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901B, Emgee Greens, Indiasteel complex, M.T.V. Road, Wadala (E), Mumbai 400 037, India

Tel: +91 22 32562807

Email: roshniudyavar@hotmail.com

Head Office

5167 Jean-Talon, Suite 370

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

HIS 1K8

Tel: (514) 593-4303

Fax: (514) 593-4659

Email: ficcaa@osde.ca

Editorial Team:

Riccardo Di Done

Angela Ficca

Roshni Udyavar

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Children Speak

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A Newsletter of the Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights

Message from the President

Each one of us is bestowed with the ability to serve society beyond the ability to survive and partake of a decent, even luxurious quality of life. It requires compassion, sensitivity and mental strength to care for others needs and to be able to bring joy and hope. For some, this is natural. For others, empathy towards others requires training which can come from the family, the school or college, friends or by working in voluntary organizations. It is, however, central to the working of what we have popularly come to know as 'NGOs' or non-governmental organizations. The Earth Summit in 1992 was the first to demonstrate the strength of such individuals, more than 17,000 of whom had gathered at the parallel NGO Global Forum. Many of them belonged to established organizations such as the Greenpeace; most, however, had come to participate and give their support to the global environmental movement. It is the ceaseless work of such organizations that has seen dramatic changes in environmental quality and socio-economic patterns in some parts of the world. The spirit of voluntary work is well represented in the article on 'Education for Rural Poor Children' by H.R. Shenoy, who having hailed

from similar settings, empathized with children with little or no opportunity and strived to provide better living, educational and health conditions. The narrative by two volunteers – Maitry Porecha, a student and Lata Manidas, a housewife – in the article 'In the Service of the Society: Voluntary Work', brings the essence of this work – that although it does not pay, it gives satisfaction of a different kind and requires commitment, dedication and discipline more than in any other profession.

The Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights started with a spirit such as this in 1983. In May, it celebrated 25 years of dedication and commitment to the cause of children. Its mission to protect and defend the rights of children, adolescents, parents and grandparents particularly, those experiencing problems related to family conflicts or the break-up of the family, has guided its work in different parts of the world. To date, the OPCR has organized six major



Riccardo Di Done

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Impact of Family Factors on CHILDREN'S SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENTS

By Renate Kränzl-Nagl and Martina Beham

It seems that in today's fast-paced and globalised world, time has become a precious commodity. The number of people reporting time poverty and stress has increased, as has the amount of advice on how to use time efficiently.

Time plays a significant role, in particular in the lives of families. As children grow older, their need for time spent together with their parents decreases; however, they demand attention from their parents and want them to be available for them.

But often, the media show parents who are stressed out and overburdened; this image is often linked with pictures showing hurried and/or neglected children. What is then blamed for this is the increasing divorce rates and neglect due to affluence. To date, however, there has not been much scientific research into time poverty of Austrian families.

This Paper is based on the results of two studies (Kränzl-Nagl et al. 2006 a,b) carried out by the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research:

1. The time spent by parents with their children of compulsory school age and
2. The links between family factors and school achievements.

National and international data was analyzed and surveys were carried out among Austria's parents with children of compulsory school age (9 to 14), which could be put into context with the data taken from surveys carried out simultaneously among these students.

Why are today's families under time pressure?

There is a range of reasons why families have problems coordinating their time. On the one hand, there are changes in the field of work, such as working times and locations becoming more flexible and an increasing number of types of work, which is closely linked with an increasing shift of responsibility towards employees and which takes up time originally reserved for recreation and leisure activities. On the other hand, parents, in particular mothers, are under time pressure because in countries like Austria and Germany, despite increasing labor market participation of



mothers and changes in the roles of mothers and fathers, the time organization of schools is still oriented towards the male-breadwinner model, where at least one parent is available in the afternoon.

Is it true that parents do not have enough time for their children?

In spite of their coordination problems, Austria's parents, in particular mothers are trying to meet their children's need for time spent together with them. The majority of the parents seem to be quite successful in doing so: most children are satisfied with the amount of time their parents devote to them on weekdays. Approximately 1 out of 10 Austrian children aged 9 to 14, however,

would like to spend more time with their parents. Analyzing the data taken from the study "Young Voices" has shown similar results: 11% of the Austrian 9 to 17-year-olds want more time with their parents; the average in the 14 countries in which the survey was carried out is 9%. According to this, it is mainly the younger children and girls who miss time spent together with their parents.

The least satisfied are children whose parents are under heavy job pressure and those children whose parents work little and whose mothers report financial bottleneck situations. The discrepancies between the answers given by the mothers and fathers and those given by their children point to the fact that adolescents do not need their parents' permanent presence, but do need parents who are available when needed.

