

EDITORIAL

“School mental health: mind the young minds”

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Abstract

Along with providing good education, school has got a role in child protection, which is now another important birthright of child after ‘education’. Observant teachers may be able to recognise signs of stress or stress related psychiatric problems earlier in school children than family/friends may be able to. Those things that work best in education occur when everyone is on the same page. Some therapists feel poetry is highly effective in helping patients overcome difficult emotional situations and mental illness. It is of utmost importance to identify children with psychological problems early and target them for quick interventions so as to be able to nail the problems at an early stage. Pro-social behaviours are crucial to children’s well-being. The life skills program focus on the development of the skills needed for life. Folie a deux or shared psychotic disorder (SPD) is a rare illness. A frame of reference (FOR) is a set of interrelated internally consistent concepts, definitions, postulates that provide a systematic description of and prescription for a practitioner’s interaction within a particular aspect of a profession’s domain. Children, adolescents and young are neurodevelopmentally predisposed to be emotionally unstable, impulsive, adventurous and violent. The anxiety-related psychophysiological disorders have been addressed directly by hypnosis. Hypnotherapy is one of the most effective treatments for low self-esteem and low confidence. Young minds are getting highly influenced by the rapid spread of world-wide-web. All types of child abuse and neglect leave lasting scars. The collaboration between the child psychiatrists, primary care physicians and paediatric specialists will require ongoing attention and research in order to optimise the multidisciplinary approach to the chronically ill paediatric patients with HIV/AIDS. The safe and effective use of medications has enabled many children to attend school and achieve academic success. Criminality simply may be the most obvious sign of a wide variety of mental disorders and environmental stressors, the final common pathway of which is aggression. Proposed revision of the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM V) includes a section for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in preschool children. Research on the mechanisms of resilience would inform prevention and intervention strategies for child maltreatment and, in particular, neglect.

Das S. “School mental health: mind the young minds”. *Dysphrenia*. 2013;4(1):1-6.**Keywords:** Violence. Hypnosis. Internet. Child abuse. Psychotropic drugs.**Correspondence:** shyamanta_das@rediffmail.com

The theme of the 22nd Annual Conference of the Indian Psychiatric Society, Assam State Branch held in Guwahati on 22 and 23 September 2012 was “School mental health: mind the young minds”.

School mental health: the concept[1]

“It is very much necessary that we provide our children a very good school environment that is very much stimulating and provides them with good intellectual and emotional nourishments so as to build their personality in a healthy manner and help them to become good citizen of world and also a good human being. Along with providing good education, school has got a role in child protection, which is now another important birthright of child after ‘education’. Other than the trained mental health professionals, the teachers also can be sensitised and trained about different child mental health related problems as well as in areas of normal child developmental psychology, so that they also can take active part in school mental health in early identification and prevention of these problems and can understand their

strengths and weaknesses being more psychologically oriented by themselves.”

Stress and psychopathology in children and adolescents[2]

“Sleep problems, enuresis (inappropriate passing of urine), encopresis (inappropriate passing of stool), physical complaints, new fears, aggression and oppositionality, school difficulties, problems with peers, depressed or irritable mood, anxiety or restlessness, poor concentration, disturbed appetite are the red flags of stress in children and adolescents. Observant teachers may be able to recognise signs of stress or stress related psychiatric problems earlier in school children than family/friends may be able to. Appropriate communication with the student/parents may help to solve some of the issues. Prompt referral to a mental health

professional can help to identify and treat those conditions where delay may cause significant suffering (and occasionally mortality).”

It's just an event[3]

“By learning how to get into the best cognitive and emotional place, people have their best shot at doing well socially because they are in the best cognitive and emotional place to make the best behavioural and lifestyle choices for themselves and others. Those things that work best in education occur when everyone is on the same page.”

Poetry therapy: where art meets the mind[4]

“Some therapists feel poetry is highly effective in helping patients overcome difficult emotional situations and mental illness. Writing is widely used in children's hospitals, often in conjunction with art, to help children articulate their fears and experiences with illness. Emotional release writing is associated with improved immune system functioning. Through poetry therapy, the mentally ill become aware of the reasons for their problems. In poetry therapy, poems aren't looked at for their value as art, but as a window into the psychology of the poet and, by extension, as a means of healing.”

