

## **COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PARENTAL DEPRIVATION AND SELF-ESTEEM OF CHILDREN**

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The development and adjustment problems of children have been a major concern of educators, psychologists and social workers. Though social, emotional and educational difficulties during childhood are, to a certain extent, a part of every child's growth, these seemingly are exacerbated in some children by the separation from one or both the natural parents.

Parental deprivation has always been seen as a traumatic event. Absence of one or both parents imposes considerable stress on the children and is likely to have a detrimental effect on their emotional development. In fact, a great minority of "problem children" have been found to have suffered some kind of parental deprivation (Hill & Price 1967; Heacock and Seale 1968;). Research has shown that nurturance, support and control of the parents play an important role in the development of self-esteem of children (Khalid, 1990; Harter, 1983; Abraham and Christopher son 1984; Cooper smith, 1967). This study looks into the impact of parental deprivation on children's self-esteem in the Pakistani environment.

Research in the area of child development suggests that self-esteem has important mediational influence on the children's behaviour. Low self-esteem leads a child to act in such a way as to maintain congruence between self-esteem and objective behaviour, even if it means poor performance (Jones & Berglas, 1978, Khalid, 1985) Moreover, low self-esteem results in anxiety and

depression which would impair concentration and lower the desire to put in the effort needed for achievement (McCandless, 1967; Wylie, 1978; Sharauger, 1972 Franken; 1988, Khalid 1990). Healthy adjustment in childhood might eliminate emotional and psychological complications later. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study was to identify the problem of self-esteem in parent-deprived children-so as to illuminate, to some extent, the hidden attitudes, feelings and needs of this particular group of children. Hopefully the information presented will provide some basis for the schools and Social Welfare Organizations in tailoring special educational and counseling programs geared towards helping these children in adjusting to these unique family circumstances.

Parent-deprived children suffer the loss of one or both natural parents through death, divorce or separation. Children of split and bereaved families like the children in institutions suffer from basically the same problem, though for different reasons. They are deprived, through no fault of their own, of parents, and therefore, are stigmatized, either literally or figuratively as "different". Parent-deprived children need not look far to find that in society's terms their's is not a complete family, since the concept of family presupposes the presence in a house hold of both father and mother and their children. The attitudes and feelings of these children may in some cases be similar and in others largely individualized, depending upon the reason for separation and the intervening variables which might have compensated or further complicated the parental loss.

In view of the above, the following hypotheses are tested in this study.

1. Children who have experienced separation from natural parents will have lower self-esteem than the children of intact families.

2. Variations in self-esteem depend on the nature of parental deprivation experienced by the children. The expected order ranging from evidence of greatest difficulty to evidence of least difficulty is: the children of institutions will have the lowest self-esteem; followed by products of split families; products of bereaved families, and finally the children of intact families.

## **Method**

### **Sample**

The present study was conducted in the city of Lahore and included children from economically lower middle-class families. The age group of the sample ranged from 10-12 years. From the standpoint of family unit, the sample for the present study included children from four different family settings.

1. Those children who had suffered parental divorce or separation and were residing with one parent.
2. Those "bereaved" children who had experienced the death of one parent and were, at the time of the study, living with the surviving parent.
3. Those "institutionalized" children who had been placed in a local orphanage or "foster Home" (SOS village) for reasons of parental death or desertion.
4. Those children from "intact homes" (The control group) who had lived from birth with both natural parents without any prolonged separation.

All the children in the sample had been in their present family state for not less than two and not more than four years. The information regarding the child's family setting was obtained from the school and was verified by the child.

The total sample included 320 children between the ages of 10 and 12. They were all students of Government Elementary Schools or schools run by the local orphanages, and were drawn from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grades. Of the 320 subjects, the control group consisted of 80 children. The parent-deprived children formed the experimental group which consists of 2 sub groups: The institutionalized group consisted of 80 children, 44 among them were from Yateem-Khana (local orphanage) while 36 lived in the S.O.S. Foster Homes. The single parent sub-groups consisted of bereaved children who were 80 in number and the split family group consisted of 80 children. (See table-1).

In case of bereaved only 2 children was living with the father while in the case of the split families all the children were living with their mother.

School records were used to provide information about the presence or absence of parents, age, grade, sex, school performance and academic achievement. When this data was recorded for the experimental groups (Children from orphanages, children of split and bereaved families) the same variables were used in matching children from control group.

Children who were regular in schools and whose school records did not indicate any academic or physical problem were included in the sample. Children whose parents had re-married were not included. Every effort was made to match children according to age, economic status, school, and presence or absence of parents. However, the variables of intervening life experiences, individual reactions to environments, personality types, emotional and psychological development before and after the parental loss, etc., might have limited the homogeneity of the groups.