Are Parents competent teachers?

Parents in Austria devote a significant amount of time to "studying" with their kids. It has been shown that (in all analyzed levels of school from levels 4 to 8) approx. 70% of the mothers spend up to 3 hours a week studying with their children and a further 19% devote more than 3 hours a week to studying with their kids. In two-parent families, 60% of the fathers also spend up to 3 hours a week supporting their children with school-work and a further 6% devote even more than 3 hours a week to providing school-related support.

Like the answers given by the parents, the answers of their children (aged between 9 and 14) have shown that a proportion of the parents spend a significant amount of time studying with their children: 17% of the children stated that their parents “help them with school-work (almost) every day”; 45% stated that “sometimes their parents provide support”. Only a minority of 12% stated that this is never the case; in 25% of the cases, parents provide help when asked to do so by their children. Generally speaking, the amount of time invested in providing support for school-related issues is highest when children attend primary school and decreases as the child grows older. The fact that less support is provided by parents for older students can be explained by the children’s increasing degree of independence and by the academic topics that become more and more complex and difficult, which is why the number of private tutor lessons increases as the students become older.

There have been critical discussions (also among experts) about the significance of this targeted support provided by the family for the child’s achievements in school. It is questioned whether (all) parents have enough competence for providing adequate help. The results of the survey carried out among parents prove that this question was worth asking: 27% of the mothers and 21% of the fathers felt that the academic topics were partly very difficult. 20% of the 9 to 14-year-olds answered that studying together with their parents was not very or not at all helpful.

How much influence do families have on their children’s achievements in school?

Contrary to public opinion that children’s achievements in school depend on the school’s quality and the teachers’ commitment, and failure and divergent behavior result from a non-supportive family background, it has been shown that it is not so much the structural features of the family such as its composition which influences the achievements of children and adolescents. It is in line with other studies that neither (significant) differences regarding the type of the family nor the degree of gainful employment of the mother could be identified as having an impact on the children’s marks and success or how they cope with the requirements in school.

According to a review in 2006 of the earlier studies conducted by the Center in 2003, educational aspirations, a positive self-image and, in particular, the socio-economic background of the family have direct and indirect (via the available cultural resources) impact on the (analyzed) performance.

Likewise, there are direct and indirect connections with a background of migration. This outcome applies to all seven countries compared by the data of the PISA study of 2003 (Austria, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Poland, The Netherlands) and again confirms the relevance of the socioeconomic background and cultural resources for children’s success in school.

Moreover, re-analyzing the data of the study “Young Voices” by UNICEF has supported the thesis that, apart from the type of family, a harmonious atmosphere in the family and emotionally involved parents are conducive to the children’s success and well-being. A positive attitude towards school in the children and adolescents surveyed is linked to a positive relationship with their parents and a “well-regulated” atmosphere in the family, with prohibitions and regulations (e.g. concerning watching TV) as well as having a say in family matters and being treated appreciatively.

Conclusions and policy recommendations

Problems of reconciling family and job are different for mothers and fathers, various types of family constellations and depend on job opportunities and perspectives; therefore, measures taken in the field of family policy must be specific to the individual target groups. Couples where both partners have various job options and development perspectives face different challenges from couples or lone-parent families working in an unstable job. What is required are combined monetary and structural measures which take into account the specific needs of families.

The greater the percentages of one-parent families, families where both parents work and children with a background of migration, the more significance solutions to questions of reconciliation have. To this end, school must be included in the debates on matters of reconciliation and has so far been largely neglected in traditionally oriented countries. Promoting all-day schools and day care as well as extracurricular institutions cooperating with schools (such as after-school clubs) would not only contribute to achieving equal opportunities, but also to relieving (gainfully employed) parents and contribute to keeping family time free of such burdens.

The outcomes of both studies prove again that children and adolescents – depending on their social and migrational background – often face different familial conditions regarding their educational perspectives and the way in which they are supported by their parents. Wealthier parents are more likely to be able to afford



DON'T BE EMBARRASSED TO ASK FOR HELP DAD.

The study indicates that adolescents do not need their parents' permanent presence, but do need parents who are available when needed.

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Education for Rural Poor Children

Can pain and suffering result in the good of the society? asks H. R. Shenoy

My 11 school years in the village during the post war years were beset with poverty at home, with two square meals difficult. I do not remember much but my younger sister remembers a day when I came home for lunch and there was nothing to eat. I drank a glass of water, slept on a bench and went back to school for the afternoon session.



ensured that all his children got minimum education, leased out the land which I had purchased two decades earlier at Doddannagudde, and built simple accommodation to house 15 students. The facilities included a cowshed, a well for water supply, a gobar gas plant and solar lighting.

