

THE UNIQUE BOND

Asruta Jena

Research Scholar (Sociology)

Fakir Mohan University, Balasore, Odisha, India

ABSTRACT

Parent-child relationships are interdependent as they influence one another. While the arrival of children into one's life, changes the person as a whole; in the shaping of a child's identity and character, parents play an important role. Parenthood also leads to economising life while bringing about specific and necessary life-style changes. However, there are times when the couple might go through marital instability which may affect the physical, mental, cognitive, emotional and social development of the children. One of the worst reasons behind marital instability is domestic violence which has been discussed. Domestic violence in parents causes depression and adversely affects the emotional health of children. The theories that describe domestic violence, reasons behind such violence taking place and the measures that can be taken to handle this social problem are discussed in detail, giving particular emphasis of such violence occurring during the current times of COVID-19 pandemic. However, be it a stable or an unstable relationship of parents, there are a few steps that if followed properly cannot stop a child from growing into a good, successful, strong and independent human being and would certainly also help in strengthening the parent-child bond. In some cases, children in unstable families grow up to have better physical and mental health, educational achievement, success and self esteem than stable families if the methods are properly followed. There is also a discussion about mentally strong children by illustrating the COVID-19 situation. Whatever the situation may be, parents should keep their personal problems aside in order to concentrate on the well-being of their children. Parents' care, protection and love for their children remain the same till eternity and can never be ceased. Parent-child bonds are unique and the parental relationship sets the bar for all the other relationships thereafter.

KEY WORDS: Parent-child relationship, Marital Instability, Covid 19 pandemic, Domestic violence (shadow pandemic)

INTRODUCTION

Parent-child relationships start with the birth of the child and in some cultures, it is believed that the bond starts even before the child is born and continues to exist even after the death of the parents. Children are life's precious gifts, who come into one's life and change the person as a whole. The arrival of parenthood is bound up with identity and parents go through an identity shift. Children make parents' lives a little hectic, complicated and tiring but at the same time, rewarding in more unimaginable ways, that too, in the best possible way. As one becomes a parent, the perspective of life changes and one becomes a better version of oneself. Personal freedom gives way to other-love and self-care gives way to baby-care. As a parent, one becomes much more patient, tolerant and sacrificing. They start learning the importance of budgeting and saving and thus planning for the future of the child becomes an integral part of their lives. Their life-style changes as they modify their schedule, plans and habits keeping in mind the needs of the child. Parents compromise on their time, sleep and each and every activity whenever needed but still go through anxiety, thinking whether they are taking the best care of and decisions for their little one or not. Parents often worry whether they are doing justice to their roles as parents because they know it is their

responsibility and duty to cater to their children's needs and guide them in the right direction. The parent-child relationship is the most significant in a person's life. A child's first bond is with parents which is unique and the parental relationship sets the bar for everyone thereafter. In my survey, I found that children are adversely affected when spouses go through various types of instabilities, be it in terms of economy, employment, family, child care and school, residence or marriage. These instabilities may affect the physical, mental, cognitive, emotional and social development of the children. Children are the worst sufferers when spouses go through *marital instability* as their academic achievement, physical and mental health are lowered.

In my opinion, one of the worst disputes in a domestic setup that is a part of marital instability is **domestic violence**. According to WHO, domestic violence often increases in times of crisis as witnessed during the **COVID-19** pandemic due to restrictions and containment measures taking place to limit the virus. The lockdown has brought the world to a halt and so has the lives of women in abusive relationships as the same violence is frequently repeated on a regular basis during this period. This worldwide increase in domestic abuse has been described as a "**shadow pandemic**" alongside Covid-19 by the UN. As my analysis of the survey conducted points out, the predictors of abuse may include increased tenacity levels, perturbation, job insecurity, financial instability, and other such emotions of parents.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the various aspects of a parent-child relationship.
2. To study the impacts of unstable relationships between spouses on children.
3. To study the measures to prevent stress and trauma in children.
4. To suggest good parenting techniques for the betterment of children.

