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Levels of social maturity among normal and street children

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Abstract

Social maturity is a process by which adolescents acquire the habit, attitudes, skills and standards that their families and social group value for adulthood. The three components of social maturity are Personal adequacy, interpersonal adequacy and social adequacy. The present study plans to observe and compare Social maturity status of normal and street children. One of the major social problems found by our nation is 'Street Children'. To tackle this burning problem there is a need to conduct research on various related factors leading children to streets for their rehabilitation. The total size of the sample of the subjects selected for the present research is 175 children of 12-15 years consists of 100 normal children and 75 street children. The children were subjected to interview schedule on Life profile to obtain general information. To assess the social maturity status of the subjects, Rao's social maturity scale. There is significant difference between normal and street children regarding their social maturity status. This indicates that children from families with high income, education and social support provided better life opportunities to their children. This is lacking in families of street children.

Keywords: Social maturity status, normal and street children, rehabilitation

Introduction

The most vulnerable of a nation's resource is its children. It is the bounden duty of a nation to ensure that every child is adequately housed, clothed, fed and trained so that it is able to enjoy the pleasures of childhood. Street children are a growing phenomenon of modern times, especially in the urban centres rapid and unplanned urbanization. The pressures of rural poverty contribute to the increasing tide of urban migration sending millions of the metropolis add to the population of the urban poor and the slum dwellers there in.

Certain basic factors accompany family loss, it is most usually not a something that happens overnight. but a gradual process or cycle which begins with rural to urban migration, frustration and deprivation (Family Abandonment) in city slums, the living up and leaving of father (mother abandonment) and the inability of the mother to cope economically or otherwise Child abandonment (UNICEF)

UNICEF indicated major causes of this phenomenon of street children as poverty in rural areas, family disintegration, school dropouts and vagrancy. Families who struggle for livelihood in slums and deteriorating social environment in urban poor neighbourhood also contribute to the growing number of street children.

Social Maturity is a "process by which adolescents acquire the habit, attitude, skills and standards that their families and social group value for adulthood". A child's perception of work related skills and development of proper attitudes towards work is to be studied for assessing social maturity. The other aspects to be focused are one's own capacity to independently act and exercise control over one's actions, an ability to exhibit appropriate emotional stability and react without embarrassing either himself or in group he is in, ability understand, write, communicate and make clear meaningful speech and gestures etc. There are various factors which can influence the social maturity of an individual. They are family background, type of family, socio-economic conditions of the family, living conditions, and also the education of as individual can also influence the social maturity of an individual.

The main thrust of the present research is to study and compare various dimensions of social maturity status among normal and street children of 12-15 yrs. It also emphasizes on family back ground and life profile of street children. The period of early adolescence was selected because the preliminary survey revealed that majority of the street children are belonging to this age group. And this period is also important due to the impact of peer group on the levels of social maturity and intelligence.

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- To assess the social maturity status among normal and street children
- To examine the significant difference between normal and street children with reference to social maturity levels

Methods and Materials Used

Sample: The study was carried out in the city of Tirupathi in Andhra Pradesh. The total sample selected for the present study was 175 children of 12-15 yrs of which normal children were 100 and street were 75. The subjects were selected irrespective of sex and socio-economic status.

Sample Selection: For normal children Two stages random sampling method was used to select normal children. In the first stage, four schools were selected at random. Two private and two government schools were selected and a random of 25 students is taken from each school. Thus, a two stage random sample of 100 normal children is selected for the present study. For Street children in the first stage a random sample of three areas were selected where street children are found. They are Railway station, Bus stand and Koneru Katta. In each of the selected areas a random sample of 75 street children is selected proportionately. Thus a two stage random sample of 75 street children is taken.

Tools Used

- Interview Schedule on Life Profile of Street Children:** It was developed by the investigator. It consists of the components like General information of the subjects, Family background, Living conditions, Health status, Food habits, Education, working conditions/occupations of the subjects, Recreational and socio-emotional behaviour and Future aspirations of the subjects.
- Rao's Social Maturity Scale (RSMS):** To find out the social maturity status of normal and street children. RSMS is a structured questionnaire consisting of 90 questions. The 90 questions of RSMS are in English version. For the purpose of convenience, the questionnaire schedule was translated into local language (Telugu) by the investigator.

The three dimensions of Social Maturity and its components are given below.

1. Personal Adequacy (PA): Work Orientation (WO), Self-direction (SD), Ability to take stress (AS)
2. Inter-personal Adequacy (IPA): Communication (CM), Enlightened Trust (ET), Cooperation (CO)
3. Social Adequacy (SA): Social Commitment (SC), Social Tolerance (ST), Openness to change (OC)

Scoring

There are 90 items in the questionnaire, each item was accorded a four point response spread the intervals of which were labelled as "strongly Agree", "agree", "Dis agree", and "strongly Disagree". The successive response intervals were subsequently scored 4,3,2,1 and 1,2,3,4 with the high score responding mature response. Thus it is possible to obtain the scores of three dimensions and the total social maturity score for each observation. The mean scores were taken in order to classify them into two categories as "High" and "Low" levels of Social Maturity.

Results and Discussion

The data collected was systematically classified, tabulated and analysed. The research findings were discussed with

percentages, Z values and chi-square values. The relevant intervention programmes were suggested while discussing the findings.

