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THE CHILD IN THE HOME

Paper presented by Dr(Mrs) H.M. Sharma, Director  
Community Health & FP Project of the CMAI, at a  
Symposium conducted by the Karnataka State Coun-  
cil for Child Welfare and other Voluntary organi-  
zations to inaugurate the INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF  
THE CHILD.

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## THE CHILD IN THE HOME

A Child in the Home is epitomised as the embodiment of happiness; of the ultimate in the life of parents; and the joys of caring and sharing. These sentiments are expressed in the hope that all men and women share in this belief, be they rich or poor - that children are the wealth of a Nation. It will be difficult in this short space of time to unravel the mysteries that hold the child's delight, that cradles its secret sorrows and disappointments and above all to understand the child as an individual. It is, however, a matter of importance that nurturing and fostering the inherent goodness that a child is born with, is every indication that "mankind owes to the child the best it has to give". This is the spirit of the Declaration which is reflected in the preamble to the U.N. Declaration, and India is a party to this Declaration. The preamble further states that the child because of its physical and mental immaturity needs special safe guards and more, both before and after birth.

The Child is a living growing entity - he grows in a family which belongs to a group. Thus the child though starting with a Biological foundation grows up and lives in a social environment, particularly made up of the parents and other members of the family in the earlier part of his life, and the teachers and his peers in later life. His developmental processes are thereby influenced by them.

Concurrently "Learning" a basic process (which is dependant on the Biological basis in the nervous system) also takes place at home, especially in the early years as the child is being socialised. Later, learning process takes place formally through school years when he is exposed to other social groups (urban areas) and other values of the group in which he lives.

In India, 42% of the total population <sup>300 million kids</sup> are below 15 years of age; the stages of development of children are, therefore, largely dependant on the chronological age as follows:

### I. Pre-natal Development or Cellular Birth (from Conception to



- Birth) a Biological growth;
- II. Neo-natal (New Born) or Physical Birth, a Bio-psychological growth;
  - III. Infancy - Birth to 2 years, or Emotional Birth, an Emotional growth;
  - IV. Early Childhood - 2 years to 5 years - Social Birth, the Pre-school age of Social adjustments with persons in the home and environment.
  - V. Late Childhood - 5 + years to 12 years, the School Age;
  - VI. Adolescence - 12 + to 18 years - a period of Identity crisis and recognition.

The same child may have its origin in the slum, the town or in a rural home; likewise the child may come from a low income group, a middle income, or from the affluent strata of society. The early years known as the "Developmental age" is considered the most critical of all i.e. the formative period; while the school age is the preparatory stage for the teenager (adolescence), and adolescence in today's context, the problem years of the young. Through all these stages, it is not merely the chronological age that determines the future of the child in the home, but it is the home per se and its environment that are basically the matrix for the physical, the emotional, mental and social growth and development of the child. All children are the same wherever they are placed, provided they are given equal opportunities for development. The structure and cultural patterns in each strata of society are perhaps themselves deterrents to the mental and social growth of the child, apart from the ignorance, illiteracy, superstitions and traditions that govern a home.

The most important factor that pre-determines the processes of growth and development of the child is the Nutritional status - and as we now know the critical period of 0-5 years including the last three months of pregnancy is the critical period for the child. If the child does not get adequate nutrition, it is accepted now that there is under-development intellectually, and physically also.



The brain does not develop properly, the body does not develop properly, and most of it is considered to be irreversible whatever we might do later on.

Therefore, the child starts with this disadvantage from the very beginning in a poor family and perhaps, this situation continues throughout its life, and may show up in the children of these sub-standard human beings again. It becomes a vicious circle.

It is stated that 40 - 50 % of the population live below the poverty line, and this gets reflected in the life of the child. Unfortunately children are the main victims of poverty, because whatever food is available, the priority goes to the working man or woman as far as the family is concerned. The child, therefore, suffers in a poverty-stricken family.

In rural areas and in the urban slums, there is no choice in the quality of food (proteins). Indeed there is a "Food-gap" where quantity is essential to make up the deficiency in calories. Linking the mother and child, studies on maternal nutrition during pregnancy, suggest that many instances of mild mental retardation are due to maternal mal-nutrition and inadequate prenatal care. Factors affecting the pre-natal growth or the cellular birth and post-natal growth (growth after birth) are of importance in the growth and development of the infant.

