

## AN ANALYSIS OF IMPACT OF TRANSITION IN FAMILY ROLES ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT: A SITUATION OF CONTEMPORARY INDIA

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**Abstract:** *The paper attempts to present an analytical view of the varied factors which impact the multidimensional development of children. Childhood is recognised as the most crucial period of a person's life as it conditions the child's response to the situations of life. There are both apparent and unapparent social hazards to the healthy development of a child. Family and society, often regarded as a safe haven for the child, wilfully ignore this aspect. There is a need to be conscious of psycho social state of children who are in need of care and protection. The secondary data and findings of various reports are interwoven together to analyse the impact of various factors which have an effect on the development of children in India.*

**Key Words:** *Child development, family, sociological aspects, care and protection of children.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

India is the second most populous country in the world where 13.12 percent of her population lies in the tender age bracket of 0-6 years as per the provisional Census 2011 figures<sup>1</sup>. The under 18 population of the country is 39% of the total population. A person under the 18 years of age is termed as a child. Though various laws related to children assign different age limits and that leads to discrepancy in the treatment meted out to the children during their encounter with the law of the land. This practice under Indian statutes is rooted in the definition of child as given by UNCRC where it defines every human being below the age of eighteen years as a child unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier<sup>2</sup>. This definition of child allows individual countries to exercise their discretion as to the age limits of a child in their own laws. It is equally important to assess the biological perspective as well which prescribes that childhood is the stage between infancy and adulthood and cannot be strictly confined to the age brackets as it depends on the maturation of the individual; whereas maturation itself is subjective to psycho-social stages of development and the social conditions of the phenomenon called humans. Children are undoubtedly the most valuable asset of a nation. The future of any country relies heavily on the quality of children that a nation possesses at any point in time. A country's future is carved by its children who have the potential of becoming responsible citizens and a utilitarian human resource. The investment made in the upbringing of this younger generation is a crucial determining factor in the development of any nation. Around the world, children make up nearly half of the almost 900 million people living on less than US\$1.90 a day. Their families struggle to afford the basic health care and nutrition needed to provide them a strong start. These deprivations leave a lasting imprint. In 2014, nearly 160 million children in the world were stunted (UNICEF, 2016)<sup>3</sup>. India is home to over 30% of almost 385 million children living in extreme poverty, the highest in south Asia (UNICEF, 2016)<sup>3</sup>. Extreme poverty is defined by whether a child lives in a household living on \$1.90 a day or less per person. Children growing up in extreme poverty require special attention. They are profoundly affected by poverty in different ways than adults and are almost certain to miss out on a good start in life. The consequences of inadequate nutrition, a lack of early stimulation and learning, and exposure to stress last a lifetime. This leads to stunted development, low levels of skills needed for life and work, limited future productivity as adults, and transmission of poverty down the generations. Beyond this tragic impact on human life and potential, neglecting children fails to build the human capital needed for sustained economic prosperity in today's world (World Bank Group and UNICEF, 2016)<sup>4</sup>.

The countries which have a weak economic system are under constant threat of losing upon the child population as the children face threat to a safe and happy childhood. But this problem needs to be analysed in wholistic manner because there are combinations of different factors which impact the children. It is not just economic factors but also societal and cultural factors which determine the quality of childhood. They may become vulnerable to abuse, maltreatment and come across various hurdles to development, and India is not an exception to this. These difficulties have a substantial impact on the childhood years further impacting the personality development and efficiency of an individual. The constraints that arise due to economic, societal and cultural barriers in childhood years also tend to hamper the ability of an individual to contribute to the society as an adult.

