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MENTAL HE'LTH OF THE SCHOOL CHILD IN THE PRESENT TRANSITIONAL STAGE OF RAPIDLY DEVELOPING NATIONS

by

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INTRODUCTION

Mental health has to do not only with the care of the diseased mind but also with the prevention of mental disorder and the development of normal personality, and adjustment to society.

Do school children actually have special mental health problems? The answer is positive. For the sudden transition from home to school causes overwhelming changes. In the school the child is placed in a situation, completely unknown hitherto, demanding adjustment to a large group of homogeneous strangers, and adaptation to a new type of authority. His emotions are an alternating blend of intensive anticipation, fear, rejection wonder, and gaiety in a way not known before. He is expected to produce a definite result within a definite time period.

Now let us ask whether there are any specific mental health problems common to the school children of rapidly developing nations? This question we will attempt to answer by dealing with some special features of developing countries, and clearing up certain definitions. We will deal with the following:

- I Who Is The School Child?
- II Children Who Need Special Help!
- III Who Should Deal With Troubled Children?
- IV The Teacher And The Mental Health Of The Pupil.
- V Poverty And Mental Health

VI - Home against School

VII - Family Size

VIII Complications Of Polygamy

IX - Inadequacy Of Schools.

I - WHO IS THE SCHOOL CHILD?

Defining who the school-child is, does not pose an easy task. Should we consider kindergartens and nursery schools of an integral part of the elementary school program or net? What is the permissive attendance age and what is the upper limit of the school age? Is the school child he who is subject to the compulsory school-attendance laws. Are these laws universal?

If one does not consider the kindergarten and nursery school as an integral part of the elementary school program, then current practice is almost universal in placing age 6 or 5 as the lower limit of the elementary school. In developing countries, however, we must make further distinction between potential and actual school-children. For not all, but only a fraction of the children of school age, in rapidly developing nations, are attending school. According to a study made by UNESCO on school attendance in academic year 1958-1959, almost over 50 per cent of all potential primary school children in two great regions of the World, Asia and Africa, are, for various reasons, not able to benefit from the most basic educational facilities. Thus, when we talk about the school child in developing countries, unwittingly, we overlook the other half of those unfortunate potential school children who are not actually attending the school.(1).

II - CHILDR'N WHO NEED SPECIAL HELP

From the preventive aspect of mental health all children need help. But there are children who need special help. Different western surveys, appear to agree in finding that approximately 3 per cent of the school population is suffering from serious psychiatric conditions requiring intensive treatment, and that another 10 to 12 per cent, having milder troubles, need some other form of special help (2). As a matter of emergency, these findings could be, temporarily, applied to western culture, as well as to the situation in developing countries.

guidance counselors are frequently named among those who should deal with the problems of enotionally disturbed school children. But, as the psychologist, William W. Lattenberg, remarks:

"In view of the fact that throughout the United States, and in all other countries, the number of institutions and other facilities for treating emotional disturbances of children is far below the need, and in view of the additional fact that there is little likelihood that special classes will be provided to accommodate even a small fraction of those requiring such assistance, teachers in regular classrooms will remain the principal resource for dealing with emotionally troubled children" (3).

This point is worthy of much notice and should be taken into consideration in professional preparation of teachers since they will of necessity be dealing with problems of emotionally disturbed children.

IV - THE TEACHER AND THE MENTAL HEALTH OF THE PUPIL

The teacher's own mental health is an integral part of the pupils' healthy personality development. In no other profession is good mental health more essential than in teaching. The work demands a high degree of stability - a capacity to withstand pressures, and most important of all, the skill of working aggressions off into channels different from the work situation. It has been noted that, "All day long, the teacher is dealing with emotionally toned activities - hostility, defiance, dependency, demands, destruction of property, dishonesty ..." (4). The energies of children, and the turmoil of the classroom inevitably create tensions within the teacher. These tensions must find healthy release in work and recreations. Teachers who are unable to discover mechanisms of release are apt to become irritable, emotionally disturbed, and maladjusted (5).