Mortality of infants from birth to one year of age is 126 per 1000, (and 140 in the rural area), 50% of whom die between 1 week to 6 months, when breast feeding gradually diminishes and when solid foods are introduced. Fortunately, breast feeding is prolonged in this country even upto 2 years. Breast milk is nutritious and prevents infection. There are mothers who imitate the middle class and the rich, and think it is the fashion to go in for milk powder (not even cow's milk) in lieu of breast milk. This has spread disaster in many a rural home for want of proper cleanliness of bottles and correct methods of formulating feeds. This is an expensive substitute causing dysentery, diarrhoea, respiratory diseases, gastro-



intestinal disorders - all of which have a base in malnutrition; thus resulting in either lowering the physical health of the child or increasing the Infant Mortality.

As the child grows physically, it is amazing how he continues to survive in the midst of the most insanitary environment; with minimum intake of food, and loaded with parasitic infection. Early childhood or "the Pre-school years" are generally referred to as the neglected child. It is an accident prone age. The infant in its cradle is safe when the mother is busy either in the kitchen or elsewhere. At the toddler stage, the child is free to roam around the home, on the street, help itself to whatever is within its reach eg. electrical **fittings**, match boxes etc., thus exposing itself to accident situations. The programme of Health, Nutrition and Safety measures, includes the education of the mother concurrently with programmes for improving sanitation and water supply etc. It must be remembered that providing prepared food to the poverty areas is not a solution, nor is a mass feeding programme. What happens to these children when this programme is withdrawn? Nutrition education emphasises the availability of locally grown foods, methods of cooking, and budgeting. The purchasing power of available foods must also be taken into account.

The problem with children in more affluent circumstances is again one of ignorance and superstition; because parents can afford to provide adequate food of high quality. Here the child is over-nourished or malnourished in the sense that too much of the wrong type of food is given. Mothers in the better income group believe that a plumpy infant is a healthy infant unmindful of the hidden dangers of adiposity.

Talking about Foods and Food Pattern, it is generally understood that the child in the home will accept the foods offered by the parents. The food pattern will naturally relate to the specific area and location and the child learns to appreciate over the years the type of food that it has been accustomed to. It is a difficult task to change the food pattern of adults, and their likes and dislikes



are often reflected in the child. Adults in almost all homes are aware of foods that produce "cold" and those that produce "heat". There is, therefore, selection in the type of food given to children particularly in rural homes as this is part of a child-rearing practice. The adult, therefore, rejects what is "good" for him only because of his experience gained in early childhood.

Again on Food Habits, the infant nursed by the mother has in reality no sense of supply and demand. There is no time-schedule for mothers both in rural areas as well as those in the lower income group who find nursing their babies when convenient to both. Social responsiveness of the infants emerge from feeding situations. It is also the basis of development of social relations and the mother acquires a positive value by being associated with hunger-reduction of the child. It is at a later stage after 8 to 12 months and upto 2 years after solid foods are introduced, that there is a problem of feeding. All the various emotions develop and temper tantrums start. There is plenty of dramatization at feeding time, particularly in the better income group homes. The child in a poor home, however, knows only the pangs of hunger and accepts whatever is offered to him, at any time. Most children if left to themselves need no persuasion to have their food.

The Emotional Development: Everything and anything in the environment affects and has an effect on the child. Many of the personality traits of adults have their source in early childhood. The social and emotional behaviour of adults can also be traced to the emotional adjustment or mal-adjustment during the period of childhood. The formation of an individual of his personality and his social behaviour continues throughout childhood and depends completely on the environment of the growing and developing person. To quote Watson, a renowned Psychologist, who emphasized the importance of environment in the development of the child - he says "Give me children in the early years, and I will make them what you want". Emotional development is concerned with the practical problems of child-rearing in the home which are really the parental practices. The behaviour patterns of



of children are the result of inter-action of these parental practices between the parents and their children, such as the attitudes of parents, their expression values, interests and training of children.

For example, the arrival of the new born in the family. The father feels neglected and sometimes jealous as affection is concentrated on the child. The psychological adjustment between the father and the new born may be made after a while; again the presence of the older child creates a problem for the child and parents. The child is lonely and feels deprived of love and affection. Older children should be prepared by the parents to receive the new born, and accept him readily in the family.