The analysis of the situation of children and women in India would be incomplete without paying attention to the disparities that exist between and within states, and the inequalities that persist among different subgroups of the population, notably women and girls, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes can be identified across several sectors: geography (between and within states, districts, and sub district level), social identity, and gender being the most

notable (UNICEF, 2011)<sup>4</sup>. These disparities have a long-standing impact on the physical, social, psychological, mental and moral development of a child. A child, who does not have a socially healthy childhood, comes across many compromising situations, which not just directly impact the social functioning of the child, but also leads to psycho-social repercussions that may last even for a lifetime. The abused children grow up to be individuals with mental health problems like depression, anxiety and restlessness and mental illnesses which may even develop suicidal tendencies. As a result, the children after reaching adulthood continue to struggle in the personal sphere only and are most unlikely to become capable of contributing to the society. In a research titled Relationships between adverse childhood experiences and adult mental well-being: results from an English national household survey, a household survey on 3885 respondents was conducted on current mental well-being and life satisfaction and retrospective exposure to Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) such as abuse and dysfunctional home environments show strong cumulative relationships with physical and mental illness yet less is known about their effects on mental well-being in the general population. It is of significant value to invest in acquiring information about the impact of quality of childhood experiences on an adult's behavioural or mental health problems.

## **2. ANALYSIS:**

The foundation that is laid in the childhood has strong impact on the entire life span of a human being. A childhood which is characterised by the state of acute deprivations leads to distortions in the personality of the individual. This can very well be understood through Abraham Maslow's description of 'hierarchy of needs'. A child, who has to grapple for the fulfilment of own basic physiological, safety and emotional needs in the most crucial years of growth and development, is seldom capable of reaching the state of self-actualisation and thereby lacks the ability of problem solving and adjustment to the changing demands of the environment. He explains that the availability of adequate resources for sustenance like food, shelter, clothing, health etc. is important; also it is equally important to have a secure environment where there is safety from hazards to life, mental health and emotional well-being. It also implies the availability of social security measures which accrues from financial security as well as social protection, goes beyond the lofty barrier of class, creed, gender or age differentials.

Maslow is of the firm view that when an individual reaches the stage of self-actualisation, only then s/he is able to constructively contribute to the society. In context of children, it is prima facie the responsibility of the family to ensure continuity of fulfilment of basic needs. That is why; family environment plays a catalytically important role. It is the family which plays a protective role by providing safety to an individual in the growing years and ensure survival and adequate development of the children by providing them a shield against the vagaries of difficult situations of life. But the reality for some children is gruesome. They are exposed to abuse in the family which is otherwise considered to be the safest haven for an individual. The family environment turns hostile for varied reasons such as poverty, unemployment, family breakdown, migration, unhealthy lifestyles, crime against children, natural and manmade disasters, religious differences, social ostracization, armed conflict, exploitation of the health and strength of children, denial of rights of children, battering of mothers, etc. Also, the fact that contemporary families are going through a major social change and in this process they are drifting away from their traditional roles of provider of care and protection. Rampant urbanisation is an attributing factor in bringing change in the roles of family members individually and collectively.

Documentation Centre for Women and Children, NIPCCD (2010) observed that there were many definitions of child abuse but the originally used definition "Acts or omissions by a care giver leading to actual or potential damage to health and development, and exposure to unnecessary suffering to the child" was quite appropriate. It was found that younger children, 5-12 years of age, reported higher level of abuse. Boys, as compared to girls, were equally at risk of abuse, and persons in trust and authority were major abusers. 70% of the abused child respondents never reported the matter to anyone. It was observed that two out of every three children were physically abused. Out of 69% children who were physically abused in 13 sample states, 54.68% were boys. It was found that over 50% children in the entire 13 sample states were being subjected to one or the other form of physical abuse, 88.6% were physically abused by parents, 65% school going children reported facing corporal punishment, and 50.2% children worked 7 days a week. 53.22% children reported that they faced one or more forms of sexual abuse, and 21.9% children reported facing severe forms of sexual abuse. Many times, child abuse is meted by those who are themselves responsible for the care and safety of children.

