

## **Levels of Adjustment of Institutionalized and Non-Institutionalized Middle School Children in Mizoram**

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### ***Abstract***

*Adjustment is adjusting to a changing circumstance in every given situation. It significantly impacts children's overall development, including academic success, social skills, relationships, and emotional health. The capacity of children to adapt is essential for enhancing their problem-solving abilities, refining their emotional regulation, and enabling them to effectively manage academic and social challenges. This study examines the adjustment levels of institutionalized and non-institutionalized middle school children across educational, social, and emotional domains in Mizoram. The study comprised 100 middle school students (50 institutionalized and 50 non-institutionalized) from five middle schools. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select institutionalized middle school children, while a random sampling technique was utilized for non-institutionalized children. Data were collected using an Adjustment Scale developed by the investigator and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed a significant difference in the educational and emotional dimensions between the two groups. However, no significant difference was found in the social adjustment of institutionalized and non-institutionalized children.*

**Keywords:** *Adjustment, Institutionalized children, non-institutionalized children*

### **Introduction**

Adjustment is an individual's ability to adapt to various situations and environments. It is considered an essential skill and process for an individual's general well-being since maladjustment often leads to conflicts and psychological distress.

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According to Good (1959), “adjustment is the process of finding and adopting modes of behaviour suitable to the environment or the changes in the environment.” It is the maintenance of a harmonious relationship between humans and their environment; an individual needs to change or modify themselves in some way or another to fit into or accommodate themselves with their environment (Gates & Jersil cited in Mangal, S.K. 2008, p.490). Thus, adjustment is the ability to adapt to various situations and changes and to maintain a harmonious relationship between an individual and their environment.

The adjustment process begins as early as infancy and is lifelong. However, adolescents require the attention, care, and warmth of the people around them to adjust well to their changing environment and master this important behavioural process. Early adolescence, encompassing middle school years (ages 11–15), is a critical and transformative period in human development. This stage, often referred to as a time of “storm and stress,” is marked by significant physical, social, emotional, and cognitive changes. These changes can create psychological discomfort as adolescents struggle to navigate their evolving roles and identities. During this stage, the adolescent may appear to be more of a problem to themselves than others due to confusion and maladjustment. The importance of an appropriate environment to ensure healthy adjustment during this period cannot be overstated.

Among the various environments that influence an adolescent’s life—such as school, peer groups, and the broader community, the family environment is considered the most important environment for the child to be brought up. Family is an effective institution that guides children in their development, socialization and integration (Yavuzer, 2001, cited in Upreti & Sharma, 2018)). This lays the foundation for an adolescent’s emotional and social well-being. A warm and understanding family provides adolescents with a sense of security and belonging, helping them feel valued and supported as they navigate the complexities of their developmental changes.

### **Institutionalization and Children’s Adjustment**

One of the primary needs and rights of a child is to receive care, comfort, and nurturing from parents and close relatives. Children are biologically predisposed to seek care and safety from their caregivers. This not only helps in developing a sense of security among children but also ensures their psychological well-being as they grow up. However, not all children are raised in a comfortable environment within their families and homes. Many children find themselves in institutional care for various reasons such as families facing extreme poverty, social stigma, or the inability to provide for their child’s basic needs. The institutionalization of children has adverse repercussions on their overall physical, cognitive, emotional and psychological well-

being. Institutionalized children- children raised in different alternate care homes such as orphanages and shelter homes are considered a highly disadvantaged group of society. Early separation from families deprives them of one or more necessities of life. Early separation from parents disrupts normal socio-emotional development.

### **Review of Related Studies**

Many studies have pointed out how institutionalized children struggle with adjustment compared to their peers who are raised in a caring family environment.

Chopra and Kalita (2006) conducted a study on “Adjustment problems of elementary school children of single-parental and intact-parent families” and found that ‘the emotional, social, and educational adjustments of elementary school children of single parents have exhibited more problems compared to those from intact families, affecting their development’. The challenges they encountered were comparable to institutionalized children, who lacked the stability and emotional security found in a two-parent environment. The lack of a stable environment affected the development of both groups and hindered their adjustment.

Seggane et al. (2007) carried out a comparative study of the “Behavioural and emotional disorders of primary school-going orphans and non-orphans in Uganda”. They found that ‘school-going orphans reported more dissatisfaction with life and more psychosocial difficulties than non-orphans’. Orphans were found to be emotionally needy, insecure, and materially deprived. They suffer from emotional instability, depending on support from their guardians. Without it, they face difficulties coping with life challenges.

Hunshal and Gaonka (2008), in their study, “Adjustment of institutionalized children,” found that most institutionalized children demonstrated unsatisfactory levels of social, emotional, and educational adjustment. The lack of a stable family environment plays a key role in emotional well-being and academic achievements, as few institutionalized children showed good adjustment. These children struggle to build secure relationships (with peers or caregivers), affecting their general adjustment.

