

INFLUENCE OF PARENTAL ATTITUDES AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT ON THE PERSONALITY OF THE BLIND SUBJECTS

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The study was conducted to explore the influence of parental attitudes and social environment on the personality of the adolescent and post-adolescent blind subjects. The sample comprised of 8 male and 8 female subjects. Bell's Adjustment Inventory (Student Form), Child Questionnaire, Parent Questionnaire, and the Evaluation Scales of Vilastein Sommers were used for evaluation. Results show that the Blind subjects were maladjusted in the areas; Home, Social, and Emotional adjustment. Results from parent questionnaire indicated that 37.5% of the parents were having disguised rejection attitudes, 50% provided poor protection. Majority of parents were showing negative attitudes and their modes of adjustment to their handicapped children did affect the handicapped children

Introduction:

Personality is the psychological organisation of the individual as modified by his life experience, this also includes hereditary and environmental factors. Thus heredity and environment in the form of experience help in the development of personality. Children differ in their way of acting, feeling and thinking. The child who is congenitally blind experiences the world in his own way, which is different from that of other children, and must also cope with special difficulties in getting about. His personality is affected by these differences and it can be assumed that owing to his handicap, he is more likely to be under nervousness and to harbour feelings of insecurity and frustration.

Among all disabilities, blindness is one of the serious handicaps. Normal people depend on sight for their daily activities and feel that the loss of their sight would almost tantamount to the loss of life itself. Studies on personality development have paid increasing attention to the role which environment plays in the child's physical, mental and emotional growth. The degree to which one proves to be a stable and responsible adult would depend on the amount of security

and satisfaction he has found in his earlier relationship with people.

Inspire of its impending need, and the interesting nature of the problem of personality development of the adolescent blind from a research point of view, studies in this area are unfortunately scarce. In discussing the psychology of the blindness, Sommers cite points that "Indeed the whole field of the personality of the blind is a fertile one for research. At present our knowledge in this field is practically zero". Sommers (1944) was among the first to study the influence of parental attitudes and social environment on the personality development of the blind. Sommers found that the blind adolescent as a group fall below in the social adjustment and blind girls seems to be slightly better adjusted than blind boys. Subjects were found to exhibit feelings of insecurity. Zahram (1966) found no significant difference between blind and the sighted in their adjustment. The study by Kurzhab (1971) indicate that blind children's restriction in variety of experiences and mobility leads to poor self-image and the complexity of environment easily arouses fear and anxiety.

The survey of research work reveals that there is an appreciable

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lacuna of knowledge with regard to the area of the personality development of the blind in the first place and with regards to the influence of the parental attitudes and social environment on the personality development of the adolescent blind. The present study is an attempt to fill the gap especially in the Indian situation.

Methodology:

Subjects:

The present study was conducted using the children from the Sree Ramanamaharshi Academy for the Blind at Bangalore as subjects. Eight males and eight females constituted the study group. The subjects under study were chosen from IV standard to X standard in the same school.

Materials: To study the personality adjustment of the blind subjects, Bell's Adjustment Inventory (student form) along with the Child Questionnaire designed by Sommers were used. To study the parental attitudes and their mode of adjustment towards handicapped child, the parental questionnaire designed by Sommers was employed. In order to judge different factors of specific interest in this study, as observed in the interview,

the evaluation scale were used to rate the parents and their children. The investigator and the teacher rated the responses in the interview. The subjects included in this study were either congenitally blind or acquired blindness before reaching the age of six, and only subjects with seeing siblings were selected. Out of the 16 subjects 10 had both the parents living and 6 had only one parent alive.

Results and Discussion:

Since the study group consisted of male and female subjects, it was felt necessary to find out whether these two groups differed significantly from one another in personality adjustment. The male and female subjects were grouped into two groups each i.e. adjusted and maladjusted for each of the four areas of adjustment mentioned in Table 1 by considering the cutting scores suggested by Bell (1934). Using chi-square analysis it was found that the two groups did not differ significantly from one another on any of the four areas of adjustment.

