

## **Families in Difficult Situations**

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This article first focuses on the consequences of internal and external forces and events impinging on Indian families which may push them into difficult situations and may lead to family disorganisation or family dysfunction. The discussion includes an examination of the variety of difficult situations faced by families in the contemporary society and theoretical frameworks which can be used to understand families as well as methodologies for making a holistic assessment of such family systems.

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### **I**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The family serves as the basic unit of socialisation, a source for realisation of personal satisfaction and an important instrument of social control. It is also a link between continuity and change. Families bear the marks of major social changes that occur in society. Though the Indian family's response to social change had been rather slow and complex (Shah, 1998), since the 1980s the impact of the changes on the family has been more rapid with far-reaching implications — both for its structure and functioning. The social forces influencing the family are varied: for instance, the new economic structures and institutions evolving over the past decade have been forcing broad-based changes in rural agricultural society, urban employment structures, educational and health services. These are, in fact, influencing the Indian family in many crucial ways. Similarly, the political and economic scenario espousing a decreased role of the government in the provision of social services is to be noted as an important shift in the family policy in the country — again with long-term implications for Indian families. Then there are other external forces which are not human-made such as natural disasters in the form of cyclones, earthquakes, epidemics, and so on, which have always resulted in the destruction of human lives and

property on a massive scale. Human-made disasters such as communal riots have also caused immense suffering to families.

*What are the Consequences of these Changes on Families?*

In our opinion, the most critical fallout — in terms of social dislocations — are growing unemployment, economic recession, desertion by spouse, marital conflict, family violence and substance abuse by a family member. Other dislocations are the growing incidence of single-parent households, and depletion of resources of families to cope with these trends — both at the micro and macro levels. In the process, different areas of family living have got affected such as: patterns of behaviour and communication within the family, functioning of family roles and rules, support systems and resources available to the family, and the nature of coping strategies adopted by families (Kashyap, 1996).

*How do Families Cope with these Changes?*

Most families lead a normal functional life, perform routine tasks and withstand stress with their resilience, strength and resources. Sometimes, some families get into difficult situations which are beyond their control as a result of which their coping mechanism becomes inadequate or exhausted. Families differ widely in their capacity to adapt to the complexities of these situations and in their ability to cope and survive these forces.

In extreme cases it may lead to family disorganisation which refers to, according to Goode (1964), ‘the breaking up of a family unit, the dissolution or fracture of structure of social roles when one or more members fail to perform adequately their roles/obligations’. This also affects the socialisation function of the family. Family disorganisation may take place because of divorce, desertion or in the case of illegitimate parenthood due to willed absence of one of the parents to carry out his or her role obligations. There can be unwilled absence of one of the spouses where he or she has died, separated or been jailed, because of war, depression, or some other catastrophe. Severe mental or physical illnesses can also lead to unwilled major role failures. Empty shell family is one where family members continue to dwell together but have little communication or interaction among themselves and fail to give emotional support to one another. Occurrences of natural disasters and radical social economic changes may also precipitate family disorganisation on a large scale.

It may also lead to family dysfunction, which is a state of disorder in the family’s pattern of functioning. It implies failure on the part of family

members to fulfill basic, socially expected tasks and functions, which are needed for its survival or well being of its members. When the family's internal processes are disrupted due to stress events arising out of internal and external factors, they result in family dysfunction. The family may become dysfunctional if there is disengaged or enmeshed cohesion, rigid or chaotic adaptability patterns with the environment, and negative communication pattern. Role strain or role conflict of individual members, and delay or failure in carrying out individual member's developmental tasks may also lead to family dysfunction. Sometimes, a crisis may also lead to such dysfunction. These dysfunctions would be viewed within the theoretical frameworks of social exchange, psychoanalytical, developmental as well as the symbolic interaction approaches. This would also encompass the coping strategies of the families such as family adaptability and family integration.

In today's rapidly changing times, more and more families are finding themselves in difficult situations, which are beyond their control. Due to this, their own repertoire of strength and coping mechanism become inadequate or exhausted. These difficult situations may be the result of varied forces — both intra and extra — exerting a pressure on the families and leading them to such situations.

### **INTRA-FAMILIAL FORCES AND EVENTS**

Those events which occur due to internal family dynamics and affect the family functioning thereby resulting in family disorganisation or dissolution are intra-familial forces and events. Marital conflict, divorce, pregnancy out of wedlock, and violence and abuse of family members such as child abuse, spouse abuse and abuse of elderly are examples of such events. The other events are substance abuse by a family member, presence of terminally ill or physically or mentally ill family members, death or desertion of a family member, prolonged unemployment of a family member, and so on.

Marital problems in any culture are rooted in its cultural norms and practices and socialisation of boys and girls. Indian marriages structurally imply an unequal gender hierarchy that is male superiority of role, power and status over females. Problems in marriage can be related to interpersonal factors within the family and caste systems. They can also be due to the marital couple's disequilibrium with other systems in its environment leading to a crisis situation. Divorce is one such example. Most societies disapprove and discourage divorce. A problematic marriage leading to divorce results in several dislocations in relationships with in-laws, child

custody and support, dowry and property arrangements, and so on. Research evidence (Choudhary, 1988; Pothen, 1986) shows that marital disension affects women and children the most.

In the Indian sociocultural context, infertility has a negative social value, as the social status of the Indian woman and her acceptability in her family are largely dependent on her fertility. The social ostracism of the 'barren' woman, threats of divorce and pressures of remarriage are very real problems. However, most often, the problem of infertility is understood and handled as a medical one and the emotional, psychological and social aspects, which are in fact more important, are overlooked.

