

## Adjustment patterns of newly admitted children in laboratory day care centre

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■ **ABSTRACT** : The investigation aimed at studying the time differentials, non-adjustment reactions and strategies adopted by parents and care providers to facilitate the adjustment of children in the Laboratory Day Care Centre. The study was based upon a sample of 32 (15 male and 17 female) children admitted in April,2009 & April,2010 sessions in Laboratory Day Care Centre, Department of Human Development, PAU, Ludhiana as well as Care Providers (n=3) and Parents of the sample children (n=32). Observation-cum-Interview method was used for data collection for the study. Based on their non-adjustment reactions, the children were divided into two categories, viz., 'Early adjusting children' and 'Late adjusting children'. The subjects displayed non-adjustment reactions in varying frequencies and intensities. The three children who took longest to adjust were the subjects of the case studies taken up in the Laboratory Day Care Centre. These case studies presented in detail the dynamics of parent-child attachment and the adjustment reactions of newly admitted children in Laboratory Day Care Centre. The analysis indicated that over-protective or over- possessive behaviour of parents or other family members, parental over-indulgence, lack of socialization experiences and irregular attendance at Centre contributed to poor adjustment of the child to the Laboratory Day care centre.

■ **KEY WORDS** : Laboratory day care centre, Care providers, Non-adjustment reactions, Early adjusting, children, Late adjusting children

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Now-a-days, it is the accepted norm for majority of children to have a mother who is working. The factors influencing this decision are well- known, and range from the need for additional family income to the need for personal self -fulfilment. For a kid, entering a new pre-school environment filled with unfamiliar teachers and kids can cause both anxiety and anticipation. The impact of this decision on the family unit, the parents and the child, however, is nevertheless not fully understood. In fact, the complexity of investigating this issue has eluded even the best of researchers.

During early childhood years children make a slow but immensely important shift from dependent baby to independent child. Seeds are also sown for the child's social skills, personality and contacts with the world outside the home. This marks the beginning of a child's contacts with

adults and peers as well as the experiences with objects. Thus, the preliminary working model of social relationships is revised, consolidated, and established more firmly.

Each newcomer to the Laboratory day care center passes through this transitory phase and reacts to the demands posed by the newly found environment. As children seek to understand and craft relations with the care providers in the Laboratory day care center they encounter certain amount of anxiety and distress. Some children resist their parents' departure. Other children withdraw or refuse to engage themselves in activities initially or after attending the day-care centre for a few days or more. Indeed, the children need time to differentiate between what goes on in the day-care centre and what goes on at home. It is quite natural and expected, but if the period of non-adjustment lingers on too long, it causes concern. The situation becomes disturbing for

the child as well as the parents and also hampers the quality of the program at the centre causing distress to the other children and staff.

Some children are quick to adjust to their new abodes some take moderate time but few show unusual resistance and denial to fall into the routine of coming to the daycare centre. The non-adjusting reactions of this group of children are surprisingly intense and varied. Many forces are at play in creating these non-adjustment reactions, including the age of the child, home environment as well as certain basic ingredients found in all the Day Care Centres per se: the physical setting, space to move about, the human qualities of care providers and playmates, plenty of learning materials and other resources.

Children's early adjustment plays a critical role in shaping their ongoing academic and socio-emotional competence. A myriad of studies have highlighted the significant role of prior-to day-care experiences in shaping early day-care success. From a bio-ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998), children's development is best understood when we consider the multiple contexts in which they operate, including the family and non-parental care environments as well as individual characteristics of the developing child.

#### **Theoretical perspective of the issue :**

Attachment describes the tendency of human infants to seek comfort, support, nurturance and protection from one or more discriminated care-givers. The tendency for selective seeking of comfort is not apparent at birth. During the first few months babies don't differentiate much among care-givers and usually can be calmed by any loving person, regardless of the relationship. Following a period of sociability and comfort with a wide range of adult care-givers during the first 6 months, at about 7 to 9 months of age, two new infant behaviours appear, stranger wariness and separation protest.

Stranger wariness describes an apparent discomfort with unfamiliar adults and a turning for comfort selectively to those they know and trust. 'Separation protest' refers to the infant's new tendency to protest separation from familiar caregivers. Although individual differences in the intensity and expression of these behaviours are clear, they may be considered virtually ubiquitous. When these behaviours appear, the infant is said to be attached to one or more caregivers.

Infants and mothers seem to be biologically primed to develop reciprocal contact and communication patterns. Harlow and Zimmerman's, research (1959) with surrogate-reared infant monkeys emphasizes the importance of contact comfort provided by the mother's body furthering infant's development of love and attachment.

Ainsworth (1967) found that the mothers of infants who were more securely attached were better informants than other mothers. These mothers communicated greater interest in and

gave more specific information about their babies. Strength of the infant's attachment was positively related to amount of time spent in care giving and to mother's enjoyment of breast feeding.