How many teachers are muladjusted? Pernaps the most comprchensive studies of the condition of the mental health and adjustment of teachers are those of Fenton and Hicks. Both Fenton and Hicks estimated that about 20 per cent of the teachers in their sample were in need of psychological and psychiatric assistance (6).

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The need for better screening of teachers as well as availability of facilities for diagnosis and treatment of mental troubles become obvious from the above survey which was made in a western culture. This writer has no knowledge of similar studies in developing nations.

However, there are no indications that the situation in that area is better if not similar or worse. The situation has been worsened by the conditions influenced by rapid change and continued need for re-adjustment.

Many teachers in this part of the world are suddenly faced with the task of educating great number of people especially in an area where the drastic need necessitates emphasis on quantity.

This was especially true in late 1940's and early 1950's where countries are abruptly faced with the task of educating masses as part of their developmental programmes.

The UNESCO Education Mission to Burma reports:

"The mission has a high regard for the teachers of Burma; they do remarkably well considering all the handicaps under which they work, but something more than an increase in salary is called for

They need further training both academically and professionally (7).

Burma is not an exception. The sine trend may be cosily found in other developing countries. Libya is highly illustrative:

"As the Tripolitanian Government is determined to employ only Libyan teachers in primary education, it has been obliged to recruit a majority of young people firsh from school (8).

Another UNESCO educational mission to Afghanistan reports similar circumstances:

"Among the several possible ways of improving Afghanistan schools the most important is the training of good teachers... The primary task for Afghanistan to-day, tomorrow, and for many years to come is to

UNESCO World survey of Education in "Trends and Problems of Education in Philipines", emphasizes especially the "shortage of staff and overburdening of the teachers in service" (10). And in Viet-Nam:

"Public secondary schools were very short of teachers for the school year 1957/58. The Department of Education was then obliged to recruit teaching assistants paid by the hour and to ask all teachers, both permanent and those engaged on a contractual basis, to do a considerable amount of overtime" (11).

This trend which requires the need for education of more students by the same number of teachers has often resulted in reducing the duration of training. Thailand is only an example:

"The increased number of students has led to a great shortage of teachers. In order to solve the immediate problem, the syllabus of the teacher training schools for primary education has been reduced temporarily from three to two years. The Ministry is well aware that a student with a Matayam 6 certificate and two years in teacher training is still immature and cannot be a well qualified teacher" (12).

In many other countries facing the problem of illiteracy the governments are forced to reduce the course of teacher training to a few months.

V - PROVERTY AND MENTAL HEALTH

Perhaps it would not be too much to say that a striking criterion for many of the developing mations is poverty. Poverty has been rightly called the grand-mother of all evils. Those who are born into the world of poverty are not only deprived of most of the material comforts of life, but many are also stunted in their emotional, intellectual and social development, and thus effectively prevented from realizing their human potentialities. It has been indicated that there are two different meanings for poverty:

- $a \lambda$ relative term indicating the absence of the comforts of life and an adequate supply of the necessities.
- b More precisely defined as that point at which deprivotion makes impossible the maintenance of physical efficiency(13).

The kind of poverty which seems to be more the fate of developing countries is of the second type. The economist, Paul A. Samuelson, states that:

"Most of Asia and Ifrica are even to-day of lower levels of living than were the Western countries before the Industrial Revolution.."(14).

According to the United Nations Statistical Office, half the people of the world live in countries that have per capita incomes of less than \$100, some of them much less. In brief, two-third of the world's population live in countries where yearly incomes average less than \$150 per person only...(15). "e are talking about the mental health of these people's children!

Different studies have shown the close connection which exists between poverty and personal maladjustment (17). Not all children who come from underprivileged families are problem children by any means, but statistically speaking, low socio-economic status breeds conditions unfavorable to sound adjustment. The American President's Task Force on Manpower Conservation found that:

"... One third of the nations's youth would, on examination, to unqualified on the basis of standards established for military service. Moreover, poverty is the principal reason why these young men fail to meet those physical and mental standards...

These findings are dramatic evidence that the problem of poverty as still very much with us, and that its social and economic costs are neavy....

Physical and mental disease, delinquency and crime, high infant mortality, loss of productive capacity - all of these are part of the environment of poverty" (18).

