
UNIT 14 SOCIO-EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY

Structure

- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Objectives
- 14.3 Socio-Emotional Needs
 - 14.3.1 Importance of the Socio-Emotional Needs
 - 14.3.2 Emergence of Socio-Emotional Problems
- 14.4 Socio-Emotional Problems of Individuals with Disability
 - 14.4.1 Stigmatization and Withdrawal
 - 14.4.2 Emotional Problems
 - 14.4.3 Problems in Interpersonal Relations and Social Adjustment
 - 14.4.4 Communication Problems
 - 14.4.5 Negative Self-concept
 - 14.4.6 Behavioural Problems
 - 14.4.7 Problems in Employment
- 14.5 Role of Parents and Teachers
- 14.6 Role of a Guidance Counsellor
- 14.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 14.8 Unit-end Exercises

14.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit covers socio-emotional needs of students with disabilities. It explains the importance of these needs and the emergence of problems related to socio-emotional needs in these individuals. It also describes the types of handicaps and the role of parents, teachers and guidance counsellors in helping these students to cope up with their problems arises due to their socio-emotional development.

14.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- list and explain about the various types of handicap i.e. mental, hearing, visual and physical;
- describe the socio-emotional problems of the persons with handicap with reference to physical, visual, hearing and mental handicap;
- find out how parents and teachers should deal with the handicapped students to alleviate their problems;
- list and explain how a guidance counsellor can help the students with handicap(s) and their families.

14.3 SOCIO-EMOTIONAL NEEDS

We need a little shift in our perspective to understand the needs of the individuals with disability. Just take a few minutes to recall the last three activities you have done and then try to visualize how a disabled person would have accomplished those.

For example, imagine that you have just returned from the market after shopping. How this task would have been accomplished by a person with visual, hearing, physical or mental disability?

A person with visual impairment may have problems in finding the way, crossing the road or avoid tripping on to something. A person with hearing impairment may not be able to hear sounds of warning of oncoming vehicles. A person with physical disability may need assistance in walking and may require much longer time to cover the distance. People with intellectual disability may find it difficult to negotiate with others about their requirements. If the trip to market required use of public transport, say a bus, the problem gets more complicated. The person with sight problems would not be able to read the bus number, the person with loco-motor disability may not be able to board the bus and the intellectually disabled may not be able to articulate about his/her destination. In short, things which come to normal persons naturally are not that easy for the disabled. This leads to frustration.

Handicap due to societal system

Besides the frustration caused by the inability to perform tasks with dexterity that a normal person does, the special needs person's misery is compounded by other factors also. One major external factor is the attitude of the society.

The attitude may vary from indifference to ridicule to isolation to acceptance.

Answer the following questions honestly to see what kinds of attitude you have towards disabled persons.

- 1) Do you ever feel awkward in the presence of a person with disability?
- 2) If you come to know that a group of people with some disability were going to be your neighbour, would it bother you?
- 3) Would you avoid employing a person with some disability?
- 4) Are you aware of the problems that people with disability may have to face in using public transport, gaining access to many public buildings or using telephones?
- 5) If a person with a disability was attending a social gathering, would you avoid that person?
- 6) Do you ever feel that you are treating a person with a disability as less than ordinary?
- 7) Would you pay a disabled person an extra special attention?

If your answer to any of the above questions is 'yes' that shows you have some negative attitude towards disabled persons which may influence your dealings with them. This will lead to additional socio-emotional problems for the individuals with disability.

In our country, the systems and public conveniences are generally designed to meet the needs of the normal persons only. Our telephones, transport, banking systems and even elevators are not designed to be used by the disabled independently. Whereas in the developed countries, the systems have been designed keeping in mind the needs of the disabled individuals. For example, the lifts in public places in advanced countries have switches that are marked with Braille for the convenience of the visually impaired. The public buses have steps which can be lowered so that even persons on wheel chair can board easily. There are special telephone instruments available for individuals with hearing problems.

Thus, the system not designed according to the special needs of the individuals causes difficulties when they use these systems. This makes daily living of people with special needs more strenuous. They encounter anxiety, fear, isolation and trauma due to a system that doesn't respond to their needs. Thus we can say the disabled experience handicap due to the uncaring system that does not meet their needs.

Normal individuals have means at their disposal to relieve stress by way of entertainment or by indulging in other social activities. Here again the people with disability are at a disadvantage.

In the light of the above discussion, it is very necessary to understand the social and emotional needs of persons with disability. They should be seen as 'person' first and handicapped later.

14.3.1 Importance of the Socio-Emotional Needs

“My brother gets a pair of shoes once in 3 months I, get a pair of shoes once a year.”