In a study conducted by Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2007, it was revealed that in 83% of the cases, emotional abuse is meted by parents on their own children. The children, even though living in the confines of a house, tend to fall in the category of children in need of care and protection for the reason that they lack the emotional, mental and social support crucial for their development. It is an ambiguous situation when children lack the care and protection during the course of being brought up in the family setting. They may also become victimised due to parental neglect. This deprivation arising out of neglect and familial abuse grossly affects the quality of nurture and opportunity to grow in a conducive environment. The neglect and apathy that these children face impacts their mental

health and their susceptibility to lead a positive life. Prevalence of alcoholism and spouse battering also has grave psychological repercussions on tender minds. Children become victim of abuse because direct cognisance of impact of abusive acts of parents on their wards is rarely taken. The bitter truth remains that children in need of care and protection also lack the pure love and affection of their near and dear ones. They are mostly neglected, exploited, emotionally jostled and abused. This lowers their self-confidence and ability to develop trust on others and form healthy relationships with significant others in their environment like guardians, parents, caregivers, peers etc. They are generally not empathetically understood and are often termed as deviants and social hazards. In a report titled 'Behind closed doors: The impact of Domestic Violence on Children', the findings show that children who are exposed to violence in the home may suffer a range of severe and lasting effects. Children who grow up in a violent home are more likely to be victims of child abuse. Those who are not direct victims have some of the same behavioural and psychological problems as children who are themselves physically abused. Children who are exposed to violence in the home may have difficulty learning and limited social skills, exhibit violent, risky or delinquent behaviour, or suffer from depression or severe anxiety. Children in the earliest years of life are particularly vulnerable. Studies show that domestic violence is more prevalent in homes with younger children than those with older children. The numbers estimated by the research are astounding. As many as 275 million children worldwide are exposed to violence in the home. This range is a conservative estimate based on the limitations of the available data. In actuality, millions more children may be affected by violence in the home. In India the data is staggering, falling between 27.1 to 69 million. (UNICEF,2006).This figure draws our attention towards the attitude of the people of the country and highlights the insensitivity on the part of the society in recognising the importance of fulfilment of social and emotional needs of child population. A child, who does not receive affection and love from the environment, fails to learn the worth of these emotions and does not value them at later stage in own life. This may sound to be a hypothetical construct for pure science, but love and emotional bonding has the propensity to develop social bonds. An affectionate touch forms the construct of development psychology as it acts as a stimulant for developing the sensory system in the young ones and also boosting the circulation of blood in the body. The love and affection accorded to the children, develops an invisible shield around them and gives a sense of protection, enabling them to grow up as emotionally and physically fit adults. But an absence of these emotions does severe intangible harm which is not just psychological but has an impact on their academic, health and social development. The values that one imbibes through observation of behaviour and conduct of the family members have a long lasting impact than million words of wisdom or bookish knowledge. The family supersedes other systems in the responsibility of the care of their children, but if they fail to do so or are incompetent in guarding the interest of the child; the state assumes the responsibility of the guardian of the child. For these children, the government along with the civil society comes forward to play the role of the saviour.

The nature of vulnerability of CNCP which accrues due to failure of home and family in ensuring safety; creates the need for special protection from other institutions. This intermittent help is an arrangement for protection of children from the vagaries of unfavourable situations. The constitution of the country entitles the states to enact special laws for CNCP and subsume the role of the guardian as well as protector. The Juvenile Justice Act clearly specifies that the proceedings regarding the child in need of care and protection have to take place in the presence of special committee constituted in each district for this purpose, known as Child Welfare Committee in order to ease out the process of transition of a child from the care of the parents/ guardian to the care of civil society/ government as this time-consuming ordeal is accompanied with harsh experiences. The Juvenile justice Act, 2015, defines the children in need of care and protection in a very exhaustive manner. It states, "Child in need of care and protection" means a child who is found without any home or settled place of abode, child labour, child beggars, street children, mentally ill, physically and mentally challenged children, orphans, abandoned children, missing, runaway or lost children, children who are victim of sexual abuse, drug abuse, armed conflict, civil unrest or natural calamity or are vulnerable to abuse. The definition also covers children who have been injured, exploited, abused or neglected by the parents or guardians or if the parents or guardians are unfit to take care of their wards. Those children who are at imminent risk of marriage before attaining the age of marriage and whose parents, family members, guardian and any other persons are likely to be responsible for solemnisation of such marriage are also treated as children in need of care and protection.