REVIEW OF LITERATURES:

After doing a lot of study and research, I can hereby state that the motives behind domestic violence can be better understood with the evaluation of three theories which are the social conflict theory, the social functionalist theory and symbolic interactionism theory. According to the social conflict theory, one of the reasons for domestic violence could also be when one of the partners instigates the conflict with the desire to have more control over the other because of uneven distribution of resources.

According to Boss, Doherty, LaRossa & Steinmetz (1993), in the social functionalist theory, "men are supposed to hold instrumental positions within the society whereas women are expected to occupy expressive roles". This suggests the patriarchal framework. This theory states that most of the abusers believe it to be their responsibility in society to make sure that their women are controlled. Thus, domestic violence takes place when women strive to occupy instrumental roles that are meant for men. Such violence is considered to be an operating procedure of practicing control and also sustaining power. According to Eaton, Davis, Barrios, Brenner, & Noonan (2007), "Domestic violence is considered to be a social issue that has its foundations in gendered principles and in continuing wealth inequities".

On the other hand, according to symbolic interactionism theory, different societal norms and principles the society pose various constraints that affect an individual's behaviour. This theory holds that individuals while living in a physical world also live in a symbolic society.

If there is mutual understanding between partners, there will be no reasons for domestic violence in their relationship.

All the three theories mainly suggest the main purpose of domestic violence is evaluation of power, diffidence (when one party feels inferior) and control concerns.

DISCUSSION:

As is showcased in the news and other social media platforms, globally, during COVID-19 lockdown, there has been a surge in cases of domestic violence and this has led to increased vulnerability among children. I would like to emphasize on the fact that children who witness the violence while growing up, experience paramount societal impact. According to Cyleste & Dressier (2008), these children grow up knowing that such violence is acceptable and might become abusers in their relationships in future. Therefore, as Adelman & Kil (2007) pointed out, it is vicious to condone domestic violence given that it will spread to the future generations.

Moreover, my interviewees believed that domestic violence in parents causes depression and adversely affects the emotional health of children. By gathering all the answers, I may point out that domestic violence leads to children suffering from stress and depression at a tender age and thus, lessening their learning abilities and this impairing their health. Therefore, domestic violence should be treated as a social problem which needs to be handled properly by taking appropriate steps. One such step would include raising children in a peaceful surrounding in which they are fostered to harbour, cherish and respect relationships.

Other steps or measures that I would like to highlight would include practising self-care (individuals with antecedent abusive, pugnacious tendencies, anger management issues must work on keeping their stress, tension and anxiety as low as possible), keeping someone (friend, family, neighbour) informed who is reliable and is in close proximity in case of spiraling risk, discussing the issue with trusted family member/s or friends and limiting media exposure. Victims can use a number of helplines for domestic violence and online counselling websites and organisations that are available. Currently, these helplines, websites and organizations are working constantly to deal with this global issue, all over the world.

Writing about the current times of the pandemic in particular when job security is threatened, dealing with a partner whose financial priorities are not sorted can be a major exacerbation and cause many arguments. One of the best ways to resolve this issue is by sitting together and making a list of expenses and investments that need to be taken into account. Spending on emergencies and cutting down on luxuries would certainly help. It is important for the parents to keep in mind the fact that their momentary loss of control may have adverse impacts on their child, more than they know.

Rosalind Sedacca, a parenting coach told the Huffington Post, "If your marriage has created a toxic home environment, children are probably better off getting some distance from it. For me, divorce is preferable to years of living in a home where parents fight and disrespect one another. If children are being raised in a war zone or in the silence and apathy of a dead marriage, divorce may open the door to a healthier, happier future for everyone in the family."