“My mother takes my sister to all the parties but not me. She tells me she has to face lots of problems when I am around.”

“My mother does not allow me to play with other children in the park as other children make fun of me and call me an idiot”?

“My father keeps fighting with my mother for my weak performance in the class.”

“This disappoints me a lot.”

What do the above expressions by the disabled persons reflect?

Persons with disability have the same physiological, social and emotional needs as any other person.

All children are born with certain basic needs that must be satisfied before they can develop physically, socially or intellectually. Growth in any one of these areas is necessarily related to and influenced by growth in the others. One method of viewing social and emotional needs within this context has been formulated by Maslow (1954) who conceived of individual needs leading to psychological health as forming a hierarchy. According to his model, higher order needs such as belonging, love, self-esteem and self-actualization can only be achieved once more potent physiological and safety needs have been met. Even in the higher order needs, achievement of each level leading towards self-actualization depends upon the satisfaction of the previous level's needs.

While the satisfaction of physical and health needs are essential to survival, emotional and social growth are vitally important for the overall development of the child. The child's psychological growth is fostered by feeling loved or accepted by the significant people in his or her life as well as by being stimulated and active.

Physical and emotional security provides a basis for the development of trust, which allows the child to explore and examine aspects of environment and to strive towards developing a sense of self.

As it is, persons with disability have to face problems because of societal handicap, lack of attention to their social and emotional needs may compound their problems. It is therefore necessary to understand their socio-emotional problems so that they can develop their potentials to the maximum.

14.3.2 Emergence of Socio-Emotional Problems

Disability of any kind is sufficient to limit a person's mobility in the society in a number of ways.

The sympathetic responses, the negative or hostile reactions or indifferences in behaviour shown by others influence the attitude of persons with disability towards the society. This results in the form of withdrawal, maladjustment and non participation in the social world. Disability is not only a medical matter, it is an area of social concern also. It is not an 'objective' thing in a person but a social value judgment. Social value judgment is quite important for one's judgment and integration with the society and community. Society's perception of his/her 'deviance' lessens the possibility of understanding his/her interests, aspirations etc. This often leads to withdrawal behaviour by persons with disability in situations which are discriminating, hostile and indifferent.

Individuals with disability cannot do certain things that are normally expected in the ordinary time available. They cannot keep up with the standards of performance and ways of behaving that are presented by the surrounding society.

This inability to do things at par with other normal individuals may cause discomfort and feeling of 'looked down upon' and results in a low self-esteem. This low self-esteem leads to a feeling of inferiority.

But if individuals with special needs have been regarded and treated with respect by their family and other people in close contact with them, especially during their early years, it will positively influence their 'self image' - their own conscious and subconscious view of themselves.

How does a child feel when faced by repeated failure? He will feel frustrated. In any child, a series of successful activities tend to build up morale and confidence, whilst a series of unsuccessful attempts leading to no recognition or reward tend to lower his confidence which may further affect his/her chance of success in future activities. For example, a child with physical disability is likely to find some of his/her sensory motor experiences such as learning to control his/her hands accurately, eye and hand coordination quite frustrating especially if his/her parents become impatient or critical of his/her efforts at using a spoon or building the blocks, etc.

The standard of performance expected of a child at a certain age is set largely from parental expectations. The child with special needs is as likely a normal child to make comparisons between his/her performance and that of children of similar age, assuming, of course, that she is not leading a very isolated existence. As a result, in addition to sensing parental dismay at his/her clumsiness, s/he is becoming aware that his/her performance is not matching up to that of other children.

A child, therefore, feels she is not keeping up to the expectations of his/her parents and it results in a poor self-image with low morale and confidence. Socio-emotional problems are thus related to what an individual with disability feels about him/herself, as discussed above. Attitudes of 'normal' individuals also contribute to the socio-emotional problems of persons with disability.

There is a tendency among 'normal' people to dwell on the problems and frustrations associated with disability to such an extent that the person with disability ceases to be regarded as an individual with his/her own personal abilities and contributions to make to the society.

People tend to generalize from the disability and attribute it to the whole individual. As one spastic child puts it "Just because my legs are wobbly, people think my mind is wobbly too". Such a generalization is one of the primary aspects of faulty attitude towards individuals with disability.

Hence, the feelings of persons with disability about themselves and the feelings of others towards them lead to a number of socio-emotional problems.

Check Your Progress

Notes: a) Write your answers in the space given below.

b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the block.

1) Mention three factors that lead to the socio-emotional problems of the individuals with disability?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2) For the overall development of the child, fulfillment of certain needs is very essential. Mention any two of them.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

3) What is the general perception of normal person towards person with disability?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

4) State “True” or “False” in the given statements.

