ATTITUDE TOWARDS LIFE: A FAMILY ENVIRONMENT PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT
The present study was undertaken to assess the difference in the optimistic-pessimistic attitude of adolescents being brought up in foster home and biological nuclear families. SOS Children’s Village was purposively selected as a base for conducting research pertaining to foster home. The sample for the present study comprised of forty five (45) 14-18 year old adolescents from SOS Bhimtal and an equivalent number of respondents from biological nuclear families of Bhimtal itself, thus, making a total of 90 respondents for the present study. Results revealed that respondents from foster home as well as biological nuclear families were predominantly optimistic and very optimistic. Gender of the respondents as well as their type of family did not seem to have any significant influence on their optimistic-pessimistic attitude.

Field of Research: Optimism, Pessimism, Adolescence, Foster Homes, Biological Families.

1. Introduction

The entire lifespan of a human encompasses significant advancement. He passes through infancy to childhood and through adolescence to late adulthood and at each stage of his life he witnesses distinct and unifying character of growth, development and learning. However, adolescence phase of human life is believed to be the one when growth, development as well as learning is at its pinnacle. Adolescents create their own lives with their own ideas and actions which can lead to great success and achievement or to frustration and disappointment. This success or disappointment in life is greatly influenced by one’s attitude. Attitude is defined as a readiness of the psyche to act or react in a certain way (Jung, 1921).

Attitude of humans is generally expressed as positive or negative and that is often denoted by the terms optimistic or pessimistic, respectively. It is well known that in order to develop positive/optimistic attitude towards life, an individual requires a secure emotional base from where to explore and experience the world. Primarily, a healthy home or happy family acts as this secure emotional base in an individual’s life and thus, provides the most intimate context for attitude formation. Family bonds are a link to our beginning and a guide to our future. But, unfortunately everyone in this world is not blessed with these precious family bonds and hence, remains deprived of the care, affection and enriching
environment provided by a natural/biological family. Such helpless individuals are known as orphans. In an attempt to provide home/family to such orphans and destitute individuals Foster Homes have come up.

Extensive review of literature revealed that numerous studies have been conducted on the adolescents from foster homes; residential care; orphanages etc but none highlighted the optimistic-pessimistic attitude of adolescents from foster family and that too with those from biological nuclear family. Thus, the present study intended to investigate the difference in the attitude of adolescents with respect to the type of family they are being brought up viz. foster family and biological/nuclear family. The matter of concern more specifically was to find out that if a destitute is brought up in a foster home where all his basic needs of love and belongingness; safety and security; food; clothing etc is being met satisfactorily then does any difference exists in the attitude of these adolescents with the one who are being reared up in their natural/biological nuclear family.

2. Methodology

2.1 Sample

In India, at present, quite a few numbers of foster homes are running. However, among those SOS Children’s Village was purposively chosen for the present study because of its unique concept and structure of foster home. SOS village consists of fully furnished houses situated nearby to one another. In each house, there’s a woman as a motherly figure who provides care and nurturance to a group of children of varied ages. These women are specially interviewed and trained before being appointed in the village as mothers. In case of report of any sort of harsh or unkind behavior by them, they are immediately rusticated from the organization. Thus, in SOS Children’s village inmates get a loving and caring environment as in any biological family. The majority of SOS Village’s inmates as well as the local children of Bhimtal study in Hermann Gmeiner School, a constituent body of the SOS Children’s Village. Thus, this school was used as a platform to draw respondents for the first sample i.e. adolescents from foster home as well as for the second sample i.e. adolescents from biological nuclear families. The respondents for the first sample that is adolescents from foster home were selected by census method. The entire population of SOS Bhimtal’s 14-18 year old adolescents studying in Hermann Gmeiner School (45) was selected as respondents for the said sample. On the other hand, equivalent number (45) of respondents for the second sample was picked up using random sampling method from Hermann Gmeiner School, itself.

2.2 Tools

The main research instrument employed for the present study was Optimistic- Pessimistic Attitude Scale (1998) standardized by D. S. Parashar for Indian context. This scale consists of 40 statements in total out of which 20 statements are related to optimism and 20 statements to pessimism. These statements demand response of the respondents in terms of agreed or not agreed. On optimistic statements, a score of 1 is awarded for the response of agreed and score of 0 is awarded for the response of not agreed. On the other hand, in case of pessimistic statements, a score of 0 is awarded for agreed response and score of 1 is given for the not agreed response. The scale is meant for adolescents and adults aging from 13 to 25 years.
2.3 Procedure

The respondents were approached in the foster home and School itself and purpose of the study was made clear to them. They were requested to give honest responses. The distributed questionnaire approach was used to collect information from the students. Each sample student was given the questionnaire individually and was asked to fill out the questionnaire under the strict supervision of the researcher.

