

ORPHANS- THE DISADVANTAGED SECTION OF THE SOCIETY

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The paper discusses the socially disadvantaged children –the Orphans. Millions more children are abandoned and in need of supportive living environments because their biological parents are not able to provide food, shelter and safety; are forced to leave their children to seek employment elsewhere; or are mentally or physically unable to care for children. This problem has aroused the attention of educationists, psychologists, sociologists, social anthropologists and social activists. The Orphan children are, to a great extent, isolated from mainstream of social setting. They are a class by themselves. A psychological study of their problems would reveal the areas of disorder and disharmony in their personal and social relationships would help superintendents, educational and vocational guidance to them and thereby help in successfully meeting the various vicissitudes of life.

The socio-cultural environment of any society consists of a variety of experiential dimensions along which its members enjoy different positions. At one extreme are those who are equipped with almost all kinds of facilities required for growth, while the other extreme is occupied by those who are not endowed with even the minimum facilities of life necessary for healthy and normal growth. It needs no emphasis to point out that social disparities are widespread in all societies, though their nature, causes and consequences differ from society to society.

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Majority of people, especially in developing countries, is still living in stark poverty, suffering from under and malnutrition, socio-cultural inequalities and other serious handicaps such as lack of elementary health, sanitation and educational facilities. In recent years, social scientists have shown considerable interest in studying the socio-psychological problems of under-privileged or disadvantaged sections of society- the Orphans.

Orphaned children suffer from inadequate attention, affection and concern of elders, pressure of being closely watched and monitored by adults in the institutions, few or no avenues for recreation and play, lack of opportunities for free expression of personal wishes.

Apart from these, they are sometimes not fed properly and are made to live in small, dingy rooms in unhygienic conditions. Often the people who deal with the children are insensitive, untrained, and not motivated to discharge their duties effectively and with diligence. All this leads to further alienation of the children from society and adds to their anguish and frustration. Children already suffering from lack of parental love and attention and made to encounter difficult situations in reformatory institutions develop a sense of being wronged and try to escape from them. The general attitude towards such children is that of disregard, suspicion and threat. They are treated as anti-social with no ability to lead a life of dignity. What they need is shelter, protection, education, vocational training, health care services and more importantly counselling delivered with affection and encouragement. It is therefore, essential that officials and all those dealing with them are sensitised to children's will.

Orphan children are class by themselves. They are placed in orphanage on account of parental deprivation. Being deprived of parental care and familial protection such children suffer from environmental deficiencies in many ways. These children develop a style of life and learning which runs counter to the life styles of other children. They get lesser opportunities for interaction with physical and social world outside their immediate neighborhood.

The question is whether such children should be left to their own fate and be allowed to develop their own life styles or they should be brought into the mainstream of national life by providing educational opportunities which will take cognizance of their problems and suit their

requirements. Whether the question is considered from political, philosophical, humanitarian or pragmatic considerations, the education of such children is essential in view of the expanding demands of social life and ever increasing demand for “equal opportunities for all”.

The Government of India has, to some extent, tried to meet the requirements of such children. Providing care and protection to the abandoned, neglected, unwanted and orphan children is an important programme implemented by the Ministry of Social Welfare. The need for such a programme has arisen as a result of the break-up of the old family system which provided care and shelter to dependent children. Under the scheme assistance is provided to voluntary organizations, through the state government for residential care as well as foster care for orphan children (India, 1982).

Orphan children have to face multiplicity of problems in the environmental settings in which they are found. These problems arise because the needs of an individual are not satisfied. The environmental setting places hindrances and blocks their satisfaction. These problems can be categorized as:

1. **Home-centered problems**
2. **School-centered problems**
3. **Social problems**
4. **Community-centred problems**

1. **Home-centered problems**

The various needs and problems of orphan children's home life are as follows:

- a. *Biological needs and related problems.*
- b. *Psychological needs and related problems.*
- c. *Social needs and related problems.*

- a. *Biological needs and problems*

At birth the human individual is absolutely helpless. In order to survive and grow up he needs continued protection and nourishment from his parents. As he grows older he needs to be guided

regarding toilet routines, rest and sleep habits, food values, avoidance of physical dangers threatening life etc.

Adequate guidance regarding these biological needs and the various problems associated with them is indispensable for survival and healthy growth of a child.

Negligence or inadequate guidance results in all kinds of complications and undesirable developments.

b. Psychological needs and problems

On the psychological side, the child needs emotional warmth and security at home. An orphan child who is denied affection at home and made to feel insecure by his parents due to any adverse factors in the home life has little chance to develop into a healthy and efficient adult.

The most important psychological needs are

- **The need for love and security**

There is no doubt that this need for love and security is basic. Observation of any society where in the world will yield the information that where children are emotionally secure they are best able to cope with any demands that may be put on them. Even the child's basic physical needs such as those for food and shelter cannot be separated from his requirement for love and security, as many studies document that orphan children who are deprived of this do not thrive, no matter how good their physical environment is (Pringle, 1974).