- a) Negative attitudes of the society towards individuals with disability lead to problems of persons with disability.
- b) An individual with disability has the same basic physiological, social, and emotional needs as a non-disabled individual.
- c) The family environment has nothing to do in determining the ‘self image’ of an individual with disability.
- d) A person with disability has strengths as well as limitations.
- e) Parents of persons with disability should have high expectations from their special children.

14.4 SOCIO-EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS OF THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITY

In this section we are going to discuss some socio-emotional problems commonly found in persons with disability.

14.4.1 Stigmatization and Withdrawal

Because of the stigma attached to disability of any kind, the individuals with disability are not accepted by the society and people try to see their disabilities instead of abilities. As a result of this, individuals with disability withdraw and remain isolated from the rest of the community. Degrees of stigma vary from place to place. In India social stigma is more as compared to developed countries. This attitude acts as a barrier in their integration into the society.

The visibility of disability, as in the case of physical and visual impairment, leads to rejection by others. Even though other factors are involved, the presence of a visible impairment appears to negatively affect the self concept of individuals with such disability. These individuals may perceive themselves as different and not fitting in, and as a result they may withdraw from their peer contacts. The ignorance of the society towards disability may result in the non-acceptance of disabled individuals who may then withdraw and remain segregated. For example, the individuals with visual impairment do not suffer because they yearn for sight but because of the negative social attitude towards them.

The withdrawal problem of individuals with intellectual disability is also caused by the pathetic or mostly hostile attitude of society towards them which magnifies their problem and even threatens their freedom and existence.

14.4.2 Emotional Problems

You must have seen individuals with physical or visual impairment moving about in a place. What hazards do they face as compared with normal persons? The answer is obvious. The physical hazards may lead to insecurity and emotional disturbances. The effect of this is more if as a child, they encounter negative experiences at home, school and in the community.

Because the visibility of the disability attracts contemptuous attention, people try to hide their disability. It is for this reason people often resist the use of walking stick, crutches, eye glasses and hearing aids even if it leads to functional impairment. Attempts to hide the disability are sometimes made by parents who do not wish their children to be exposed to such behaviour of others or are ashamed of their deformed offspring. This leads to embarrassment for the disabled individuals, which often leads to emotional trauma. Some of the psychosomatic complaints include insomnia, reduced appetite, gradual loss of interest in life, negative attitude towards self and family, insecurity, anxiety and emotional instability.

Threatened by the demands of life and confused by the ambivalent attitudes towards themselves, the individuals with disability are likely to suffer from anxiety. Consequently they may restrict their sphere of activities, keep their aspiration low and suffer from fear of failures. The impairment imposed anxiety is therefore one of the important factors of decline in ability to cope with the demands of life. This diminished coping capability is often expressed through impulsive, compulsive and rigid behavior.

The presence of hearing impairment itself does not cause emotional problems. The problem behaviors of individuals with hearing impairment are more similar to than different from those of hearing individuals. If deafness is present from early childhood it may create considerable stress and adversely affect personality development. Because of the hearing impairment in their children, parents either do everything for them, thereby creating delay in self-dependence or neglecting their children which leads to anxiety in them.

Sometimes, because of the discriminatory treatment from parents, children with disability may develop feeling of jealousy towards their brothers and sisters who, they think, are better treated by their parents.

Among individuals with visual impairment, fear of being watched may create an emotional strain, and this fear may persist well into later life.

Since individuals with intellectual disability have fewer coping skills, stresses of daily living are greater for them. It is found that there is high incidence of emotional disturbances among persons with mild intellectual disability than in general population. They are subjected to greater stresses, frustrations and conflicts and consequently more likely to develop behavioural disorders.

Multiple disability conditions can increase an individual's social and emotional problems. Potential for effective social functioning decreases as the number of impairment increases. In studies of individuals with intellectual disability associated with hearing and visual impairment, poor social relationships and generally maladaptive interpersonal behaviour such as aggressiveness has been reported.

14.4.3 Problems in Interpersonal Relations and Social Adjustment

The atmosphere of continued frustration and rejection at home leads to serious maladjustment. A child with disability may become bone of contention between parents who may frequently blame each other for the shortcomings. The disharmony between the parents and lack of acceptance by siblings make the feeling of rejection more acute for the person with disability.

Satisfactory adult relationship is largely dependent upon a satisfactory first relationship (mother and child). In the care of blind infant mutual attraction fails to develop, which leads to adjustment problems later. Because of the deprivation and maltreatment from others, the individuals with disability may exhibit characteristics like, irritability, temper outburst, aggressiveness along with moodiness and emotional instability. The teasing and criticism of others leads to low self-esteem in the individuals with disability.