Doborah Mecklinger, a mediator and therapist said, "Chronic marital conflict undermines a kid's sense of safety and sameness at home. Usually spouses look to 'escape' unhappy marriages and avoid being at home in order to avoid their partners. They may work longer hours, spend more time with friends to avoid being present."

Terry Gaspard, a therapist said that being raised in a high-conflict home can cause children to have feelings of low self-esteem and unworthiness and even the most confident, sure-footed child feeling uncertain and rejected. Parents in high conflict or extremely unhappy marriages teach their children that it is all right to settle for less than they deserve in relationships. Children who observe their parents settling for a miserable marriage might become passive, depressed or pessimistic about their ability to love and be loved in a healthy intimate relationship."

However, according to me, be it a stable or an unstable relationship, if the following important points are kept in mind and followed properly step by step then nothing can stop a child from growing into the most beautiful (internally) human being. These following measures would certainly help in strengthening the parent-child bond as well.

Positive parent-child bonds are important for all areas of a child's development. Such bonds foster autonomy, curiosity, self-regard and better decision making skills. Positive parent-child relationships help children learn about the world in general, by helping them adapt to different situations. Children learn about the planned and unplanned changes which take place in future along with learning about safety and security. These positive parent-child relationships are built on spending quality time.

By **spending quality time** together, parents get to know about each others' experiences, thoughts, feelings and changing interests. "Quality time" can happen anytime and anywhere. During this time that is spent together, parents show that they value and appreciate their children. This is done by sharing powerful positive messages while exchanging smiles, laughter, hugs and gentle touches. Parents can improve and create a bond with their children by getting involved with their lives and building stronger communication as this is valuable for their relationship. Parents need to learn to adapt to parent-child relationships with time and should never forget to interact with their children in any situation.

Prioritising **face to face interactions** help form a connection with each child, helping the parents focus on each child's individual strengths and talents. Children have different personalities. Some children might need less alone time with parents than others but they will all benefit from special time with each parent. On busy days, parents might not have longer interactions but should try to have one on one time at least for a few minutes, everyday. Although it is always better to have longer interactions whenever possible. Being at the moment or being at the time of need of children is extremely important. If parents are available or present when children need them and spend quality time with them by showing warmth, affection, care, love and respect, they can strengthen their relationship with their children. Parents need to try to adjust their time schedule if it is related to the child's health or career. Children reciprocate by showing the same as they understand that parents care for them, especially by being attentive listeners.

Parents should practice **attentive listening** as it strengthens the bond with their child. While listening to the child, parents should not be distracted but should be facing towards the child by making eye contact and listening attentively. Such attentive listening would help them respond to their child with appropriate views. Having proper, worthwhile communication and

relaxed conversations are essential for the bonding. In case the parents and children share similar interests or hobbies (singing, dancing, gyming, etcetera), they should try working on them together as this will bring them close and connect them together. Attentive listening to the child's experiences in a day and understanding, interacting and reciprocating makes children feel secure, brings them closer and binds them with the parents. Sometimes, parents have to listen to the children even when they are tired or busy or have other minor engagements at home. Parents should listen to their children whenever they want to speak to them and should not shut them up rudely otherwise children might stop sharing anything with their parents. Parents should neither humiliate their children in public nor talk about their children's drawbacks and make fun of it in front of others. They need to be in touch with the teachers and listen to the child's problems. The children should always be nurtured in such a manner that they are as less dependent as possible.

Children should be made **self-reliant** by giving them the chance to choose their own clothes, accessories and other activities that are associated with the child only. They should be taught to do their own work and should be encouraged to help parents in household chores and give them the chance to plan a meal for the family. Parents have to respect their children's feelings, opinions and choices to let the children know that they trust them. Active participation of parents is needed in the lives of their children. Fun, entertainment, recreation will enliven parents' lives with their children. Inviting the children's close friends to home and enjoying time together will help strengthen the bond between the budding close friends who may, in turn, grow up to become family friends, enabling everlasting friendships and relationships. This will ensure that the children have a good support system whom they can trust and rely on.