- **The need for new experiences**

As Pringle writes (1974, p.42) "new experiences enable the child to learn one of the most important, because basic, lessons of early life: learning how to learn; and learning that mastery brings joy and a sense of achievement."

Thus children can only learn through actively interacting with their environment. (Clarke and Clarke, 1976).

- **The need for praise and recognition**

In a study of twelve secondary schools in London, Michall Rutter and his co-workers (1979) also observed that immediate and direct feedback in terms of praise or approval was strongly associated with constructive pupil behaviour. Siann and Ugwuegbu (1984) state that both behaviorally inclined psychologists as well as humanistic psychologists agree that it is the child's attitude to himself that mediates his behaviour and that this attitude derives largely from the way others treat him.

- **The need for responsibility**

Siann and Ugwuegbu (1984) are of the opinion that children, whether in the home or in school need to be involved in some decision making. As Pringle writes (1974, p.57). In the conventional classroom where both work and discipline are laid down by the teacher, there is relatively little room for allowing each child a measure of responsibility for his own actions and learnings. A more pupil-centered regime gives each child a sense of involvement and participation in planning their own activities according to their different interests and ability levels; while rules evolved jointly with the teacher help to make the reasons for necessary constraints understood and hence more readily accepted by the pupils.”

Children need elementary knowledge about sex and appropriate guidance in their sexual problems.

Parents also need to guide the child into developing certain desirable mental traits, e.g. cheerfulness, perseverance, etc. They should safeguard against the development of undesirable traits in him like temper tantrums, impulsiveness, etc.

The aim should be to so guide the child as to enable him to develop into mentally adjusted and healthy adult.

c. Social needs and problems

Children also need guidance in the art of sociability. Human beings are gregarious by nature. But if the social instinct is denied proper guidance during childhood, it is liable to develop in

undesirable directions, e.g., formation of anti-social and delinquent groups or gangs, etc. Parents should, therefore, remain vigilant in ensuring that children that develop the right attitudes towards other children and adults around them, during their playful activities and general social intercourse in and outside the home.

Children (orphans) who are deprived of proper early social guidance at home are liable to develop into unsocial and introverted personalities. They may even grow into being anti-social, delinquent and criminal adults in later life.

2. School-centered problems

In entering school, a child's expanded social and cultural horizons open up before him infinite opportunities of progress and development. But these developmental opportunities and possibilities can only be exploited to the full if the child gets adequate and continued guidance from his school teachers.

The needs and problems which orphan children face at school may be enumerated as

- *Psychological needs and problems*
- *Academic problems*
- *Vocational problems*
- *Personal problems*

- *Psychological needs and problems*

Rosenthal_1966 has stated that warm social- emotional mood is associated with effective learning (the need for love). Naturally teacher cannot be expected to love their pupils in same way as a child's family loves the child. Nevertheless, a warm accepting teacher provides a background that is conducive (helpful) to learning.

A teacher has also to provide security. By this we mean firm standards of behaviour. Warmth does not mean permissiveness. Children should be made very aware of what sort of behaviour is expected by them at specific times.

As in the home so in the school a child's love for new experiences is to be satisfied. It is the job of a teacher to create such situations and to provide such experiences which are novel to them.

Related to the need for new experiences is exploration. It is through exploration and manipulation of objects that the child learns to feel effective in his environment. So the teacher should cater to the child's need to be active in his learning and not to expect children merely to remain passive partners in the learning process.

The need for praise and recognition is basically the need for feed-back. Empty and automatic praise is not effective. Praise should be given when a child has truly made an effort. Recognition of what the child is doing is important. And, therefore, a key task in increasing feelings of personal worth is to get pupils to perceive for themselves the relation between success and effort. The final need is responsibility. One of the most effective ways of encouraging this is to get the class to help set the limits of accepted behaviour themselves. Rules are more likely to be obeyed if pupils help to set them up so that they can understand the rationale (reasoning) behind them. But another equally effective way of encouraging children to feel responsibility and in this way raising both knowledge of their effectiveness (enhancing self-concept) and feelings of personal worth (increasing self-esteem) is peer teaching.

▪ ***The Academic problems***

A child can learn the three Rs without tears only if the teacher really knows the art of teaching young children. Efficiency in teaching methods necessitates thorough knowledge of the psychology of child learning. Unless the teaching methods that a teacher employs in the classroom are sound, pleasant and stimulating the child will make little academic progress at the school.

As he advances in age, a child needs guidance in making the correct selection of the school subjects which are most suited to his natural aptitudes. While offering guidance, a teacher should also be mindful of the individual differences, abilities and handicaps of each one of the children. Uniform treatment and guidance of every child irrespective of his individual personality is by no means a safe course to follow.

▪ ***Vocational problems***

Children's vocational aptitudes need to be assessed as early as possible in their school career. Before the school-learning age the teacher must have given them an appropriate bias and sufficient training for a specific vocation which appeals to them most and for which they are most suited.