In the same cultural context, pregnancy out of wedlock is a social stigma on the individual and her family. In general, Indian men and women are not expected to have sex before marriage. Premarital sexual activity in such a society where sanctions against it are severe and socially supervised, can have serious implications for women in terms of unwanted pregnancies, abortions and the resulting physical and social complications (Mehta, Schensul and Fall, 2004). In fact, one of the results is lack of awareness and knowledge about sexual and reproductive health, which has serious implications affecting women's choices. However, studies such as the Third National Family Health Survey (IIPS and Macro International, 2007) show that there is premarital sexual activity in the country with the rates higher among men than among women. Similarly, there is now a feeling that sex before marriage is on the rise with the social and economic changes being brought about by globalisation. Premarital sex had gained some protagonists among movie actors, and among people from some specific sector jobs resulting from globalised economy. Living together and having a child before marrying each other is currently reported though in limited circles (Lekha, 2008).

Family violence is violence between the intimates in the family context. Gelles and Cornell (1990: 22) define violence as 'an act carried out with the intention or perceived intention of causing physical pain or injury to another person. The physical pain can range from slight pain, as in a slap, to murder'. There are four forms of violence between the intimates: violence between partners, child abuse, elder abuse, and abuse between siblings. Family violence may occur in four different patterns such as verbal abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, and material abuse and neglect. Sexual abuse is also an important pattern though not much explored in the Indian context (Devi Prasad, 2001).

Violence in the family is inter-connected. One form of family violence may be closely connected to other acts of violence in the home. Therefore, to

focus on just one type of family violence often causes one to miss the overall picture. Violence against women within the marriage is one of the most rampant forms of abuse and often assumes multiple forms. Though Indian research has focused mostly on dowry-related violence (Gandhi, 2001; Mazumdar, 2001), there have been very few attempts at estimating incidence of wife abuse in the Indian context. Of late, a few important sample surveys have attempted at such estimates. According to the Second National Family Health Survey (1999), one in five women (20%) in India reported having experienced some form of violence since age 15 and one in 10 women (10%) reported having experienced violence in the past one year. These women reported husbands as the most frequent source of violence. (IIPS and Macro International, 2000). According to the Third National Family Health Survey (2007), a higher percentage of rural women (36%) were subjected to violence than women living in urban areas (28%) and more women with little or no education experienced violence compared to their educated counterparts. Violence was also found to be inversely related to the Wealth Index (Visaria, 2008). In a survey conducted by MEASURE-DHS (Kishor and Johnson, 2004), 19% of the ever-married women in India reported spousal physical abuse since the age of 15 and 10% of women during the past 12 months. The highest rates of violence occurred in moderately wealthy households and not, as often assumed, among the poorest households.

In the context of changing demographic scene and social values, the situation of the elderly in Indian society is becoming more critical and of late abuse and neglect of the elderly in the family context is emerging as a significant problem. In a recent community study in a rural context, an overall abuse rate of 48.2% was reported with physical abuse at 9% during the preceding year (Devi Prasad and Vijaylakshmi, 2008).

Family violence has emerged as a major health care issue as it is increasingly seen as a threat to the physical and mental health of the population. Abused women often experience adverse mental health conditions, such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Similarly, women with a history of abuse are more likely to display behaviours that present further health risks, such as substance abuse, alcoholism, and increased risk of suicide attempts. Similarly, children who witness violence in the family are at greater risk of developing psychiatric disorders, developmental problems, school failure, violence against others, and low self-esteem. Counselling the victims to help them through the healing process and making the offenders accountable for their actions may be considered as needed interventions.

Substance abuse is one of the most serious worldwide problems in modern society. It is often regarded as a family illness, as there is no way family members can escape or ignore the abused. The family members' behaviour mirrors their feelings of confusion, bewilderment, anger and anxiety and their responses characteristically become as impaired as those of the abuser (Chitale, 1994 cited in Jejeebhoy, 1998). Therefore, treatment of families of substance abusers needs to be an essential component of treatment programmes for abusers.

A vast number of physically and mentally challenged individuals, as well as terminally ill family members are being cared for by their families. Diseases like cancer and HIV/AIDS are resulting in families with terminally ill family members, creating situations which challenge families' resources and coping strengths. Since the family unit can play a vital role in supporting such members, its direct involvement in the treatment and rehabilitation process as an active partner in the multi-disciplinary team, is considered necessary and helpful. At the same time, it is obvious that the presence of such a family member disrupts family equilibrium. So, the reactions of the family towards the affected family member are as crucial as the actual impact of the presence of such a member on the family's daily life. Therefore, families would need guidance, training and counselling to enable them meet their own needs, to adjust to their family member's condition, as well as to function effectively as a member of the rehabilitation team.

### **EXTRA-FAMILIAL EVENTS**

They are those events which occur due to external forces and pressures affecting the family functioning resulting in family disorganisation such as: societal violence due to ethnic and religious differences, environmental disasters — natural or human-made — economic recession, displacement, migration, and so on. Though India has declared herself as a socialist welfare state, there are disparities related to income, consumption patterns, educational levels, migration patterns, and so forth, between different regions of the country. There is increasing communalising of politics and politicisation of religion and jostling by different communities for a better share of welfare benefits. In this scenario, one finds that violence against society is increasingly being used as a means of protest as is evidenced in the growing number of communal riots, strikes and election violence. As a consequence of these incidents, families are left without loved ones, bereft of economic resources, uprooted from their surroundings, and affected in terms of their physical and mental health (Narayan, 1994). In such

situations, support networks within families, neighbourhoods and by the voluntary sector can play a significant role in the prevention of mental breakdown and social and psychological dysfunction of individuals.

