

MENTAL ILLNESSES

IN CHILDREN

AND

THEIR PREVENTION



The fact that good health is the paramount wealth that every one, whether, young or old could possess, needs no repetition. The prevention of physical sickness which keeps the entire world awake, has to be placed second since physical health is directly affected by mental illnesses. The mother's womb and her mental condition as well as the people around her prepare for the birth of a child, even before the child is conceived. It is essential that a mother preparing for her first confinement is properly educated in this respect

by medical clinics and by health care workers. However, it is a pity that such education is limited to the aspect of protecting physical health.

A flower bud exposed to the sun will mature into a fully grown flower, only after undergoing a mass of changes. Similarly all the experiences absorbed by the child during childhood are permanently deposited in the child's mind. The personality and the intellect of the man of the future evolves in the form of a store-house of

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memories based on childhood experiences.

Mental illnesses in children evolve as a defence mechanism developed by the child's subconscious to protect the child from external influences which are directed forwards the child. This can be described as one of the measures provided by nature for all beings to their ensure self stability. Mental affliction in a child can be

recognized from the confused pattern of behaviour, displayed by a child when a child is deprived of a mentally secure environment, is lacking in self confidence or is separated from loved ones.

A child's mind which is at peace from the day of its birth, is subjected to stress for the first time, with the addition of a younger sibling to the family at which time

parental attention to the older child often becomes less. The insecure environment built by the parents can lead to irregular stammering, bed wetting, severe bouts of anger, being startled and isolation.

Nearly 70% of the nursery age children and children of school admission age in Sri Lanka are subject to school-phobia. The dislike to be separated from parents, the resultant insecure feeling, being unused to the group environment, lack of freedom within the school, exert pressure on a child. With time many students get accustomed to a happy school life. However the situation is aggravated when the child's mind loses its equilibrium.

It indirectly causes physical illness in the child. Intermittent fainting, diarrhoea and vomiting and severe head aches are symptoms shown by children subject to school-phobia.

Such illnesses if not properly treated could come the child's education to be disrupted.

A steady increase in the number of students who undergo examination phobia at a young age is becoming a new trend.

Children who suffer from examination phobia too suffer from the type of physical ailments described above. The pressure exerted by parents for attainment of educated goals and the intense competition generates an unbearable stress within the child. Physical illnesses are caused by such stress. Children who become victims of examination phobia during childhood, fail to face examinations successfully in the future too. It is a tragedy that the majority of students who become victims of examination phobia are clever students.

Children who grow up in a harsh and unpleasant environment too show symptoms of similar mental illnesses.

What is known in the villages by terms such as "Bhutha Dosh", "Thanikam Dosh", "Pretha Belma" and "Sanniya" are also phenomena caused by a shaky mind. Young girls who are about to attain maturity or who have attained maturity mostly become victims to this condition. Such mental abnormalities are due to undesirable notions such as "Yaksha"s, "Pretha"s and the spirits of the dead which have traditionally been in-

grained into the subconscious. When there is emotional imbalance in the mind, such irregular notions gain prominence and the mind becomes distorted. Such mental imbalance is caused by factors such as the concentration of hormones at the time of reaching maturity and by the providing of unwanted security by the parents etc.

Contributing a healthy citizen with a fine personality to the world is an obligation fulfilled by parents towards nature. This is why the physical health of the growing child receives great attention. There is an awareness to a certain extent in the majority of people regarding the prevention of physical illnesses, due to the high rate of literacy, the spread of the mass media, and the proliferation of government and non governmental organizations. However public awareness with regard to mental illness is very low. The shortage of psychiatrists and psychiatric hospitals, the non existence of psychiatric clinics etc. might be at the root of this lack of awareness.

Mental illnesses in children could often be overcome through a course simple behav-

ioral therapy. Treatment after the hypnotizing the patient to awaken the subconscious is also a widely used system of therapy in psychiatry. Mental illnesses are also treated by the use of electrical and oscillating current.

Years of research have proved that a person's childhood influence his future ethical values and correctness of his decisions. Details of notorious criminals, thieves and gangsters show that their childhood had been full of unpleasant events. Therefore the development of good qualities during playful childhood is, although indirectly an achievement for the progress of the nation. Therefore I wish to make it known to the world that it is time to tell the older generation that protecting the healthy minds of children who are like delicate flower buds is a meritorious deed.

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