

REHABILITATION OF MENTALLY RETARDED CHILDREN

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Mentally Retarded are those unfortunate persons, whose mental growth is arrested or incomplete. These individuals have been posing problems to society in various ways and society has been trying to help them in order to help itself. Much has been done for them in advanced countries, but very little has been done in India. There are many aspects of the problem such as classification, causes, prevention and treatment, etc.

In the case of severe mental subnormality the individual he or she needs complete nursing care. Lesser degree of severe mental subnormality may require institutionalization or permanent supervision by others. Such an individual cannot read or write, handle money or find his way about. The cases which present problems to the professional worker are those, where the subnormality is relatively mild and the individual not only lives in society, but participates in its activities. Proper rehabilitation is most important for this group of subnormals.

In developed countries things are much better. They have proper facilities to deal with the problem of rehabilitation of mentally subnormal. But in India things are much worse. I have been associated with child guidance clinics for the past 8 years and so far my experience goes, I can say that more than 60% cases, who visit Child Guidance Clinics come with the problem of mental subnormality. Of course, parents bring these children with the hope that some cure will be there which will increase the intellectual potentials and bring them to a normal range. Persons who deal with subnormal children, know it well that very little help can be given through drugs. More important is proper training and placement in proper occupations. Although psychologists and Psychiatrists find it difficult to convince the parents that increase in mental potentials is not possible and the only thing which can be done is proper training and placement of such subnormal children. But this is to be done and I am convinced that it is not very difficult for a person who is trained in methods of counselling and psychotherapy.

Drugs are helpful in cases, where behavioural problems are there. Behavioural problems are often found in cases with organic involvement such as encephalitis, meningitis, etc. In such cases first we have to control the irrelevant bizarre behaviour and then think of rehabilitational problems.

(Paper read at the conference on Mental Retardation organised by Mansik Parshid, Lucknow)
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Psychological Assessment for Rehabilitation Programme:

Before we can think of any rehabilitation of a person, it is necessary to have **the** assessment of mental and personality potentials of the person concerned. This assessment will involve: evaluation of intelligence precisely and an evaluation of other factors such as memory, interests, attitudes, perceptual abilities, motor abilities and aptitudes.

Proper assessment of intellectual potentials, interests, aptitudes and other functions will show us a path in respect to training and placement of the individual. An individual with an I.Q. of 70 requires different type of training than a person who has an I.Q. of 40 only. The former individual is definitely superior to the latter and he can do the things in a much better way. Two individuals with same I.Q. may differ in their interests and aptitudes. Given a chance to work with their interests and aptitudes they will do much better than forcing them to work with things in which they are not interested. It is not uncommon to find mentally retarded children with physical defects and anomalies. One has to keep in mind these things as well, while advising for training and occupation for mentally subnormal.

Education and Training Of Mentally Retarded.

Mental development is the result of spontaneous growth of the brain and from its stimulation by sense organs. Mentally subnormal child lacks in mental potentials and **if** he has to progress, he requires special efforts with the sense organs as well as with the motor organs. Thus he requires special training. There are a number of educationists like Seguin, Froebel, Pestalozzi, Montessori and others, who have shown us special methods of education and training which will work.

With the help of these methods a child's sensorium is stimulated **and** developed. His interests and attention aroused and his powers of observation, comparison discrimination, perception and judgement, are cultivated. They are followed by instructions in reading, writing and arithmetic, object and shop lessons, knitting, sewing, basket and rug making, weaving and other simple jobs. Subsequently they are taught the use of tools and finally they are given more definite technical and trade training. Of course, this type of training is to be given in special schools by specially trained teachers for the purpose.

Home Training

Parents of a subnormal child should be advised to be careful from the very beginning in order to avoid the wrong habit formation in a subnormal child. They should provide the child with opportunities, where the child can do the things for himself whenever it is possible. Training regarding cleanliness and moral aspects should be provided at home. High grade subnormals can continue to live at home

and go to day schools for special type of education and training. This will help in better socialization of the child. Later he can live at home and work at special occupational centres or any where else.

Institutional Training

Many a times it is not possible to accommodate a mentally subnormal child at home for various reasons and in such cases institutionalization of the individual becomes necessary. There are a few institutions in India where such children are kept and trained. This is helpful in many cases, since a subnormal child gets an environment, where he can easily adjust. Other children are like him and there are special facilities which make life least stressful.

Our Institutions are lacking in many respects for want of funds and special type of personnel. So far as I know these centres lack expert counsellors and psycho-therapists and now it is an established fact that psycho-therapy and counselling are very important in such cases. A Psycho-therapist helps them to solve their emotional problems as well as to choose a proper occupation.

Technical training is very important for mentally sub-normal children. This type of training helps them to engage themselves in some kind of useful and constructive work and by this many cases become capable of employment in community as well as in special occupational centres. High grade subnormals can be given industrial training as well.

In this country greater efforts are required in this direction, since we are facing unemployment problems. Special occupational centres may be of much help, where jobs are provided for mentally subnormals only. Private organizations may be encouraged to employ such persons. More homes for mentally subnormals are required, since many children are outside, who badly need institutionalization. There is acute shortage of day training centres for such children and steps should be taken to have such day training centres in community. Let us hope that Association for Mentally Retarded will take concrete steps to solve these problems.