

Preventive Aspects of Child Psychiatry

By Dr. N. N. Pyne, M.B., D.P.M.

MODERN psychiatrists believe that mental illness can be solved to a certain extent by adopting preventive measures in childhood and early infancy. In children we encounter three types of mental aberrations: (1) Mental subnormality due to congenital anomalies, (2) Emotional disturbances and behavioural disorders due to anomalous personalities, and (3) Brain damaged children due to organic diseases after birth. It is not possible to discuss preventive aspects of all of them in detail in this article. A broad outline is laid down so that the general public may look at these mentally handicapped children with humane understanding and handle them with care.

A child's 'psyche' develops in four stages. Chronologically placed they are: (a) development of motor functions (b) development of adaptive functions, (c) development of language, and lastly (d) development of personal social interaction. Development usually starts at about the age of three months and ends at fifth year. When the child has reached the school going age, his brain has developed all the primary mental functions—he is ready to face his small world by his own right. From then onwards the mind develops parallelly with his body. Both are dynamic processes; static condition in any stage may bring about mental disorders as stunted growth due to physical illness or malnutrition.

Mental subnormality: As has been mentioned, this aberration is due to certain congenital anomalies like brain trauma during birth, hereditary factors, endocrine disorders etc. All these conditions are associated with mental deficiencies and physical incapacitations. But if the cases are detected early prognosis is very satisfactory now-a-days.

Emotional disturbances: The underlying causes are anxiety state, over or under-achievement at school, sibling (brother or sister) rivalry, etc., resulting in enuresis

(incontinence of urine), thumb sucking, nail biting, temper tantrums, stuttering etc. Most of these conditions develop out of the interaction between ego functioning and the pressure of environment. These are heralding symptoms of serious mental illness in future. Little adjustment at school or at home may avert this future catastrophe.

Brain damaged children: Organic disorders leading to mental defects are few. Epilepsy is the commonest example of this group. It may be due to birth trauma, head injury, meningitis etc. Proper treatment may totally control this disease.

From the above we find that most of the mental disorders can be controlled or avoided. Proper diet, relevant education, proper selection of vocation etc. may put the children into a life with limited scope. By applying, eugenics, the familiar diseases may be avoided.

Proper guidance in children's clinics may solve various emotional problems. If detection and diagnosis are made at an early stage we can reduce the incidence of mental health problems in adult life which have become a threatening challenge to the society and the State in this world of insecurity and inadequacy. Children of the post-war world are facing now and then the various edges of life and thereby developing mental mal-adjustments. With our knowledge of personality trait and its make-up, we can solve various problems of childhood mental disorders.

For proper development of mental health, children are to be reared up in simple atmosphere like 'Brahmacharyashram' of the past days. Too much protection or neglect, constant chastisement may thwart the emotion or excite it. Under-achievement alters the mental balance. Parents' behaviour among themselves also greatly influences the child's mind. Thus we find that a little understanding and socio-individual adjustment may avoid future catastrophes. Prevention is always better than cure.

(Courtesy Your Health)

DO YOU KNOW?

The Population of India is estimated at 529 million on December 1, 1968 (from 439.2 million in 1961).

The Population of India, scattered over 3,000 towns and cities and 560,000 villages, is estimated at 529 million on December 1, 1968 (from 439.2 million in 1961). It constitutes 14 per cent of the world population although India has only 2.4 per cent of the world's land.

The rate of growth of population is 2.5 per cent per year. A baby is born every one and a half second, the total number of births being 21 million in a year and the net addition to population is 13 million.

At this rate, the population of India is expected to reach 1,000 million in 26 years.

There are 1,000 million children in the world today. Three babies are born every second.

As many as 600 million children suffer from hunger and disease.

According to statistics, in Africa every third child dies before reaching the age of five, and 96 per cent of the children under the age of five fall a prey to disease caused by malnutrition.

South Rhodesia makes extensive use of child labour, 40 per cent of whom die before they reach the age of 14.

In Latin America more than 600,000 children die every year from hunger and diseases. In a number of Latin American countries children under 15 make up almost 10 per cent of the working population.

In Ecuador about 70,000 children cannot attend schools due to lack of facilities.

In Chile only six per cent of the children complete their primary education.

In order to focus the attention of the world to the condition of the younger generation, the Women's International Democratic Federation had decided in November 1949 to observe June 1 as International Children's day.