Being trustworthy is the most important aspect of parenting. Parents should keep their word, keep secrets and confidence between them. Children should be able to rely on their parents and feel free to share their thoughts. This helps the child feel secure and attached. Children should be valued for what they are, and encouraged for their creativity, talents and potentialities. For example, if the child loves dancing or singing, parents need to encourage the little one. One way of doing this is by listening to the child's favourite singer or watching the child's favourite dancer along with the child.

Further, the **3F formula** (firmness, fairness and friendliness) is the most effective parenting style and is the key to strengthening the parent-child bond. Children should be allowed to evolve naturally and gradually, and parents need to accept the changes with the changing times. They have to relax the rules with the growing age of their children. They have to be a bit flexible and change the rules whenever needed. Parents need to encourage their children to be independent, gradually with some amount of liberty with their growing years. Sharing personal experiences and life lessons make children aware, careful and insightful. Children learn indirectly by watching their parents. Caring for the orphans, old, downtrodden and helping others can teach children compassion indirectly. They become sensitive to situations, inculcate good values and become good human beings. They should be encouraged to stand up for themselves and speak up when they are wronged. This will make them stronger and empowered. They should be encouraged to take up challenges and be individualistic. This will help them to adjust, adapt to different situations and help them in good decision making powers. These children can take on challenges and face the world. This can be possible only if the *parent child bond is strong*.

I strongly feel that *Diana Baumrind's authoritative parenting style* is the best method of parenting. Parents should adopt the authoritative parenting style in which they should have “high responsiveness and high demands”. According to Diana, “authoritative parents are responsive to the child’s emotional needs while having high standards”. Parents have to nurture their children, listen to them attentively, provide them protection, support and shower them with whole hearted love and affection. As a child keeps growing, independence gives way with every stage of growth, parents should consider their children’s feelings, allow them to make small choices, validate their emotions and reason with them. However, at the same time, they should establish rules, set clear limits on behaviour, encourage self-discipline, be strict and use positive and fair methods to discipline their children. Thus, earn respect and not demand respect.

Parents are the first and best teachers of their children. In my opinion, parents should raise their children in such a way that they have kids with strong self-regulation skills, competence, assertiveness, independence, self-reliance and who can engage themselves in creative and extra-curricular activities so that they achieve higher academic success, have a balanced personality and can explore new environment without fear. Parents have to be flexible depending on the personal goals and unique behaviour of the child so that they have good emotional regulation, self-control, develop good social skills, maintain healthy relationships with their peers and elders, have better mental health and develop good self-esteem. As a result, children learn to balance freedom with responsibility. While nurturing children, parents should instill in them the right values, mores, norms, manners, etiquette, develop their personality and mould their character. The moulding should be done in such a way that in future, when the parents are ever at fault, their children can show them the right path, reminding them of their own teachings and guiding them towards the right direction.

Being a mother, I must state that as the little one gradually grows into a teenager, there are a whole set of experiences, struggles and concerns. Parents need to strike a balance by rewarding their children for their achievements and punishing them for their faults. According to Chanakya Neeti, parents should give their children unconditional love and take care of them till the age of 5 years, and then between 6-15 years, parents should teach them strict discipline and etiquette while punishing them for their bad deeds. But 16 years onwards, they should be made friends and parents should not hit them as they might leave the house and go.

Sometimes, parents have to be adaptive, understand their children’s situation and state of mind and be sensitive to forgive them for their mistakes. Teenage is the most crucial stage for adolescent children because of the hormonal changes. Children sometimes do not understand what they do and get irritated and throw temper tantrums. Parents should be extremely careful and handle their children carefully with patience. It is a fact that children often learn from their own mistakes. Parents continue to be their constant pillars of support, cheerleaders and greatest comforters. They have to always encourage and motivate them to lift up their spirits. They need to teach their children to be happy and content with whatever they have, do their best within their limits and to compete only with themselves and not with anyone else to achieve their goals. This will enable the child to have a stress-free academic life and understand the value of things and not the price or the reward.

