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"Once there was a girl who was born in jail…"

- A narrative study of a group of children of incarcerated parents in India

Social Work, Bachelor Programme for Professional Degree

Bachelor's thesis

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Abstract

Title: "Once there was a girl who was born in jail…" - A narrative study of a group of children of incarcerated parents in India

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This study investigates how a group of children of incarcerated parents in India make meaning in their lives and how India Vision Foundation affects their meaning-making process. The empirical data is in the form of life stories and observations. Using Narrative Analysis, Coping Theory and Human Ecology Theory, the data is analysed. The study shows that the children express relations, education and future goals as the most important factors in their meaning making. These values coincide with the efforts of India Vision Foundation. The study also shows that India Vision Foundation intervenes in and affects the children's lives on several different levels, which makes India Vision Foundation a vital aspect of the children's meaning making.

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1. Introduction

The girl who started her story with the line I chose for the title is 11 years old and presently stays at a boarding school outside Delhi together with 32 other girls between the ages 6-16. All of these children have parents who are or have been imprisoned and most of the children have themselves stayed with their parents in jail until the age of 5. Out of these 33 girls, 27 shared their life stories. This study was conducted in spring 2011 in New Delhi, the capital of India and home to Asia's biggest prison.

After visiting India five years ago, I have always wanted to go back. Within my Social Work studies in Sweden I was an intern at an institution for families with infants where parenting abilities are evaluated and supported. My time at the institution has provided me with great interest in parenthood. When considering the impact of parenthood, one cannot refrain from thinking of children who are separated from their parents. At the Department of Social Work, guest lecturers have come to talk about the situation for children of incarcerated parents. These children often struggle with the reactions of adults around them concerning their parents' situation. Although the adults are aware of the separation being difficult for the child, it is caused by the parents doing something society deems *wrong*. The reactions must thereby depend upon the surrounding society's norms and values. Seeing as the child's situation is highly dependent on the societal and cultural context, I found it interesting to investigate the situation of children in another cultural context than my own. In India I met both charming children and hard-working and dedicated social workers. Children of incarcerated parents in India are a group whose voice is not often heard in society. With this thesis I want to give them the chance to tell the stories of their lives.

Children without parents are in general a vulnerable group. Indian children of incarcerated parents might suffer from societal exclusion because of stigma, financial problems since their guardian is not able to provide for them and many other difficulties. The support is very much depending on NGO:s rather than government resources, but not all Indian children whose parents are incarcerated are reached by these organisations. In this study I have met children who are fortunate enough to be included in the efforts of India Vision Foundation. India Vision Foundation (which will from here on be referred to as IVF) is an NGO founded by Dr Kiran Bedi in 1994. The main objectives of IVF are social mobility for children, prison

reforms, police reforms, rural and community development and women empowerment. Each of these objectives holds one or more projects. My main focus in this thesis is the project called the Children of Vulnerable Families project (it will from here on be referred to as the CVF project). The project aims to help children whose parents are or have been imprisoned. These children are at higher risk than children in India in general to suffer from illiteracy, lifelong stigma and lacking social security. IVF provides the children with schooling, boarding, other financial support and counselling. While making these efforts in direct relation to the children, IVF also engages parents, relatives, school staff and prison authorities. The main activities included in the CVF project are school visits, home visits, prison visits and exposure trips. At present there are 190 children involved in the project. (India Vision Foundation 2011-04-20) When IVF engages in a child, they do it long-term. If the child's parent(s) are released from jail, the child is still included in the CVF project up until the age of 16 years old. This means that some of the children live at boarding schools even though their parents are living at home. This has got to do with both practical (geographical) factors and socio-economic situations, as the areas where these children come from are often dangerous to live in. These areas often have a high crime rate and poor living conditions (concerning hygiene, diseases etc.).

1.1 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate how the CVF children make meaning in their lives and how IVF contributes to this meaning making. The study is performed using participant observations and children's life stories. By analysing the information using Narrative Analysis, Coping Theory and Human Ecology Theory, conclusions are possible to make about the children's meaning making. I intend to investigate how the children view their reality.

1.2 Research Questions

- How do the children tell the stories of their lives? Which factors do they find important enough to include?
- How do the children make meaning in their lives in relation to their stories?
- How does India Vision Foundation contribute to these children's meaning making?

2. Disposition

First of all I will describe the local context in order to provide the reader with some background understanding to the research. After that I will present previous research that makes a background to the empirical part of the study. Following that, the research method will be described and analysed. After that I will describe the theoretical framework. Finally the results will be presented, analysed and discussed referring back to previous research.

3. The local context

3.1 Indian society

Larsson, Lilja and Mannheimer write about the importance of not only understanding the informants' life situation, but also the specific culture and the historical process that has shaped the cultural patterns of the informants environment (Larsson&Lilja&Mannheimer 2005). The Indian anthropologist Saraswati goes as far as saying that "the structure of a culture remains a meaningless entity so long as its function is unexplained" (Jha 1994:158). In terms of global meaning-making, context is vital. I can of course not give a full picture of the context of the informants' lives, but I will try to draw a background of the society in which the study was performed. It is also necessary considering the impact of culture on choice of coping strategy (Chen 2011-09-18) and how the prerequisites that children face differ according to context (Balagopalan 2011-09-18). The Indian society is incredibly complex. Indian Professor of Sociology and social analyst Nagla claims that it has developed from "monarchy, feudalism, colonialism to democracy" (Nagla 2008:1). This development has evolved differently in different parts of the country. Having travelled widely in the country during my stay, I have become even more convinced than before that it is impossible to talk about *one* Indian society, as it consists of so many cultures separated by traditions, religions, politics and geography. What I can do is talk about the immediate surrounding for my study, namely the North Indian urban society in which the IVF perform their work.

3.2 Slums

Gupta defines slums as densely habited areas with implications of poverty, which suffer from "demoralization sliding into crime" (Gupta 2004:147). This is the reality for the informants of the study. I have myself visited one of the slums in which some informants live. The situation included a very low degree of hygiene and a high degree of both poverty and crowdedness.

Although there are several NGO:s working in the slums of Delhi, schooling is no guarantee for the children growing up in these areas.

3.3 Collectivism

Indian Doctor of Social Work Kumar explains collectivism as the "supremacy of the society and lesser importance of individual interest vis-a-vis social interest" and an "ideal of interdependence" (Kumar 1994:4). Collectivism is generally used as a contrast to the western ideology of individualism. Besides from collectivism the terms familism and holism, which are merely different in nuance from the term collectivism, can be found in the literature. Indian Professor of Anthropology Das tells us how Indian society is based on traditions and values of hierarchy and holism (Das 2004:21). In collectivistic cultures the fear of exclusion keeps the group members "in their places". If you do not have the group, you have nothing. (Barker-Hackett&Mio&Tumambing 2009) In many cases collectivism coincides with distrust in authorities. The group is the safety net and being part of it is vital. Indian culture being collectivistic, it is very unfortunate for the children of this study to bear a stigma that might lead to their exclusion. A typical feature of collectivistic cultures is the fear of "losing face", meaning to be embarrassed, humiliated etc. For this reason insulting someone to their face (especially in front of others) is avoided as far as possible. A phenomenon that occurs in collectivistic cultures is that individuals are sometimes defined by their group rather than their individual characteristics (Barker-Hackett&Mio&Tumambing 2009). The children of this study might thereby be defined by their parents' criminal actions even though they themselves have never committed a crime.