In a rural home, generally, patterns of behaviour are not planned, but arise in the day to day actions of care-taking, feeding and protecting - though not intentional these practices are inherited from generation to generation and most of them are centered around religion, and have an influence on the child's emotional growth, ~~expressions~~ of love, annoyance, anger etc. In contrast to a home where parents are educated and of a higher income group, the aspects of training are regulated, so as to maintain a particular form of behaviour and these influence the child's actions. However, with reference to those educated parents where both are employed and where there is a nuclear family - what happens to the child at home? An ayah takes care of the child and spends most of the hours of the day with the child - this leads to acquisition insidiously of "ayah-culture" by the child without the parents perception. What of those who are of the affluent society and whose mothers are more interested in their society life? The emotional pattern in a child is established early, particularly with breast feeding; a certain amount of emotional security is established then. This situation increases the mother-infant relationship. The mother continues to be the reinforcing agent and the child's happiness depends on her. As the infant grows he learns to rely on the other members of the family. During the 2 - 5 year period of development, the child is the object of loving care in the family. He comes into close contact with his elders; then he is provided with the opportunity of mastering by

gross rigidity  
or  
indulgence



means of imitation and learning the abilities of language necessary for his subsequent life. The child's upbringing and his development are indivisible. There can be no development without proper training and education which have an exceptionally great effect on the child. The child loves his parents, the actions of parents are imitated. To the young boy the father is the hero and to the young girl the mother is the heroine. The child, therefore, absorbs their feelings and through the process of identification, incorporates into himself the characteristics of his parents. The Home, therefore, sets the pattern for the child's attitudes toward people, things and institutions. (Example). The female child that has been cheated by her father feels a sense of frustration and develops hatred towards her father, and this may be projected to the elder brother and the new born if he is a male child and perhaps extended to all male members in society. Also the child where the parent has not fulfilled its promises - however trivial these may seem, loses trust and confidence in it's parents. In the matter of untruth where parents do not hesitate to utter lies - the child either exposes the parents or accepts it as a pattern of behaviour. Elders are frequently mistaken when they think that the child is still too small to understand and, therefore, permit themselves to do and say things in his presence that are undesirable in the child's behaviour. For example, children are very sensitive to the relationship between their parents. The child loves both his parents and is deeply troubled by quarrels between them; and the child becomes the victim when parents are estranged in their relations, or separated and divorced. The child is faced with a conflicting emotion.

Never try to overcome the child's fear by stringent measures such as punishment or force. Speak kindly, explain what the frightening object or sound is, get the child used to it gradually.

It must be said that in rural homes, urban slums and in the lower economic groups, where joint families still exist, the grandmother and other relatives help the growing child through love and affection to attain a certain degree of independence and the child is



seldom reproved in any way (eg. Toilet habits). The child's personality gradually develops through learning and maturing. Apart from this, because of the fact that the parents have too many children in the home that individual attention is lacking, naturally the children depend on relatives/neighbours and look to them for attention and care. But this dependance-independence growth is a cultural phenomenon reflecting the behaviour pattern of a class or group of people depending on the social and economic circumstances. In this context, when a child of 5 years is in the habit of picking up things from neighbours homes, or pinching and beating others, bullying other children, it is treated very lightly by parents and elders. This is the case where poverty is intractable, particularly with child-beggars and in slums. The same habits in a 10 year old is described as unhealthy and he is reprimanded then. In the early teen-age years it is considered crime. Picking becomes stealing and theiving; bullying becomes teasing; beating becomes assault. Therefore, if these habits are checked in the very early years, and affectionately taught that these unhealthy habits should be avoided, there is every likelihood that child-delinquency and social maladjustments could be controlled and reduced. Motivation generated in the child towards achieving a desirable pattern of behaviour is more helpful than merely offering rewards for good behaviour and punishments for other than what is acceptable. Children must be praised and given recognition for their achievements.

The Mental Development of a Child in a home is a measure of adaptive responses made by him to his physical and social environment. Environmental factors appear to have considerable influence. Here again the socio-economic status of the family affect the mental development of the child. The child in the one-room hut in the village has few objects to provide variety of stimulation - such as toys, picture books, coloured pencils etc. Children love to play with whatever is available. A very strong factor that affects the mental and intellectual development of school children in rural areas is that they are withdrawn by the parents even in the early classes. Girls are wanted at home as baby sitters and boys to work in the field or



graze cattle. Children are looked upon as economic assets and are therefore deprived of primary education. Since more than 70% of people are illiterate, they pursue skilled or unskilled occupations and seldom have faith in education. Nevertheless the child in a rural home is not less happy than his counterpart in the urban home where perhaps the educational process starts quite early arising out of his advantaged position. Studies have clearly shown the need for enrichment of the environment of experience particularly in the pre-school age at home in order to develop to the full whatever potential the child has.

