

Mental Hygiene and the Environment

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MODERN science and ultra modern technology offer comfort and pleasure to the human being, but at the same time they place mankind in stressful situations like stockpile of nuclear weapons, fear of nuclear accident, dread of nuclear holocaust, etc. Bedi (1977) has pointed out that the rate of increase of mental problems increases along with the process of modernisation. As a result the human being of modern age faces the hazards of mental ill health. So mental hygiene should be cultivated to overcome the dangers of mental ill health and to attain a good mental health.

Meaning and definition of mental hygiene

Mental hygiene deals with the prevention of mental ill health, preservation of healthy mind in a sound body, protection of a good mental health, promotion of a healthy mental life, control of mental aberration, cure of mental ailments and treatment of psychical disorders.

According to Cavanagh and McGoldrick (1958), mental hygiene is the science and art of maintaining mental health and preventing the development of mental disorders. Crow and Crow (1948) mention that mental hygiene is concerned with human welfare. It pervades all fields of human relationship.

Aims and objectives of mental hygiene

The main aims and objectives of mental hygiene are to achieve a good mental health and to prevent mental illness. Appropriate education in mental hygiene can prevent many of the mental disturbances and maladjustments. Bedi (1977) has mentioned that mental hygiene includes the techniques which promote and maintain mental health.

The three major purposes of mental hygiene are: (a) the development of understanding of the relationship between development of personality and experiences of life, (b) improvement of mental health, and (c) use of therapeutic techniques for treatment of mental patients (Crow and Crow, 1948).

Relation between mental hygiene and mental health

There is a close relationship between mental hygiene and mental health. Mental hygiene is the way for achieving a good mental health which is the ultimate goal of human life. Mental hygiene is the science of mental discipline, but mental health is the healthy state of mind. Mental health is the well-being of body, mind and soul. Both mental hygiene and mental health deal with the human well-being. They are intimately related with each other. Mental hygiene is the means, but mental health is the end.

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Principles of mental hygiene

The undernoted principles of mental hygiene should be followed to attain a good mental health: (1) to determine the goal of life; (2) to develop a sound philosophy of life; (3) to break bad habits; (4) to form a good habit system; (5) to eliminate environmental factors causing mental ill health; (6) to modify the environmental conditions suitably for achieving a good mental health; (7) to face the reality, but not to withdraw from it; (8) to accept the hardships of life, but not to avoid them; (9) to participate in social activities actively; (10) to contribute constructively to changes in the environment; (11) to resolve mental conflict; (12) to tolerate frustration; (13) to be neat in body and clean in dress; (14) to control emotional excitement; (15) to build a good moral character; and (16) to have peace of mind.

Relation between mental hygiene and environment

Mental hygiene is concerned with the prevention of environmental conditions which are responsible for causing mental ill health. An unhygienic environment produces maladjusted persons and anti-social elements. But a hygienic environment brings out well-adjusted persons and socially desired people. According to Crow and Crow (1948) parents and educators must eliminate the dangers to mental health that are inherent in the environmental conditions. Mental hygiene and environment are very closely related. The standard of mental hygiene cannot be improved without the improvement of environment. According to Murphy (1964) an environment may be stimulating and helpful to some one, but the same environment may produce a meagre result with others.

Importance of mental hygiene in prenatal environment

Environment has a definite influence on human life and behaviour. Prenatal environment includes the stages and situations of embryonic life in mother's womb. Mother supplies nutrition and oxygen to the growing embryo through her own blood during her pregnancy. If the pregnant mother suffers from malnutrition, anaemia, German measles, etc., the development of the embryo will be hampered definitely. If the pregnant mother smokes heavily, premature birth may take place.

Bedi (1977) has mentioned that mental hygiene programme in the maternity services provides the ante-natal care and general hygiene nutrition. According to Sorenson (1964) certain events during congenital period of life or gestation may influence the physical or mental development of the child. If the pregnant mother suffers from mental ill health and

does not follow the principles of mental hygiene, the growth of the embryo will be affected badly. If there is a birth injury, it will damage the development of brain of the new born baby. So there is a great importance of mental hygiene in the prenatal environment.

Importance of mental hygiene in the post-natal environment

Post-natal environment includes the environment in which a baby is born. The post-natal environment may be classified into three broad heads: (a) Physical, (b) Social and (c) Biological.

(a) *Physical environment*: Physical environment includes air and ventilation, water and drinks, food and nutrition, clothing and housing, etc. A good physical environment provides a good hygienic situation, but a polluted environment such as polluted air, bad ventilation, dirty water, spoilt food and drink, unclean clothing, etc. causes unhygienic conditions which lead to deterioration of mental health. Carbon dioxide is released in respiration and combustion of fuels. This carbon dioxide is utilised by plants which release oxygen in exchange. Thus supply of oxygen in the environment is maintained. Due to the heavy deforestation this supply of oxygen is hampered. As a result air is polluted heavily. So tree plantation and preservation of forests are needed to check the pollution of air.

(b) *Social environment*: A normal person cannot live alone in a solitary place in an isolated condition. Every normal individual wants the assistance and co-operation of others. A human being who is a social creature requires a human society for attaining a good mental health. A social environment includes residential, educational, religious, cultural and recreational institutions, etc.

According to Sorenson (1964) there is a high probability that the children will have good mental health if they are brought up in a healthful home. Children reared in a good environment generally do not become behaviour problems. Kuppuswamy (1974) mentions that every individual is born into a society which influences his behaviour. The social environment shapes knowledge, skills, attitudes, habits, interests, values and goals. Bhatia (1977) is of opinion that stress of examination results, lack of opportunities for recreational and constructive activities etc. deteriorate mental health. The educators should eliminate or reduce such hazards to mental health. So the principles of mental hygiene should be inculcated to eliminate social evils in order to achieve a good mental health.

(c) *Biological environment*: Biological organisms, germs, bacteria, virus, etc. are responsible for caus-

ing infection and disease. The preventive steps should be taken for early recognition of problems, education of the public and support during periods of stress (Munn et al, 1975). Medical care throughout life as an environmental influence controls many infections and diseases. Improved health care system lengthens the life span and reduces the rate of death (Sorenson, 1964).

If the hygienic measures are not adopted and proper health care is not taken, infection and disease will occur. So biological environment should be free from germs and infection in order to improve the standard of mental hygiene and to attain a good mental health.

Conclusion

In conclusion it may be mentioned that proper education and suitable training in mental hygiene and improved health care system will offer enormous opportunities for improvement of environment for achieving a good mental health in particular and human well-being in general.

Role of Nurses

With this aim in view nurses can play an important role in (1) Home visiting, (2) Communicating mental hygiene principles, (3) Detecting mental illnesses early, (4) Applying psycho-therapeutic techniques, (5) Offering guidance and counselling to the emotionally disturbed and maladjusted people of the community, (6) Manipulating both prenatal and post-natal environment, (7) Rehabilitation and (8) After-care services.

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