3.4 Family structure

Indian Professor of Sociology Uberoi writes that family is widely seen as the primary agency of socialization (Uberoi 2004). I will report shortly about the institution of family in India. Although the major part of the indigenous literature I have read presents the institution of family as threatened by modernization processes and imported ideals of individualism, consumerism and market relationships, Indian Emeritus Professor of Sociology Singh mentions the resilience of the traditional Indian family (Singh 2000). My observations also clearly indicate that the extended family is strong in India, contrasting the nuclear family of the Western world. Uberoi quotes Karves definition of the joint family as "a group of people who generally live under the same roof, who eat food cooked on one hearth, … hold property in common and … participate in common family worship and are related to each other as

some particular type of kin" (Uberoi 2004: 277). This definition is not perfect, as families can still be defined as joint without meeting all these criteria. Uberoi asks if maybe we should talk about the joint household disintegrating rather than the joint family doing so. (Uberoi 2004) I have heard several people describe their interconnectedness with their relatives no matter the geographical distance. So the modernization, globalization and migration that is going on might not affect the family structures as much as is sometimes suspected. There are, tradition and affectionate reasons aside, other reasons such as joint business and property interests that may incite the continuation of the joint family (Uberoi 2004). Tax claims that "the best, if not the only way to test a hypothesis concerning a group's perception of a situation, is to change the situation in terms of the hypothesis" (Tax 2009: 79). By asking Indian people about their perceptions of European family structure, I learned a lot about their perceptions of their own structures. What I found was a strong norm of interdependence within the extended family and a respect for elders, which they believe contrast the family norm in the West. The Indian family structure will probably affect the outcome of separation between child and parent(s), but this I am not qualified to analyse.

3.5 Literacy

"Education is considered to be the most important ladder of social mobility" (Chattoraj 2006:31). Educational deprivation for an Indian is a many-sided burden affecting their employment opportunities, social mobility, health and resilience towards corruption (Drèze 2004). For this reason the CVF children are provided with schooling. In the parent-teacher meeting I observed, several of the parents were illiterate, and some of them so to the extent that they could not write their signature and needed to instead leave their fingerprints. Drèze mentions the following causes for educational deprivation: economic deprivation, school quality and parental motivation. The economic reason consists not only of school fees, but sometimes also loss of income as the alternative might be the children doing labour. Lack of parental motivation is often a matter of education not being valued highly, as people struggle to see the fruits of it (Drèze 2004).

3.6 Criminality

Crime is one of the mentioned social problems in Indian Professor of Sociology Ahuja's book Social problems in India (1997). Let me first of all define a social problem. Ahuja suggests different definitions, which all have in common that the problem is on a social and not an individual level, and that solving the problem also needs to be done on that level. Social

problems are formulated within societies, and are defined by those societies' values and institutions. Crime can be defined in different ways and interpreted with several different approaches. A selection of explanations might be biological, psycho-pathological, economic, topographical and environmental. Ahuja explains "slums, unemployment, crimes, delinquencies" as being "urban problems which are generally the result of intolerable living conditions" (Ahuja 1997:20). He mentions the poverty dimensions lack of livelihood strategies, inaccessibility to resources (money, land, credit) and feeling of insecurity and frustrations (Ahuja 1997). The approach that seems to be the base for the work of the IVF is a multiple-factor one with an emphasis on the social and economic explanations, as the work is aiming to enhance the children's possibilities for the future and provide them with an alternative social context. The most common crimes committed by the parents of the study's informants are murder and drug-dealing. The murders are in most cases based on marital disputes or property disputes. During recent years the situation for criminals in India has changed, with factors such as improvement of the conditions in prisons and humanizing of the deviant (Ahuja 1997). Dr Kiran Bedi, the founder of IVF is personally responsible for revolutionizing Delhi's Tihar jail and has made an immense contribution to humanizing the convicts in the eyes of society.

3.7 Social work in India

Kumar argues in her book Social Work – an experience and experiment in India (1994) that although the tradition of solidarity and social service runs way back in Indian history, the modern scientific and professional social work is an imported one. Kumar accredits this to the industrialization and urbanization process that has taken place in the last century. She claims that social welfare in India in the past has been "basically non-secular, whimsical, sporadic and according to the choice of the provider" (Kumar 1994:3). Kumar mentions, amongst others, the following definition of social work: "a professional activity of helping individuals, groups or communities to enhance or restore their capacity for social functioning and creating social conditions favourable to this goal" (Kumar 1994:8). Kumar further suggests that the needing and deprived people were needed to stay that way in order to enable the more fortunate people to enhance their karma by making good deeds. By saying this, she implies that there might traditionally have been a stronger emphasis on *caring* than *curing* and *changing*. Caring, curing and changing are mentioned as the three major incentives of social work (Kumar 1994).

3.8 Social mobility

"There are no known societies today that are not stratified in one form or another" (Gupta 2004:121). India's caste system is one of the most well-known systems for social stratification in the world, and also one of the more clearly defined. In the past it was a strict way of controlling and disabling social mobility (Gupta 2004). Because of occupational and techno-cultural changes in India, linkages between castes have been promoted. Although many people believe that the caste system is a past phenomenon, it is very much still in practice (Singh 2000). I have received the information first hand on how inter-caste marriages are unacceptable in some areas, to the extent that they sometimes are followed by honour killings. In Delhi, where my research is performed, I was told that caste no longer is an issue in everyday life. The only time I saw caste being a part of the IVF work, it was in order to take advantage of affirmative-action concerning schooling, university etc. Paradoxically people these days can use a lower-caste background to enhance their social mobility. One can expect affirmative-action to give the caste system a function and a perk for even the lower castes, which might keep the stratification system alive. I was also informed that groups of people go to great measures in order to devaluate their caste level, in order to enjoy the benefits of belonging to a lower-caste. Other factors except from caste come into play when talking about social mobility in the Indian society. The cost of schooling, unemployment and stigma are a few. All of these factors are included in the efforts provided for the CVF children (India Vision Foundation 2011-04-20).

4. Previous research

I will in this section present research from both India and Western countries to provide a background and a context for the empirics in this thesis. It was difficult to find information about the life conditions for children of incarcerated parents. However, there is extensive research to be found about orphans and street children. The children in this study have little in common with these children since they live in a safe place at the boarding school, and since their parents are still alive and more or less available.

B.N. Chattoraj published Children of Women prisoners in Indian Jails in 2006. In this study no children were interviewed, and the information is collected solely from mothers, wardens and official statistics. Chattoraj tells how the Indian Juvenile Justice Act section 2 aiming at five types of neglected children leaves children living in jail out of its target. Chattoraj also

describes how the children who are raised in jail in India do not get to see the world outside of the prison walls. The norm is for children up to the age of 5 years old to stay with their parents, but there are cases of 9-year olds still living inside the jail. Chattoraj points out that it might have a devastating effect on children not to see animals, parks or let alone society outside the prison walls before the age of 5. Chattoraj writes that these children's socialization patterns can fail to prepare them for middle class school, which might lead to teacher disappointment and labelling. This then leads to the child suffering from feelings of inadequacy, which might in turn lead to the child choosing a criminal way of life. Concerning the practical conditions, the mothers in the study explained how they found the amount of food insufficient. In many cases the children were not given any food and were left to share their mothers' food. Many nursing mothers also told that they were not given any extra food to cover their increased need for it. As many as 93% of the mothers believe that the jail environment has a negative impact on their children's mental development (Chattoraj 2006).

Juringe and Svensson studied Swedish social service's work with children of inacarcerated parents. Juringe and Svensson's conclusions concerning the impact of parental incarceration include that there are specific conditions that come with separation caused by incarceration compared to other separations (for example death or divorce), such as the surrounding adults' reactions and support. Incarceration bearing a stigma, the children might not get the same amount of support as they would have, had the separation had other reasons (Riksbryggan 1 2011-04-20). Another study that shows similar results is one made by Karlsson (Riksbryggan 2 2011-04-20), where he has compiled research on children of incarcerated parents. Comparing the situations these children face in Sweden and England, he finds that outcome of parental incarceration depends strongly on the surrounding society (Riksbryggan 2 2011-04-20).