Verma and Kumari (2016) conducted a study on “Academic Achievement of Children at the Elementary Stage in Relation to Their Adjustment” and found a significant relationship between a child’s adjustment and academic achievement. Those with poor social, emotional, and educational adjustment generally perform worse academically. This highlights the fact that institutionalized children face educational and emotional challenges due to the lack of individualized attention provided in the family environment.

Sousa et al. (2023) made a study of “Academic Performance in Institutionalized and Non-Institutionalized Children: The Role of Cognitive Ability and Negative Liability” and found no significant difference in academic achievement, emotion regulation, and negative liability between institutionalized and non-institutionalized children. The findings suggest that institutionalized children should also receive high-quality, standardized care and emotional support comparable to family-raised children.

### **Rationale of the Study**

This present study aimed to examine how institutionalized children, without the care of their family, cope with their circumstances and adjust to their environment. It also seeks to compare their educational, social, and emotional adjustment with non-institutionalized children who have grown up in a loving family setting. The present study also assessed whether institutional care can adequately fulfil the developmental needs of adolescents, foster their educational, social, and emotional well-being, and prepare them for a successful transition into adulthood. Understanding these areas will be helpful for informing policies, improving institutional care systems, and ensuring that all children will be given the opportunity to go through adolescence optimally, irrespective of their background.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To determine the adjustment levels of institutionalized and non-institutionalized middle school children.
2. To compare the adjustment levels of institutionalized and non-institutionalized middle school children in Mizoram with regard to their educational, social and emotional adjustment.

### **Hypothesis**

There is a significant difference in the educational, social and emotional adjustment of institutionalized and non-institutionalized middle school children in Mizoram.

### **Methodology of the study**

The study employed a descriptive survey method to examine the adjustment levels of middle school students in both institutionalized and non-institutionalized environments and compare their adjustment levels within the educational, social, and emotional domains.

### Population and Sample

The study population comprised all middle school children in Mizoram. The sample consisted of 100 middle school children, of whom 50 were institutionalized children selected using a purposive sampling technique, and 50 were non-institutionalized children selected through a simple random sampling method.

### Tools used for data collection

An adjustment scale for middle school children developed by the investigator was used to collect the data. The scale consists of 40 items. Each item was provided with three alternatives (always, sometimes, and never). High scores indicate a high level of adjustment, and low scores indicate a low level of adjustment.

### Statistical techniques used for data analysis

Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation and percentage and inferential statistics such as t-tests were used for data analysis.

### Analysis and Interpretation of Data

**Objective No.1:** *To determine the adjustment levels of institutionalized and non-institutionalized middle school children.*

**Table-1**

**Levels of Adjustment of Institutionalized and Non-institutionalized Middle School Children**

Dimen-sions	Category	No of Institu-tionalized Chil-dren	%	No. of non-in-stitutionalized children	%
Educational Adjustment	High	31	62%	37	74%
	Average	15	30%	13	26%
	Low	4	8%	0	0
	Total(N)	50		50	
Social Ad-justment	High	36	72%	42	84%
	Average	13	26%	8	16%
	Low	1	2%	0	0
	Total(N)	50		50	

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Emotional Adjustment	High	30	60%	43	86%
	Average	16	32%	7	14%
	Low	4	8%	0	0
	Total(N)	50		50	

Table 1 presents the adjustment levels in the three domains among institutionalized and non-institutionalized middle school children: educational, social, and emotional domains. Among the institutionalized children, 62% demonstrated high educational adjustment, 30% demonstrated an average, and 8% had low educational adjustment. Furthermore, 74% non-institutionalized children demonstrated high levels of educational adjustment, while 26% were in the average category.

Concerning social adjustment, the results indicated that 72% institutionalized children had a high social adjustment, 26% had an average social adjustment, and 2% child had a low social adjustment. On the contrary, 84% non-institutionalized children had high levels of social adjustment, 8 had average levels, and none had low levels.

In the emotional adjustment category, the table showed that 60% institutionalized children were found in the high adjustment level, with 32% in the average and 8% in the low adjustment category. Children in the non-institutionalized environment showed 86% in the high emotional adjustment category, 14% on average, and no children were found in the low emotional category.

**Objective No. 2:** *To compare the adjustment levels of institutionalized and non-institutionalized middle school children in Mizoram with regard to their educational, social and emotional adjustment.*

**Table-2**

**Comparison of Educational Adjustment of Institutionalized and Non-institutionalized Middle School Children**

Category of Respondents	No. of Respondents	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	t-value	Significance at 0.05 level (p-value)
Institutionalized	50	33.98	4.461	3.89	Significant (S)
Non-institutionalized	50	36.87	2.777		

The data in Table 2 highlight the differences in educational adjustment between institutionalized and non-institutionalized children. The mean score of educational adjustment for institutionalized children was 33.98, with a standard deviation of 4.461, whereas non-institutionalized children had a higher mean score of 36.87, with a standard deviation of 2.777. A t-value of 3.89 indicates a statistically significant difference at the level of 0.05 (with a p-value of less 0.05). Therefore, the hypothesis “There will be a significant difference in the educational adjustment of institutionalized and non-institutionalized middle school children” was accepted. This suggests that institutionalized children experience significantly different levels of educational adjustment than their non-institutionalized counterparts.