Even in highly developed countries, schools located in lower-class neighbourhood are often inferior in quality. The so called "Slum Schools" have special problems and characteristics. As Burton R. Clark in his "Sociology of Education" comments on the Slum School in America:

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"Many children come ill-prepared and little motivated for school work. The teaching is more difficult than in middle-class and upper-class schools, and the school and teacher must make special adaptations. Most teachers try to escape by transferring to other schools.

In the slum school ... teachers expect less of the children. A teacher in one city says: "For instance, in the second grade we're supposed to cover nine spelling words a week. Well, I can do that up here. But the best class I ever had at slum school was only able to achieve six words a week and they had to work pretty hard to get that"...

The gap between what the children should know and what they actually do know becomes wider with each grade ..." (19).

At the 12th annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association in New York, May 1965, the Columbia University psychiatrist, Viola W. Bernard, speaking on "Some Principles of Dynamic Psychiatry in Relation to Poverty", made appeal to the experts as follows:

"Since mental health services for poor people in this country America are markedly inferior on the whole, both in quantity and quality, correction of this injustice become a specific top priority in our field..(20).

Thus, they who need more receive less. Therefore, the elimination of poverty becomes a major mental health problem in itself.

As to the facilities,

"Mental Health care for school children and Child Guidance are still lacking in the majority of the countries of the (Eastern Mediterranean) Region" (21).

And in other similar parts of the world the case is not too different. But, as Bernard remarks, the problem of the mental health of the poor is not only the inadequacy of facilities, it is rather to find more efficacious kinds of mental health services to reach all segments of the needy populations, and to eliminate the poverty - the main spring of most evil - itself.

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VI - HOME AGAINST SCHOOL

of all the groups of which a person is a member, the most important for his destiny is the family. It is in the family that the child arrives at a conception of self. Research by sociologists, psychiatrists, psychologists and cultural anthropologists all show the paramount importance of the family in shaping personality. The counseling experience has also shown that success in dealing with the behavior problems of children often involves the feasibility of treating difficulties in their relationships to their parents and in the relationships of the parents to each other. The family is, therefore, as Burgess has rightly formulated:

"... The crucial group in the preventive way toward mental health. The happy family, united by ties of affection and companionship, is our greatest resource for mental health" (22).

And, on the other hand, growing up in a broken, insecure, or poverty-stricken home affects the values, attitudes, and motivation of children in relation to school and work. Especially where the ever-increasing use of communication media such as radio, television and films are demonstrating other and more attractive sides to everyday life. Children are strongly conditioned in the family setting by unconscious, as well as explicit instruction through word and example, on the part of parents and other members of the family. The educational attainments of parents exert a strong predisposing influence upon the relationship between them and their children. When the parents are more educated, children seem to feel more satisfied. Discontentment with parents among teenagers is almost universal (23). But in the developing countries, the case is more serious. Lack of understinding in the fimily is the major complaint of most of the youth of developing nations (24). For example, Persian literature which in the old days was highly respectful towards parents and their attitutues and rights, is not always so at present. criticism and evidence of the friction between old and new values is not infrequent. A wive of letters denoting this phenominon is received by press and radio daily. This is not merely aniranian phenomenon. Observers of developing nations report similar situations elsewhere. Nuri Eren, writing on

"In a comparison of the daily life of an average family in Ankara, Adnara, Istanbul, or Ismir, with that of the twenties, only the food would be found unchanged... The teen-agers freely express their views ... Only the subject of marriage is not argued. Both the parents and the younger generation are conscious of the clash in their outlook; the elders still regarding it on arrangement between families, the younger folk accepting it as a matter of individual choice. This difference in outlook they prefer not to discuss" (25).

In other words, many youth and their families in devcloping countries live together without understanding each other, but with tormenting scruples and doubts resulting from conflucting values and sudden cultural change. We find further evidence in the report of T. Lin on "Two Types of Delinquent Youth in Chinese Society":

"The behavior of Tai-Pau (A Chinese Term for an individual delinquent, adolescent, or a group of such deviants), expressed by disregard of authority, contempt for traditional life-patterns, and imitation of Western forms of vulgarity cause concern and shame to parents and teachers ...