Examining the influence of cultural factors on coping strategies, Chen found apparent differences between U.S. informants and Chinese informants concerning the choice between emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies connected to factors such as self-construal and religion. (Chen 2011-09-18) This shows that culture influences the choice of coping strategy. For that reason it would be inappropriate, maybe even misleading, to look too much upon the coping strategies of children in similar situations in other cultural contexts.

This makes a lot of the existing research on children of incarcerated parents inappropriate, as most of it focuses on children in American or European societies.

Balagopalan uses the term "*multiple childhoods*" to describe the multitude of life conditions of Indian children. This is done to avoid childhood "essentialism" where an "ideal" child is assumed. Although there is an official legal content with the Western world's definition of childhood expanding until the age of 18, it is a well-known fact that such a definition does not apply to reality in many non-Western areas. How a "child" is defined differs according to context. There are huge differences in life conditions between children in India today. Factors such as social class, geography, religion and ethnicity come into play. The life of a street child is very different from the life of a middle-class child. Thus it is impossible to describe *one* Indian childhood, and the term "*multiple childhood*" is needed (Balagopalan 2011-09-18).

Indian psychoanalyst Kakar explains how "While the 20th-century West has wrenched philosophy, history and other human concerns out of integrated narrative structures to form the discourse of isolated social sciences, the preferred medium of instruction and transmission of psychological, metaphysical, and social thought in India continues to be the story" (Kakar 1996:5). He argues that the story with its "metaphoric richness" perhaps gives a more accurate insight into "the core of man's spirit" (Kakar 1996:6). He further talks about how narrative research is now spreading also in the West with the thought that "narrative thinking – 'storying' – is not only a successful method (…) it is the most effective" (Kakar 1996:7) method for qualitative research. Kakar has made clear that story-telling as a research method is especially appropriate in an Indian context (Kakar 1996).

5. Method

The material which this thesis is built upon was gathered by the two main methods observations and life stories. Additional information was gathered through informal conversations and literature. Nagla mentions contextualization and indigenization as two of the main issues within the contemporary discourses in Indian sociology of today. He refers to Mukerjee when he claims that "Ideology, theory and method are related to the context. Without the context there is no relevance of any ideology, theory or method" (Nagla 2008:356). Nagla further refers to Atal when mentioning positive aspects of indigenization such as improving the quality of professional praxis and the opposition to "false

universalism", meaning assumptions that all cultures contain the same behaviours. Atal's suggestions for pursuing indigenization involve two aspects which I have used: the use of local materials and methodological reorientation. (Nagla 2008) My method of collecting the life stories in the shape of fairy-tales was inspired by Sudhir Kakar's report on how story-telling has been and still is an accepted part of Indian research, contrasting its Western counterpart (Kakar 1996). The choice of method has been further encouraged by noticing how common references to myths and stories are in scientific literature.

The observations have two functions: they grant me a background understanding and a relationship with the informants as well as serving as research material. Kerlinger stresses the importance of the researcher bearing the analysis in mind all through the research process (Kerlinger 2010), which I have tried to do. By analysing the data myself and in discussions with others during the entire process of the study, the research has been kept focused on the research questions.

5.1 Scientific Approach

The research has been performed in an explorative manner. The material I have found and the advice from people around me have greatly influenced my collection of information and analysis. The study is performed hermeneutically, as I analyse how the informants view their own situation. My wish is for the life stories to go through the whole three-step hermeneutic process of (1) the informants' interpretation of their reality, (2) my interpretation of what the informants express and (3) potentially a change in how the informants are perceived by society (Brinkmann&Kvale 2009).

5.2 Selections

The group that is being researched in this study consists of children involved in the CVF project. After taking into account age, gender, language barriers and availability when selecting, the group consists of 27 girls in the ages 7-15 who all go to the same school. All members of the group have been with the IVF project since below the age of 5. The school where the life stories were collected was a school for girls. There are boys in other schools connected to the CVF project. The living conditions in the schools are similar. Divided into age groups (in order to keep the confidentiality I prefer to group them together) the selection consists of eight 7-9 year olds, thirteen 10-12 year olds and six 13-15 year olds. The target

group has been presented to me by IVF. My contact person and I have discussed all aspects we have come to think of in order to get the best possible selections for the life stories.

5.3 Observations

The first step in my gathering of information was to join the organization for some of their various activities. During three weeks I joined the IVF staff on five school visits, one parent-teacher meeting and one community visit. The aim of the observations was on one hand to build a background understanding of the children's situation and the work of IVF, and on the other hand to build a relationship with the children in order for them to trust me enough to tell me their stories. I was advised to do so by my contact person at the organization. Kvale suggests building an appropriate relationship with the informants in order to get meaningful information (Brinkmann&Kvale 2009). When I performed the observations I realized that they gave me a massive amount of material to work with. One of the advantages of observation as a research method is the flexibility it offers when it comes to alteration of research strategy (May 2001). The observations guided me in both research design and analysis. Within the observations I had the chance to observe the IVF praxis. Praxis can be described as generalized and structured actions and interaction that are part of continuous chains of actions aiming for certain goals. Practical actions are the primary way of handling the surrounding world. Reflection and theory is the intellectual counterpart (Retzlaff&Thomassen 2007). My observations have consisted of both observing the IVF staff in action during the various activities, and by listening to their reflections about their work during the hours spent travelling to and from the activities. Out of the five school visits, three were made to the same school, which also was the school where the life stories were collected. I had planned for the observations to be passive from my side, but they turned out on the contrary. My role was quite participative, as I was talking, playing, having tea etc. with the children during the visits. As DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) point out, everyday social interaction naturally includes both participation and observation. What signifies the research method of participant observation (as opposed to the everyday practice) is the explicit recording and analysing of the information that is gained and the systematic use of the information for scientific purposes. Participant observation is defined by the researcher joining the informants in their natural habitat while recognizing the influence of the researcher's participation in the situation and keeping an analytic mindset (DeWalt&DeWalt 2002). The information is preferably recorded in field notes, which are analysed during and

after the process of observation (DeWalt&DeWalt 2002, May 2001). After each day spent with the IVF staff I wrote notes on courses of events, conversations and whatever reflections I had. When analysing the information, I focused on how IVF affects the informants' meaning-making processes.

5.4 Life stories

The life stories were told in the shape of fairy-tales. I was told that the children were already tired of being interviewed by students and researchers before I started my research, but the organization was still interested in evaluating the children's CVF experience. So I figured the fairy-tale form would be a "softer" way for the informants to give out information. The decision to collect the information in writing was made on the grounds of several reasons: it saves the children from seeing the reactions of the receiver (me), it allows increased anonymity, it saves time and it allows me to handle greater amounts of material. By asking the children to tell their stories in the shape of fairy-tales (including telling it in third-person, inventing all names and giving them the freedom to manipulate the details, see appendix for complete instructions), my hope was that the children would experience a sense of distance to their own stories and freedom from some loyalty conflicts, which might allow them to be more honest. I also tried to give them the agency to choose how to tell their stories without being held back by what they might think is expected of them to tell.