School mental health: mind the young minds[5]

“Schools and parents can and should work in collaboration with each other to become the clinics of sound mental health for our youngsters. According to an estimate, nearly one in five children/adolescents is ailing from a behaviour or an emotional disorder at sometime during his/her growing years. With the concept of universal education catching up globally, school but naturally adopt the role of importance in improving, forming and transforming the lives of young children. It is of utmost importance to identify children with psychological problems early and target them for quick interventions so as to be able to nail the problems at an early stage.”

Fostering pro-social behaviour and value-based education through positive child guidance[6]

“To be responsible parents in today's world is a matter of challenge. Nobody is born “as parents,” we learn to be one. The moment we figure out and think that we have a handle on it, the rules change. Child guidance is the clinical study and treatment of the behavioural and emotional problems of children by a staff of specialists usually comprising a physician or psychiatrist, a clinical psychologist and a psychiatric social worker. Pro-social behaviours are crucial to children's well-being. Pro-social behaviours can be grouped into three distinct categories: Sharing (dividing up or bestowing), helping (acts of kindness, rescuing, removing distress) and cooperation (working together to reach a goal).”

The importance of life skills education for children and adolescents[7]

“Internalising the core essential life skills helps the adolescents to deal with the concerns in the modern world in a dignified and mature way bringing success to them. The life skills program focus on the development of the skills needed for life such as self-awareness, communication, decision-making thinking, managing emotions, assertiveness, and relationship skills. Mental health professionals directly or through teachers or parents should be involved in skill building exercises and promoting competence among adolescents.”

Merapani children: a rare folie en famille (shared psychotic disorder)[8]

“Folie a deux or shared psychotic disorder (SPD) is a rare illness. Four children of the same family of Merapani area of Golaghat district of Assam near the Nagaland border were living in the most unusual way in their rooms day and night without any interaction with any person except with the mother since about eight to ten years by the three elders and about five years by the youngest brother. The eldest son was the ‘inducer’ and the other three were ‘acceptor’ in that belief. The help from the local people in the management was a great boon for their recovery. In their management, socialisation, separation from each other and medication were in need for the recovery. After four months, all were behaving normally.”

Use of occupational therapy: cognitive frame of reference in children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder[9]

“Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) mainly features issues from the occupational therapy view point as sensory processing issues, cognitive functioning and executive functioning issues along with difficulties in psychosocial interaction. The most neglected area becomes difficulty in functioning in basic activities of daily living such as self-care and social participation within the community (psychosocial frame of reference [psychosocial FOR] for children). A frame of reference (FOR) is a set of interrelated internally consistent concepts, definitions, postulates that provide a systematic description of and prescription for a practitioner's interaction within a particular aspect of a profession's domain. In the field of occupational therapy a cognitive frame of reference (cognitive FOR) has been used on the theoretical constructs of Piaget's stages of development mainly with the adult population. It is now finding its way in use with children with ADHD in view of the impairment in executive functioning noted with these children. The cognitive FOR works hand in hand with the psychosocial FOR as the condition impacts not only the child but also the family.”

Youth violence prevention[10]

“There are increasing trend of events of mass unprovoked violence/homicide of innocent people at various places across the globe, which are claimed to be perpetuated by mentally disturbed youth. Research on adolescence violence is limited. Modern neuroscience indicates that the youth are at higher risk for violence due to their inability to control affect. The first part of the brain to develop is the limbic system, which regulates the survival system of the brain and engages the flight, fight and freeze behaviour in youth. The frontal lobes (judgement, deductive reasoning, discernment and wisdom etc) do not fully develop until about 25 years of age. Children, adolescents and young are neurodevelopmentally predisposed to be emotionally unstable, impulsive, adventurous and violent. The science of violence prevention is clear but the political will to disseminate, adapt, and implement these programs waxes and wanes. It is hoped that the science of violence prevention will become so strong that to not provide such programs ubiquitously throughout the country will become unethical.”