It is increasingly being recognised that 'natural disasters' are not entirely natural, but are increasingly human-made though triggered by natural events such as floods and earthquakes. Disasters like famine, drought and floods are caused more by environmental and resource mis-management, abuse and exploitation, than by too little or too much rainfall (Nadkarni, 1994). Disaster is characterised by widespread suffering and loss of life, damage and destruction to possessions, social institutions and basic systems. The immediate social consequence of such events is complete disruption of normal social life. Interventions will, therefore, have to focus on preventive relief and rehabilitation measures, and to focus on micro and macro issues related to disaster management.

During the last few decades, many people have been displaced not only because of disasters such as floods, earthquakes and epidemics, but also due to development projects such as dams, mines, industries, thermal power plants, national parks, and so on. Most of the mineral resources and large tracts of vacant land are located in the backward areas of the country, especially the tribal areas. So, the indigenous people and the poor are displaced more frequently than others. Displacement not only scatters homogenous groups, but also affects the landless occupational groups such as barbers, washerfolk, and artisans who have to build up their trade all over again.

The worst-hit groups among those displaced are women and children. Displacement disrupts the established pattern of life of the people displaced and sets in motion a succession of events, which constitute social, psychological and economic trauma to the families. Production systems are dismantled, kinship groups get scattered, traditional sources of employment are lost, market links are broken, and long established relationships and customs relating to community living, get dissolved. These dislocations are profound because people find themselves landless, assetless, jobless, and without access to community and other life-supporting resources. Interventions will have to focus on ensuring that relief and rehabilitation of displaced families is comprehensively undertaken and implemented by the state.

Though intra-familial factors are important, their influence cannot be seen separately from the extra-familial events which impact families. Not infrequently, they play a greater role in neutralising whatever positive strengths the families may have or exacerbate the negative impacts further.

In current times, it is truer that broader social changes are getting reflected more in the personal travails.

### **NEED FOR FAMILY ASSESSMENT**

In order to make correct decisions about effective intervention strategies that need to be used in helping families in difficult situations, a holistic family assessment needs to be carried out as speedily as the situation warrants. However, if information about the family is only partially obtained, and if the intervention is focused primarily on only the symptoms presented outwardly, this will result in limited and inadequate problem definition and problem resolution (Kashyap, 1996).

An accurate assessment is a crucial element in the counselling process. The content of assessment should include the background details of the family sub-system that is, the index client, information about the nature of the problem, and its effect on the psychosocial functioning of the client. Assessment of the family system should also include information related to structure and composition of the family, inter-generational family history and the family dynamics, such as the communication patterns in the family, decision making, conflict resolution, cohesion, flexibility, major sub-systems and alliances in the family. The assessment should also include a focus on the hidden strengths and positive mutual bonds that exist between the family members. Throughout the assessment process the counsellor must make an attempt to observe the family members' participation in the sessions. The counsellor must also make an attempt to observe the influence of the problem situation on the client and the family. Such an observation assessment adds to the speed and accuracy in assessment.

A holistic assessment, therefore, consists of complete gathering, analysing and synthesising of data into a well-formulated statement, which encompasses the totality of the system, problem or situation with its interacting sub-systems. Such an assessment will require an extensive knowledge about the family system as well as understanding of the various other systems (economic, legal, educational, medical, religious, social and interpersonal) that impinge upon the family system. There are several theoretical frameworks which help us in studying families such as the Exchange, the Symbolic Interaction, the Social Systems, the Ecological Framework and the Family Development Framework (Chibucos and Leite, 2005; Klein and White, 1996; McKenry and Price, 2000).

In the Indian situation, the framework for family assessment suggested by Holman (1983) seems to be the most suitable. This framework outlines four major areas or dimensions, which needs to be investigated: (i) the problem, (ii) the family as a system, (iii) the family and its environment, and (iv) the family life cycle. Each of these dimensions, along with their corresponding theoretical frameworks, is briefly discussed in this article.

### **The Problem**

First of all, a clear understanding of all aspects of the problem is essential before deciding how to deal with it. Some of the aspects that need to be understood are the nature, origin, duration, urgency, the client's perception of the problem and reaction to it; his or her acceptance of the ownership of the problem; other family members' perception and response to the problem; and action taken so far. The exchange and the psychoanalytic approaches are useful in understanding these dimensions of the problem.

The Exchange Framework is one of the frameworks which can be used to study the problem. According to this framework, groups are just collections of individuals; prediction and explanation depend on the study of individual motivation, individuals are motivated by self-interest, and people are rational calculators of rewards and costs. The key concepts are: reward and cost, profit (the ratio of reward to cost), comparison levels (the evaluation of profit relative to others in a similar position or relative to alternative positions), rationality, exchange (giving up something in order to get something more valued), equity (fair exchange), and generalisable sources of reward (things generally valued in society, such as social approval). Thus, the central assumption of the exchange theory as proposed by Nye (1982) is that 'actors in a situation will choose whichever behaviour maximises profit'. Maximising profit can comprise either maximising rewards or minimising costs, and can include a focus either on short-term or long-term profit. An example of applied exchange theory is the analysis of profit maximisation in divorce decisions. Individuals considering divorce must evaluate the profits of their own marriage relative to other marriages and to single life. Similarly, exchange theories can also provide a framework for family counsellors, who may focus the attention of spouses on making the relationship more rewarding and less costly for each other.