The story writing was unprepared from the children's side and took one hour. Because of surroundings and time range, it was impossible to keep the informants separated from each other while writing their stories. They sometimes helped each other in finding the right words. A few of the younger children needed help to write and translate. An IVF staff member helped them, but assured me that the words were the children's own, why the grammar is a bit off and there is no flow to the story. In other words, she did not try to enhance the stories in any way. I was very clear about the stories having to be their own individual ones. Some of the informants were reluctant to participate when the assignment was presented to them, however most of them felt safe enough to participate when I assured them that I know nothing of their personal background and would not possibly be able to make out who wrote which story. In order to analyse the stories I categorized them. I then cross-checked the data to find possible correlations. I did not know what to expect from the stories, so I had to read them before finding suitable categories. Kerlinger gives five rules for categorization of information:

1.	Categories are set up according to research problem and purpose.

2.	The categories are exhaustive (all objects fit into one of the categories).

3.	The categories are mutually exclusive and independent (no object can be placed in more than one category and no object can affect the categorisation of another object).

4.	Each category is derived from one classification principle (no more than one variable per category).

5.	Any categorization scheme must be made on one level of discourse (be clear about which variable is being discussed).

(Kerlinger 2010:137)

I have followed these rules in categorizing the data in the life stories. The one thing I struggled with was rule number 3, as it was sometimes hard to evaluate the mention of certain topics as more or less important for the story. Some informants used more words when mentioning the topics than others did. Because of the variety in age among the informants and the language barrier, it is problematic to compare the depth of the parts where the topics are mentioned. In the end, I decided to go strictly with mention whatsoever without minding the impact on the story in total. The categories I chose for the material are:

1.	Mention of future

2.	Mention of incarceration

3.	Mention of school

4.	Mention of family

5.	Using friends as main feature

6.	Switching to first-person telling

7.	Age

8.	Number of words

Deciding to collect the information in writing was hopefully beneficial to receiving the children's stories as *they* want to tell them. Kvale warns about using leading questions when collecting information from children and about children being prone to letting themselves be guided by the adult researcher's reactions (Brinkmann&Kvale 2009). Collecting the information in writing allows for a minimum of impact of my own reactions when receiving the stories, as I have no chance to give any back-channel utterances (Elliot 2005). The

patterns of back-channel strategies differ according to context, and I suspect I might have influenced the story-telling unknowingly if I had had the chance to react.

5.5 Literature

I have chosen to use some indigenous literature. Before writing this thesis, I was not too familiar with Indian scholars. In order to find appropriate Indian literature I have considered the year of publication and the author's background and profession. Useful Indian literature has covered topics such as Social Problems, Social Work, Sociology, Anthropology, Criminology and Research Methodology. I have also used European and American literature on Methodology and Narratology. The research on children of incarcerated parents has been both Indian and European. As I have discussed earlier, the problem being researched depends a lot on the surrounding society. For this reason it might be problematic to lean too much upon literature focused on another cultural context.

5.6 Limitations

The most obvious limitation is that of conducting research in a foreign context. To meet that limitation I have done my best to get into the culture by spending time in it, asking questions about things I do not understand and discussing aspects of the culture which I have found strange, so as to eliminate misunderstandings as far as possible. I have in total spent 9 weeks living together with an Indian friend in India. He has been there for any need of explanation, feedback or advice that I have had at any point of the research process. There is also a chance that I can bring another perspective to the research, one that an Indian researcher would not have had.

One of the most important aspects when handling the foreign context is defining myself, the researcher, to show what type of a filter I am in the analysis of the results. This I try to do as clearly as possible in the section *My role as the researcher*.

Another limitation is the language barrier. I speak English fluently, but English is not my first language. The children are all taught in English. Although many children speak English well, with many of them their level is insufficient for the visits to be held completely in English. Parts of the school visits, home visits and parent-teacher meetings were instead held in Hindi, which I do not understand. Luckily I could get the staff to interpret whenever I felt the need to understand. A surprising side effect of the language barrier was that the times spent observing communication in a language I do not understand, forced and enabled me to focus on the non-

verbal communication. As English words were frequently used while speaking Hindi, I could follow the topics more or less. Concerning communicating in English with people who speak Hindi as their first-language, I have gotten some advice from a native English-speaking woman studying Hindi. She had found explanations to why Indian people sometimes express themselves in English in a way that she would misunderstand. One example is how she when an Indian person instead of saying that "he *is* late", says "lateness *happened* to him", interpreted it as him not taking responsibility for his delay. While learning Hindi she realized that the passive tense was used in other situations than it would in English. Bearing this in mind, I did not take into account the use of different grammatical forms in the children's stories when I analysed them. The aspect I have focused mostly upon when performing the narrative analysis is *tellability*. Choosing what is worth telling is linked to the possible quality of its manifestation (Hühn 2009). I worry that the informants might have excluded some information thinking they would not be able to tell it in an interesting way. This is due to both their own conception of their knowledge of the English language and their self-esteem.

The selections have limited the results that I have found. The life stories all come from *girls* from *one single school*. The selections omit all boys and all children attending other schools.

5.7 Validity, Reliability and Generalizability

Choosing to ask the informants to tell me their life stories as a fairy-tale was a risk. I was very clear about wanting *their* stories and no one else's, but I am in a position of not knowing what is factual and what is fictional. One girl asked if she could tell another story rather than her own, but I was strict about wanting her story or none at all. I was clear with the informants about what I wanted from them, and as in any research situation, I had to trust them. One of the conditions I gave was that the stories were to be told in third person. The fact that 4 of the informants on one or more occasions within their stories switched to first-person makes me confident that the stories are actually theirs. Hühn claims in his Handbook of Narratology that there is no one definition on the opposites fictional and factual. He also writes that a poststructuralist would criticize definitions of that difference claiming that every narrative is a human construction (Hühn 2009). My interest is in meaning-making, and what is most important to me is what the informants deem important enough to include. No matter the level of truth, what is included has what Jackson calls the "truth of utterance" (Jackson 2007). What I do know for sure is this: what is being mentioned is being mentioned.

Larsson, Lilja and Mannheimer explain validity in qualitative research as measurable by whether the reader is presented a clear image of what is being researched (Larsson&Lilja&Mannheimer 2005). In order to try to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpreting my information, I have been frequently asking my contacts at IVF and my other contacts in India questions to get feedback on the conclusions I make from the material. This has helped the validity of my research, as I have let their feedback further guide me in designing it. I have also strived to make the research transparent by defining myself and declaring the research process as clearly as possible. When the method was just formulated and I ran it by my contact person at the IVF, she told me that one of the children a while back had spontaneously showed her a story that she had written. Although it was written in fictional form, my contact person, knowing about this particular girl's background, was convinced that it was her own story. This assured me of the appropriateness of the method.

Balagopalan has pointed out how widely life conditions differ between children in different parts of the Indian society (2011). This makes generalization difficult. For this study's purpose, the informants are the universe as I am looking for their stories in particular. The stories are theirs and no one else's. To be able to say anything about the general situation for children of imprisoned parents in India, a bigger sample would be needed. This study can along with other studies be a part of a sample big enough to be the basis of generalization.

5.8 Ethical considerations

When performing this research I have faced a number of ethical challenges. Kvale believes that social scientific research needs to benefit both scientific and human interests (Brinkmann&Kvale 2009). I definitely intend for this thesis to do so. It is my hope that IVF will benefit from the study, and thereby the children whom they aim to help. I also hope for the study to be of scientific value by the unorthodox use of storytelling as a way of collecting information. Brückner and Schömbucher speak about the new perspectives that linguistic analysis opens up in the interpretation of culture, especially since it is interpretations the informants themselves make of social life (Brückner&Schömbucher 2004). They also stress the importance of considering "in addition to the content (…) the sender as well as the receiver of the linguistic utterances, the mode of transmission, and the scenario of the communication" (Brückner&Schömbucher 2004:243). This I try to do as much as I can by defining myself as the researcher, and by describing my method and the situation in which the

information was collected. Brückner and Schömbucher point out the problem of deciding what should be included in "context" (Brückner&Schömbucher 2004), and to me it seems that such a decision will always be arbitrary.

