CHILDHOOD BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS: EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS AND REMEDIES

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Abstract

If behavioral patterns of children are closely observed, we will understand them and know how to relate with them and assist them. Home is said to be the bedrock of every behavior in children, to this end it is advisable for parents to make more time to interact with their children to help them from stress and rejection. There should be affection on children. Children should be handled the way it is supposed to be. There is a saying "don't spare the rod and spoil the child". Every disciplinary action on any bad behavior would be meted on children to help them achieve in life. Students who have behavioral or emotional disorders can exhibit widely varied types of behavior, including both internalized behavior (such as depression or an eating disorder) and externalized behavior (such as verbal out bursts). Other common characteristics and behavior include these: Hyperactivity (short attention span, impulsiveness), aggression or self-injurious behavior (acting out, fighting), withdrawal (failure to initiate interaction with others, retreat from exchanges of social interaction excessive fear or anxiety, Immaturity (inappropriate crying, temper tantrums, poor coping skills), learning difficulties (academic performance below grade level).

Introduction

Many attempts have been made to understand the development of behavior problems. Early attempts frequently implied the work of demons and heavenly retribution. Recently, sophisticated theories have taken the place of superstition and have done much to explain the dynamics of behavior development. Other researches too have approached behavior problems from an epidemiological view point and have examined their distribution in the population in terms of their relationship with particular environmental and other developmental factors.

In recent years a distinction has been drawn between "problem children" and "children with problem", both of whom are likely to be "Disruptive Children".

School for many children is a problem, so is learning; so is relating to some teachers, meeting their requirements, getting to grips with their "understanding" of the pupil/teacher relationship. There is some evidence to suggest that some children find relating to teachers more problematic than others and need more help in adjusting to the demands made upon them. There is also evidence to suggest that this facet of schooling is not all one sided; teachers also have their own problems; they find it easier to relate to some children than others. If one accepts that in order to explain the difficulties people experience in interacting with others around them, that one needs to take into account both sides of interaction, then a socio-psychological perspective may be sought. As well as for the "disruptive child" the child who presents a severe and persistent non-conformity there is "disruptive behavior". This may refer to the occasional or persistent behavior of groups of children, or whole classes, and very rarely, to the behavior typical of large number of children in "a difficult school". The behavior of disruptive children may be disruptive at certain moments, but children who are not "disruptive children may also exhibit "disruptive behavior" more or less frequently; these distinctions are obvious but important.

Every stage of development in human life has its own peculiar behavioral disposition. Childhood stage is not an exception. Some of the behavioral trends of childhood are deviant which turns the child into a nuisance at home, in the school and

in the streets. This write up will explore the childhood behavioral problems, educational implications and remedies to the observed problems. In the process, maladjusted behaviors of the child shall be isolated and examined for treatment with the aim of mastering their antics.

To be able to look critically at the topic, let's see what scholars have said about behaviors.

Procter (1979) defined behavior as "a way of behaving to try to show one's best behavior". Herbert (1978) postulated the following hypotheses subsequent behavior... that it is the social world which actually shapes behavior… that behavior development and change emerge out of a combination of physical maturation and socialization.

Having been exposed to what behavior means, we will now look at the behavioral problems of the child at the third stage of human development (childhood). Even though there are many behavioral problems of the child, we shall consider just few.

Childhood as a Level of Human Development

Childhood stage in human development begins from the age of two years to approximately eleven years in girls and thirteen years in boys. At these periods, they are sexually mature. The period is subdivided into two that is the early childhood and the later childhood respectively. The early childhood begins from two years to six years while the late childhood extends from here to eleven years and above.

Oladele (1989) affirmed that there is no agreement among writers as to the exact period of early and late childhood. According to him the pre-school or early childhood extends from two to six years and late childhood extends from six to approximately eleven years plus.

In another allusion, Ukpong, (2000) mentioned the early childhood in her summary, and agreed that during this period the child undergoes rapid growth and development physically, mentally and emotionally. Physically the child increases in size, the bones harden, develops complete set of teeth,

emotionally the child can express love, anger, fear, etc. and mentally can engage in problem solving activities, generalization and offer answers to cause and effect relationship.