**Table-3**

**Comparison of Social Adjustment of Institutionalized and Non-institutionalized Middle School Children.**

Category of Respondents	No. of Respondents	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	t-value	Significance at 0.05 level (p-value)
Institutionalized	50	28.40	4.342	1.41	Not significant (NS)
Non-institutionalized	50	29.44	2.865		

Table 3 presents the differences in social adjustment between institutionalized and non-institutionalized children. The mean score of social adjustment for institutionalized children was 28.40, with a standard deviation of 4.342. In contrast, non-institutionalized children had a slightly higher mean score of 29.44, with a standard deviation of 2.865. The computed t-value of 1.41 does not reach statistical significance at 0.05 level, indicating no significant difference in social adjustment between institutionalized and non-institutionalized children. Thus, the hypothesis “There will be a significant difference in the social adjustment of institutionalized and non-institutionalized middle school children” was rejected.

**Table-4**

**Comparison of Emotional adjustment of institutionalized and non-institutionalized middle school children.**

Category of Respondents	No. of Respondents	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	t-value	Significance at 0.05 level (p-value)
Institutionalized	50	24.87	2.472	3.84	Significant (S)
Non-institutionalized	50	26.66	2.182		

Table 4 presents the differences in emotional adjustment between institutionalized and non-institutionalized middle school children. The mean emotional adjustment score for institutionalized children was 24.87, with a standard deviation of 2.472, whereas non-institutionalized children had a higher mean score of 26.66, with a standard deviation of 2.182. The t-value of 3.84 is statistically significant at 0.05, indicating a significant difference in emotional adjustment between the two groups. Therefore, the hypothesis “There will be a significant difference in the emotional adjustment of institutionalized and non-institutionalized middle school children” was accepted. This suggests that institutionalized children experience lower emotional adjustment than their non-institutionalized peers.

## Discussions

1. The findings indicate that children raised in institutional care settings encounter greater challenges adjusting to the educational environment than those in family settings. Statistically significant differences were found between the two groups, and these findings were also aligned with those of Sousa et al. (2023) and Kaur and Chawla (2018). Children exhibit better academic adjustment in the family environment due to personalized attention, emotional support, and parental involvement, which are crucial for their educational success. Conversely, although institutionalized children may achieve some level of educational adjustment inconsistently, some experience significant difficulties, particularly in terms of poor educational adjustment. This could be attributed to the lack of individualized care in institutional settings, leading to more children falling into the low level of educational adjustment. This study emphasized the importance of a supportive environment for academic success and suggested that institutionalized children could benefit from more personalized care.



2. The findings of this study revealed that non-institutionalized children exhibited better social adjustment than institutionalized children; however, statistical analysis revealed no significant difference between the two groups. This suggests that institutional care does not substantially hinder social adjustment, challenging the belief that institutionalized children would experience greater social adjustment issues. The structured routine, organized activities, and peer interactions present in institutional settings may contribute to the development of social skills, even in the absence of informal socialization in the family environment. These findings are consistent with those of Padmaja et al. (2013) and Yeow et al. (2011), who also reported no significant differences in the social adjustment of children raised in institutional environments compared with those raised in family-based environments.
3. Non-institutionalized children exhibit better emotional adjustment than institutionalized children. Specifically, non-institutionalized children demonstrated significantly higher levels of emotional adjustment, as evidenced by the statistically significant difference. These results corroborate those of previous research by Ford et al. (2007) and Erol et al. (2010), which suggests that institutionalized children are more prone to experiencing emotional difficulties. The results of the present study confirmed that emotional development occurs within a stable environment, typically found in a family-based environment, where children receive consistent emotional support. Conversely, institutionalized children may encounter emotional challenges because of the uncertainty of emotional support.

## Conclusions

This study provides valuable insights into the impact of institutional care on children's educational, social, and emotional adjustment. The findings revealed significant differences in educational and emotional adjustment between institutionalized and non-institutionalized children, with those in family settings demonstrating better outcomes. However, social adjustment showed no statistically significant differences between the two groups. These results highlight the complex relationship between various factors that influence child development in different care environments. While institutional care may present challenges in certain aspects of adjustment, it also appears to offer some protective factors, particularly in social domains. Future research should further explore the specific mechanisms underlying these differences and investigate potential interventions to support the holistic development of children in institutional care. Policymakers and caregivers should integrate these findings into the development and application of care strategies to ensure the best possible outcomes for all children, regardless of their living situations.

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