The Swedish Research Council has set up guidelines for social scientific research. These guidelines consist of four main requirements concerning information, consent, confidentiality and utilisation (Vetenskapsrådet 2011-09-20). The Indian National Committee for Ethics in Social Science Research in Health (NCESSRH) has set up ethical guidelines with similar goals, although they are slightly more comprehensive. Their general principles are:

1. Essentiality

2. Maximisation of public interest and of social justice

3. Knowledge, ability and commitment to do research

4. Respect and protection of autonomy, rights and dignity of participants

5. Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality

6. Precaution and risk minimisation

7. Non-exploitation

8. Public domain (keeping everyone involved informed)

9. Accountability and transparency

10. Totality of responsibility (every person involved in performing the research is responsible for ethical considerations)

(NCESSRH 2011-10-16)

Within the frames of this study I have strived to meet all these requirements. The children have been informed about the purpose of the research as far as possible. I did not want the informants to be too prepared as I wanted their stories to be told as spontaneously as possible. The matter of consent is a bit complicated. I chose to let the children decide for themselves whether they wanted to take part in the study or not. To find out who is legally responsible for each one of them and to find that person in order to obtain their consent would be impossible

within the frames of this study since the parents (the ones who are alive and legally responsible for their children) are spread in and out of jail in vast areas in India. Choosing the children to be the informants of the study was based on IVF's wishes, in order to improve the CVF project and to describe the children's experience of the project to possible funders. The children's participation is thereby aimed at enhancing their own life conditions. I instructed the informants to make up names for every character in the stories, but to tell me their real age for my analysis. Seeing as the stories are anonymous and as the research will hopefully benefit the children's life situation, I feel that it is acceptable that the children took this decision for themselves. The anonymity issue leads us to confidentiality, which I have stressed firmly in this study. The original material has been kept in a folder and copies on a USB flash drive. I am the only one who has read the stories. Even I myself do not know who wrote which story, as I specifically told the informants not to write their real names. The names used in the quotes are fictive and chosen by the children themselves and no informant will be pointed-out. The fact that I have not read any of the informants' background files makes it impossible for me to even guess who wrote which story. This has also got to do with utilisation. For any help that the IVF staff offered me, I considered the need for it in order to perform the research. I was hesitant beforehand whether it was really a good idea for me to visit the children's homes. I was convinced by several people that it would be good for my background understanding to see where the children come from and what the alternative would be if the children were not included in the IVF efforts. In the end, I found it helpful in those ways. The issue of accountability and transparency is dealt with in the sections "5.7 Validity, Reliability and Generalizability" and "5.9 My role as the researcher". By speaking of children of incarcerated parents as a vulnerable group and writing and publishing this thesis, I risk prolonging the stigma surrounding them. Bearing this in mind, I believe that my intent with writing this thesis, to improve the situation for these children by helping IVF motivate (and maybe even increase) their funding, makes up for that. Kvale stresses the need to consider the benefit of the human situation being studied (Brinkmann&Kvale 2009). Hopefully this study will help IVF in their work and with funding. By having a thesis written about their work and the children, they hopefully will gain more recognition. With better funding, the organisation will be able to help the children even more.

5.9 My role as the researcher

Kerlinger formulates the major problem of behavioural observations as *the researcher himself*, both by him/her being part of the measuring instrument and by his/her interference. Kerlinger speaks of the problem of the observer influencing the object. The object may behave in a different way than she would normally do, to communicate something to the observer. (Kerlinger 2010) Although, as Kerlinger says, "a teacher cannot do what she cannot do" (Kerlinger 2010:539). He advises the observer to be "unobtrusive and not to give the people observed the feeling that judgements are being made" in order to minimize the problem of the object behaving in a way that would decrease the study's reliability (Kerlinger 2010:539). Kerlinger appeals to the ideal of the observer being unobtrusive, but I chose a different approach. I chose to define myself and take a clear role in the situation in order to create a trusting relationship to the informants to achieve valuable information. I was told that the informants might have trust issues, and advised to build a relationship with them before asking them any questions. I was participant, and I believe that it was the best way to go about it.

Defining myself might include me being a 26-year old female white Swedish Social Work student with a background in language- and culture studies. I have lived abroad for a considerable part of my adult life. Out of that time one year was as a student in China and one as a student in Egypt. Both these cultures are considered collectivistic. Having lived there for an extended amount of time, I believe that I have another way of perceiving the Indian culture than the average Swedish person of my age. I had before conducting this study visited India once before, and thereby had a sense of what the culture is like. While doing the research I stayed with my very good Indian friend who was my constant source of feedback, advice and explanation. My internship, within the Social Work Programme, in an institution for infants with families gave me a lot of knowledge about infant- and child psychology. One of the main goals of the work at the institution is to support the attachment between parent and child. The theories that make the foundation of the work at the institution are suited for the individualistic Swedish society with its nuclear family norm. They do not automatically apply to the Indian society. What the internship did do was to inspire the choice of thesis topic, and give me useful tools for the observations of behaviour and interpreting non-verbal communication. I am aware of the fact that I represent something in the research situation, from my mere appearance and background. India is a country with a history of

colonialisation. I come from the same part of the world as the former colonial rulers of the country, which the colour of my skin illustrates. Diving into what this might mean in the research situation would be too much to handle for this thesis, so I will leave it at saying that I know that I represent *something* which will influence how I am related to by people in India.

6. Analytical framework – Definition of theories and concepts

The theories which I have chosen are all suitable for any cultural context, as they are not normative. They do not say that phenomena, behaviour and relations are good or bad, but only that they exist. The theories used are Coping Theory (within which I focus on meaning-making), Human Ecology Theory and Narratology (focusing on tellability).

6.1 Coping Theory

The concept of coping was introduced by Lazarus (1993) and enabled research on how people deal with stressful situations. Coping can be described as a conscious cognitive strategy for handling a situation. Coping strategies can be divided into *problem-focused* and *emotion-focused* ones. Problem-focused coping aims at changing the practical situation, whereas emotion-focused coping aims at changing the reaction to the situation. Coping can be studied with a *process approach* or a *style approach*. The process perspective holds that coping changes over time and depends on situational context, while the style perspective accentuates individual characteristics. To briefly describe the process perspective, important factors are that there are no universally good or bad coping processes, that people will alter their coping strategies according to the consequences/feedback they meet, and that coping is able to change the emotional outcome of the situation. The style perspective is focused on inner psychodynamics rather than social elements (Lazarus 1993). I have chosen coping theory in order to analyse how the informants deal with their reality. My focus concerning coping in this thesis is mainly on meaning-making.

6.1.1 Meaning-making

There are many different definitions of *meaning*. It might be seen as general life orientation, personal significance, causality, coping activities, and as an outcome of stressful situations. Within the coping process it might be defined as reevaluating events, explaining reasons for events, and evaluating the outcome of events. The word 'meaning' will in this thesis be used

in terms of significance and purpose. Meaning as purpose refers to "beliefs that organize, justify, and direct a person's strivings" (Folkman&Park 1997:119). Folkman and Park believe that goals make a central element of a person's meaning system. Division can be made between *global* meaning (a person's enduring beliefs and valued goals) and *situational* meaning (meaning formed in interaction between global meaning and circumstances of a given situation). Global meaning is said to influence "people's understanding of the past and the present, and it influences their expectations regarding the future" (Folkman&Park 1997:116). Global meaning is in general described as "an accumulation of life experiences" (Folkman&Park 1997:119). Situational meaning consists of *appraisal of meaning* (assessment of significance), *search for meaning* in a situation, and *meaning as outcome* (assessment of consequence). In many ways, situational meaning is modified by global meaning. Meaning-making can be defined as an attempt to reduce discrepancies between situational and global meanings. This is a fluent process where meaning depends on the present relationship to the event/matter (Folkman&Park 1997). In this study we get a glimpse into how the informants make meaning in their lives at the moment of the research, and from the place in the process where they are at that moment.