Ainsworth *et al.* (1978 a and b) research paradigm that indexes differential communicative patterns in infant-mother attachment is the "strange situation". Mother, baby and observer are introduced into an experimental room. For alternating three-minute periods, different dyadic pairs are left together. This sequence of situations revealed three major responses. About 70 per cent of infants showed securely attached patterns of responding to mother's presence, absence and re-entry. About 20 per cent of infants were anxious/avoidant. Their mother's tended to be rejecting impatient and dislike body cuddling. About 10 per cent of infants were resistant to or resentful of maternal efforts to comfort them on reunion. Their mothers tended to be inattentive to and insensitive to infant signals.

Two behaviours were much more frequent among the mothers of secure infants than among the mothers of anxious/insecure infants. These behaviours were called "contingent pacing" and "encouragement of further interaction". A mother was identified as showing contingent pacing when she leaned toward the baby, smiling, or talking, gently and in slow tempo allowed the baby plenty of time to mobilize a response before she gave a gentle burst of stimulation.

After little or no initial response from the baby, these mothers did not abandon efforts to get interaction going, but instead gently persisted in stimulation, increasing positive effect as the infant became more responsive. These mothers were more apt to hold the infant tenderly and carefully.

In contrast, mothers of anxious babies confined face-to-face interactions to routine care situations. Their interactions were initiated silently with impassive facial expressions, and they were more frequently inappropriate in their pacing.

Pre-attachment behaviours occur in the first six months, and in the first 8 weeks infants smile, babble and cry to attract the attention of caregivers. Although babies are learning to discriminate between caregivers, these behaviours are directed at anyone in the vicinity. A number of attachment patterns develop in infants: secure attachment, avoidant attachment, anxious attachment and later disorganized attachment (Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978 a and b). Between two and six months, the infant increasingly discriminates between familiar and unfamiliar adults, becoming more responsive towards the caregiver, adding following and clinging to its repertoire. Clear-cut attachment develops in the third phase, between the ages of six months to two years. The infant's behaviour towards the caregiver becomes organized on a goal-directed basis to achieve the conditions that make it feel secure. By the end of the first year, the infant is able to display a range of attachment behaviours designed to maintain proximity. These manifest as protesting the caregiver's departure, greeting the

caregiver's return, clinging when frightened and following when able.

Hence, there are three main ingredients to a secure attachment relationship. The first is physical connection, which means plenty of touch and eye contact. Such things as cradling an infant while feeding, cuddling with a toddler before bedtime, and hugging a teenager increase the sense of physical connection, especially if touch and eye contact take place on a daily basis throughout the childhood years. The second ingredient is emotional connection. Children sense their parents are connected on an emotional level when their parents are tuned into their feelings. Infants feel their parents' attunement when parents respond accurately to their infants' cries or when they share their infants' delight in new discoveries. Children sense the emotional connection when their parents empathize with their feelings or provide them with comfort or reassurance. Even discipline, when carried out with empathy, can increase the emotional connection. Finally, children need an environment that is consistent, predictable, and safe in order to develop a quality attachment. Children need to know that if their feelings or behaviours get out of control, their parents will remain steady and calm. They need to be able to depend on a consistent schedule, consistent limits, and consistent parental responses. Without this kind of safe, dependable environment a child will develop emotional walls which will prevent a secure attachment.

To facilitate the adjustment of the children, 'Care' providers need to acquaint themselves about the children in general and about each child in their care. Although it is difficult to predict what the two-year olds will do next, the care provider can become thoroughly familiar with the developmental characteristics of this age group. In addition, specific information about a child's family, early experiences and likes and dislikes might help to make her or his behaviour more predictable and less stressful for the care provider. Therefore, an attempt has been made to analyse the three typical cases identified during the study who took the longest to fall into the routine of the Laboratory Day Care Centre, Department of Human Development, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana. The brief sketch of the case studies conducted and developed is presented here:

#### **Subject- A :**

Subject-A was a 2 years 3 months old female child being reared up in a joint family. She had one elder sibling (sister). The subject was a typical case and took unusually long, rather the longest time among the sample subjects to fall into the routine of the Laboratory Day Care Centre. Her mother was educated up to Master's level and working as a Research Fellow in the University. Father of the subject was a Graduate and working as an Insurance Advisor. The subject joined the Laboratory Day Care Centre in April 2010 and was observed to display several non-adjustment reactions particularly Eating