2.4 Data Analysis

The data obtained was analyzed using statistical tools like arithmetic mean, t-test and Z-test. Arithmetic Mean was calculated to sum up the characteristics (optimistic-pessimistic attitude) of the whole group of respondents from foster home and biological (nuclear) families in figures. t-test and Z-test were used to study the statistical difference in the mean scores of foster home and biological (nuclear) families’ respondents on optimistic-pessimistic attitude across gender and type of family, respectively.

3. Results and Discussion

A cursory look at Table 1 clearly shows that almost half (52.94%) of the foster home boys were optimistic whereas, foster home girls (46.43%) were very optimistic. However, a very few percentage of foster home boys (17.65%) and girls (3.57%) were observed to be pessimistic also. Still, none of the foster home respondents were reported to be very pessimistic. Similarly, in case of the respondents from biological (nuclear) families, good proportion of boys (62.07%) were found to be optimistic and girls (43.75%) were very optimistic but none of the respondents were reported to be very pessimistic.

Table 1: Distribution pattern of the respondents from foster home and biological nuclear families on optimistic-pessimistic attitude across gender and type of family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components of Attitude</th>
<th>Score Range (0-40)</th>
<th>Foster Home (n1=45)</th>
<th>Biological (nuclear) Family (n2=45)</th>
<th>Total Sample (n= 90)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girls (n1a =28)</td>
<td>Boys (n1b =17)</td>
<td>Total (n1 =45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girls n %</td>
<td>Boys n %</td>
<td>Total n %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very optimistic</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>13 46.43</td>
<td>2 11.76</td>
<td>15 33.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>8 28.57</td>
<td>9 52.94</td>
<td>17 37.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>6 21.43</td>
<td>3 17.65</td>
<td>9 20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pessimistic</td>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>1 3.571</td>
<td>3 17.65</td>
<td>4 8.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very pessimistic</td>
<td>0-15</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>0 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 reveals that there was no significant difference in the optimistic-pessimistic attitude of respondents from foster home as well as biological (nuclear) families across gender. This finding is in contrast to Boman's (2001) who reported that compared to the boys, girls tend to exhibit significantly higher levels of optimism. However, few years later Jacobsen (2008) contradicted his finding by reporting that men are more optimistic than women over time and across countries. Hence, no conclusion can be drawn on this issue. As far as the finding of the present study is concerned, it may be said that over the years with the increasing education in India discrimination of children by parents on the basis of gender is diminishing. All the adolescents, irrespective of their gender are provided an equal enriching environment which has inculcated an equally optimistic attitude among them.

Table 2: Comparison of optimistic-pessimistic attitude of respondents from foster home and biological nuclear families across gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components of Attitude</th>
<th>Foster Home (n1=45)</th>
<th>Biological (nuclear) Family (n2=45)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls (n1a=28)</td>
<td>Boys (n1b=17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean  S.D.</td>
<td>Mean  S.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimism- Pessimism</td>
<td>28.44  3.78</td>
<td>27.11  4.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A close perusal of Table 3 clearly shows that there was no significant difference in the optimistic-pessimistic attitude of respondents from foster home and biological (nuclear) families across type of family, as well. Zimmerman (1982) revealed that foster children do not see life as any less satisfying than do individuals who were not separated from their families during childhood.

Table 3: Comparison of optimistic-pessimistic attitude among the respondents from foster home and biological nuclear families across type of family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components of Attitude</th>
<th>Foster Home (n1=45)</th>
<th>Biological (nuclear) Family (n2=45)</th>
<th>Z Calculated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean  S.D.</td>
<td>Mean  S.D.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimism- Pessimism</td>
<td>28.02  4.05</td>
<td>29.35  3.66</td>
<td>1.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly, Seligman (1991) postulated that when life events are resolved in a way that does not harm a child’s well-being, the child may develop positive expectations for the future because the child may learn that stressful experiences are temporary and manageable. Likewise, Shelby et al (2008) also observed that access to supportive people in one’s life may influence one’s positive expectations for the future.

In the present study, respondents from the biological nuclear families enjoyed the fruits of living in a happy family and thus, developed an optimistic attitude towards life. However, in SOS Children’s Village it was the natural family like set up which acted as the booster. Foster mothers were especially trained and observed before being appointed as mothers and housemates acted as biological siblings due to similar former distressful life experiences as well as the family values practiced at each house. Thus, love, care and support received from the foster mother and foster siblings at SOS Children’s Village...
helped the respondents in overcoming the effects of earlier bitter experiences of the past and building positive outlook towards life.

4. Conclusion

It is for sure, that there is no substitute of biological family. However, one thing which is also certain is that loss or absence of natural/biological parents in one’s life does not mean an end to everything. If an orphan or destitute gets love, care and support from substitute significant others such as foster family members like the one at SOS Children’s Village, then he/she can successfully cope up even with the distressful experiences of parental loss and thus, be able to maintain positive view for their future.

References