Similarly, parents should not show overexcitement or be extremely happy with their children’s success nor should they show extreme disgust and disappointment with their failures. While celebrating their children’s success, parents should also prepare them for

failures and struggles so that children are prepared for the worst. Doing this would help prevent children from getting into depression and being stressed. Children should also know and understand that they have to work hard and sincerely but everything is not in their hands. Parents prepare them to face the challenges and hardships of life and make them strong to fight their own battles while urging them to handle difficult situations. By doing this, they raise disciplined, honest, straightforward, strong, determined, independent, decisive, compassionate, sensitive, sensible, responsible, happier, healthier, successful, and grateful children, who are equipped to face real world challenges.

During the current times of COVID-19 pandemic, I witnessed (as my analysis of the interviews showcase) that the students who are mentally strong as a result of proper parenting, prepared themselves to face the hardships and challenges of these times, and stayed back at their place of study while others went back to their homes as soon as the lockdown was announced. The lockdown period has been a challenging time for everyone around the world. More so, for the children living alone in their places of study as earlier, they had always been surrounded by their parents and other family members for a major part of their lives. Majority of these children had never done any household chores before but this does not mean that they were unaware of the fact that they would need to do all the chores, all by themselves sometime in their lives. It is not that they would have to do all this for other people but for their own survival.

I would also like to stress on the fact that physical challenges have not been as tough as the mental ones. No doubt about the fact that the children are able to take care of themselves physically, be it by cooking, cleaning the dishes, cleaning the house or managing all the academic work. However, at the same time, they are immensely troubled by the thought of not being able to meet their family for such a long time. They have been mentally strong as they decided to prioritise their academic work and were unable to return to their hometowns in order to follow the rule of physical distancing. The decisions of holding or not holding the examinations took a long time to be declared. Now that the decisions are out, the virus has spread everywhere upto a large extent and the children find it difficult to risk travelling to their hometowns as they are scared of being carriers of the infection and infecting their family members. Also to be noted that many of these children lack proper facilities in order to home quarantine.

As much as these times have been physically and mentally challenging for everyone, it has had an adverse impact on the emotional wellbeing of these children and their parents. It is not as if these children do not want to go back to their homes and meet their near and dear ones. Children and their family have been found to have broken down during these times as they miss each other but they pose to be emotionally strong in front of one another to prevent the other person from knowing what one is going through. They decide to be mentally strong and stay away (wherever they are - in different places) from one another for everyone's safety and physical well-being. Therefore, maintaining physical distance while staying socially connected with one another.

Therefore, in the process of socialization, parents' lives revolve around their children and they live their dreams through their children. When children reach adulthood, parents should allow them to do things by themselves, experience life on their own terms, let them follow some of their self-made rules and let them believe in themselves and respect their decisions. Children have their own dreams, goals and destiny. *Kahlil Gibran* has rightly said "Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.

They come through you but not from you, And though they are with you yet they belong not to you." Parents care, protect and love their children in-person for a short span of their lifetime as children stay with them temporarily. They cannot hold on to their children forever. However, their care, protection and love for their children remains the same even virtually and can never be ceased.

In my viewpoint, children have their own unique identities, lives and destinies and their own unique part to play and fulfil in this world. Parents cannot imagine what potential lies within their children neither can they fathom what their children's world will be in future. Children have their own individual thoughts and beliefs. They are living in their own time just as their parents are. They are created for their time and not for their previous generation's. Time marches forward and everyone has to move forward with it. Life has to move on to make way for a bigger and better platform for the brave children to showcase their talents and potential which is unique in each child. Though hard for a parent to do, one has to practice level-headed detachment and restraint so that the children remain strong, follow their dreams and reach their goals. This will help them in building their own lives as well as their next generation and thus become useful and productive members of the society.