During the Pre-school years and as well as in the School years the child's hours are shared at institutions and the home - the child seeks to gain control over his environment and the process of socializing is strengthened - through his contact with other children he becomes more independent and carries this sense of discipline and training to his home - best observed in rural situations. In the affluent and middle class homes, children tend to have too much freedom, little discipline with limited experience. There is also over-protection of these children by their parents and too much negativism. These children, therefore, tend to be boisterous and aggressive, demanding too much attention at home. Their sense of values depends on the occupation of their fathers and this, in later years, tends to breed an air of superiority and bossism. In the case of the only child, he is frequently over-protected and over-cared for, and in relations with other children he is apt to be selfish, takes away his toys and does not share them with other children; takes offence easily when he has to give in to others. As he grows up this child becomes extremely moody and cannot adapt himself in society easily. The major development at this stage is acquiring friends, and social inter-actions become mature. Here again parents are responsible for either encouraging or discouraging their children in discriminating between the class/occupation/economic, or social status of their associates. Behaviour problems arise because of these factors. The parental help provided in promoting tolerance and the need to be aware of their influences of the comments, on the experience of their child,



serve as a foundation for and the development of his personality and gaining confidence in himself. A negative effect on the child's personality is produced by a variance of opinion on the approach of the elders of the family towards him.

A word on the Adolescent, which is the period of transition from the 12th to the 14th year of life - the teenager - these are "the problem years of the young" where the development of identity, and the growth of interest in the opposite sex constitute two basic issues. It is a period of intensified personal interaction with associates of the same and opposite sex, or with those at home. There is a growing concern for personal appearance and outside influence bears more on them than those of the home. While in childhood, children are prepared to be nurtured and guided by parents at home, at the adolescent stage, a sense of identity and a greater sense of independence develops with less attachment to the home and strong resentment against the attempts of parental control, particularly against the father, who happens to be the disciplinarian. This is the picture of the urban groups of teenagers, where the influence of the home recedes and where a desire for freedom prevails. The urban community being heterogenous in character and because of the city life, it is dynamic and constantly changes - the teenager therefore desires to keep pace with those changes. On account of frustrations at home, and resentment against established authority, the growing adolescent tends to escape from reality through drugs or alcoholic aberrations. Restiveness, straying away from home leading to juvenile delinquency or criminal tendencies are all symptoms of the problems of the teenager in today's context. Compare these to the rural situation where opportunities for self-advancement are few and far. A rural area being homogenous in its traditions & cultural practices (reference is not to caste), whole villages of families are interested in each other. There is hardly any conflict in their value systems and they do not question customs and traditional practices as they are largely religion-centered. Hence people are conservative and therefore follow an accepted way of living. While the city teenager is more autonomous in his behaviour



than his rural counterpart. The urban parent therefore has to be more understanding than the rural parent.

In conclusion, to quote the Vice-Chancellor of Kurukshetra University in his keynote address at the Haryana State Board of the Indian Council for Child Welfare, where he emphasized the importance of what he called "parent education". He pointed out that for most Indian children "pre-school" is not a balwadi, or a nursery school. It is just the home and everyday surroundings. So the only way to make sure that these children enter school with the right mental and emotional approach for their intellectual development is to educate the parents. These thoughts are relevant with our theme of the 'Child in the Home'.

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(Paper presented by Dr (Mrs) H.M. Sharma, Director, Community Health & Family Planning Project of the Christian Medical Association of India, at a Symposium conducted by the Karnataka State Council for Child Welfare and other Voluntary organisations to inaugurate the INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE CHILD.)

- quarantining in front of kids
- make use of natural instincts, environment + the older people + traditions
- Discrimination of friends / our own soul searching
- Child more independent / in nuclear / joint families



Fr. Charles Vella - Director Centre of Fam. Studies.

Fr. McCormack - " Pop Dev. Office Rome, London. - Mill Hill fellow  
Economics of dev in dev. countries

Dr. AFM - take home a working progr.

- stickers 5 lakh 0.25p
- community centre / rallies
- coordin. of vol. agencies
- background, approach, know what you want to achieve.

Mrs. GN.

- Nutri
- Immuniz - 15 million target
- CHW - water
- preprim + nonformal

60% dropouts - 45% K

75%

- 7%

7.5 million prim children - get mid day meals

25 million

33 to 100 Blocks covered by ICDS this yr.

1971 census 11 million children forced to work.

concrete plans

To reach the deprived child - has abt preventing depriv.

Dr MMH - 300 mill. pop. - India

- Tradition / Customs in child care
- Accidents
- Nutri
- Handicapped child
- Growth + dev.
- Child health
- Child health services
- Welfare
- Mental health