reported to be in good physical health and was enrolled in school at the home. But sometimes she appears quiet and misses being with her parents.

Case 2: An 8 year old girl comes from a poor family in a small village of Vizianagaram district, where her parents struggle daily to meet basic needs. Due to limited supervision at home and growing concerns about her safety and well being, the child was noticed by a local Anganwadi teacher and later brought to the attention of the authorities. Though her parents care for her, their difficult living conditions and unstable livelihood made it hard for them to provide consistent care and guidance. She is now living in Bobbili government children's home, where she is receiving care, education, and protection. In this new setting, she has begun to settle into a routine, attend school regularly, and experience a sense of security and hope, offering her a chance for a more stable and brighter future.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The case studies from Vizianagaram district shows the real life situations of young children who come from poor and difficult family backgrounds. In most of the cases, poverty was the main reason why children were placed in government children's homes. Parents had to work as daily wage laborers or domestic workers and were away from home for long hours. Because of this, they were unable to take proper care of their children and felt that the children's home would be a safer place for them. Another important finding is the role of CWC workers, Anganwadi workers, and staff of children's homes. They noticed the children's situations and helped bring them before the Child Welfare Committee. Their support ensured that the children received protection, shelter, food, and education at the right time. Most of the children were physically healthy, but they lacked proper care and supervision at home. Most of the children showed sadness due to separation from their parents and home environment at the initial days of children home. However, after staying in the children's home, they slowly adjusted to the new routine. Regular food, schooling, care from staff, counselling and mediation support and interaction with other children helped them feel safer and more settled. The children's homes provided a stable environment that supported their daily needs and learning. This the Government children's homes play an

important role in protecting and supporting children, but long term improvement depends on helping families improve their living conditions and ability to care for their children.

APPLICATION & INTERVENTION OF SOCIAL WORK

Social workers play an important role in ensuring the well being of children in residential care. They can provide regular emotional support through individual interaction, play, and group activities, helping children feel safe and supported in the institution. They also promote child friendly care practices by guiding and sensitizing caregivers and staff to treat children with respect and understanding. Encouraging children's participation in daily routines and decisions related to their care helps build confidence and a sense of belonging. Social workers can support education by coordinating with schools, monitoring academic progress, and addressing learning needs. They can also maintain regular contact with parents or guardians, provide counseling, and link families to welfare schemes to reduce financial stress. Additional social workers can coordinate with health services to ensure regular medical check ups and timely treatment. They can also advocate for better facilities, resources, and policies that improve the overall quality of residential child care.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the lived experiences of young girls residing in government residential care institutions in Vizianagaram district. The case studies show that most children were admitted not due to neglect, but because of poverty, lack of supervision, and the inability of parents to provide continuous care and education. Families viewed residential care as a supportive option during difficult times, hoping to ensure safety and a better future for their children. While the children benefit from structured routines, education, and personal care, the study emphasizes that institutional care should not replace family support completely but it could definitely help the families and children to lead a better life. The findings indicate that government children's homes play an important role in meeting the basic needs of children by providing food, shelter, education, and a structured daily routine. Over time, the children adjusted to institutional life and experienced a sense of stability and care.

At the same time, the study emphasizes the importance of maintaining the dignity, safety, and well being of every child through ethical and child friendly care practices. The study also brings attention to need for stronger social work interventions within residential care settings.

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