The children brought from far-fetched villages of the state, who otherwise probably never think of schooling, are provided food, shelter, clothing and education in a municipal school once they are brought to the Home. During Diwali and summer vacations, the children go back to their parents. During the first year, the institution had just five students; in the second year, there were ten. And we are looking forward to more students in the forthcoming academic year.

It was during those years, I got scholarships of Rs 3 (7 cents) per month, for 3 years, Rs 50 (US \$ 2) per annum for 3 years and an adhoc scholarship of Rs 15 (35 cents). A rupee would fetch ration for the family for a day in those days.

In many small ways, I kept giving back to the society when I reached a stage in life where I could spare to give. My suffering due to poverty was almost forgotten and resulted in the welfare of a few human beings, perhaps in the ratio of 1 to 10.

Three years after retiring from active service in 2003, my mother who was living with my brother in Udupi, a small town in the state of Karnataka in South India, fell seriously ill at the age of 83. I had to make frequent visits to Udupi from Mumbai

It was during that period that my younger sister introduced me to Mr Seetharam Hegde, the whole and soul of an institution run privately at Kolalagiri near Udupi where a dozen children from remote villages are housed, fed, sent to municipal school and taught organic farming, generation of gobar gas, cow rearing, etc.

Impressed by his dedication, I took this as an opportunity to do something more concrete for all the scholarship money I got when I and my family needed it most.

I formed a charitable trust in the name of my late father, an almost illiterate person who

Poverty is a major barrier to education of rural poor children in India

Profile

The infrastructure cost of Rs 2 lakhs (US \$ 5000) was borne by my family and friends. They support the yearly budget too, with my niece last year giving Rs 50,000. However, Mr Seetharam Hegde bears quite a bit. Incidentally, he resigned from his teaching job to devote his time for renewable energy like gobar gas and solar power, goshalas (cow herd caring), promoting gomutra (cow urine) as a medicine, helping poor children, etc. I am grateful to him for helping me to return to society in abundance during the last leg of my life's journey. Something good has come out of my mother's suffering of 2 years – she passed away 3 years ago.

I also give back to society by conducting training programs on Reiki natural healing and conducting workshops on self-development. ■

HR Shenoy, Mumbai, India, hrshenoy@rediffmail.com, Cell: +91 9324600554

In the Service of the Society

Voluntary Work

By Roshni Udyavar

If only we had bricks with which to build and volunteers to put them together, money would be but a piece of paper. Voluntary work provides individuals with tremendous opportunities for self-development

along with the satisfaction of being able to serve those who are less privileged. Working with children – pre-school, school-going or school-dropouts – requires the ability to learn and to teach and to understand the physical and psychological needs of young minds. However, the value of voluntary work to the community, says Mary Morris in her book, *Voluntary Work in a Social State*, is not limited to meeting specific needs. It makes a two-fold contribution since it affects both the practice and policy of social work as a whole.

“My tryst with voluntary work began three years ago”, says Lata Manidas, who spends nearly 3 hours daily with lesser-abled children at the M.B.A. Foundation in the suburbs of Mumbai. “After my kids became independent, I had plenty of time on my hands. Though I had the desire and the time, I didn’t know whom to approach. Then on one of my travels, I learnt about SOSVA (Society for Service to Voluntary Agencies) through a fellow passenger. It sounded interesting, and I decided to approach them. SOSVA guided me to M.B.A. Foundation – a place for lesser-abled people. It was difficult in the beginning as it involved traveling by public transport – something I was not used to. However, I was overwhelmed by the love showered by the special children. Every time I enter the class they give me a rousing welcome, even though some of them cannot speak. I merely listen to what they have to say, but I get immeasurable unconditional love from them. This continues to inspire me to keep making my humble contribution towards voluntary work.”

“Lives of people often tend to be focused on them”, says Maitry Porecha, who spends a good 12 hours every week working with destitute children living in the railway stations of Mumbai. Maitry worked as a volunteer for Project Kiran, a project initiated by the OPCR in Mumbai. She often visited the



Left: Maitry Porecha teaching street children; Right: NSS Volunteer Faraz Sheikh spent considerable time understanding the problems of the destitute children in Mumbai

children at the railway station, spent time talking to them, preparing educational material and even writing and teaching. “People hardly find time to come out of their cocoon and take a peek into the world outside. Voluntary

work gave me an opportunity to build a stronger relation with people around me. It made me more sensitive to their needs, desires, thinking and lifestyles as a whole. The holistic perspective enabled me to respect the views of the opposite person after making mine heard”, says Maitry.