Hypnotherapy for children with anxiety related to allergies, asthma and atopic dermatitis: a case study[11]

“Anxiety is common experience in lives of adults and children alike and most of the time, anxiety is often an appropriate response to events. It can also result in positive effects under certain circumstances especially when they face some sort of challenge to perform. Anxiety has also been implicated in aetiology maintenance of certain paediatric psychophysiological disorders, such as asthma, headaches and hives, tics, ulcers, sleep disorders, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), enuresis and other autoimmune diseases. Anxiety disorders represent one of the most common categories of psychopathology in children and adolescents. In general, children respond more readily to hypnosis than adults. Hypnotherapy may be useful for a wide range of disorders and problems, and may be particularly valuable in the treatment of anxiety disorders and trauma-related conditions. Hypnosis has been used both primarily and adjunctively to treat anxiety disorders. The anxiety-related psychophysiological disorders have been addressed directly by hypnosis, usually with suggestions and invoking the imagination and fantasies of children for relaxation, comfort and confidence. Many issues can be resolved with hypnotherapy. Asthma and many such autoimmune disorders are very prominent. In treatment of these issues, special focus is also on anxiety component. An illustrative case study is presented in which hypnotherapy played a big role along with counselling, family involvement and medical treatment. All this led to symptomatic relief and improved behaviour and hence expedited and enhanced

the response to pharmacological treatment. This also improved the family atmosphere.”

Hypnotherapy and metaphors for self-esteem and related issues[12]

“In today’s world where adults have their own stresses related to career, relationships, finances etc, even children are experiencing their own challenges. No one is born with low self-esteem. The negative emotions that come with low self-esteem also weaken the body immune system and can manifest in psychosomatic ailments. Hypnotherapy for children is specifically suited for the developmental needs of children, and is an alternative to the ‘child as a smaller adult’ way of thinking. Hypnotherapy is one of the most effective treatments for low self-esteem and low confidence. Hypnotherapy is a method whose intrinsic qualities and values make it possible to tailor interventions according to both the developmental and individual needs of the child. Because of its flexibility, hypnotherapy can be used as an adjunct to other therapies. The results are faster, permanent and without any side effects.”

Social networking: psychological impact on Indian teens[13]

“Internet and teens have become inseparable. Young minds are getting highly influenced by the rapid spread of world-wide-web. Keeping in view the importance and ‘no-boundary’ nature of Internet, it is critical for parents and teachers to understand and enforce safe, responsible use of technology among kids making them responsible digital citizens in turn. More and more primary researches should be carried on in this area so that data is collected and the future trend may be predicted accordingly.”

Child sexual abuse and neglect[14]

“Child abuse is more than bruises or broken bones. Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me? Contrary to this old saying, emotional abuse can severely damage a child’s mental health or social development, leaving lifelong psychological scars. Children living in intense fear have a lifelong impact in their mind. All types of child abuse and neglect leave lasting scars. Severe abuse early in life can lead to reactive attachment disorder. Recognising that having a problem is the biggest step to getting help.”

Mental health issues of children infected and affected by HIV and AIDS[15]

“Children of today are the youth of tomorrow. Children with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) disease have been called “the missing face of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS)” because, more often than adults, they lack basic health care and they have been “missing from global and national policy discussions.” Mental health issues of children involved

with HIV/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) include social stigma, disclosure of HIV status, compliance and adherence to medical regimen and coping with bereavement and physical as well as mental health consequences due to direct effect of HIV/AIDS on developing central nervous system (CNS). The collaboration between the child psychiatrists, primary care physicians and paediatric specialists will require ongoing attention and research in order to optimise the multidisciplinary approach to the chronically ill paediatric patients with HIV/AIDS. Even if a vaccine or cure is found, psychiatrists will be called on to respond to the psychiatric sequelae of the AIDS epidemic for the next generation.”

Child psychiatric disorders: paradigm shift of management[16]

“Children and adolescents suffer from all the illness of adulthood. Childhood onset illness is likely to be at least as severe and functionally disabling as adult onset illness. A variety of interventions are available to help children and adolescents with psychiatric illness. In last decade there is a shift in the paradigm and the off label use of psychotropic drugs in this particular age group has increased to a great extent. The safe and effective use of medications in this group has enabled many children to attend school and achieve academic success. Safety and efficacy of most psychotropic drugs are based on clinical experience than on evidence from large clinical trial data. In most of the diseases except attention deficit hyperkinetic disorder (ADHD) and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), results from adult studies are extrapolated. Also developmental differences in pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics result in unexpected outcome.”