Individuals with visual impairment have problems with mobility, because of which their opportunities for social-interaction are affected. The acquisition of movement skills should be encouraged through games which involve activities like climbing, balancing, bouncing and soon. These activities promote sense of confidence and self-control which serve as a base for healthy social interaction.

Individuals with intellectual disability may be slower to incorporate values of right and wrong and to develop internal controls. As a result, they may frequently exhibit inappropriate or socially unacceptable behaviour.

Individuals with hearing and speech impairment have a lot of communication problems which lead to social-interaction problems.

14.4.4 Communication Problems

Major problem found among individuals with hearing impairment is of communication and the consequences of this problem are many. It leads to the problem of socialization and discipline.

Students with hearing impairment, in their early years, are more likely to experience frustrations due to not understanding or not being understood, due to which they often show temper tantrums.

In recent years, however there have been positive developments in increasing opportunities for individuals with hearing impairment. Access to computer and specially designed portable devices helps in establishing effective personal contacts.

Individuals with hearing impairment tend to have difficulties in articulation. Speech problems not only impede children's social relationship but may also make it particularly difficult for them to make their needs known effectively. They are likely to be less flexible in acquiring social skills and in dealing with their social environment as compared to other individuals who can express discomfort, pinpoint dissatisfaction and ask questions about something they do not understand.

14.4.5 Negative Self-concept

Self-concept denotes an individual's evaluation of his/her worth and limitations in all those aspects of which s/he is aware of. To feel that life is worth living the individual should have a positive concept about his/her self. People around us play a significant role in the formation of our self-concept.

Individuals with impairment are likely to receive cues of negative evaluation. It is reported that the persons with disability often feel that their conditions prevent others in recognizing their positive attributes.

If the teachers and parents focus only on his or her impairment by making comments such as "you can't do this", "it is not possible for you to achieve" etc., he/she will lack in confidence and develop a negative self-concept.

14.4.6 Behavioural Problems

Because of the faulty attitudes such as rejection, overprotection and over expectation of parents and society, children with disability develop a lot of emotional and behavioural problems such as aggression, head banging, temper tantrums etc. Societal reaction to persons with intellectual disability is more unfavorable than to persons with physical or visual impairment.

Parents and teachers should try to create a more favorable attitude i.e. an attitude of acceptance and non segregations of the children with disability. Without an appropriate attitude on the part of the society it is difficult for the parents to bring up children with disability and more difficult to allow adults to live in the society, enjoy as much independence as possible and work according to their actual capacities.

Other harmful effect of over protection is that parents do not let the individual grow up into an independent person. Adults who have been overprotected during their childhood days might be immature, insecure and mostly depend upon others for taking decision for them.

Parent's, over expectation brings lack of confidence and insecurity in the individual. The individual may have many abilities but s/he will experience severe inferiority feelings due to critical attitudes of his/her parents.

Majority of the persons with disability could be helped to lead socially useful and independent lives if they were able to obtain proper encouragement, early stimulation and guidance.

14.4.7 Problems in Employment

Can persons with disability be employed? Persons with physical disability and other chronic health problems can enter occupations commensurate with their abilities. When adequate measures are taken to protect them, and those with whom they work from possible hazards arising from their disability, they can contribute productively.

Persons with disability are discriminated against in getting the employment. Most employers do not want to recruit persons with disability in their work force. This attitude blocks their entry in the employment markets. This also leads to lot of emotional problems.

Check Your Progress

Notes: a) Write your answers in the space given below.

b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the block.

5) How does a person with disability react to the negative reactions of others?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

6) What is the main cause of social maladjustment among persons with disability?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

7) Define 'self-concept'.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

8) What will be the consequences of overprotection of parents towards persons with disability? Mention any one.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

9) State whether the following statements as True or False.

- a) Technological advances have nothing to do with the intervention programmes for persons with physical impairment. (T/F.)
- b) Families play an important role in the educational process of an individual with disability. (T/F)