Theories of Childhood Development

A theory according to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary is "a set of properly argued ideas intended to explain facts or events". The theories which explain events and facts of childhood are divided into three categories:

1. Psychoanalytic theories based on the works of Sigmund Frued and Erik Erikson gives importance to unconscious maturations. Erikson divided childhood psychoanalytical development into two stages: a period of "INITIATIONS" and "GUILT", the time the child may express autonomy (initiative) after learning the rudiments of right and wrong. At this point if the parents or teachers over moralize they cause the child to feel bad and withdraw. He postulates the second stage to be that of "INDUSTRY AND INFERIORITY" where the child denotes his energy to self-improvement and conquest of his environment. In the process, he realizes that he is in the midst of adults and therefore inexperienced. This may lead to feeling of inferiority which could become a complex.

2. The Behavioristic Theories of Child Development

    This lays emphasis on stimulus - response association. In line with these theories is Robert Bears, an American Child psychologist who classified childhood into two phases of:

    (a) Secondary Behavioral System - where a child's training begins at home, and the child learns by imitating his parents. This culminates finally in identifying with peers.

    (b) Secondary Motivational Systems - where the child at the age of five years plus leaves home for school thus increasing contact and accelerating socialization. The teacher becomes a new support for the child's dependence. As the environmental enforces increase the child

identifies with models which best satisfies his needs. If adults fail to provide desirable model, the child identifies with his peers.

(c) Cognitive Theories of Child Development
These theories lay emphasis on perception and its organization. Among them is Jean Piaget who sees the cognitive development in the child in two phases - PRE-OPERATIONAL where the child acquires elementary vocabulary appropriate to his experience, the child can also extract concepts and manipulate objects in the mind. The second stage of CONCRETE OPERATIONAL presents the child with the ability to think logically and rationally about problems that he faces.

These theories revealed that a child may unconsciously form guilt or some complex deprivation, loneliness, inability to co-ordinate, etc. These may surface in terms of one deviant behavior or another.

Behavioral Problems of Childhood

The behavioral problems of the child are those behaviors which according to Williams (1974) "are against school or class routine practice and minor rules". They constitute problems to teachers and parents. Some of them are:-

1. **Delinquency:** More than 2000 years ago, an Egyptian priest carved on a stone "Our earth is degenerate; children no longer obey their parents". As far as his time, Socrates bitterly attacked youths describing them in the following terms: "bad manners; contempt for authority; disrespect for the elder; children nowadays are tyrants (Shertzer and Stone, 1981). Nonetheless, it has been noted that all through history "denouncing" the young has been tonic for tired blood, and defying elder's hygiene for the young".

The foregoing suggests that children no longer obey their parents, delinquency is now new problem. Today, it includes not only the more serious offences such as burglary, assault, and robbery but also "state offences"
- acts such as curfew violations (in the U- S. A), truancy, running away, sexual activity, "incorrigibility" which would not constitute violations of the law if committed by an adult. Nonetheless, current rates of delinquency are causes for serious concern in many countries of the world.

2. **Phobic Anxiety:** Phobia would be regarded as an extreme and recurrent fear which is maladaptive and serve no useful purpose. Robert Burton commenting on the torment of phobic anxiety in Herbert (1979) said "They that live in fear are never free, resolute, serene, marry, but in continual pain. No greater misery, no rack, no torture like unto it". Similarly, school refuses are anxious because for some reasons they cannot cope outside the home. Truancy would be regarded as higher degree of school phobia. These are groups of children who are non-attenders, whose parents do not usually know their whereabouts, let alone about their absence. They go elsewhere and amuse themselves and are much seen as rebels. One can rightly classify refusal and truancy as quite emotional problems.

3. **Separation Anxiety:** Furthermore, separation anxiety is another element of risk in children. Here, both literature and empirical evidence show that this is likely to affect the mental health of the child and lead to delinquent character development, emotional maladjustment and persistent misbehavior and affect the child's academic performance. These sets of children tend to be more demanding clinging and susceptible to separation anxiety than those cared for at home. This pattern of behavior is particularly evidence in the girls. On this Herbert, (1997) states; should such tendencies persist, the girls would tend to grow up anxious and neurotic, while the boys will be bullies and delinquent.

4. **Temper Tantrums: Tantrums occur when children have frustration or stress. There**

May be other feelings such as fear, feeling unwanted or jealousy.