Voluntary work inculcates self-discipline and trains one with managerial skills – such as organization of events, team work, writing, fund raising and many others. Moreover, Voluntary workers, says Mary Morris, are the vital link between those who are the recipients of welfare and those who contribute to it. “The biggest hitch in voluntary work is when one finds oneself wanting to make a change but is confronted with unfavorable circumstances - lack of facilities, lack of support, dearth of finances, non co-operation of team members, lack of motivated people, unsupportive government and a plethora of similar reasons.”

“It is rare that one comes across all these challenges together. There is no one big challenge, in fact, there are many. But in spite of all this, one must always do whatever one can within ones own capacity to make the most of what is provided at a given time and circumstance.”

Others like Lata feel, on the contrary, that the biggest challenge is the lack of awareness among people and the biggest resource that a volunteer has is love and affection. “The biggest challenge in voluntary work in India is lack of awareness about the immense power of voluntary work. There is an entire world of orphans, disabled people, bed ridden patients, street children and aged people who need help. These people who are left behind by the fast running society have no one to talk to. Some may have parents to take care of them but the rest are left to fend for themselves in asylums, hospitals and on the streets. These love-starved people need someone

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In the Service of the Society



besides them to share their thoughts, to open their hearts and to laugh with them. Everyone in this world has the right to be happy. If each one of us, especially homemakers like me, find time to be with these special people, for as little as 1 to 2 hours a day, we can bring smiles to their lives."

Lata Manidas provides voluntary work for the mentally and physically challenged children at beyond a point money is not

M.B.A. Foundation important. One day all of us

have to leave everything behind and go. In those last days when you look back you will have the satisfaction of having done something and gained lots of love from people who are not related to you. But having said this, there are many kind-hearted people who have the intent to contribute towards voluntary work but don't know how to go about it. I think there is not enough publicity for organizations like SOSVA. Even in a city like Mumbai people don't know whom to approach." This is where organizations like Karmyayog.com have played the role of networking and released its immense powers to connect people who are striving to build a new society. ■

World Malaria Day 2008

By Anwulika Okafor

Ten years after UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO) and their partners launched the Roll Back Malaria initiative, malaria is still the single largest child killer in Africa. The disease takes the lives of some 3,000 children per day.

Of the more than 350 million people who are infected with malaria every year, 90 per cent live in sub-Saharan Africa.

UNICEF & its partners, along with governments and public and private-sector organizations, came together on 25 April, World Malaria Day 2008, in an effort to ramp up global action to combat the disease.

A disease without borders

Malaria is endemic in 107 countries and territories where 40 per cent of the world's population lives. The theme for World Malaria Day this year was 'Disease without Borders'. It will cost an estimated \$3.2 billion to achieve global control of malaria. Through increased public and private commitments and partnerships, Roll Back Malaria has raised \$1 billion so far. ■

UNICEF



World Malaria Day is observed annually to spur global action on the disease, which kills 3,000 children every day. Above, a mother awaits treatment for her malaria-infected daughter.

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Impact of Family Factors on Children's School Achievements

support in coping with the requirements at school as well as to have access to extracurricular recreation and leisure institutions than less wealthy families. Furthermore, cultural and social resources support abilities and skills in varying degrees, which is expected in the existing school system. As has been shown in more recent works on the significance of families in the field of education policy, families are not only a prerequisite and help develop skills for learning in school, but also parents play a crucial role in helping their children.

Against this background, a new and comprehensive attitude toward education is required which involves as many players as possible and takes into account the different aspects of gaining skills and knowledge. Apart from political conditions to help parents reconcile family and working life, a new way of thinking is required. It must not be the private matter of the "affected" people themselves or a luxury whether families in the future will have more time or not. Families are very important care providers and parts of society. Therefore, their financial well-being as well as their well-being concerning their time, their time welfare, is in the interest of the whole of society. Finally,

political measures which support these aims are not only good for the parents, but also for their children. ■

(Policy Brief is part of a research project by the European Center for Social Welfare Policy and Research commissioned by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Social Affairs and Consumer Protection)

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Message of the President

international conferences on Child Rights with a focus on education, health, violence, poverty, children and divorce, food & nutrition and law, forging new collaborations and bonds with like-minded organizations around the world. Its offices are now based in Montreal, Quebec, Edmonton, Kamloops (Canada), Mumbai (India) and Nairobi (Kenya). The OPCR also has a number of official representatives in other countries. With its upcoming International Summit on *Sustainable Best Practices in Children and Youth Programs* to be held on September 10th and 11th, the OPCR continues to strive for a better world for children around the world. . ■