

DISTURBED AND DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY RELATIONSHIP AND CHILD GROWTH

DR. ARCHANA KUMARI ANAND

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF HOME SCIENCE, A.N.D.N.N.M.M., KANPUR

ABSTRACT

However, family relationships become disturbed because of a variety of factors and thus causes the family situation to be lacking in the fundamental areas that contribute to normal home-life. Family relationships are often disturbed because of illness, separation, desertion, divorce, death as well as because of economic or psychological stress. In such cases the family is not able to contribute optimally to the child's development. The problem of vagrant children is becoming acute due to urbanisation and industrialisation. One often comes across children who commit thefts, take to begging or are loafing about in the cities. They are not looked after by their families and are not able to take advantage of educational facilities. Because of the absence of love and security in the home, they come out and try to earn their bread but when they meet with failures, they adopt various fair and foul methods for their survival. In case those children are not looked after, they have the potential of becoming delinquents. Hence, the deprived child could be the child who has no home or the child who has a home but not a normal home-life. In such cases it is necessary to assess whether or not a substitute home should be found for the child. A family is the single most important influence in a child's life. It provides security, identity, and values to its members, regardless of their age. An individual learns about his sense of self and gains a foundation for the rest of his life. This foundation includes the family's values which provide the basis for his own moral code. Therefore, the parenting style that parents adopt while raising children can have a huge impact on their development and growth. Now, imagine the mental condition of a child, especially a toddler, brought up in an environment where problems such as parental negligence, rigidity, alcoholism or abuse exist in the family, disturbing its smooth functioning, leading to constant conflicts, fights, arguments, and tension.

KEYWORDS: *Disturbed family relations, children's with difficulties, Dysfunctional Families.*

Unfortunately, millions of children in this country are homeless or have poor, inadequate homes and their consequent sense of anxiety and insecurity emanates from what the home fails to provide. The only place of refuge or substitute homes are the institutions where the orphans, the poor, the homeless and the destitute are being cared for. The number of children who are reared or brought up in these institutions is very high in this country compared to that in the Western countries. This makes the problem still more complicated in providing them with a suitable atmosphere with proper opportunities to grow and develop as normal children. The various types of destitute children broadly known are as follows:

1. **Children without parents:** These are children who have lost both parents or whose parents are unknown
2. **Children who have been rejected by their own parents** due to various reasons such as births from illegitimate parents unwanted pregnancies and extreme poverty
3. **Children with only one parent:** This group includes children born out of wedlock, children of broken homes caused by desertion or divorce, children of families where the bread-winner is living and working elsewhere; and children whose parents are absent from the home for a long period of time because of hospitalisation or imprisonment
4. **Children who suffer from intolerable home environment** due to alcoholism, prostitution, crime, long illness, imbecility, imprisonment of a parent and other psychosocial factors as separation, divorce, cruelty, neglect and mental instability
5. **Children who are neglected on account of natural calamities** like flood or famine, relentless poverty from unemployment and migration in search of work,

A child deprived of a normal home-life can be affected not only in physical health but also in his mental health and in his general adjustment to society. Workers in education and in child-psychology recognise the fact that children who have spent their life in institutions and have been deprived of maternal care since babyhood, present a type of their own and differ from children who develop in a normal family atmosphere. Many studies proved that when a child is deprived of maternal care, his development is retarded physically, intellectually and socially and sometimes symptoms of emotional and mental disturbances appear.

Many deprived children are forced to beg in the streets to earn their living. Several children do not get even the basic school education. In modern cities, far too many children lead uprooted and thwarted lives. They are caught up in an era of machines and technological progress and consequent urbanisation. Life is moving at a very quick pace. This has brought about a great deal of unrest in family life. The movement from rural to urban has disrupted many families bringing about a great deal of stress and insecurity. There is greater pre-occupation today with material concerns. Thus the child of today is faced with fluctuation of values and is hampered in finding a meaningful, satisfying and productive role in life. This is a very serious problem from the national point of view. Hence, homeless children should be helped through substitute care to find a substitute home as well as a proper education, where they have the opportunity to develop normal social habits and be helped in their adjustment to society.

Many people hope that once they leave home, they will leave their family and childhood problems behind. However, many find that they experience similar problems, as well as similar feelings and relationship patterns, long after they have left the family environment. Ideally, children grow up in family environments which help them feel worthwhile and valuable. They learn that their feelings and needs are important and can be expressed. Children growing up in such supportive environments are likely to form healthy, open relationships in adulthood. However, families may fail to provide for many of their children's emotional and physical needs. In addition, the families' communication patterns may severely limit the child's expressions of feelings and needs. Children growing up in such families are likely to develop low self-esteem and feel that their needs are not important or perhaps should not be taken seriously by others. As a result, they may form unsatisfying relationships as adults.

The following are some examples of patterns that frequently occur in dysfunctional families.