5. **Lying:** Why do children lie? There are several possible answers. Children lie (as they cheat) in order to compensate for real or imagined deficiencies. They lie, as adults do, to protect themselves from social embarrassment or to escape the inevitable (and possible painful consequences of their actions). A child who has broken a vase may say that it was done by the cat so that he will not be criticized for carelessness, which he equates with badness. Genuine lack of insight can also make children lie'. No child is ever to blame when he or his brother fights. It is always the other child who started it. In a large and awe inspiring world, most children are bound to feel somewhat insignificant and inadequate. The child - at the mercy of the adult world in which he finds himself develops early in life - "a life style consisting of attitudes and patterns of behavior which help him to compensate for his inferiority feelings, and it provides the basis of his adult character and personality". Lying is just one of the strategies used by children to maintain self-concept. The strategy may be discarded as the child gains more confidence and power, but some individuals go on lying into adulthood and in the end cannot even distinguish between truth and falsehood.

6. **Aggression:** Collins, in Clarizo and Mecoy (1976) defined aggression as a tendency to attack, usually in response to interference or opposition or to take the initiative vigorously". Aggressive behavior in children is the cool calculating type designed to produce a reward to the individual. Aggressive children find it difficult in getting along with others and are likely to become delinquent when they grow older.

7. **Stealing**: One of the biggest problems for those who live in an acquisitive society, but who know that they have a less than average chance of acquiring much for themselves out of that society, is what to do with their envy.

The simplest reaction to a society that puts people in this position is to steal from it.

The stealing done by young people is very often not simply on avaricious attempt to acquire more goods; it is more than that. Very often, to the young, it seems to be an act of aggression against what is felt to be an unfair world. It is also, in very many cases, an attempt to replace symbolically what is missing from life in the way of affection and security.

Chandler (1980) affirms, "Stealing, infect, is probably the most frequent act of aggression by both boys and girls against the adults in their lives. But where boys break and enter, girls simply lift what is around. Shoplifters and pilferers are never ending menace in schools and a high proportion of them are girls."

Stealing, however, should be taken seriously. Girls, who are likely to have strong sense of morality inculcated into them from an earlier age than boys, are usually well aware that they are doing what they themselves believe to be wrong when they steal. If a girl steals money, parents should take it more seriously than when a boy steals.

The well taught child learns early that it is wrong to take or use the possessions of others without their permission. Children learn that acts of stealing are wrong when parents label them as wrong, and punish children for continuing to do them. A child can be stopped from stealing if he is reprimanded sharply just before or after the act. Stealing is a juvenile crime.

8. **The Hyperactive Syndrome**: This is the name for one of the most trying problems a mother or teacher has to cope with; the overactive child, who never sits still.

Such a "hyperactive" child faces severe impediments to achieving success at school, because his problems militate against efficient learning. First of all, he suffers intense and disorganized over activity. This in

turn, is associated with distractibility, a very short span of attention, and impulsiveness. Also, more often than not, children with these problems do not get on very well with their peers, being aggressive and rather destructive. Their control over their emotions may be limited, and trivial setback may trigger sudden and violent outbursts of rage, while stressful situations may precipitate panic attacks. Ruther (1979) who has made a study on these youngsters has this to say; these children are the despair of the school teacher. They are usually of below average intelligence and may show any of the foregone abnormalities - delay in speech, clumsiness, difficulty in learning to read, poor perception and understanding of shape relationships and difficulties in differentiating right from wrong. Often, the children have fits.

9. **Bullying:** This is ongoing aggression by a child or children against other children. It can have detrimental effects on all involved.

10. **Autism:** This is a complex disorder which affects a child's ability to interact with the world around them. Signs of autism include poor speech and a lack of interest in other people.

11. **Shyness:** A shy child is anxious and inhibited in unfamiliar situations or when interacting with others. Most children feel shy from time to time, but the lives of some are severely restricted by their shyness.

12. **Enuries:** This is the tendency of a child to soil him not just at night but in day time.

13. **Truancy:** This is exhibited in a child when he or she avoids school and learning after leaving home on pretext of going to school.

Patterns of Maladjustment

All the above behaviors can be observed in these types of behavioral disorders.

(a) **The Socialized Aggressive:** The socialized aggressive child is one who defies authority figure (Police Officer, teachers and so forth), is cruel, malicious, and assaultive and has no guilt feeling. Children of this type come from homes where they receive no love or attention in infancy. They developed no attachments to anyone or to any group. In psychoanalytical terms, they did not develop a super-ego or conscience.

(b) **The Socialized Aggressive:** The socialized aggressive child has the same characteristics or behavioral problems as the socialized aggressive, but is socialized within his or her peer group; usually the gang or companions, in misdemeanor and crime. Unlike the unsocialised aggressive child, the child had some security with the mother figure in infancy but was later rejected.