In a study conducted on the basis of analysis of data from India's National Family Health Survey-3 (2005-2006), as well as from the national census study conducted by SOS Children's Villages India, it was revealed that India is home to 20 million orphans. Under the terms of the study, "orphan" was defined as a child who has been abandoned or has lost both parents. Poverty was assessed to be the main reason for rise in orphan children in India (India Now Home to 20 Million Orphans, Study Finds, n.d). In almost every society on earth, the main function of a family is procreation and rearing up of children. A child not just inherits the genetic endowments from the parents but also learns the art of living in the process of developing social and emotional bonding with parents and significant others in the environment. The parents are also expected to provide the best possible care and nurture, limited only by their available resources and social support from the state. The absence of one or both parents from the family directly

implies lack and absence of social and emotional security which is also accompanied by economic insecurity. The social support that a family provides to a child makes it possible for the child to learn the societal customs and values; have a support system to lean to when the life unveils difficult experiences. A family plays a pivotal role in the life of a human until s/he is able to form a family of her/his own. Often orphan children are devoid of love, affection and supervision and develop an apathetic attitude towards life. This generates a feeling of mistrust for others for having been rejected by own parents in case of abandoned children. There are no clear cut known factors behind abandonment but the general observation reveals that factors such as societal taboos associated with illegitimacy, poverty, death of one of the parents, gender of the child, apathy of the parents, physical or mental abnormality are main factors behind abandonment of children. When the parents refrain from their most vital function that is childcare; the child goes through mammoth difficulties in sustaining life. Jawahar Devi Birla Institute of Home Science (1999) compiled a document using abstracts of various studies conducted mainly in the field of children in difficult circumstances. The various studies deal with manifold subjects, i.e. adoptive parents, behaviour problems of children, personality traits of institutionalised orphan girls, pre-school children living in slums, children of mentally ill parents, physically handicapped children, mental illness, adolescent girls, juvenile delinquents, runaway children, etc. It was found that mother's love is an important factor which influenced adolescent institutionalised girl's psychological development. In the matter of parental relationship, it was observed that the father did not play a very important part while the mother did in the lives of girls. The poverty of mother's love had very adverse effect as a result of which girls tended to be lonely and even neurotic. It was revealed that social maturity and intellectual capacity (in terms of abstract and logical thinking) of orphan girls as compared to non-orphan girls were low; where as the neurotic tendency of orphan girls as compared to non-orphan girls was high. Children coming from deprived backgrounds had differential levels of development, and their deprived backgrounds called for special interventions for different categories of children. Good parenting was found to be an important factor contributing to positive outcomes.

By virtue of their status, the children in need of care and protections are exposed to sour experiences attributable to physical, sexual, emotional, mental abuse or neglect. Physical abuse may also produce the 'battered-child syndrome' in the victim thereby seriously impairing child's growth and mental and emotional development. Similarly, emotional and sexual abuse not only affects them physically but also poses hazards to social, emotional and mental development. In the Indian context, where mental and emotional health is accorded least priority; the vulnerable child is not given due attention. An abusive situation can lead to erratic patterns of behaviour in the child and compromise her/his ability to adapt to the society. The care in the initial years of life is of paramount significance in the development of not just the child but also of the society as a whole. Even the children living in the families are not immune to abuse, but the sad part is that this often goes unnoticed and unchecked.