- a) One or both parents have addictions or compulsions (e.g., drugs, alcohol, promiscuity, gambling, overworking, and/or overeating) that have strong influences on family members.
- b) One or both parents use the threat or application of physical violence as the primary means of control. Children may have to witness violence, may be forced to participate in punishing siblings, or may live in fear of explosive outbursts.
- c) One or both parents exploit the children and treat them as possessions whose primary purpose is to respond to the physical and/or emotional needs of adults (e.g., protecting a parent or cheering up one who is depressed).
- d) One or both parents are unable to provide, or threaten to withdraw, financial or basic physical care for their children. Similarly, one or both parents fail to provide their children with adequate emotional support.
- e) One or both parents exert a strong authoritarian control over the children. Often these families rigidly adhere to a particular belief (religious, political, financial, personal). Compliance with role expectations and with rules is expected without any flexibility.

Dysfunctional families have several characteristics in common which showcase the infelicitous dynamics between family members and their attitude towards each other. Here is what it is like to be in a dysfunctional family:

1. Lack of Communication:

Members of a dysfunctional family do not know how to openly communicate with one another and often have serious communication problems. They sweep issues under the carpet and never discuss them. They do not create a healthy conducive environment for discussion and often shout or have huge screaming fights. Family members do not listen to each other and usually resort to other ways of communication.

2. Lacking Empathy:

In a family which is dysfunctional, there is no empathy or a very little bit of it. It is to such an extent that the children feel bad about themselves. There is no unconditional love and issues are always subjected to behaviour

corrections even when it's not necessary, and the child has only made a small mistake. There is no room for error which creates a claustrophobic environment which leads to a constant fear of failure in children.

3. Prone to Addiction:

Children who have witnessed their parents being addicted to drugs, smoking or alcohol often as adults end up using such substances to cope up with life.

4. Mental Issues:

Children who grow up watching adults around them suffering from mental illnesses and personality disorders often do not know how to cope or behave like adults. They also have a tendency to suffer from the same illnesses due to genetic predisposition.

5. Controlling Behaviour:

Sometimes when parents exert an extra amount of control in children's life, stifling their ability to grow, they also end up not encouraging good behaviour. This kind of control can lead to self-doubt in children when it comes to their abilities and also creates trust issues.

6. Perfectionism:

Parents often end up putting pressure on their kids to perform and when that pressure becomes excessive, it leads to dysfunctional behaviour in them. Fear of failure is triggered and the children intend to grow up to be perfectionists.

7. Criticism:

Children growing up in a dysfunctional family are constantly criticized for their abilities or lack of them and are berated for all their actions. Parents are often condescending, patronizing and mean instilling a sense of helplessness and lack of belief in the child leading to low self-esteem.

8. Lack of independence and privacy:

Parents constantly invade a child's privacy and smother them to ensure that they have zero independence when it comes to decisions in a dysfunctional family. They need to check at all times what the kids are doing and do not have honest communication or rules about it.

9. No emotional support:

There is no room for emotions or support for members of a dysfunctional family. There is no safe space provided for children to express their emotions clearly and in a positive manner. Kids often grow up lonely or isolated from their parents in this situation.

10. Violence and Abuse:

Parents of the dysfunctional family may resort to physical abuse and hurting of a child. There may be signs of verbal, physical, sexual or emotional abuse in children who come from dysfunctional families. Children observe this as normal and showcase the same behaviour as adults later.

Interest in the effects of early "deprived" rearing came from observations of children lacking normal family life. Bowlby (1951) reviewed a number of studies of children brought up in institutions or suffering long periods of hospitalisation or other forms of separation from the family during early life. Among these, he reviewed the important contributions of Goldfarb who showed a clear superiority in various aspects of development, of children reared from infancy in foster homes as compared with matched infants who remained in institutions. Bowlby's review made it clear that a number of dire consequences including the failure to thrive known as "anaclitic depression" are associated with rearing children under institutional or hospital conditions.

Wayne Denis (1960) examined children between one and three years of age confined in institutions in Iran. Most of these children were given little attention - the attendant to child ratio was one adult to eight or more children and were left lying on their backs. They were not put on their stomachs or held in a sitting position when fed and they had no opportunity for play with toys, caretakers and other children. They were very slow in developing basic motor skills. In one orphanage, most of the one year olds could not sit up and the three year olds could not walk. In another institution, however, there was one attendant for every three children. They often put the infants on their stomachs and held them for feedings and encouraged the children to play actively. These children walked at the usual age.

Dennis (1973) also studied Lebanese infants reared in a foundling home where the ratio was one attendant to twenty children. He found that the motor development of the institutionalised infants was from two to twelve months behind that of infants in Lebanese and American homes. The foundlings were also retarded in picking up a cube, a fine manual skills.