**Table – 1**  
**Composition of Sample**

<u>Control Group</u>	<u>Experimental Groups</u>		
<u>Intact-families</u>	<u>Institutionalized</u>	<u>Split Families</u>	<u>Bereaved Families</u>
40 G	40 G	40 G	40 G
40 B	40 B	40 B	40 B

G=Girls

B=Boys

### **Measure**

The self-esteem of the child was measured by Pier Harris Short Form, which is a rating scale, used for measuring the self-esteem of children between the ages of 8-13 years. This scale was development by Bagley, C & Verma, G. K. (1982) from Piers-Harris Scale (1964). The Pier Harris Scale was built out of a pool of items derived from Jerschild's (1952) collection of children's statements. The items were written as simple declarative statements. The final scale was reduced to 80, Yes-No items after several pilot studies. Bagley et al., (1982) further reduced these items to 39 and developed Piers-Harris Short Form. Examples of these items are "I am often sad"; "I am a happy person"; "I give up easily". It is a wide ranging scale covering physical appearance, social behavior, academic status, depreciation, dis-satisfaction and contentment with self. The statements are equally divided between positive and negative forms and between high and low reflections of negative forms and between high and low reflections of self-esteem. A high score (negative items reversed) indicated a more positive self-esteem, thus, there was an attempt to control the acquiescence response set. Scoring consisted of allowing one point for each answer indicative of positive self-esteem; the minimum score possible was 0 and Maximums was 39.

## **Procedure**

The Self-Esteem Inventory was administered to the subjects in groups. The preliminary instructions were designed to diminish threat and anxiety. Subjects were reassured that the results would have no effect on academic grades or placement, will not reflect intellectual ability or achievement level, and would remain strictly confidential. No time limit was set for completion of the inventory; therefore, subjects were able to work at their own pace.

## **Analysis of Data**

Individual scores for each subject and mean scores for each group (Institutionalized, divorced, bereaved, total experimental, and control) were computed. t-test was then administered to identify any significant differences which might have existed between the control group and the total experimental group.

One-way analysis of variance for independent samples was used to see the difference between the control group; bereaved group; split family group and the institutionalized group. In order to determine which of the means differ Tukey Test (Cohen & Holliday, 1982) was applied.

## **Results**

The first hypothesis proposed in the present study stated that:

Children who have experienced separation from natural parents will have lower self-esteem than the children of intact families.

Table – 2, shows the self-esteem scores of the total experimental group (composed of the institutionalized, the



divorced, and the bereaved groups) and the self-esteem scores of the control group.

**Table – 2**  
**Significance of the Difference Between Mean Scores**  
**for Experimental and Control Group.**

	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>p</u>
Control	80	29.81	0.97	Not Significant
Experimental	240	27.89		

The results indicate that although the mean for the control group (29.81) is higher than the mean for the experimental group (27.89) this difference is not significant at the 0.05 level. Therefore, the first hypothesis that the self-esteem of the children who have experienced separation from natural parents will be significantly lower than the children of intact homes is rejected.

The second hypothesis stated that:

Difficulty in self-esteem varies depending upon the type of separation experienced. In terms of degree, the children who evidence the lowest self-esteem are those in the "Institutionalized" group. The second group, the products of separation experience somewhat higher self-esteem than the institutionalized group; however, their deficiencies are more marked than in the bereaved. Finally, though the bereaved evidence the highest self-esteem it is lower than the children from intact homes. Thus, the expected order ranging from evidence of greatest difficulty to evidence of least difficulty will be: The institutionalized, the children of parents who have separated; the children of bereaved families; and finally, the children from intact homes.

The results of One Way Analysis of Variance of the self-esteem scores of all the groups are shown in table-4. The

obtained value of  $F=14.73$  is large than the values in  $F$ . Distribution (Cohen & Holliday 1982, P.321) at both the .05 (2.60) and the .01 (2.78) levels for d.f.'s=3 and 316. We therefore conclude that there is significant difference among the groups.

**Table-3**  
**Analysis of Variance**

Source of variation	Sum of squares	d. f.	Variance	f
Between group	1775.31	3	591.77	40.17
Within group	4655.16	316	14.73	
Total	6430.49	319	606.50	40.17

**Table-4**  
**Group mean differences & their significance on Tukey Test**

	Comparison of Means	$M_1$	$M_2$	$M_3$	$M_4$
Group 1 (int act families)	$M_1=29.81$		$M_1-M_2=0.1$	$M_1-M_3=0.36$	$M_1-M_4=5.51$
Group 2 (Bereaved)	$M_2=29.91$			$M_2-M_3=0.46$	$M_2-M_4=5.61^*$
Group 3 (Sp ilite families)	$M_3=29.45$				$M_3-M_4=5.15^*$
Group 4 (Insti tutionalized)	$M_4=24.3$				
	$T_{0.05} = 1.56$			* Significant	

In order to find out how the groups differ, Tukey Test was applied. The results show that the Institutionalized group have significantly lower self-esteem than the control, ( $d=5.51$ ;  $T=1.56$  therefore, the first part of the second hypothesis was accepted.)