Table 1: Levels of Social maturity of Subjects (n=175)

| Subjects | n | Mean | S.D | Zo |
|-----------------|-----|--------|-------|--------|
| Normal Children | 100 | 298.22 | 28.72 | 31.73* |
| Street Children | 75 | 206.58 | 34.82 | |

*Significant at 0.01 level

The mean and standard deviation of level of social maturity in normal and street children of 12-15 years and Zo values shows that the mean values of level of social maturity is greater in normal children than street children and there is significant difference among subjects regarding level of social maturity.

A person must have opportunities to learn how to behave in a socially approved way. If his attitudes towards people and social experiences are favourable, he will have the necessary motivation to take advantage of the learning opportunities. But motivation alone is not enough. His learning must be guided and controlled, so that he will win social approval and acceptance. Successful guidance must help him to learn to get along with people and how to adjust to his interest and desires to these of the members of the group with which he is identified. These are the factors which can shape the social behaviour of individuals, their actions, feelings, and thoughts towards society.

The present study reveals that, in case of street children, these opportunities were not provided. Lack of guidance and motivation, creation of an unhealthy environment at home as a result of poverty, bad habits of the parents and also availability of poor models etc. are the major for exhibiting low social maturity status compared to normal children. The scores of different dimensions of social maturity and its components obtained both by normal and street children reveal that normal children obtained high mean values compared to street children. This reveals that the Social maturity status of normal children is higher than the street children.

Many studies have pointed that there is differential socialization of normal and street children with greater emphasis on achievement, competence, independence and assumption of responsibility and inter-personal relationships with others.

Some of the influencing factors for lower social maturity among street children which were evident in the present study are type of family, Area of living, Family issues like Relationship between parents, Family crisis, Parent – Child relationship, Unacceptable Socio-emotional behaviour, Presence of indiscipline and Behavioural problems of the subjects.

Table 2: Type of Family (in Percent)

| Type of Family | NC (n=100) | SC (n=75) |
|----------------|------------|-----------|
| Nuclear | 82 | 65 |
| Extended | 18 | 35 |

From the study it is interesting to know that majority of the street children are coming from the single parent families rather than the intact families. It is because of the existence of broken families due to desertion or separation or death.

Table 3: Area of living

| Area of living | NC (n=100) | SC (n=75) |
|----------------|------------|-----------|
| Urban | 88 | 16 |
| Slum | | 71 |
| Rural | 12 | 13 |

The above table clearly indicates that majority (88%) of the normal children are living in urban areas where as 71% of the street children are living in urban slums. In slum areas children are prone to exposure to various anti-social elements with low morals like drug addiction, alcoholism, prostitution, family violence etc. Continuous exposure to such anti-social activities have great impact on street children. Influence of peer group on children in late childhood and adolescence is also predominant reason for it. Hence it is obvious that street children mostly hail from slum areas.

Table 4: Type of Family crisis of subjects (in percent)

| Type of crisis | N C (n=100) | S C (n=75) |
|----------------|-------------|------------|
| Death | 02 | 20 |
| Divorce | | - |
| Separated | | 30 |
| Desserted | | 38 |
| No Crisis | 98 | 12 |

It is significant to note from the above table that majority (38%) of the street children hail from deserted families. The present study revealed that one of the main reasons for separation and desertion is extra marital relationships of parents. Hence family crisis leads to the problems of street children. Relationship between the parents of the subjects is also a contributing factor for creating an unhealthy atmosphere for the children and that is the reason for a street child who spends considerable time living and eking a livelihood on the streets.

Results indicated that all the parents of the normal children (100%) had cordial relationships which create a healthier, good and encouraging environment for proper development of the child. Where as in the families of the street children quarrels between the parents leading to family disharmony extra marital relationships between the parents (72%) were evident.

The findings suggest that stressful, psychological and emotional experiences in the family lead to deterioration in the child's relationship with the family members and force him to leave home.

Table 5: Unacceptable Socio-emotional behaviour of the subjects (In Percent)

| Socio-emotional behaviour | NC (n=100) | SC (n=75) |
|---------------------------|------------|-----------|
| Aggressive behaviour | 15 | 22 |
| Use of foul language | - | 38 |
| Quarrelling with peers | 06 | 40 |
| Any other | - | - |
| Nil | 79 | - |

It is evident from the above table that street children exhibited unacceptable socio-emotional behaviours viz. Aggression, use of foul language, quarrelling with peers, etc. More frequently than normal children.

Aggressive behaviour is common among children especially when they are angry and unhappy. Though there is not much difference between normal children and street children in their aggressive behaviour, street children differed in use of foul language and quarrelling with peers.

Conclusion

The study shows that there is significant difference between normal and street children regarding their social maturity status. This indicates that children from families of high income, education and social support provided with better life

opportunities. This is lacking in the families of street children. It is evident from the study that use of foul language and quarrelling with peers were the major unacceptable socio-emotional behaviour of the street children. All the selected subjects of the street children hailed from families with frequent quarrels due to poverty, ill health, low morals, addiction etc.

Implications

It is heart rendering to note that many children in our country have lost their childhood. Ever since the days of industrial revolution the children have been found working, living or loitering around in streets, cross roads, public parks, market places, and railway stations etc. The phenomenon seems to have acquired a gigantic dimension in the wake of the rapid industrialization and urbanization.

Based on the result found in the present study, the following intervention programmes were planned to lift the status of street children.

Parental protection and affections is very important in order to improve the harmonious personality development of the children. The poor parenting practices of the parents should be changed in order to bring up- their children in a proper way. The child must be treated as a whole person with attention to his/her psychosocial and emotional needs as well as physical needs.

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