The Psychoanalytic Approach helps us to understand the problems of families in difficult situations by emphasising on the unconscious forces influencing individual behaviour and its impact on family functioning.

### **The Family as a System**

As the family is a system of interdependent relationships, it is important to identify the relationships or connections between family members and recognise the implications of these connections since change in any one member affects all other members and the family unit as a whole (Kashyap, 1996). Hence the level of relatedness of each family member to the other family members need to be understood by examining three areas such as: (i) the pattern of behaviour of family members in terms of the extent of permeability of outer and inner boundaries and the extent of family cohesion; (ii) extent and type of communication; and (iii) the functioning of family roles and rules. The systems framework can be used to understand the family as a system, whereas the Symbolic Interaction Framework will help our understanding of the family's relationship with its members.

Symbolic interactionism is a sociological perspective, which examines how individuals and groups interact with a focus on the creation of personal identity through interaction with others. One of the central ideas of this perspective is that people act as they do depending on how they define the present situation. As proposed in the exchange theory, individuals are not just maximising profit as any rational actor would, but pursuing various purposes depending on 'how they define themselves and their situation'. That is, through interaction individuals create structures that multiple social actors experience and understand in similar ways: this is how 'society' is created. So, symbolic interactionists assume that we must study the meanings that people give to themselves, to their situation, and to their actions if we are to understand what they do. Thus, symbolic interaction is concerned with the individual mind, and sees it as a product of the society that provides the shared symbols necessary for human thought. The key concepts in this perspective are: mind, self (a symbolic representation of a person constructed through interaction with others), socialisation, role, and definition of the situation. Herbert Blumer and Manfred Kuhn are associated with the major schools of thought in symbolic interactionist perspective.

Burr, Leigh, Day and Constantine (1979) developed a formal, deductive theory based on symbolic interactionism. They argued that a person's satisfaction in a relationship depends on the quality of their role construction, which (in turn) depends on the clarity and consensus in defining role expectations. For example, if a wife believes that she should be responsible for only half of the housework, her construction of her role carries with it implications that her husband should be willing to be responsible for the remaining half of the housework.

While explaining the Systems Framework, theorists assume that a system of interconnected parts is a useful model for understanding any object. Because of the interconnections, the whole is more than the sum of the parts. Key concepts include system, boundaries (with various degrees of permeability), rules of transformation (governing how the actions of one part affect the actions of another), feedback, variety (flexibility), equilibrium (balance of inputs and outputs), and sub-systems.

Family theorists have mostly used a social systems approach to understand families under stress. Thus, families are viewed as living organisms with both symbolic and real structures. They have boundaries to maintain and a variety of instrumental and expressive functions to perform to ensure growth and survival (Boss, 1988). As with any social system, families strive to maintain a steady state. Families are products of both sub-systems (for example, individual members, dyads) and supra-systems (for example, community, culture and nation). Also, families do not live in isolation; they are part of the larger social context. This external environment in which the family is embedded is referred to as 'the ecosystem' comprising the cultural, historical, economic and developmental influences. Thus, a social systems approach allows the investigator to focus beyond the family and the individual to the wider social system (McKenry and Price, 2000: 5).

Smith (1979) has developed a general systems theory model for the family. Two more specific areas of family study which have drawn from the systems concepts are: (i) communications theory, which studies the encoding and decoding of messages between family members such as differences in how women and men decode non-verbal messages; and (ii) family process theory, which has used the systems concepts to evaluate and treat troubled families, addressing issues such as how individuals can relate, while maintaining their boundaries.

### **The Family and its Environment**

The family's relationship with its environment is a critical focus of assessment that is, the family's connection and the extent and quality of individual members' connections with their environment, which includes physical realities, familial, and social support systems. Assessing the fit between the family and its ecosystem in terms of the extent of use made of and support received from familial and social networks will further our understanding about the strengths and coping abilities of the family in the face of stress.

The Ecological Framework will help us to understand the family's relationship with its environment. The intellectual roots of ecological framework can be traced to the theory of evolution developed by Darwin and Mendel. In fact, Ernst Haeckel, a German biologist, first used the term 'ecology'. The theory of human ecology was developed by the Chicago School of Sociology to study the spatial organisation of the city.

In studying family dynamics, the Ecological Framework assumes that individuals and groups are biological beings dependent on their physical environments, and also social beings interdependent with other social beings. Key concepts used in this Framework are: ecosystem — a subset of the environment; niche — position within an ecosystem; adaptive range — range of behaviours of which being in capable, which for human is very large, units — beings distinguishable from mere aggregates by their internal organisation; and adaptation and natural selection — the sources of evolutionary change. According to family ecologists, children develop within the context of the family ecosystem, which is itself embedded in a larger ecosystem. The specialised roles of adults change both in response to changes in the family's environment and to the changing functions of the developing child. Within this framework, proponents such as human development ecologists, family demographers and family socio-biologists have emerged to study the family from different angles.

More specifically, ecological theories have studies with a focus on environmental impacts on children, such as the effects of day care on infants and the effects of neighbourhood organisation on the rates of child abuse. They also provide a basis for parental education focused on changing the family's relationship to the environment, in addition to the parent's relationship with the child.

The Structural Functional Approach views family as one of the sub-systems with its relationship with the larger system that is, the society. It provides an insight into family functions in relation to its external environment. Integration and equilibrium are the two important concepts of this approach.