Comparison of the mean scores of the separated group with the scores of the control population indicated that, although a difference was noted, that difference was not significant.

Comparison of the mean scores (29.91) of the bereaved group with the mean scores (29.81) of the control population show that the bereaved group obtained higher scores, though the higher scores were not statistically significant. (See Table-4). Thus, the second hypothesis in case of the bereaved group was not accepted.

Comparison of means of the three experimental groups show that the mean scores (29.91) of the bereaved group and the mean scores (29.45) of the separated group did not differ from each other significantly. However the mean scores (24.3) of the institutionalized group were significantly lower than the mean scores (29.91) of bereaved and the mean scores (29.45) of the separated group. Thus, the second hypothesis was only partly accepted.

## **Discussion**

The results indicated that self-esteem development in pre-adolescent children was not necessarily lowered or even hampered by separation from one natural parent.

The children who had lost a parent through death showed no significant difference in self-esteem when compared with children living with both parents, in fact, the bereaved group displayed a slightly higher degree of positive self-perception than did the control population. Initially, these findings seem to contradict the research on the effects of bereavement which were previously cited. Some earlier studies pointed towards childhood bereavement as a variable in the development of subsequent psychological

and emotional maladjustment. However, due to the fact that this study tested only one phase of emotional adjustment-specifically-self-esteem and dealt with pre-adolescent children rather than adults, the present finding do not preclude later difficulties which may or may not stem from faulty adjustment related to the bereavement as the child approaches adulthood and is faced with further conflict.

Another possible reason for these results is, that all the bereaved children were living in an extended family system. It is usual for a Pakistani widow/widower who does not remarry to live with parents, in-laws or other family relations so that load of child-rearing is shared. The presence of other adult family members in the case of our sample provided emotional support and psychological stability and security to the bereaved children.

Another interesting finding of the present study was that although the self-esteem scores obtained by children whose parents were separated were lower than the scores obtained by the children living with both parents, the difference was not statistically significant. Comparison of these results with earlier studies in this area (McDermott, 1965; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980, Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1978) allowed for optimism regarding the eventual adjustment of children of separated parents. The earlier researchers had found considerable depression and anxiety in children of divorced parents. The present study examined the children of separated parents and found no real divergence from the control population in positive self-feelings. One possible interpretation of this difference in results might be that the experience of parental divorce does not result in permanent ego damage and that children of divorced/separated parents can eventually adjust and mature emotionally as do children whose family backgrounds have been less chaotic.

The results of the present study have shown that in the case of the bereaved children and victims of split families the presence of one natural parent seemed to neutralize the loss of the other parent and served to satisfy the "Self" needs of the child. The issue then is not so much the type of or reason for the loss or even the pain associated with it, but rather the positive, stabilizing force of belonging to someone.

An important result of this study was that the institutionalized children, on the contrary, showed definite evidence of faulty self-perception, and low-self-esteem when compared with all the other children studied. In the light of these findings, the plight of the institutionalized child becomes more clearly defined. The detrimental effects of their regimented, impersonal, and affectionless atmosphere of the institution on ego development are critical. The self-system cannot possibly grow in an atmosphere which stigmatizes the movement and freedom of the individual. Furthermore, the very nature of the institution precludes the satisfaction of such basic ego needs as the craving for individual attention, the security of belonging, and the belief that one is loved. The bleakness of life of such children is reflected in their self-esteem scores. These results supported the previous researches which investigated the effects of institutional placement on children (Bowlby 1951; Tizard and Tizard, 1971; Wolff, 1981; Oswin, 1971). Research in the area concluded that the intellectual and emotional growth of institutionalized children was hampered by residence within an institution.

### **Conclusion**

It was concluded that the emotional growth of children is not necessarily dependent upon the presence within the home of both parents but that living with at least one parent

is vital. The effectiveness of institutions in fostering healthy adjustment in the children they serve is open to serious question and doubt. Forward movement for these institutions might then be directed towards placement of all parent-deprived children in adoptive homes. Certainly placement with two parents would be ideal; however, on the basis of the findings of the present study, placement with one parent would also serve to satisfy the ego needs of these deprived children. Since the existence and quality of individualized attention rather than the quantity of that attention emerges as the crucial factor in healthy self development, adoption by single adults would be far more realistic in terms of the number of people eligible and number of children reached. Policy makers and legislators must recognize this fact by making adoption legal and easy, granting the right to adult who wish to become adoptive parents. This progression must be made since emotional and intellectual growth demands satisfaction of the self-system which is currently being frustrated by the impersonal, sterile atmosphere associated with institutional life.

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