6.2 The Human Ecology Theory

I am using the Human Ecology Theory to explain how IVF intervenes in the children's lives. Bronfenbrenner founded the Human Ecology Theory, which claims that human development is a result of interaction between the person and his surroundings (Meeuwisse 2002). The person to a certain extent creates his surroundings, at the same time as the surroundings change. Bronfenbrenner claims that the different factors that affect a person's development depend on and moderate each other. What distinguishes the theory is that it does not only admit the significance of both individual and surrounding, but also the interaction between the two. According to the theory people should be studied in their natural habitat. The theory is amongst other things based on Bronfenbrenner's cross-cultural research on children's upbringing. A person's surroundings can be studied on different levels. The human ecology theory uses four levels:

- The micro system

This level deals with interpersonal matters. The most important elements are

relationships, roles and activities. The micro system level includes for example family, friends and colleagues.

- The meso system

The factor that structures the environment of the micro systems. Examples of meso systems might include schools, churches and sports teams.

- The exo system

The exo system consists of factors not included in the individual's immediate surroundings which still affect him. It takes place on a community level. School organisation and local politics are examples of factors which indirectly affect a child's development prerequisites.

- The macro system

Macro systems include culture, ideology, religion and politics. It is the highest level in the ranking of systems and contains the other levels within it.

(Meeuwisse 2002)

I chose this theory because of how IVF focuses their work on both the development of the individual, on different systems in the individual's surroundings, and on the individual's participation in society.

6.3 Narratology

I will be using narrative analysis for interpreting the children's life stories. Kvale quotes Mishler on how storying is one of the human cognitive and linguistic forms with which people organize and express meaning and knowledge (Brinkmann&Kvale 2009). McAdams says that "our narrative identities are the stories we live by" (Hühn 2009:137). Because of this, I find narrative analysis an appropriate method for analysing how the informants make meaning in their lives. A narrative is a story and, in the sense which is used in this thesis, also the organization of "a sequence of events into a whole so that the significance of each event can be understood through its relation to that whole" (Elliot 2005:3). This implies not only looking at the parts or the whole, but also the two combined. Not every utterance is a narrative. To be classified as a narrative, the information needs to have chronological, meaningful and social qualities (Elliot 2005). Bruce Jackson explains that "Life itself has no narrative. It is serial and multiple: a million things happening at once, and then another million things happening at once, forever and ever. Narrative is one of the ways in which we

apply order to that unimaginable overabundance of information" (Jackson 2007:4). Narratology can be used to find patterns of behaviour and resilience, which has made it a popular way of gathering information in criminological studies (Elliot 2005). Although this study does not investigate criminal behaviour, the method is useful in order to see if the informants tell about the role criminality has taken in their lives. Within narrative analysis content or form can be focused upon (Elliot 2005). As has been explained in the piece on limitations, there were language issues. The focus of this thesis is therefore on content rather than form. Hühn also talks about the issue of retrospectiveness, and refers to how the told stories might differ from the actual events (Hühn 2009). In this thesis I do not see that as a problem, as the question is how the informants tell the stories of their lives *today* and *in this context*. Jackson describes story-telling as "active, organic, responsive, reactive; it is here and now" (Jackson 2007), which agrees with my intentions. The purpose of narratives is not to "transparently reflect experience, rather they give meaning to it" (Elliot 2005:24).

6.3.1 Tellability

For the analysis I will focus on tellability. Tellability is sometimes referred to as "narratibility" and is a measure of the worth of the information. The storyteller decides what to tell based on what he finds significant. (Hühn 2009) By looking at what the informants found tellable, I will draw conclusions about their ways of making meaning in their lives.

7. Empirical results and Analysis

Kerlinger explains analysis as "the categorizing, ordering, manipulating, and summarizing of data to obtain answers to research questions" (Kerlinger 2010:134). I will do just that with firstly the observations and secondly the life stories. The observations are analysed using Human Ecology Theory and Coping Theory. Both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping are included in the analysis of the observations. The life stories are analysed narratively focusing on emotion-focused coping, and especially on meaning-making. The observations and the life stories will here be presented separately, and brought together and compared in the section "Concluding remarks".

7.1 Observations

The material includes information based on what I have seen and on conversations I have had during the observations.

At first the children were a bit reserved towards me, but lightened up quickly. For every time I visited them they seemed to trust me more and more. IVF staff warned me beforehand that the children might be quite hesitant towards me and that this is a strategy they have learnt from their upbringing in unsafe surroundings where it is important not to trust every person around them.

What struck me the most on the first visit was to what extent the IVF staff gets personally engaged with the children. I was told that the female staff members become a type of elder sisters for the children. Sometimes staff members even in their spare time see the children's well-being as their own personal mission, and for example go to great lengths to make them come back to school after their leave. During my visits I witnessed the staff encouraging the children, guiding them in everyday matters and bigger life matters and disciplining them in practical matters. In other words IVF works with the children's coping abilities with both problem-focus and emotion-focus (Lazarus 1993). Chattoraj reports on how the children's socialization patterns from their upbringing might hinder them if they later go to middle class school. They might there be labelled and experience feelings of inadequacy, which might in turn lead them to making unfortunate decisions (Chattoraj 2006). Bearing this in mind, IVF meets an actual need when disciplining the children. The disciplining includes for example dealing with misbehaviour and giving the children tasks such as brushing teeth or hair. Performance of the tasks was evaluated every week. The children were ordered to look out for and take care of each other. The disciplining can be a practical coping strategy in order to ease the children's meeting with parts of society that follows other social codes than the ones which the children are familiar with. Whenever the children had any questions or needed someone to talk to, they could turn to the IVF staff. When visiting a school that an IVF staff member had not had the chance to visit in three months, it was obvious how vulnerable this emotional bond is and how important it is to keep it going on a regular basis. The staff member really struggled to re-connect with the children to be able to counsel them. The IVF staff frequently used their personal lives when bonding with the children. This was done to a certain extent. They could for example talk about their own family or upbringing. Their private lives were used to bond and share joy, like when a staff member gave the children sweets to celebrate her sister's childbirth, and for comfort and recognition, like when a staff member talked of how she herself had had family problems while growing up.

The surrounding conditions are vital in Human Ecology Theory (Meeuwisse 2002) and shape the person's global meaning (Folkman&Park 1997). I was informed by IVF staff that the children are better off under the IVF protection than without it. Even with facts such as children sometimes being caned by teachers, being forced to study only Christianity no matter their own religion, and being bullied by other children for their parents' incarceration, they are said to be better off than the alternative of staying in the areas which they are from. The staff members claim that IVF intervenes in the children's surroundings to keep the children safe and help increase their social mobility. That staying in school is the better option is also what children themselves told me. When talking to a group of 15-year old Hindu and Muslim girls (without anyone else around), I asked them about about the religion issue. They just giggled a bit and said that they did not really care. They were just thankful for the opportunity of schooling. I met one girl in the community visit who had dropped out of the school where I performed the life story research. She told me the reason she left was that she did not get along with one of the wardens at her school. When she spoke up to this warden she was told that it was not her place to criticize. When I after talking to her ran the story by one of the IVF staff who knew her exact story, she said that I had not been told the full story and that the girl was probably making excuses to justify leaving the school. What she said she missed was the unity with the girls at school and the spare time she had there. In her daily life back in the slum she needed to commute far to go to the local school and spend a lot of time doing chores at home.