Similar phenomena were also observed in Japan before the war ..." (26).

The comprehension of passing traditional values and the emergence of the new ones is almost universal. But most dramatic is the rising conflict resulting from the encounter of the native cultural values of developing areas and those of the West. Their co-existence in transitional stage poses much social, as well as individual, complications. Writing on conflicting values, the sociologist, John R. Seeley, asks:

"Where are yesteryears's open champions of obedience, of the innate superiority of men over women, of the quiet, well-mannered child at any price, of bolicf in 'origin sin' or the fundamental baseness of man (or virtue, for that matter), in the unitary character of intelligence, in corporal punishment, in proprietary rights in children and women? They are still with us, so the wheelbarrow is co-present with the airplane; but in much the same places" (27).

Rejection of the old values is very much common among the younger generation of the developing nations. Even the Manus, whose primitive culture Margaret Head reported is "Growing Up in New Guinea", and who made, according to Mead, the cultural grant step from the Stone Age to the Space Age, are not free from this rejection. Margaret Mead, in the account of her return after twenty-five years to the Manus people of the Admiralties, writes:

"Later, when I showed them photographs of their old way of life, these grown men of forty would laugh in an amused, almost tender fashion at pictures of their dead elders, wreathed in leaves and dog's teeth ... It was only the very young men, under twenty-five, who disliked the pictures of a past which they had never known. For them the-old ornements and flamboyant hair-dressing ... were symbols of pure evil ..." (28).

Among the foctors contributing to juvenile delinquency in Africa, the students of "The International African Institute", speak with emphasis of poverty, the disintegration of the family system and of the conflict of cultural values (29).

In this situation of confilicting values the home is more the guardian of tradition, and the school—the agent of Westernization; and this brings about a home-against-school situation, which exerts an irritable influence on the mind of school children. It is not very uncommon that some parents even become jerlous when they find a child in a household discussion, for example, expressing a point of view different from the parents and obstinately holding to this contridiction by citing the teacher as a final authority. In some cases of father may find that his son admires some man teacher more than the father, or a mother may find that a girl reverse some women teacher. Due to all of this, special measures must be sought through—dult education courses and the parent-teacher association, to bridge this withning gap.

In most of the developing countries, unfortunately, the parent-telcher relationship is either totally lacking or it is practiced on very limited scale. For instance, the UNLSCO educational mission to Burma (1952) writes with

"The mission has been struck by the total lack of effort to encourage the active interest of parents in the education of their children.

The growth of the parent teacher movement in Western countries has resulted from a realization that many educational advances have been due to the better understanding of child development which has come through the close association of parent and teachers" (30).

The home may supplement or complement school experience or it may act to neutralize or Pegate their effects. Baldwin and Osborne made a detailed study of home-school relations in six schools. They found as the school authorities learned to know the parents better they acquired more confidence in their judgment, similarly, is the parents learned to know the school better, they more fully understood the problems faced by the school (31).

VII - FAMILY SIZE

Studies have shown the impact of family size on education, personality development and the health of its members. Basil Bernstein, in an investigation, found that success in learning, and more fundamentally the growth of intelligence, may be closely related to the type of language learned from earliest years. This has been explained by the theory of John Nisbet that the well-known inverse relation of intelligence and family size is partly due to the lesser development of language through the more limited contacts of children with their parents in large families (32). Some furtier evidence has been provided by Jean Floud and her collaborators, and by Elizabeth Frizer, all indicating that the children of small-sized families do better in school, while children from large families were found to be handicapped (33).

On the matter of health in relation to family size, again Hare and Shaw in a study of 499 urban families have shown that:

"For mothers, and to a less extent for father, the rates of various indices of ill-health increased progressively with the number of their children ...

The higher rates of ill-health in the parents of larger families, particularly in the mothers, probably reflect the increased strain imposed on them by caring for a larger number of children" (34).

The same authors found also that:

"Poor health in one parent was associated with poor health in the other parent and in the children" (35).