### **The Family Life Cycle**

Knowledge of how the family is functioning at the current family life cycle stage, and the extent to which it has been able to accommodate the transitional phases without becoming disorganised or failing to meet the needs of its members will help in further understanding the family's strengths, limitations and

coping abilities. Such an assessment will also enable the counsellor to understand whether the current problem is related to the normal stresses of adjustment to the life cycle stage or whether it is related to other factors.

The Family Development Framework is, in fact, designed specifically for the study of the family rather than for broader sociological purposes. The central idea of this perspective is that the family has a life cycle analogous to that of an individual and that families pass through distinct stages marked by significant events. These stages are distinguishable by differences in family structure and functioning. Key concepts of this framework include: family change and development; elements of social structure (positions, norms, roles); stages, transitions, developmental tasks (in some formulations but not others); and family careers (typical sequences of stages and events). The work of Hill and Rodgers (1949) laid the foundations to the development of theory under this perspective.

The proponents of the Family Development Framework assume different levels of analysis — individuals, relationships, groups, and institutions — all of which relate to families. They see the family as a semi-permeable group responsive to outside influences. They also assume that ‘time’ is not just chronological time, but includes social process time marked by significant family events.

An example of understanding family change within this framework is the increase in the age at marriage for women due to delayed marriages. Nowadays, marriages are delayed due to the time needed for women to undergo educational and career preparation. It may be true that social norms govern the timing and sequencing of family events such as marriage of a girl, and deviations from such norms may lead to disruptions later in life. But widespread deviations of such norms can bring about new norms thus leading to family change. Besides, individuals and families who deviate from such family norms may be doing so as they are trying to conform to the norms imposed by larger changes in some other institution. Such conflicts lead to social change. Besides, developmental theory can make policymakers more sensitive to the needs of families at different stages of development such as families with young children or elderly couples.

## **SUMMARY**

In this analysis we have attempted to show how different frameworks attempt to explain the different dimensions of family function or dysfunction. The family frameworks discussed so far focus on different levels of analysis,

incorporate the time dimension to varying degrees, and identify the sources of change either within the unit or outside the unit, be it family, individual or community. For instance, the Exchange Framework focuses on individuals, and treats change as endogenous, and focuses little on time dimension. The Symbolic Interactionist Framework, on the other hand, focuses more on relationships, time processes and changes occurring within the group. The Ecological Framework deals with the entire family group and looks for external sources initiating change, whereas the Systems and the Family Development Frameworks pay more attention to change occurring over time.

However, it must be remembered that the sociocultural patterns which are fast changing under the influence of the phenomenon of globalisation cannot be captured fully by these frameworks. New forms of family and marriage arrangements are emerging and the traditional concepts of work in terms of time and location are changing which in turn are influencing family roles, norms and expectations. The growth of software profession and jobs in the Information Technology sectors such as BPOs are some such examples (Singh and Pandey, 2005). From this point of view, a model or models which can explain the changing environment and the meanings individuals give to situations and relationships in the changing environment would be more helpful in understanding in the current scenario of rapid social change and its impact. The different frameworks discussed here will be useful from this perspective.

The story does not end here. While the frameworks described so far give the counselor an understanding about the processes behind family dysfunction, he or she needs to identify the nature and boundaries of the problem faced by the family, who are involved in it, strengths and resources available within or outside the family or the individual, and the interventions needed to help the family. In order to assess these aspects, there are specific tools and measures available. Some such assessment tools and scales are discussed below.

## **ASSESSMENT TOOLS**

The following tools can be used for a comprehensive assessment of families in difficult situations.

*Interviewing & Observation:* These are the two major tools used by counsellors to collect a detailed history of the family. Each family has a unique history and it has to be seen in a cultural, societal and historical context. It comprises past and present social functioning of the family, its concerns, needs and problems, formal and informal resources, and its strengths and

limitations. For this, willing participation of family members is necessary, as each one of them perceives the problem from their own point of view.

*Genogram:* Family members differ in range and intensity of emotions. Expression of emotions can be documented through this technique. Genogram is the drawing a family tree of family of origin or procreation and recognising symbolically one's feelings towards one's relatives. It also helps in understanding the relationship between relatives. The blocks in working with family members can be identified. Through this tool, one can explore one's emotions, bonds, relationships and sentiments.

*Family Sculpting:* It is a technique to position family members by choosing a scene at a particular time. Members portray relationships, status, roles, space, distance and closeness, postures and movements, verbal and non-verbal expressions and affect. New insight is developed by the sculptor when the members draw a scene of a family setting.

*Eco-Mapping:* This technique is used to understand the family in its environment. The environment comprises various sub-systems like neighborhood, education, political systems, health, legal systems, welfare, housing, and so forth. A boundary is drawn for the family, which differentiates itself from other sub-systems in the environment. It is important to understand the nature of interaction of family members with these systems in terms of intensity, proximity and frequency. It also increases the family's awareness with its social network.

### **FAMILY ASSESSMENT SCALES**

Several Indian scales are available which measure various variables and give insights into the different dimensions of family functioning (Bharat, 1996). Some of them are:

*Family Environment Scale:* To measure family environment.

*Family Interaction Patterns Scale:* To measure patterns of family interaction.

*Family Relationship Inventory:* To measure family relationship between adolescents and their parents.

