



## Importance of Family in Mental Retardation

Dr Anuradha Singh, Clinical Psychologist, Assistant Professor (Department of Psychology)

Omprakash Sharma, Special educator

### The role of the proposed research.

The issue of mental retardation or handicap has an international stature. India being the second most populous country in the world, the proportion of mentally handicapped persons in the country is quite alarming. Unfortunately, no national census has been carried out, to estimate the actual number of mentally handicapped in India. Several sample surveys have been carried out from time to time. According to this estimate, about 3 percent of the population is supposed to be retarded, of which 75 percent is mildly retarded, 20 percent moderately severely retarded and 5 percent belong to the category of profound retardation requiring custodial care (Anima Sen, 1992).

Mental retardation has existed since pre-historic times, but the earliest evidence dates back only to pre-dynastic Egypt. Harris and Weeks (1973) noted certain skeletal anomalies associated with mental retardation through X-ray examinations of ancient Egyptian mummies. Gurra (1971) found evidence of mental retardation across temporal and cultural periods in the pre-colombian civilizations of the Mayas, Incas and Aztecs.

Superstitious thinking, exorcism and fear of the retarded began to dissipate with the advent of renaissance. The first serious and systematic attempt to teach a retarded boy was made only in the nineteenth century when the French Physician, Jean Itard (1801) wrote about his endeavour to educate the feral child, Victor, otherwise known as the wild boy of Aveyron. Though he failed in his pioneering educational attempts, Itard aroused considerable interest in the retarded throughout Europe.

Equally important was the continuation of Itard's work by his student Seguin (1812-80), the most eminent figure in the nineteenth century in the training of the mentally retarded. The contribution of Alfred Binet (1857-1911) the founder of intelligence testing movement ushered in a new era for the identification and training of the mentally retarded. Since then, concerted efforts have been made to improve the quality of life of the mentally handicapped.

After a long period of apathy and neglect, the mentally retarded are becoming a concern for all professional groups in the health and social sciences.

### Steps of the proposed research.

#### The Concept of Mental Retardation

The concept of mental retardation is made more complex because the varying disciplines that deal with it hold widely divergent viewpoints. The literature on mental retardation suggests strongly that conceptual issues are complex and somewhat unclear (Barnett, 1986; Tarjan, 1989). Professionals often respond to an initial request to define mental retardation by discussing what it is not and describing causes. Clarifying the concept of mental retardation has become increasingly complex as many previously unknown factors are taken into account.

#### Definitions

There is a plethora of definitions explaining mental retardation. Definitions and classifications of mental retardation have varied greatly over the years according to the factors receiving attention and the age groups of primary concern. Parents generally express negative feelings (Waisbern, 1984). Social scientists have supported that the parents experience enormous changes including serious symptoms of psychological stress.

### Significance of the proposed research.

The mentally retarded will always be with us, it is even probable that the total number of such children will increase with the passage of time. However, medical advances, genetic counselling, improved nutrition, education regarding preventable retardation and early intervention can save those who would have died, say 50 or 100 years ago. Research has clearly indicated that biomedical prevention is likely to have



a significant impact on the incidence of handicapping conditions (Richardson and Koller, 1985). However, other undesirable forces could increase the number of retarded persons. For example, population explosion, atmospheric mediation levels, increase in alcoholism and substance abuses, increase in syphilis, natural or manmade calamities, disasters: such as Bhopal Gas tragedy of 1984, and Chernobyl disaster in Russia could increase the number of mentally retarded.

### Objectives of the proposed research.

Studies on the mothers of the Retarded Children Studies on the family reactions. Role of Family in Training Studies in relation to Home Environment. Studies on the Care of Mentally handicapped Children. Studies on Family Stress. It is widely assumed that involving parents will effect changes in the child directly (Herby and Murray 1984, Baker, Heifitz and Singh, 1980) as a result of enhancing parental management skills or indirectly improving family functioning through support and counselling.

Yule (1975) discussed the various advantages of training parents in behavioural principles which are equally applicable for any kind of programmes for the mentally handicapped persons and their families.

### Findings of the proposed research.

Studies on the mothers when reviewed indicates the parental expectations, child's performance and the coping are related (Miller, 1986; 1988; Hunt Paraskevopolous, 1980; Yoder & Farran; 1986; Tiamond & Lefurgy, 1992;) Mothers simplify their speech and modulate their behaviour in response to the child's level of functioning (Bruner; 1988; Bel, 1974; Als., 1982). Mother's risk and prevention appraisals also played a role in their attitudes toward future child bearing. Maternal, paternal and child interactions are studied, the communicative behaviour of the retarded child towards the parents were less and frequent spousal interchanges with regard to the child was found (Levy Shiff; 1991).

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