IVF also try to talk parents out of marrying their young daughters off. In many cases they succeed, in some they do not. Although Indian law requires 18 years of age for women and 21 years for men in order to get married, there are still cases where girls of 12 years and even younger are getting married today. Keeping the girls in school instead of making them become housewives provides them with all the benefits that education leads to, such as literacy, increased social mobility and better health.

From what I have been told, the IVF staff aim to facilitate the children's schooling and good relations with teachers without being "middle-men". This means not running errands for the children when there is something they are unhappy about, but helping them to communicate this to whom it concerns. The staff members do not intend to take over the children's interpersonal relationships, but offer facilitation. On one of the visits the children practiced

self-presentations. They were told that it is important to be able to present oneself in order to get anywhere in the world. On another visit a staff member told the children a story about a woman who started a bakery from scratch and advised the children to nourish their talents and hobbies as they might become their career one day. These interventions show that IVF teach the children practical coping-strategies to prepare them for the future. One of the basics of Human Ecology Theory is that the individual is constantly affected by a changing surrounding (Meeuwisse 2002), and this is how IVF meets that challenge concerning the children's future.

In order to encourage the children to be participant members of society, IVF organizes outings. These serve as exposure trips for the children. Chattoraj has pointed out the risks linked to children being raised in jail and not ever having seen the world outside the prison walls. (Chattoraj 2006) One can only imagine what it must be like to handle the world outside of prison, when having spent the first 5 years on the inside. The exposure intervention is necessary in order to claim that IVF works according to the concept of Human Ecology Theory, as they work with interaction between individual and surrounding rather than only working on the two parts separately. In terms of Human Ecology Theory, the efforts of IVF are performed on different levels. On a micro system level IVF relate to and counsel the children and facilitate their close relationships. On a meso level they place the children in safe surroundings where they are educated and they try to influence the parents' decisions about the children's future. The outings and exposure trips they take the children on help the children on an exo level to be participant members of society. By inviting researchers like myself, IVF also works on a macro level inviting academic research to theorize, analyse and hopefully contribute to their work and the societal view on the children. (Meeuwisse&Swärd 2002)

7.2 Life stories

The 27 life stories differed in length. The shortest story included 42 words and the longest one included 822 words. The average story included 215 words. They included everything from difficult memories and manifestations of friendship, to dreams for the future. After every heading below, a collection of quotes are presented to illustrate how these mentions were made.

7.2.1 Mention of future goals

"Her aim is to become doctor to treat everyone."

"Then her father and mother said her to do college. She do all the things that her both father and mother want and after completing her studies they married their daughter in good and rich family. And their daughter and they also spend a good life."

"Then suddenly her father said to her I will do you married with one good intelligent boy. They are all decorating the house one day was got married and gone her whole life. You know this is how her story end. One thing more she is having two babies both were very qute."

"Her aim is to become engineer."

Although the first instruction I told the informants was that I wanted their stories up until present time, 15 of them went on into the future talking about families and careers. Dreams about the future are important enough to make the informants forget or ignore the number-one instruction for the story. 4 informants say that their goal in life is to help other people. One informant expresses her wishes for the future as: "*Prachi want to become a good girl in her life and help other people like others help Prachi.*" It seems that dreams about the future are a substantial part of the informants' experience of present time. The study thereby agrees with Folkman's and Park's suggestion about goals being a central element of a person's meaning system (Folkman&Park 1997). There is no correlation between mention of future and different age groups.

7.2.2 Mention of incarceration

"One day police had caught Nisha's mother as Nisha was too small her mother took Nisha to jail with her."

"Once there was a girl her father was in jail. He was caught with stealing the golden. The policeman beating her father badly."

"Once there was a girl who was born in jail. Her mother was caught in murder case. She was very unhappy."

"Once upon a time there was one husband and wife. They had two children one boy and one girl. They loved their children so much. The boy name is Sunny and the girl name is Prachi. They are happy family but one day the world around them changed. The wife Miss Tanya is in jail when Sunny was 4 years old and Prachi was 2 years old."

Only 6 of the 27 informants mention their parent's incarceration at all. The informants mentioning incarceration are 11 years old or older. Tellability is a measure of the worth of the

information (Hühn 2009), and it is noticeable that the rate of mention is so low. Many of the informants who do not mention incarceration tell of other things that are also looked down upon in society, such as drug abuse and violence. The ones who mention the future are all very optimistic, and not a single one of them mention any worry of turning to criminality themselves. Another interesting fact concerning the mention of incarceration is that the word "jail" is used in every case. Whenever the IVF staff talk about where the informants' parents are, they use the word "ashram" (which can be translated as a sort of retreat centre) in order not to offend the children. When the children consistently use the word "jail", they show that they are aware of where their parents actually are or have been, and they do not tell it by using other names for the place. Research has shown that the support children of incarcerated parents receive depends on the amount of stigma in the surrounding society (Riksbryggan 1 2011-04-20, Riksbryggan 2 2011-04-20). Learning not to mention the incarceration in public might be a practical coping strategy.

7.2.3 Mention of family
"This is the story of girl name Nisha was born on August 12th in poor family. Nisha was having 2 big sister and she was the youngest."

"There was one girl. Her name was Sunita. She was having two brothers Amit and Shivam. Amit was smaller than Shivam."

22 of the informants mention their families. Only 2 informants mention missing their parent(s). 3 informants explicitly point out that they base their goals on their parents' wishes, as is exemplified in this story: "*As per the wishes of her father she loves to become an engineer. She will surely attain that target for her father*". Folkman and Park claim goals to be of great importance (Folkman&Park 1997) and basing them on parents' wishes and demands therefore signals the parents' importance. There is no pattern in mention of family concerning the age of the informant. One informant ends her story by getting restitution from her stepmother, who had been bad to her: "*One day she saw her stepmother wearing dirty clothes and begging. Her stepmother said to Kanika 'SORRY MY BABY I AM VERY SORRY CAN I LIVE WITH YOU' Kanika said it's OK! From then onwards they live happily*". In this presumably fictional ending, the informant illustrates both her hurt feelings and her wish for reconciliation. When analysing meaning-making it is important to take into account the

relation between detail and entity (Elliot 2005). The informants who do mention family generally place the family in the centre of the story, showing its significance.

7.2.4 Using friend as main feature

"There was a girl Soni, She always help others. Soni had a friend name Parvati. If Parvati have any problems Soni solve it. If Parvati did not done her homework Soni give him copy. They were best of friends and happy."

"Once there was a girl named Varsha. Varsha love a friend named Pinky. They were the best of friends. They know all the secrets of together. They play together. They eat together. They spent time together."

5 of the informants used their friends as the main feature in their stories. Using friends as the main feature was the most common among the youngest informants. As mentioned in the section above, it is important to analyse the relation between detail and entity (Elliot 2005). The stories included in this section revolved completely around one particular friendship. Interestingly enough there is a correlation between informants who do not mention family and who use a friend to be the main feature of their story. Analysing this correlation using Coping Theory leads me to consider the possibility of the children substituting one important relationship with another. All the stories were relationship-oriented, no matter if the children mentioned family or focused on friendships.

7.2.5 Mention of school

"This is about the life of Rani. She was a girl studied in hostel with orphanage children."

"Because of poverty her father was unable to fulfil her demands. Teena got admission in one residential school through her father."

"Prachi was studying in hostel she always thanks God for everything he had done for her."