(c) **The Over-Inhibited Child:** The over-inhibited child is shy, timid, withdrawn, reclusive, sensitive, and submissive. He or she is over-dependent and easily depressed. Such children in the study come mostly from over-protective families in the higher socio-economic levels.

(d) **The Inadequate - Immature:** This refers to children who are rated as inattentive, sluggish, lacking interest in the school, lazy, preoccupied, day- dreamers, drowsy and reticent. They resemble children sometimes labeled autistic or prepsychotic. They appear to be less able to function in the regular classroom than do children who are labeled neurotic or children with conduct disorders.

(e) **The Impulsive Child:** Characterizing this syndrome are extreme negative behavior such as restiveness in class, impatience, disrespect - defiance, external blame mixed with inattentiveness, and irrelevant responsiveness.

Factors Associated with Behavior Problems of Childhood

There are many factors that are associated with behavior problems of childhood. These include:

(a) **Home Background:** Home plays many parts in the life of the growing child. It is the natural source of affection, the place where he can live with a sense of security. Level (1973) states that: "psychoanalytic theory suggests that some of the first emotional attitudes are

brought about by the relationship involved in feeding and tending, while some psychoanalysts have maintained that a predisposition to anxiety is present in the infant at birth". This presupposes that security and insecurity is engendered in the early tending process and this insecurity leads to further anxiety in the child at a later stage of development. Therefore, the better the child - mother relationship, the more likely it is that the child will achieve the capacity to give and receive affection. Despite the mother's good relationship with the child, there will still exist some frustrations caused by relations, sisters/brothers and house maid/nanny who look after the child while the mother is away to work (working-class mother). This will consequently make the child to react with anxiety or aggression at a later age. Freudian theory suggests that a child out of imaginations, builds up images not associated with his parents but, of exaggerated personifications of the 'good' and 'bad' qualities; that is 'good and 'bad' in the sense of the parents' attitudes being gratifying or frustrating to him- These parental figures are then internalized so that some of the parental qualities or their opposites are built into the child's personality. The 'Ego' and 'Super-ego' or 'Conscience' might be over-severe. Then, the 'Ego' may not be able to perform its proper functions, thus, the individual may have difficulty in his relationships with others, and his mental health may suffer. Herbert (1979) is of the opinion that "the vast majority of juvenile delinquents come from poor families living in deteriorating, economically deprived neighborhood, usually adjacent to the center of a city". Personal insecurities and psychological problems stemming from disturbed family relationship also loom large in the delinquent's background.

It is assumed that delinquent children are extremely discontented at home and disturbed because of upsetting experiences with their families. Most of them feel rejected by their parents, deprived, insecure, jealous of their brothers/sisters and uncomfortable about family tensions or parental misconduct. It appears that parents of delinquents are usually lax or erratic in disciplining their children. They tend to use punishments and ridicule as disciplinary techniques more commonly that other parents whose children tend to conform to normal behavior.

(b) **Peer Groups:** In pursuance of this discussion, consideration would be given to children's playmates - peer group. The proverb 'evil communication corrupts good manners' might be tenable here. Within, as well as outside school, the child makes relationships with his peers, which become increasingly important to him from the age of eight years. Studies of social grouping in school have shown that children who are rejected or neglected by their peer are often emotionally maladjusted and the converse may be true. The very fact that he is not part of the group will indeed, cause distress to a child, particularly in the latter primary school years. When playing with their playmates that use force, threat, to attain their goal, they would tend to react the same way. But when they are with one who is socially mature and constructive, they are likely to become more cooperative, tend to seek common purposes in activity and use requests and suggestions rather than force.

(c) **Hostility in the School:** If teachers do not mind their language, they will emigrate children immensely by calling them names that are harmful to their ego. Names such as 'idiot', 'goat', 'sheep', 'dunce' and 'fool' are harmful. A school in which teachers do not interact with children will encourage truancy and wanton destruction of school property. A conducive school climate will go a long way in curbing behavioral maladjustment to both children and teachers.

(d) **Over Protective Parenting:** Children who are petted and over protected cannot live independently. When challenges come, they cannot handle it and thus become maladjusted in the face of it.