The difficult situations are often coupled with exposure to direct or indirect form of violent situations. An exposure to either of the two can lead to psycho-social repercussions on tender human minds. Sengupta (2001) revealed that the children who witness violence on their mothers in the family are affected in various ways. Often they remain neglected and hence are called 'victims of domestic violence'. In Indian society, very few services are availed by women who face violence within their family as patriarchy accepts this violence as normal. This study documented the effects of violence on children/ adolescents who witnessed abuse of their mothers by their fathers; and compared the differences, if any, of the effects on boys and girls keeping in mind the fact that a girl is brought up to consider marriage to be the only goal of her life. Data was collected from professionals from different fields whose clients had experience domestic violence and their children. 250 mothers from Kolkata were selected for the study. Findings revealed that the use of violence towards children as a method of teaching discipline is still supported by a majority of adults in India. About 21% of the students undergo physical/ emotional abuse at their homes, and 26% admit witnessing the abuse of their mothers. Another very important aspect that came out of this study is how continuing abuse affects women's relationship with their children. Many women do their utmost to protect their children from abuse, and from the knowledge of the violence, they are experiencing. The mother's silence makes it more difficult for the child to voice his/her experiences and feelings. A number of women expressed that all the pleasures and expectations they had from life depended on their children. It is normal for them to abuse their children if they fail to live up to the high standard of expectations these women have set up.

### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The discussion initiated in this paper, helps us to analyse the possible emotional turmoil that children may have to face at three levels- when the child is actually going through difficult circumstances, during the pendency of proceedings against child abuse and lastly but not the least, the long term psychological impact of the whole process which s/he goes through. In situations where the abuse is meted out by a trustworthy person, the trauma is even worse. In fact, the fear of being ridiculed, penalised and social pressure prevents them from seeking any remedial action. It is the need of the hour to arouse ourselves about the impact of the psychological harm that accrues to children in need of care and protection, even if they are rescued from the difficult circumstances. The slightest of exposure to unpleasant situations in life leads to a permanent scar in the minds of the young ones.

#### 4. CONCLUSION:

There is a need of sensitizing the parents and the society extensively about the importance of a happy childhood. The prima facie approach should be to avoid or mitigate the possibility of exploitation or harm of any nature to children. The correlation of a shattered childhood with the impaired social functioning in the later part of the life needs to be explained to parents and caregivers. The personality of an adult has its root in the social and mental conditioning that an individual receives as a child. Certainly, there are situations which may be beyond the control of individuals but in most of the cases, a child becomes the victim of neglect caused by the parents and family members. The distorted relations among the parents also impact the quality of childhood. It is not necessary that a child will be vulnerable to difficult situations only due to the direct impact of situations on own life but also due to the impact that percolates to her/him due to breakdown in the family system. This is best explained by the System's approach in Family. The family forms part of the microsystem and is responsible for the primary socialisation and adjustment of the child. It is a proven fact that all the stages of a child's life are interdependent with each other because experiences of the preceding stage impact the healthy realisation of the developmental tasks in the succeeding stage. A child who is denied this opportunity optimally in the initial years will probably reflect the maladjustment in later stages. The failure in the realisation of the development tasks leads to various hazards which mark the failure in social adjustment as per expected roles. So the experiences in the childhood are determinant of the personality framework of an individual. The personality of a person determines the person's ability to frame inference about the situation and exhibit a positive or negative response in return. The faulty development in personality results in the incompetence of the person in leading a meaningful and purposeful life. And we instantly become judgemental and react by condemning the person for the wrong doings, least realising that s/he is not solely responsible for the makeup of his/her personality traits. It is the environment which plays a pivotal role in shaping the personality of the person. Little do we realise that the physical, social, economic and environmental factors have a significant influence on the life of an individual. It is not just the loss of the person but of the mankind because a society as a whole is composed of the smaller parts - the individuals. The quality of the individuals determines the strength of the society and if urgent attention is not projected towards the child population, the society is very likely to be composed of people who are not equipped with positive character endowments. We need to be aware of the psychological needs and factors which impact the mental health of the child population; only then the children in need of care and protection will be benefited by our efforts of enforcing child protective norms and a child-friendly system. The highest aim should be that a child, who comes in contact with the law, is restored back to the normal situation with no or least psychological harm. Presently, it is the physical restoration which is receiving the attention but the quantum of psychological harm which accompanies the child for the rest of the life needs to be minimised and ideally erased in the whole process. The dire reality of the present era is that this ideal situation is a misnomer and children continue to grapple with the challenges to their innocence in varied ways; whose impact cannot be quantified in absolute numbers.

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