Adolescence and criminality: forensic psychiatric perspectives[17]

“Adolescence is the period of maturation between childhood and adulthood heralded by the physiological signs and surging hormones of puberty. It can be viewed as neurobiological “works in progress,” often consumed by academic, interpersonal, and emotional challenges and exploring new territories using their talents and experimenting with social identities. High negative emotionality predisposes to low threshold for anger or frustration so that reacts forcefully to situations others would find mildly bothersome. Distorted cognitive process leads to unwarranted alarm about environmental threats, feels impelled by some force to hurt others, erroneous beliefs about entitlement to impose one’s will on others. High anxiety triggers avoidance or escape behaviours that can injure others. Inadequate impulse control disrupts response selection so that aggression has precedence over alternatives. Abnormal development

impairs the acquisition of coping behaviours and self-regulatory capabilities that normally suppress dyscontrolled outbursts. Criminality is a legal term, not a medical or psychiatric diagnosis, illness or syndrome. It is a pattern of human behaviour or a specific act violating a law. Criminality simply may be the most obvious sign of a wide variety of mental disorders and environmental stressors, the final common pathway of which is aggression. It is true that most patients with mental illness are not violent. However, studies indicate that violence is more common in seriously mentally ill individuals. Severe mental illness causes perceptual distortion, suspiciousness, extremes of emotion, impaired impulse control. When made uneasy by their surroundings, they often lash out to defend themselves against real and/or imagined threats and wind up in jail more often than in the therapeutic settings.”

What we know about stress in childhood[18]

“Stress has been recognised as “epidemic of 21st century” due to its impact on society and mental health in general. Proposed revision of the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V) includes a section for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in preschool children. Neurosciences provide us for evidence about early childhood trauma causing massive plastic changes in the hippocampus, shrinking it, in the way new memories cannot form. Early release of glucocorticoids (stress hormones) actually kills some cells, blocking synaptic connections and interfering with learning and long term memory.”

Child neglect: what we know and to where we might go[19]

“The majority of published research on child neglect has been carried out in the UK and the USA, while little is known about child neglect in other countries and continents. The process of defining child neglect reflects the fact that neglect is largely about omissions, not acts. In research, emotional neglect is often defined as the caregiver’s lack of emotional availability and insensitivity in relation to emotional and communicative signals offered by the child. Although the research community has agreed on some working definitions for child neglect, many questions concerning its nature remain unanswered. When the caretaker is unable to satisfy a child’s basic needs due to socioeconomic difficulties, should we still consider the diagnosis of neglect? Is it viable to decide on one, universally accepted, definition of neglect, considering the reality of such a culturally variable globe? More research is certainly needed in order to provide answers to such fundamental questions. Assigned research in regions for which there is lack of knowledge on the epidemiology and further characteristics of child neglect is necessary. Although risk research has already provided

important information on the net of factors associated with child neglect, many issues remain to be disentangled. For example, there is a lack of studies on how child, caregiver and community factors interact with each other and influence the likelihood of child neglect and/or the effectiveness of prevention and intervention programs. Furthermore, the constantly increasing number of people concentrating in urban centers, the consolidation of new forms of family structure and the increased mobility of the workforce, which promotes cultural mingling, are factors that have not been studied in relation to child neglect and child maltreatment, in general; more research is needed towards this direction. An important part of risk research is the identification of protective factors, which are related to resilience. Research on the mechanisms of resilience would inform prevention and intervention strategies for child maltreatment and, in particular, neglect. Finally, it should also be underlined that there is a vast field for further research on the interaction between risk and protective factors, and their interaction with child, caregiver and environmental characteristics. Longitudinal studies are needed towards this direction. A developing child needs the support of its environment to unfold its full developmental potential and to successfully manage the many challenges of the developmental process. Child neglect has also been found to have adverse effects on cognitive development as well. Children victims of neglect are often found to present psychopathological behaviours and/or mental disorders. Child maltreatment, and child neglect in particular, is a major public health issue. One may conclude that its prevention may prove to be great value for money.”

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