"But Nisha was the lucky child because very nice English Medium School. She was very happy in the hostel."

"After 5 month her father married with another lady. She was very bad and Kanika don't want to call her mom. Her stepmother put Kanika in a convent hostel."

18 of the informants mentioned school. In most cases school was mentioned as something positive, and in the rest it was dealt with as a neutral phenomenon. It was never spoken of in

negative terms. In most cases the school is referred to as a "hostel" as this is what they call residential schools. The older girls mention school to a higher extent than the younger ones. Not one single informant mentions IVF. Seeing as schooling might be the most apparent effect of IVF in the eyes of the children, mention of school might also be seen as an indirect mention of IVF.

7.2.6 Switching to first-person

*"One day Nisha's mother was fighting with one lady because of work that lady was not doing his work that's why Nisha's mother was fighting (...) one women police had hit **my** mother with big and fat stick that time Nisha's mother died in jail."*

*"But when she was at the age of 3 or 4 years old someone gave some drugs to **my** father's coffee and from that day her father started taking drugs and her father stopped working and he didn't bring any toys for her."*

4 of the informants on one or more occasions switched to first-person telling, contradicting my instructions. There is also an example where the word "my" is crossed out and replaced by "her". As shown in the examples it occurs in the middle of sentences where third-person is generally used. It also seems to occur in extraordinarily sensitive and emotional parts of the stories.

8. Concluding remarks to the study

I here discuss the results of the observations and the life stories. The two parts are discussed together, compared and used to illustrate each other.

The restrictive reactions of the children who had not met the IVF staff in a while signal the importance of the relation. It was much more common to see positive display of affection between the children and the IVF staff, but in my eyes the restrictive reaction is just as valuable in showing the importance of the relationship. Only the ones we care about can stir up such feelings. The children clearly find the relationship to the staff meaningful. I believe that the staff by using their own lives in bonding with the children make this relationship stronger. Relationships appear to be the one most important ingredient in the life stories. Whether it is relationships to family or friends, all the stories revolve around relations to others.

The girl I met at the community visit who dropped out of school fascinated me. Her life after dropping out, as she described it to me, seemed much more difficult than her former life at the boarding school. Maybe she valued being close to her family higher than education? What fascinates me even more than her dropping out is that the absolute majority *do not* drop out. No matter how harshly treated they are in some of the schools, they find their education meaningful. The importance of education is also expressed in the life stories. The fact that IVF stresses the importance of contact with the children's relatives and home communities might be one reason for the children to endure the boarding school life.

It is clear that IVF not only work with providing the children with education and a safe environment, but also intervene on an individual level. Working on self-presentation and encouraging the children to handle their own conflicts with some help is, I believe, vital for their future social lives. The children's agency is encouraged, which I believe is a good thing so as not to let them view themselves as solely dependent persons. Knowing the probable limitations of these children's social mobility, the IVF staff advise them accordingly (like the example with the bakery) to make the best out of their possibilities. They do not try to convince them of anything else. These really are coping strategies in practice and, I believe, play a major role in the children's meaning-making.

The staff members' strategy of applying issues being discussed on their own lives surprised me as I am used to a professional ideal of leaving your personal life outside of the work situation. This seems to be the prevailing ideal amongst social workers in Sweden. My reflection from seeing the IVF staff members' strategy is that it seems to work well with the children. Being personal might contribute with some sense of normalisation. By showing their own strengths and weaknesses, the staff can inspire and comfort the children. This probably means a lot to how the children view themselves and to the relationship between children and staff.

The fact that so many informants included the future in their stories in spite of my instructions makes me believe that they use dreams for the future to make meaning in their lives at present. The low rate of mention of incarceration surprised me, especially since the incarceration is the reason that they are at all included in the CVF project. It might be because of shame. Another explanation might be that the majority of the informants do not, or do not want to, define themselves and their lives by their parent's incarceration. Many informants

who did not mention incarceration mentioned other things which I know are seen as shameful in the Indian society, which leads me to believe that it is not because of shame that incarceration is omitted from these stories. Using the word jail rather than circumscribing it seems to be a healthy way to handle the incarceration in my opinion. In Sweden, the general policy for social workers working with children of incarcerated parents is to be honest and speak openly to the children about the situation. India being a country where face-saving is important, I understand the need for the Indian social workers to use circumscribing. It can ultimately be a matter of respect. One question I come to think of concerning this is what it does with the children's meaning making. Does circumscribing lead the children to think that the incarceration is something not to be spoken about? If so, is that maybe a fact necessary to learn in order to be accepted in society? It might in fact be a clever practical coping strategy. I believe that circumscribing gives the children a message which will matter for their meaning making, although if it is that incarceration is something that shouldn't be mentioned or if it is that the children feel respected and saved from losing face, I do not know.

The fact that not all informants mentioned family surprised me as I expected them all to mention their families, being as young as they are and being part of a collectivistic culture. One reason might be that some of the informants lack a network of relatives. During the school holiday, a number of the informants do not have anywhere to go and are forced to stay at school. A thought I had when noticing the correlation between using a friend as the main feature of the story and not mentioning family was that the informants might want to fill the void of the absent family with another important relationship. I cannot possibly know if it is the children who lack a network of relatives that do not mention family. Regardless of this, an interesting fact is that when the children omit family, they let another relationship dominate the story. I cannot help but wonder if they value that friendship as being their most important relationship in life. Choosing someone else to be the centre of attention in the stories might also be a sign of the informants not wanting to share their stories, but also not wanting to refuse to participate.

As the research was conducted in their school, as schooling is the main feature provided to the children by IVF, and as this is the main fact that differentiates them from other children with incarcerated parents who are not involved in the CVF project, I expected more of them to mention school. The older girls mentioning school to higher extent agrees with my

expectations on the older girls to, because of their age and maturity, be more aware of their own life situation and the role education plays in their lives.

Something that contradicted my expectations was the non-existing mention of IVF. I thought there would be distinct expressions of gratitude. As I wrote in the section "7.2.5 Mention of school", I believe mention of school might be an indirect mention of IVF. It might be difficult for the children to grasp what IVF actually does and on how many levels IVF is active in their lives. The most obvious and substantial effect of IVF that the children can see in their lives is probably that they get to go to school, which is mentioned by 18 informants.

The CVF children appear to make meaning in their lives especially through relationships, education and future goals. Incarceration does not appear to be the most meaningful aspect in the children's lives. Global meaning can be described as the accumulated experience of a person's life (Folkman&Park 1997). IVF works with the children on different levels and is able to influence their lives from several directions. The conclusion that I have drawn about IVF's contribution to the children's meaning-making is that IVF, by altering the children's life conditions, alter the premises for their global meaning-making and thereby also their situational meaning-making. IVF seems to have an immense effect on the children's meaning-making. The factors that the children express as being the most important (education, relationships and future goals) cohere with the interventions of India Vision Foundation. Whether the children's values are shaped by being included in the project, or India Vision Foundation has found the true needs of the children, I cannot judge. What I can say is that they are working in the same direction.

For future research it would be interesting to study CVF boys in order to make a gender comparison on meaning-making. It would also be valuable to hear the stories of children in other areas of India, as the Indian society is so complex and contains a wide variety of life conditions.

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10. Appendix

The directions I gave for the assignment were:

1. Tell me your life stories from the day you were born up until present day.

2. Tell it as a fairy-tale:

- Tell it in third person.

- Make up names for every person involved.

- Feel free to change details as long as the story is still yours.

3. Tell me what you want to tell me. I trust you to tell me what you find important. If there is anything you do not want to tell me, feel free to leave it out.

4. Do not write your name. Write only your age.

5. Participate only if you want to.