The above Table 1 provides data and statistical measures for the subjects in the four areas of adjustment. Blind subjects were poorly adjusted in the area of home, social and emotional adjustment. This may be due to many

TABLE 1

The mean, S.D., and C.R., for each area of adjustment.

| Area of adjustment | Adjusted | | Maladjusted | | (CR) | Interpretation |
|--------------------|---------------------|----|---------------------|----|-------|-------------------------------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | | |
| Home | (N=11) 5.36 2.11 | | (N=5) 17 3.3 | | 7.23 | Significant beyond .01 level. |
| Health | (N=16) | | (-) | | - | - |
| Social | (N=2) 11 0 | | (N=14) 6.43 1.5 | | 11.43 | Significant beyond .01 level. |
| Emotional | (N=5) 10.4 8 | | (N=11) 16.09 3.8 | | 6.8 | Significant beyond .01 level. |

factors like the attitude of the subjects towards themselves or the attitude of the family members and society towards them.

It would be interesting to know what kinds of attitudes parents have towards their children and conversely what kinds of attitudes blind children will have towards their parents. These reciprocal attitudes matter a great deal in the adjustment of children in various areas. The interviews with parents of blind children provided valuable information.

Interview Data

The clinical interviews had with the parents brought forth the many varied attitudes the parents had towards their blind children and blindness as such. Some mothers felt that it was a symbol of divine disapproval. To put in their own words "it is due to our Karma, our deeds and we have to live with it". They felt that they or their deeds were responsible for this. They felt that they themselves were responsible for this. In fact in our cultural set up this is a common attitude parents have. Blindness in a child is considered a personal disagree to the parents. Some mothers admitted that they were self-conscious and having inferiority feelings because they gave birth to a blind child. For them the handicap was a disagree, it is a curse.

Modes of parental adjustment

The data elicited from the parent questionnaire and interview with them yields the parental modes of adjustment which is shown in the Table 2.

Half the number of parents had demonstrated an overprotective attitude towards these children. There was a greater preponderance of mothers showing this attitude towards their female blind children. This is a logical expectation from mothers as this is a commonly found culture-bound attitudes of mothers. The attitudes of disguised rejection is expressed in distress, disgust, fate etc.

Mechanisms of Adjustment

Majority of the subjects have used defence mechanism, Rationalization for resolving their problems (56.5%). Withdrawal reaction has been used by 18.5% of the subjects indicating the feelings of inferiority. The subjects who showed denial reaction were only 12.5%. These subjects did not admit the limitation that are associated with the handicap. One of the subjects, a girl of 18 year, under this category remarked "Some people are crippled, some are mentally ill, but we are only blind". The least used mechanisms were compensatory reaction and non-adjustive behavioral reaction, which were used only by 6.5% of the subjects in each category.

Relationship between child's adjustment and parents adjustment

TABLE 2

| Modes of adjustment | Parents (N=16) | % |
|------------------------|----------------|-------|
| 1. Acceptance | 0 | 0% |
| 2. Denial | 0 | 0% |
| 3. Overprotection | 8 | 50% |
| 4. Disguised Rejection | 6 | 37.5% |
| 5. Overt Rejection | 2 | 12.5% |

The obtained data on the Evaluation Scale 1 and 2 (Socio-Economic status and Cultural-Educational status of the parents) indicates that majority of them are belong to poor economical and educational status. Using scale 4 of Evaluation Scales which measures Acceptance or Rejection of the handicapped child, 31.25% parents were found having negative attitudes towards the handicapped children. The results on scale 6 (parental attitudes of protectiveness towards blind child) indicates that the child did not give enough opportunity to develop his own personality. The more significant result was shown on the scale 7 (parental modes of adjustment to child's handicaps) where 37.5% of the parents thought that the handicap was a disgrace, and 12.57% openly rejected their handicapped children. The parents showed negative attitudes towards their blind children. Parents modes of adjustment may affect the personality of the handicapped children. As a result they were frustrated, insecure and developed inferiority feelings.

Conclusions:

This investigation was intended to explore the influence of parental attitudes and social environment on the personality of the adolescent and post adolescent blind subjects. The results showed that the blind subjects were maladjusted in the area of home, social and emotional adjustment. Survey of personal and social problems indicated frustration, conflict and dependency on the part of the blind subject. Majority of parents showed over protection and disguised rejection. The results of the Evaluation Scales revealed that the majority of parents were having negative attitudes towards their handicapped children.

The blind subjects were unable to adjust to their environment, because of the frustration, conflict and inferiority feelings. So they were utilising the defence mechanisms to cope with the situation. The results indicated that the parental attitudes and social environment have great influence in the personality adjustment of the blind subjects.

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