One of the outstanding characteristic features of the family in the developing countries is its relatively large size. The UNESCO authors of "Culture and Human Fertility" writing on "Asian Pattern of Fimily Life" states, as follows:

"Under conditions where about half of all infants born alive die before reaching maturity, the anxiety for sons, even for the assured survival of a single son, results in large families... the father, to meet his religious and social needs, in an Asiatic society requires about five children He often has many more" (36)

However it may be, the fact is that family size in developing countries, with all its consequences, is notably larger than in the festern Countries.

VIII - COMPLICATIONS OF POLYGAMY

Polygamy is a custom almost exclusively found among develoring nations. Needless to say, if a community is called polygamous, it is not necessarily assumed that polygamy is the rule,
but merely that it is permitted under certain circumstances.
Polygamy is declining. However, it still is practised. A byproduct of polygamy is the increase of half related persons,
i.e. children of the various wives of a husband, being involved
in a half-relationship. This step-relationship has been, through
the ages, the kernel of hostility and conflict within the family.

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in Great Britain goes to the help of about 1,300,300 children each year (39). Although there are no statistics at hand nevertheless the conditions seem to require more consideration in the developing countries.

IX - L. ADLYJACY OF SCHOOLS

human civilization depend, to a great degree, upon how well chils fulfil their objectives and how well children learn the thills which will enable them to face the crises of tomorrow. In m derr concepts of educational theories the emphasis is more on reaching into the culture to satisfy purposes rather than on an embling elements of the culture and imposing them on the public and youth for life; or it may be said, that the aim of the school is living - a purposeful living - itself are the schools of developing mations fulfilling this aim? The answer, unfortunately is not very flattering.

lindia" observes.

"One main defect of the existing system is that it is unilineal and that all the pupils, regardless of differing aptitudes and abilities, are pressed into one pattern. The multi-purpose school as a corrective to this 'single-track' yetem, provides a diversity of educational programme on the form of electives ... The successful functioning of these schools is, at the moment, somewhat hampered by the shortage of trained and suitable qualified teachers in the practical streams and the Government is emocycled in finding a solution to this problem." (4)

Or we red in "becomery Education in Abia" on Frends and Problems of Education in Ce, lon" as tollows.

"The cira of caucation imparted in many schools is still so hish a datacrnined by the needs of examinations rather than by the country's economic development" (41)

we trace almost the sme pattern of shortcoming in indinesian education.

"In view of the rigid development of the country's industrial economic industrial economic industrials for the the balance between econdary general and vocational education has to be restored...The idea in now adopted of a distribution of 70 percent for vocational and 30 per cint for general equation of the state is such that the

diversion of more funds for vocational education could only be at the expense of general education.

...Although 60 per cent of the time is devoted to professional subjects, graduates of vocational schools are still considered inadequately equipped to cope with their future task' (42).

The MILGOO educational mission to Burma, on criticish of the curriculum of the public schools, indicates that:

"The present system does not suit the majority of the school population of Burma. It is dominated by a mistaken notion that all have the qualities necessary for higher education at the University, despite the flot that a very small percentage of the output from the schools have neither the Jesire nor the capacity to profit by university training...

The children of Burma will one day be the workers and man the country's industries, its farms, its worksnops, its oifices and its commercial establishments. Figure future is to work for themselves, their families and for Burma. The schools should fit them for the life they are to laid" (43).

Thus the schools of developing countries, if they tend to be conservative, radically ambitious educational bodies, fail to cope with the requirements of the rapidly transitional stage of these changing cultures and are upt to produce a herd of sophisticated, unsatisfied, dependent, helpless, suspicious, suffering, and rebellious angry youth (44). So in many cases inadequate curriculums of developing countries can, and indeed do, easily turn the integrative factor of education in mental health into a disintegrative one.

Fortunately, nowever, many authorities in the Governments have recognized this trend and are carefully studying the class between the old and new values, between the needs and possibilities, between quality and quantity.

In summary, this is an age of rapid transition like of which has seldon humanity seen and this change has brought about consequences some of which have mixed repacts.

a number of nations and health and education authorities have given due attention to this trend by guiding youth for

creative use of their leisure time and for better education of both the young and the old to accept new values. nations will undoubtedly follow the trend. The fact that to a great extent the social malady has been diagnosed, even if no treatment has as yet been administered, is a very promising and hopeful sign indeed!

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