Kumar K. and Muriuralidharan R. studied the effect of socio-cultural deprivation on educational development of primary school children in rural areas. The study covered children who lived in the most backward and remote rural areas and yet managed to remain in school till class V level. The attempt here was to probe and gain an insight into their educational development and to identify variables that were likely to make an impact on them. The study was based on the data collected during the satellite Instructional Television Experiment in 1975-76 from primary school children of class V in Kota District of Rajasthan. Educational development variables included scholastic achievement in language, social studies and general science; psycho-linguistic development variables such as listening, comprehension, verbal reasoning and word meaning and educational aspirations of children. The educational home. The results showed that none of the deprivation variables made any impact on the scholastic achievement of children. On the other hand it made a difference so far as psycho-linguistic development and educational aspirations were concerned. The deprived children tended to score lower in these tests, i.e. children from a lower educational home background, children of scheduled caste/scheduled tribe parents and children of lower intelligence scored lower than those of high educational home background, high caste and high intelligence.

Pushpa M. did a study on social deprivation and cognitive development of primary school children. Social deprivation for the study was taken in a global sense covering many situations like residential accommodation, home environment, food, clothing, economics, interaction with parents, motivational experiences, rearing and educational experiences. The effect of all of these factors on the cognitive abilities was studied.

The major crisis of modern time is the crisis in human relationships. In the present day national confusion and fear, society has lost its capacity for mutual trust, love and responsibility. Young children's lives are marked by a lack of bonds between individuals of different ages, generations and social groups. Fragmentation of experience between family, work, school, neighbourhoods, is accompanied by discontinuities in the steps towards responsible adulthood. Youth-serving institutions and agencies are the source. The services provided by these institutions lack coordination. Thus many of the children develop a feeling that they cannot control their own destiny.

The problem of child-care and development in India is colossal. The statistics relating to children are simply staggering. According to the census of India 1981, the number of children in the country (age group of 0-14 years), was 263 million, which was 38.8% of the total population. Of these, 205 million (78%) lived in rural areas and 58 million (22%) lived in urban areas.

CONCLUSION

Dysfunctional families are fertile ground for neglect, abuse, secrecy, addiction, or denial. In these family systems, children's emotional needs go unmet because the parents' needs take precedence. One or both parents might be suffering from a substance use disorder, personality disorder, or mood disorder. Sometimes, the adults in these families have authoritarian "my way or the highway" parenting styles or have a toxic and abusive relationship with each other. In other cases, parents are emotionally immature or unavailable—caught up in workaholic, shopaholic, gambling, overeating, adulterous affairs, or other pursuits. No parent is perfect, but in dysfunctional families, the problems in the household are ignored or denied. Children who dare to raise these issues may be shamed or punished, leading them to deny their own perceptions of reality and suffer from low self-worth. Often, the parents in these families expressly forbid children from sharing these problems with outsiders such as friends, teachers, coaches, counselors, or clergy members. They might even scapegoat one child to divert attention away from the troubles in the household. The source of dysfunction in any particular family may vary,¹ but the common thread is that the children who belong to these families suffer. Deprived of parents who nourish their emotional needs, provide stability, and acknowledge problems, they struggle to grow into secure adults with high self-esteem and healthy coping skills. Unsure of how to nurture their relationships with themselves or to foster healthy relationships with others, they may go on to create a dysfunctional family of their own when they have children.

Ideally, children should grow up in an environment which helps them feel lovable and valuable. Such children grow up to be emotionally healthy and go on to have healthy relationships. However, when children grow up in an environment where their needs are curbed or they are constantly criticized and abused, they have low self-

esteem and poor self-image. Thus, they grow up with the belief that such an arrangement is normal and accept it as a part of their life.

Abuse and neglect inhibit the development of children's trust in the world, in others, and in themselves. Later as adults, these people may find it difficult to trust the behaviors and words of others, their own judgements and actions, or their own senses of selfworth. Not surprisingly, they may experience problems in their academic work, their relationships, and in their very identities. In common with other people, abused and neglected family members often struggle to interpret their families as "normal." The more they have to accommodate to make the situation seem normal (e.g., "No, I wasn't beaten, I was just spanked. My father isn't violent, it's just his way"), the greater is their likelihood of misinterpreting themselves and developing negative self concepts (e.g., "I had it coming; I'm a rotten kid").

Sometimes we continue in our roles because we are waiting for our parents to give us "permission"; to change. But that permission can come only from you. Like most people, parents in dysfunctional families often feel threatened by changes in their children. As a result, they may thwart your efforts to change and insist that you "change back." That's why it's so important for you to trust your own perceptions and feelings. Change begins with you. Some specific things you can do include:

- I. Identify painful or difficult experiences that happened during your childhood.
- II. Make a list of your behaviors, beliefs, etc. that you would like to change.
- III. Next to each item on the list, write down the behavior, belief, etc. that you would like to do/have instead.
- IV. Pick one item on your list and begin practicing the alternate behavior or belief. Choose the easiest item first.
- V. Once you are able to do the alternate behavior more often than the original, pick another item on the list and practice changing it, too.

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