CONCLUSION

To sum it up, in my standpoint as a parent, I strongly believe that parents should keep their personal problems aside in order to concentrate on the well-being of their children. Additionally, young children should not be exposed to overt conflict and the reasons behind the problems that their parents face. The child's education, health, hobbies, recreation, emotional and other needs should not be neglected. Both the parents have to focus on the overall development of the child, Parents should not have unrealistic expectations from their children and should let them fulfil their dreams according to their capabilities and potentialities. They should prepare their children to face the worst and unplanned situations. Children should never be compared to their siblings, friends or any other person. Mentally strong and independent children are able to handle domestic violence and marital instability of their parents and real world challenges like the current crisis of COVID 19 pandemic. In some cases, I found that children in unstable families grow up to have better physical and mental health, educational achievement, success and self esteem than stable families if the methods mentioned earlier are properly followed. Another reason for this could be the undivided attention that the children get from each parent as the parents spend most of their time with their children and not with each other.

Parents need to love not only themselves but also keep themselves engaged by spending their time for the betterment of society. They have to be stable and accept the reality, adapt to the new situations, make their minds, bodies and souls strong to face the transitions. Every growing up stage of their children's lives are intrinsically woven with them and this bond becomes so special, indispensable and unique that the children often become best friends with their parents. The parent-child bond never fades and children are always close to their parents' hearts, no matter how far away the children stay from them. This unique bond of a parent and a child is the purest and is inclusive of true, unconditional and unspoken love.

SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Why are children with stable and happy parents, physically and mentally disturbed?
2. What parenting techniques are useful for happier and healthier children in unstable families?
3. How can children be handled in families with domestic violence and marital instability?

REFERENCES

1. Allen, Harris, et al. *Stop Using the Term 'Social Distancing' -- Start Talking about 'Physical Distancing, Social Connection'* | *Health Affairs*. (April 2020), Stop Using The Term 'Social Distancing' -- Start Talking About 'Physical Distancing, Social Connection'
2. *Applied Theory of Domestic Violence Sociology Essay (December 2016)*. Applied Theory Of Domestic Violence Sociology Essay
3. Baumrind, Diana. "Effective Parenting during the Early Adolescent Transition." *Family Transitions*, vol. 2, no. 1, p. 1 (1991).
4. "Building Good Parent-Child Relationships." *Raising Children Network*, (June 2017), Good parent-child relationships
5. Damania Aviva , Parvez. "Lockdown and Rise in Domestic Violence: How to Tackle Situation If Locked with an Abuser." *The Indian Express*, 17 May 2020, Lockdown and rise in domestic violence: How to tackle situation if locked with an abuser
6. Gibran, Kahlil. *On Children by Kahlil Gibran - Poems* | *Academy of American Poets*, (Knof, 1923), On Children by Kahlil Gibran - Poems | Academy of American Poets
7. Kar, Pk "Domestic Violence: Need for Legal Awareness"
Jena, Asruta "Domestic Violence: An Outcome of Marital Instability" Dominant Publishers & Distributors Pvt Ltd, New Delhi (2009)
8. Mohan , Megha. "Stopping Lockdown Domestic Abuse on My Street." *BBC News*, (June 2020), Coronavirus: Domestic violence 'increases globally during lockdown'
9. Rube , Tasha. "How to Develop a Good Parent and Child Relationship." *WikiHow*, (April 2020), How to Develop a Good Parent and Child Relationship.
10. Tangermann, Victor. "The WHO Wants You to Ditch the Phrase 'Social Distancing.'" *Futurism*, (March 2020), The WHO Wants You to Ditch the Phrase "Social Distancing"
11. Wong, Brittany. "7 Ways You Can Damage Your Kids by Staying in a Bad Marriage." *HuffPost India*, 17 May 2016 7 Ways You Can Damage Your Kids By Staying In A Bad Marriage