(e) **Poverty:** A lack of basic needs due to poverty can encourage stealing and other behaviors aimed at meeting the basic needs. Most children exhibit behavioral problems when they lack some basic needs. Sometimes they do bad things like stealing in the school and using bullying to get what they want at a particular time.

Educational Implications of Behavioral Problems of Children

The implications of a disturbed child through any of the behaviors mentioned above in the classroom setting is that learning does not take place on such children. There may be effective teaching but the teacher will at the end of the class discover that the children do not learn. This observation at the end of the class will assist the teacher to develop some skills to enable him assist the children to do well. He sometimes can do this by referring them to the counseling unit of the school for counseling.

The observation of the teacher of the disturbed children will assist him to identify the maladjusted children to enable him give them appropriate help. The teacher will be able to arrange the children according to maladjusted problems. It will also help the teacher to bear in mind their problem so as to plan his lesson according to their problems.

In another development, the implication of this is that it enables the teacher to group learners according to their intellectual abilities, provide slow learners with remedial courses. It assists him to ensure that individual attention is given to each learner and also teaches from simple to complex.

Sometimes, a child who is weak in a subject has fears each time this subject is taught. Thus the teacher should be able to give attention to learners with emotional problems which shows itself during this childhood period. The attention given would help restore confidence in the learners.

It encourages the teachers to give assistance to students with adjustment problems such as from home to school and peer relationship. Since at

this level children are always provoked more often, the teachers' understanding of behavior problems will be able to make him accept the children and interact with them to help them cope with the system.

Finally, it is important, valuable and forces teachers to be specific and accountable to whatever line of action they have taken. It is also an extra tool for teachers.

Remedies

Since adjustment in a child posed a problem on him, it will be necessary as a teacher to provide remedies to the behavioral problems to help the child achieve. The remedies are:

(a)   Positive Reinforces: Present a positive stimulus (a rewarding event or object) following the desired behavior. You should arrange matters so that an immediate reward follows the performance of desired behavior. These include tangible - materials reinforce (treats, privileges, sweets, money, etc.), intangible - social reinforces such as hugs, smiles, encouragement, etc.

(b)   Modeling: Provision of an appropriate model would solve some problems. Let the child observe a person who is interested or significant to him performing the new and desired pattern of behavior.

(c)   Cueing: Encourage the child to respond to cues for the correct performance just before the actions is expected, rather than after he has performed incorrectly - in order to train him to act at a specific time. This principle can be applied to remedy the poorly motivated, underachieving child's performance.

Cues are among the most important behaviors used by the classroom teacher to control behavior. A cue can be defined as anything used (e.g. Instructs, encourages) as a means of informing the pupils about the responses they should make (e.g. Concentrating on the pupil's capacity to make). By presenting cues and withdrawing others (fading), the teacher can become an

effective contingency manager, attaining stimulus control over certain crucial classroom behavior.

(d) Extinction: This implies the withdrawal of attention on a child following his inappropriate behaviors. For instance, if affection is shown on the particular child in both the home and the school, the child tries to behave normally and if abnormal behavior is exhibited and one withdraws this love, the child will try to correct his or herself to please the parents or the teacher in class.

(e) At this feeling level, parents, teachers should show affection to children and treat them as individuals.

(f) Parents and teachers should learn to interact with these children to make them feel they belong.

(g) Peer group membership should be encouraged because it is not dangerous at this level. Teachers and parents should not reject it, but should use sociometrics to identify peer inclination and direct it.

(h) Punishment: Positive punishment should be given to children when they possess maladjusted behaviors.

(i) Role-Playing: There should be a role-playing of a problem in form of drama to help a person to learn new skills, initiate rehearsal of the required behavior under the direction of a teacher or parent.

(j) Flooding (Implosion): Bring the child into contact with the most feared item on the hierarchy and keep him in contact with it until the fear has been extinguished. Essentially, there is an immediate and sustained confrontation with the strongly aversive stimulus, either in real life or in the imagination.

(k) Desensitization-Active Participation: Help the child to overcome his fear of a particular situation by exposing him gradually and more closely to the feared situation while he is being rewarded or is feeling comfortable or secure-perhaps in the company of a supportive person.

Conclusion

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Home is said to be the bedrock of every behavior in children, to this end it is advisable for parents to make more time to interact with their children to help them from stress and rejection. There should be affection on children. Children should be handled the way it is supposed to be. There is a saying "don't spare the rod and spoil the child". Every disciplinary action on any bad behavior would be meted on children to help them achieve in life.

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