An adequate vocational guidance at school level can avert a lot of 'misfitism' in professions which can be a source of great unhappiness to the individual in later life. Early vocational guidance thus prevents tremendous human and material loss to the nation.

▪ ***Personal problems***

The main personal problems of the school child pertain to his

- **Physical health**
- **Mental health**

The school child needs guidance regarding his physical health and development. This need must be met by providing adequate medical health services at the school campus.

For his mental health the child needs security and emotional nourishment in school. He must feel at home in the classroom. The school authorities must take all appropriate measures to see that every child feels at ease during the course of all the school activities should a child experience some emotional perplexity, the teacher should endeavour to understand it from the child's point of view. By providing him sympathetic guidance, he should enable the child to face and solve his problems as amicably as possible.

3. Social problems

The social problems of the school child are manifold. A child needs adequate social guidance in order to make satisfying adjustment with the class-mates, teachers and every one he comes in contact with during his stay at school. Providing appropriate guidance to children to enable them to meet their social problems effectively is as fundamental a duty of the school teacher as imparting academic instructions.

Poverty, disability, disagreements, and lack of awareness are noteworthy constrictions to many children getting into schools. Economic hardships and society's lack of interest and protection mean that orphans may lose the opportunity to avail the facilities provided by the public health system as well. Children who have been orphaned by the death of parents or the single surviving parent is not able to take care, are commonly discarded by society, denied affection and care and left with few resources to live on. For social and economic reasons these children often drop out from schools. Sometimes these children are undernourished and suffer from ill - health and are at a risk of mistreatment and negligence.

India is leaving no stones unturned with the objective to bring orphan into the mainstream. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Ministry, Health Ministry and Education Ministry of Indian government have implemented various welfare and health schemes for the underprivileged. Also there are more than 800 orphanages across India for the upliftment of this underserved section of society.

The government's endeavor to improve the access of primary education and health care facilities for orphans is rooted in the importance of basic human rights for all children. This effort of government's can ensure a status of equality and social security among all sections of society. The benefits of social incorporation, psychological development, secure and structured environment etc. can be leveraged by conferring knowledge and life skills. According to the official statistics, the orphans in India are 4% (nearly 20 million) of the total population, which is significant figure and should be looked into very seriously. Legislation to combat the child health and education in India is both disproportionate and inadequately enforced. Despite existing legislation, these are the children who constitute the never - been - to - school category, posing a serious challenge to the universalisation of primary education and to the goals of WHO. Irrespective of allocation of considerable funds for the education and health to all, government strategies to combat the problem have not been very effective.

4. Community-centred problems

Besides the problems which revolve round the home and the school children have certain problems which spring from the community. In order to meet these problems effectively children need guidance both at home and at school.

Some the main problems falling under this group are as follows:

- ***Problems of occupational adjustment***
- ***Problems of marital adjustment, and***
- ***Problems of general attitude and social behaviour.***

- ***Problems of occupational adjustment***

The health of a community is largely dependent upon vocationally capable and adjusted individuals. If children are given adequate vocational guidance and training by teachers and parents, they have abundant chances of choosing for themselves the right occupations. Developing professional health and efficiency and adjusting to their colleagues in the profession is the main sphere in which guidance is needed during adolescence and later life. Such a task can be better performed by specialized vocational guidance agencies.

It is hardly necessary to re-emphasize that adequate vocational guidance averts a great deal of professional inefficiency, misplacement and maladjustment. Occupational maladjustment is a serious mental and economic drain on the resources of a nation.

- ***Problems of marital adjustment***

In order to grow up to be successful husbands and wives, children need preliminary orientation and training for marital adjustment at home and school.

Pre-parental education and guidance would save many a child from becoming unsuccessful in married life and thus having his entire life ruined by marital maladjustments and failures.

Maritally maladjusted parents are a serious social liability not only to their children but to the entire community.

▪ ***Problems of general attitude and social behaviour***

A child must be trained to live and let others live peacefully, cheerfully and creatively. For this he needs suitable guidance for development of desirable attitudes and outlooks on life in general. Early guidance in a healthy and graceful social behaviour saves the child, his parents, his future family and the whole of community from innumerable unpleasant developments.

Conclusion

During so many years, since the promulgation of Indian constitution, several attempts have been undertaken by our planners and administrators for rehabilitation of the disadvantaged children. But these attempts seem to give a perfunctory treatment to their problems and in reality there is deterioration in their conditions. The case of children living in orphanages is even more pitiable. Being deprived of parental protection, care and love these children have cut themselves off from the main currents of the national life. Attempts made by government and privately sponsored agencies seem to touch the fringe of their problems these children are neglected by researchers also. It is true that children living in orphanages form a very small portion of the total population of the group called disadvantaged. But how far it is justifiable to neglect them. They also have right to live. Therefore, it is necessary that their problems are assessed and studied. Such an attempt is bound to create an awakening in the minds of those who are committed to the building of an egalitarian society in India.

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