In addition to the above scales, Touliatos, Perlmutter and Straus' (2001) handbook of family measurement is an important collection of techniques which can be used to measure various dimensions of family interactions, relationships, and so on. The assessment tools and measures help the counselor to understand the family situations that he or she is dealing with. They

will also be useful in assisting the families to develop insights into their problems and to encourage their participation in finding ways to overcome them.

### **SERVICES AND PROGRAMMES FOR FAMILIES**

State and voluntary initiatives are some of the important strategies to help families address the concerns they face as effectively as possible. Since the early days of our independence, government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been closely working as partners in the area of family welfare. During the 1960s and 1970s, there was a quantum increase in government funding to family welfare programmes. The partnership role between the state and the voluntary sector resulted in further expansion of the number of social welfare programmes during the 1980s. However, the 1990s saw a decline in state-supported welfare programmes as well as increasing cuts in the overall welfare spending. These changes have affected families, especially those belonging to low-income groups, and special groups such as children, women, families with disabled or mentally ill members, and so on. In the current social scenario, NGOs are increasingly taking over the function of social service delivery and planning for community needs but with very limited economic resources.

Since 2006, the Ministry of Women and Child Development has come to exist as the nodal agency for matters relating to welfare, development and empowerment of women and children. It has introduced several schemes and programmes for the benefit of these groups. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment deals with the issues of Older Persons and other groups at risk for substance abuse, and so on. The schemes of the Ministry of Women and Child Development such as Swashakti, Swayamsiddha, Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP) and Swawalamban aim at women's economic empowerment. Working Women's Hostels and creches provide support services. Swadhar and Short Stay Homes provide protection and rehabilitation to women in difficult circumstances (see Appendix 1). The Ministry also supports autonomous bodies like the National Commission for Women, and Central Social Welfare Board, which work for the welfare and development of women. Three important recent developments which have a bearing on the welfare of families can be mentioned here. They are:

1. *The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005*: This Act provides for effective protection of the rights of women who are

victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family and for matters connected therewith or incidental to it. It provides for immediate and urgent relief to women in situations of violence of any kind in the home.

2. *Integrated Child Protection Services*: It is a centrally sponsored child protection scheme of government–civil society partnership. As per this scheme, several child protection mechanisms are conceived. To mention a few, they are the Integrated Programme for Street Children, Juvenile Justice programmes, CHILDLINE, Shishu Graha Scheme, Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme for the Children of Working Mothers, pilot project to combat the Trafficking of Women and Children for Commercial Sexual Exploitation, and so on. This is a comprehensive child protection scheme, which seeks to address many of the limitations of the earlier programmes of child protection, despite its overbearing focus on institutional services. It also focuses on the family to help the child. Thus, it seeks to prevent children from falling into difficult circumstances, by identifying and supporting families in which children are vulnerable. It also provides for universalising CHILDLINE to create a national database and 24/7 emergency helpline service to link children in difficult circumstances access long-term care and rehabilitation services (Mander, 2009).
3. *The Maintenance of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007*: This Act makes it a legal obligation for children and heirs to provide sufficient maintenance to senior citizens, and allows state governments to establish old age homes in every district. State governments shall set the maximum monthly maintenance allowance. The Act itself caps the maximum monthly allowance at Rupees 10,000. It provides for punishment for abandoning a senior citizen of imprisonment up to 3 months or fine up to Rupees 5,000 or both.

A review of these services may give an impression that many schemes are available to deal with the problem situations. But the question is how far these services are effectively implemented. Do these services reach the target groups? What is the impact of such programmes on the larger society as some of them take up a proactive or developmental approach towards the issues? Have the voices of those who have been suffering and those who are deprived, been heard? These are some of the questions which need to be focused before beginning to understand the social impact of these programmes.

As indicated in the article, there is a need to take into account the larger socioeconomic changes which are characteristic of the current times and their impact on families. As compared to the professional practice two decades back, the present situation demands greater focus on current external realities to better understand families in difficult situations.

### **INTERVENTIVE STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES**

While the initiatives of the state and the NGOs to support families impacted by major social changes are important, more specifically the role of human service professionals such as counsellors working with families in developing the coping competencies of the families in the face of major social changes is also very crucial. The counsellors have a variety of strategies to choose from, which can be used either singly, or in combination with other approaches to help the families in difficult situations.

*Family Crisis Intervention:* This is used in a crisis situation when a stressor causes disturbance in the structure or functioning of the family, thereby affecting the entire family and its members. It is a process where a counsellor actively and urgently focuses on the crisis and involves the individual and family to address it from a practical point of view. Quick decisions and careful instructions are required. It involves problem solving at affective, cognitive and behavioural dimensions. Coping tasks have to be specific.

*Family Counselling:* It is a specialised technique, which aims at enabling family members to restructure and redefine their goals, roles, relationships, boundaries, and so forth. The family as a unit is focused both structurally and functionally. Family members are offered several alternatives and they are enabled to take the right course of action.

*Family Therapy:* A clinical approach, which aims at helping family members change dysfunctional patterns of relating, and create functional ways of interacting. It is based on the assessment of unique family relationships, systems, and their conscious or unconscious implications for the individual members. There are various theoretical models available for practice.

*Networking:* This technique is used to enable the family to vuse both formal and informal resources with all other sub-systems in the larger system. The formal resources include various non-governmental and governmental organisations with which the family can negotiate for fulfillment of its needs and requirements. On the other hand, informal resources are the

social support systems, which comprises relatives, friends, neighbours, caste groups, and so on. Family members are helped to create a 'network shop' and see what influence of it might have on family.