14.5 ROLE OF PARENTS AND TEACHERS

- 1) The persons with disability (PWD) should be encouraged to accept their limitations without succumbing to them.
- 2) Parents and teachers should encourage play, talk and free imagination. Play is one of the most powerful means of socialization.
- 3) Considerate and unprejudiced attitudes towards the persons with disability can help them in attaining self-sufficiency and self-actualization.
- 4) Parents and teachers should try to make the home and school environment accessible to the PWD. For example, provisions like stairs as well as ramps, doors wide enough for wheel chairs etc.
- 5) The PWD do possess potentials for development as a fully independent individual. Parents and teachers should create and provide conditions for creative development of the PWD and foster their creativity.
- 6) Parents should accept the child's special needs. Parents unconsciously tend to reject or punish their children with disability or develop over protective attitudes. Both rejection and over protection have negative effect on the integrated personality of the individual.
- 7) Parents and teachers tend to make wide generalisation about the capabilities of the PWD which are unwanted and unrealistic. Perception of the discrepancy between his/her ability and social expectations contribute to tension and discomfort to the child and consequently his/her behaviour undergoes some change.
- 8) As far as possible parents and teachers should try to provide as normal a life as possible to them.
- 9) Emotional problems should not be tackled by force or punishment. They should allow healthy and constructive expression of sexual interest and provide appropriate information to help them to understand what is helping to their body.
- 10) Social activities should be arranged to foster socialization in them.
- 11) The emotional relationship between parents, their social behavior with the child as well as with other family members form models for the child's social behaviour. Quarrelsome and hostile parents, for example, inculcate aggressiveness and hostile behaviour in children. Emotionally unstable parents cause insecurity to children that leads to poor adjustment.
- 12) Emotionally well-balanced and stable family surroundings need to be provided to children with disability. This lays a foundation for the healthy social and emotional development of the child.
- 13) Handicapped children are either not understood or misunderstood as far as their social needs are concerned. Teachers and parents should be aware of their characteristic needs of given stages of social development which may help them to intervene more effectively.

14.6 ROLE OF A GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR

Counsellor has a role to play towards not only the person with disability but also his/her parents and other members of the family. Counsellors who work with the PWD must realize that the primary objective in counselling him/her is to help him/her recognize his/her potential for achievement. The counsellor should help the PWD learn to develop confidence in his/her abilities and to become as self-reliant as possible.

The persons with disability have as active emotional life as any other person. The counsellor should make the PWD feel that he/she can place his/her trust in the counsellor. The counsellor should remember that it is important for him/her to earn this trust, otherwise the counselling effort will not be successful. Counsellors who work with PWD should keep in mind that they have need for success and successful experiences, which should be provided to them.

Counsellors also need to work with the parents to help them understand the child to the greatest extent possible and to accept the child.

Keeping in mind the parent's point of view, the counsellor should attempt to direct discussions to those problems that seem to be of greatest importance to the parents.

Counselling should be directed towards:

- helping them to be more objective about their child.
- helping them to learn about behaviour their child will outgrow and behaviour they can expect to continue.
- helping them to assistance ideas about handling various problems common to families of children with disability.
- advising them about the help books and pamphlets that can provide guidelines for managing PWD and making these materials available for their study.
- how to handle their child more successfully with greater acceptance, understanding and knowledge.
- aiding them in keeping the child engaged in leisure-time pursuits and other constructive activities.
- advising them regarding the community resources which are available- clinics, sheltered workshops, educational institutions, etc.

Parents go through a chain of reactions when they learn about the disability of their child. There can be feeling of shock and disbelief, denial, anger, guilt, frustration, depression, recognition and adaptation. A counsellor should be supportive in these stages.

Counsellor should involve both parents in the counselling and training of the child. The diagnostic evaluation should emphasize what the child will be able to do. The family members should be counselled in order to assist them in rising above the stigma of disability and its accompanying problems.

The counsellor should help the PWD in planning their future.

14.7 LET US SUM UP

Disability may lead to problems when the individual accepts it as a condition of inadequacy. The problems of the PWD is reinforced by the individual and social factors. Individuals with disability have the same social and emotional needs as normal individuals.

They also have the basic need to live, to be loved and accepted by others. They experience all the emotions such as joy, sadness, anger and disgust. Without satisfying basic needs no individuals, whether able or disabled, would feel that their life is worth living or meaningful.

Individuals with disability face a number of problems because of their impairment, societal attitude to disability and lack of acceptance by parents and other family members. The social stigma attached to disability forces the PWD often to withdraw into oneself. They often find difficulty in establishing interpersonal relationship. Some of them have problems in articulating their needs and concerns. The difficulties they face in day to day life may lead to certain behavioral problems which further complicate their socialization and relationship with others. Parents, counselors and teachers have a significant role in facilitating the development of persons with disability.

14.8 UNIT-END EXERCISES

- 1) Observe the activities of a student with disability for a week. Discuss with him/her the difficulties he/she faces every day socially and academically. Find out the attitude of the teachers, parents and the peer group towards his/her disability. Write a report in 250 words.
- 2) Interview parents and teachers of a student with disability studying in a secondary school. Write a report in about 250 words describing the various problems faced by them in helping the student in his/her proper development.