problem, Temper tantrum, Over attachment with mother, Over attachment with care-providers, Unwillingness to come to the centre and Withdrawn behaviour. However, with the intervention and support of the care providers the Eating problem was the first non-adjustment reaction to fade out within a week. Usually the care-providers address to the eating problems of children very promptly and this might be the reason that this reaction of the subject disappeared at the earliest. Over attachment with the mother was the next to fade out within 6 weeks followed by the Withdrawn behaviour and Temper tantrums. However, the subject was observed to demonstrate Temper tantrums more intensely than any other child in the Laboratory day care centre and took quite long, almost 10 weeks to fade out. Over attachment with care providers and Unwillingness to come to the centre were other alarming reactions that lingered on for 11 to 12 weeks. Unwillingness to come to the centre was the last reaction to fade out. As per the observation of the investigators and interactions with the care providers as well as parents of the subject, it was comprehended that the subject was always happy to go anywhere except Laboratory day care centre. The mother of the subject admitted that she was occupied with her own work and was unable to provide much of the quality time to the child. The subject was spending most of her time with her grandmother and was over pampered by the grandmother. Her insecure attachment with the mother and the over attachment with grandmother made this transition for the child difficult. The subject was also found to be irregular in attendance which also contributed to the slow adjustment of the child as it disturbed the regular routine of the child.

#### **Subject- B :**

Subject-B was a female child aged 2 years and 2 months from a nuclear family set up. She was the only child, had no siblings. Her parents were well-qualified, mother being a Post graduate, working in Corporate Sector and father a Medical Officer. The subject was also observed to be slow in falling in the routine of the Laboratory Day Care Centre and displayed many non-adjustment reactions such as Eating problem, Over attachment with mother, Over attachment with care providers and Withdrawn behaviour. Over attachment with care providers was quite prominent during the initial few weeks, but was foremost to fade out. In this case eating problem was ascertained to be a major problem as she disliked the very sight of the food. She showed all resistance during the meal times and in spite of all the interventions employed by the care providers, she took nearly 4 weeks to accept the food. The subject was also withdrawn and never got involved in any activity for nearly 9 weeks. It was around 10 weeks that she started showing interest in the activities of the Laboratory day care centre and paid some attention to the instructions of the care providers. Over attachment with the mother was another reaction which lingered on till 11 weeks. As per the

interactions with care providers and the parents, it was quite evident that the mother of the subject was over permissive. Usually at home she allowed the child to do whatever she wished to. But she rarely provided any opportunity to move out of the house and interact with the people other than the parents. It was reported by the mother that the child often felt uncomfortable and disturbed in any gathering and hardly had any experience of socializing before joining the Laboratory day care centre. Also, the subject was found to be quite irregular in attendance, which was established as the significant reason for her prolonged non-adjustment.

### Subject- C :

Subject-C was another case again a female who displayed continued resistance to adjust in the Laboratory day care centre. She was 2 years 3 months old and from a joint family. She had no siblings and happened to be the only child of her parent's. The father of the subject was a Post Graduate and running his own business. Mother was a doctor. The subject displayed a variety of non-adjustment reactions that disappeared one by one, but took unusually long time to fade out. Eating problem was the first to fade out. In the beginning she vomited whatever she ate but started accepting food from the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of joining the Laboratory day care centre. Over attachment with mother and Temper tantrums diminished after 4 to 5 weeks. Her strong unwillingness to come to the Laboratory day care centre also weakened in about 6 weeks. Withdrawn Behaviour lingered on and gradually disappeared after about 8 weeks. Over attachment with care providers was the reaction that took the maximum time (10 weeks) to fade out. But in this case, as reported by the care providers, the mother of the subject was very cooperative and always kept the line of communication open with the care providers. She extended full support and even prolonged the period of her stay with the child in the Laboratory day care centre till the subject got adjusted. As per the information of the mother, it was brought to light that the subject was pampered too much by her paternal aunt residing with them. She was spending most of the time with the aunt before joining Laboratory day care centre. Hence, she was unable to interact with other children. She always asked one of the care-providers to stay and play with her.

### Conclusion :

Some children during the entry to the pre-school environment are under enormous stress. Most of them have problems with adjustment to the new environment of various kinds and degrees, which manifested itself in the forms of behaviour problems. As Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) has suggested, adjustment to the pre-school setting forms a prototype for later ecological transitions, influences the ability of the child to function in different environments and the

consequences of early adaptation process have a long-term influence. Most children with adjustment problems at the beginning of the first pre-school year also had a tendency to behaviour problems in the first elementary school year and these problems intensified. All these problems have an impact on the child's commitment to schooling and motivation for learning. If everything has gone well the child will have a measure of self-confidence, be very trusting and perhaps even a little adventurous. He will have a strong attachment to the parent figure(s), based on the affectionate, approving and supportive relationship he has experienced.

The adjustment behaviour of the child is a testimony of the quality and stability of the attachment child has with the parents, particularly mother, as well as the care providers in the Laboratory day care centre. The investigations indicated that over- protectiveness or over- possessiveness on the part of parents or other family members, parental over- indulgence, lack of socialization experiences and irregular attendance at centre contributed to poor adjustment of the child to the Laboratory day care centre. Also, infant disorganized attachment is a major risk factor for problematic stress management and later problem behaviour (Bakermans-Kranenburg *et al.*, 2005). Thus, emergence of attachment disorganization has to be prevented. The study illustrates the need for interventions specifically focussing on the prevention of disorganization.

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