*Self-Help Groups:* An informed group of members who come together towards a collective action for a common cause. This is formed with an assumption that people with similar problems can help one another. Examples of such groups are: Alcoholic Anonymous, Association of Adoptive Couples, Association of Families of Schizophrenic Patients, Single Parents Association, associations of Persons Living with HIV/AIDS, and so forth. Such groups provide multiple sources of support, members feel at ease and communicate easily with one another, as there is normalisation of common concerns and experiences. They share and learn from each other.

*Family Advocacy:* A macro level approach used by professionals to advocate for families in difficult situations by raising consciousness among the public, and by sensitising the allied systems and civil society towards their needs and problems. Issues related to families can be brought to the forefront for discussion and debate through this approach. At a micro level, all counsellors do advocacy work. However, when there is a group effort, the impact could be more.

*Family Life Education and Enrichment Programmes:* It is widely accepted that enriching family life can best enhance human development. Family life education and enrichment programmes are preventive and developmental programmes through which formally structured professional intervention is offered for helping individuals living in families to make adequate preparation for successful achievement of individual and family life cycle tasks and to make their experiences more meaningful and their life more democratic and enriched.

## II

### COURSE OUTLINE AND LESSION PLAN

#### Learner's Objectives

1. To develop an insight into the different types of difficult situations which families are facing in contemporary times.
2. To analyse the internal and external familial forces/events that have pushed families into difficult situations and to understand their needs.

3. To become familiar with relevant theoretical frameworks helpful for studying families and their use while making a holistic assessment of the needs, issues and coping abilities of families in difficult situations.
4. To become skilled in the use of assessment tools such as Genogram, Eco-mapping, and Family Sculpting.
5. To gain an understanding of the professional interventions and other services needed and currently available by families in difficult situations.

### Lesson Plan

Module	Detail	No. of Hours
1	Families in difficult situations; Identification of families in difficult situations; Needs and issues faced by such families; analysis of causal or contributing factors.	4
2	<p>Families in difficult situations due to intra-familial events:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marital conflict, desertion, divorce/separation and pregnancy out of wedlock.</li> <li>• Family violence against children, women and the elderly.</li> <li>• Substance abuse.</li> <li>• Terminally ill family member (HIV/AIDS, cancer, and so on)</li> <li>• Presence of a physically or mentally challenged family member, or family member's involvement in anti-social activities</li> </ul> <p>Families in difficult situations due to extra-familial events:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Societal violence due to ethnic and religious differences,</li> <li>• Environmental disasters — natural and human-made.</li> </ul>	8

Module	Detail	No. of Hours
3	Theoretical frameworks to study families and holistic family assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perception of problem and exchange framework.</li> <li>• The family as a system and symbolic interaction and systems frameworks.</li> <li>• The family and its environment and the ecological framework.</li> <li>• The family life cycle and the family development framework.</li> </ul>	10
4	Interventions and Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Services and programmes at state, local and national levels — both Governmental and NGO efforts.</li> <li>• Crisis counselling, family counselling, self-help groups, network support, and so forth.</li> </ul>	8

### Teaching Methodology

A range of teaching methods can be used to achieve these outcomes. Some of them are outlined here. They are:

1. *Lecture, brainstorming and assignments:* Give topics such as theoretical frameworks to study families, case material, small group discussion, use of creative and indigenous literature to understand family dynamics, and so forth.
2. *Simulation/sensitivity exercises using assessment methodologies:*
  - To enable the learner to gain sensitivity towards families in difficult situations; understand their needs; analyse the internal and external familial forces/events which push families into difficult situations.
  - To help the learner use assessment tools such as genogram, eco-mapping, networking, mapping and family sculpting for making a holistic assessment.
3. Case studies of dysfunctional families; video films/slides to show such situations.
4. Use of creative or popular literature for sensitising the learner towards families in difficult situations by using some stories from M.M.

Desai's book 'An Anthology of Short Stories for Social Work Education (1985)'.

5. Use of role-plays to develop insight into family dynamics that is, communication/relationships/role performance, and so forth.
6. Exercises for networking and establishing linkages with resources.

Teaching of these modules can be done through different techniques:

- Module 1 and 2 on families in difficult situations can be taught through role-play, stories, films, and case studies. These methods will help the learner to understand different types of problems faced by families and also the intra-and extra-familial forces/events which push families into crisis or difficult situations.
- Module 3 is on theoretical frameworks and family assessment. The theoretical frameworks to understand the family can be done through lectures, discussions and illustrations. Family assessment can be taught through drawing of eco-map, or genogram by trainees and family sculpting through a simulation exercise. The trainer can follow up the exercise with a discussion to enable the trainees to study the history of a family, positioning of family members, and understanding power dynamics.
- For Module 4, charts, slides, lectures and discussions will be helpful to give an idea to the learners about the variety of interventions available. Field visits could be arranged to service sites such as Family Courts and Lok Adalats and practitioners could be invited to the classroom to share their experiences of working with different services and using different intervention approaches.

**Exercise 1 (for Module 1):** Identification of a Family in a Problem Situation

**Purpose:** To understand how dismemberment causes role overload, which can lead to child abuse and neglect and to marital conflict

**Duration:** 60 minutes

**Material Required:** Only volunteers from the group and copy of script.

**Instructions/Ground Rules:** A situation will be enacted and all should note down observations as;

1. What is happening?
2. Why is this situation?

3. Where will it lead?

- Observers will not comment on any ones' behaviour and no judgment will be made.
- No non-verbal comments are made during role-play.
- Discussion will follow at the end.
- Roles are fictional and have no resemblance to anyone.

**Method and Description:** Role-play; 3 characters to be depicted, one male child (14 years); one female adult and one female child (10 years). Script will be explained to these three characters.

**Points for Discussion:**

- What is the family situation like?
- What are the problems visible in this family?
- What are the reasons for the problems?
- Where should they go for help?

**Description to be Given to the Role Players:**

- Enact the situation as per the role given to you.
- Do not personalise it.
- Act spontaneously

**Sample Scenario (Script):**

- A boy of 14 yrs returned home with bruises after being beaten by his employer (who is a tea stall owner) as he had broken a few cups and plates. The boy begins to cry on being asked to hand over his earnings for the day as his mother wanted to buy groceries for the day.
- The mother is 32 years old and works as a domestic servant. As she has taken loan from her employer a part of her salary is being cut every month towards repayment of the loan.
- A small girl aged 10 years does not go to school but takes care of the household activities. She screams when she sees that her brother is bruised and bleeding.
- The father has deserted the family and lives with other women.

**Concepts to be Identified:**

- Dismemberment of the family member (husband)
- Role overload on all the three members

- Neglect and deprivation of the children
- Child abuse
- Marital conflict – relationship/divorce issues

**Outcome:**

The trainees/counsellors should be able to understand the concepts of Role, Relationship, Family Life Cycle, Development tasks, Parenting and see the usefulness of Symbolic Interaction Theory, Role Theory and Family Development theory.

**Debriefing:**

- Close your eyes and derole
- How did you feel playing the role?

**Exercise 2 (for Module 2):** Understanding Internal and External forces that Affect Families

**Purpose:** To help the trainees/counsellors appreciate the role of internal and external forces that affect families and put them in a difficult situation.

**Duration:** 60 minutes.

**Material Required:**

1. Film on Disasters or Riots.
2. Short Stories from Prof. Manu Desai's book
  - The Disinherited – Shivkumar
  - The Sky before her – Ram Darshan Mishra.
3. Pen & Paper.

**Instructions/Ground Rules:** Learners will see a film on Disasters and see what happens to families during disasters. One story will be given to a learner to read and to note down the message of the story.

- Why is this message given?
- What should they do as counsellors?
- What are the internal and external forces influencing the family?

**Method and Description:** Learners will be divided into small groups and will be encouraged to discuss their points in that group. This will then present these points in the plenary sessions.

**Points for Discussion:**

1. The trainer should help the trainees to bring out in the discussion the internal and external forces observed in the stories and also in the film.
2. The group should also understand the implications for interventions.
3. Concepts like displacement, migration, trafficking, societal violence, disability and psychological trauma should be discussed.

**Outcome:**

1. The trainees/counsellors should be able to see that holistic assessment of the family includes consideration of the internal forces and external forces and their effects on the family and society.
2. Its implications for intervention planning.

**Assessment Methodology**

Class room participation	20%
Presentation of case study/studies of families in difficult situations	25%
Using assessment methodologies to under-stand such families	25%
Written Test (Classroom)	30%
Total	100%

**III****CONCLUSION**

In this article, we discussed the various internal and external forces which influence family functioning, and reviewed some of the difficult situations that contemporary families are facing. This was followed by an exposition of important theoretical frameworks, which would be helpful in understanding the processes which lead families into disorganisation. We have also enlisted some assessment methods to understand the nature and boundaries of the problem(s) faced by families or individuals. These methods are not exhaustive, but suggestive. Professional counselors need to continuously update their knowledge and repertoire of methods. The counselors will have to develop unique strategies by using specific approaches or a combination of

approaches to help families to cope with the stresses resulting because of difficult situations and to help them move into the comfort zone.

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### APPENDIX 1: Welfare Programmes and Services

*Family Counselling Services and Legal Aid:* These services are provided by Social Welfare Advisory Boards in each state through grant-in-aid to NGOs all over the country. Family counselling centres in police stations is an innovative scheme in each state provided by the Boards.

*Women's Helpline:* These are set up by the Directorate of Social Defense to protect women in distress. Police intervention is easily available because of the nature of service.

*Legal Aid Centres And Conveyance Assistance To Legal Aid Centres:* Commission of Women and Child Development provides conveyance to the needy to facilitate access to these services.

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Central Social Welfare Board and other allied organisations sponsor the following programmes:

- Shelter Homes for Women.
- Hostels for Working Women.
- Family Counselling Centres.
- Creche and Day Care Centres: Both State Boards and the Department of Women and Child Development sets them up. Some such services are also run by NGOs.
- Family And Child Welfare Programmes: These programmes are funded by State Boards. Women's organisations are given financial assistance to take up entrepreneurship training programmes, self-development and skill development programmes, awareness generation programmes for women, and so forth.
- Establishment of Training and Production Centres.
- Economic Assistance to Destitute Women/Widow Pension Scheme
- Training of Physically Handicapped Women.

Besides the above, the following are other services, which are useful in helping the needy families.

*Family Courts:* These courts are set up under the Family Court Act of 1984. They are established to promote conciliation and secure speedy settlements of disputes relating to marriage and family matters. Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu are some of the states where such courts are operative.

*Lok Adalats:* They are quite active in some parts of the country and are effective in expediting cases and avoiding any malpractices.

*De-Addiction Centres:* The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment initiated these centres for the treatment and reintegration of drug addicts. Professionals run these centres.

*Old Age Homes:* They are run by NGOs and are also supported by Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment for the elderly who need shelter, protection and care.