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Mother's perception on behavior of their school going children

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Abstract

The immediate environment of growing children continuously impacts them ^[1]. A child possesses different types of fears and fantasies, some of which are completely imaginary; others may be acquired/learned from the family, while some others may be experiential in nature. Sometimes the fears are just a passing phase, but at others, they can grow to be larger than life.

The aim of the study was to find the objects of fear and fantasy imbibed from the environment of children between 6 to 8 years of age. Parents of 80 children aged 6 to 8 years selected on incidental purposive basis were interviewed regarding their children's favourite and fearful objects/figures from their child's world of stories and television and the day-to-day surroundings.

Most of the figures of fantasy and favourite objects were found to be acquired through TV and are animated characters like Tom and Jerry, Chota Bheem, Doraemon, Ninja Hattori, Chin-Chan and Barbie. The most common fears in children as reported by mothers were fear of darkness, loud noises, animals, ghost, being left alone and burglars as well as that of being harmed by superhuman creatures.

Keywords: Childhood fear and childhood fantasy, immediate environment, Fear and fantasy

Introduction

The immediate environment of growing children continuously impacts them ^[1]. A child possesses different types of fears and fantasies, some of which are completely imaginary; others may be acquired/learned from the family, while some others may be experiential in nature. Sometimes the fears are just a passing phase, but in others, they can grow to be larger than life.

Aim: The aim of the present study was to find the objects of fear and fantasy imbibed from the environment of children between 6 to 8 years of age.

Method: Parents of 80 children aged 6 to 8 years selected on an incidental purposive basis were interviewed regarding their children's favourite and fearful objects/figures from their child's world of stories and television and the day-to-day surroundings. A detailed interview schedule both in Hindi and English was developed for this purpose.

Conclusion: Most of the figures of fantasy and favourite objects were found to be acquired through TV and are animated characters like Tom and Jerry, Chota Bheem, Doraemon, Ninja Hattori, Chin-Chan and Barbie. The most common fears in children as reported by mothers were fear of darkness, loud noises, animals, ghost, being left alone and burglars as well as that of being harmed by superhuman creatures. Human development always occurs in a context and these contexts often influence the course of that development ^[1]. In his ecological model, Bronfenbrenner emphasizes the interrelationships of the individual with layers of environmental context. The theory suggests that the environment and the child continually influence one another in a transactional manner. The first layer of the environment i.e. the micro system consists of the family, the school and the peer group along with the relationships the child forms within these settings. The physical characteristics in their day-to-day surroundings such as the playground, the play equipment, books and TV programs etc. also have a tremendous impact on the developing child.

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In this context, the type of TV programmers, story books or/and stories told to the child have a lasting influence on her budding mind including her fantasies and fear.

Fear and fantasy have negative connotations but everyone needs to understand that fantasy and fear are natural emotions, completely normal and present from a very young age. Some fears develop at an early age while others may develop later in life, like adolescents' social fears, but they are always triggered by events or encounters in one's family and surroundings. Sometimes the fears are just a passing phase, but at others, they can grow to be larger than life. Most of us who suffer from different kinds of fears are those who have not really learnt to let go of their childhood fears. A high level of fear is often categorized as childhood trauma and can be caused by extremely disturbing events in his or her childhood years.

Fears are natural, necessary and of different types. They are developmental in nature. As children grow, the objects of their fear, its stimulation and reactions to fear keep changing. The types of fears a child has provided a clue to his surroundings, care and cognitive abilities.

For years, fantasy or imagination was thought of as a way for children to escape from reality, and once they reached a certain age, it was believed they would push fantasy aside and deal with the real world. Children were very often pushed away from imaginative play considering them a waste of time. But, increasingly, child development experts are recognizing the importance of imagination for young children and the role it plays for them in understanding reality. Imagination is necessary for learning about people and events we don't directly experience, such as history or events on the other side of the world. For young kids, it allows them to ponder the future, such as what they want to do when they grow up. One of the most important fantasy happenings in children's life these days is the presence of cartoons which are there in all TV programmes, advertisements and shows. Largely children are the true fans of tons and get new concepts to demonstrate their skills in different areas by watching them. Cartoon films aid in areas like vocabulary, pronunciation, new languages, problem-solving etc. and in general promote child literacy. A number of mothers and fathers are now using TV as the way of fascinating their children while they're busy doing different work. It's thought that at the age of eight or before it creates the child begins living with the means they have discovered from TV. Cartoons are nice; however they contain several dangerous things, and many kids get a habit of watching cartoons that spoils their future. They learn those dialogues, actions, etc. that have an awful impact on them [4].

Fantasies allow the actor to consider and speculate about central and sometimes painfully realistic themes in a way that is more palatable than in reality. The fantastic nature of the characters and the setting provides with emotional distance that gives room to consider sensitive and important ideas more objectively. An irony about fantasy is that despite the fanciful characters, strange imaginary worlds, and bizarre situations encountered, it has the power to help us better understand reality [5]. It can then be said that both fear and fantasy are an influential part of children's life and their budding personalities. It would, therefore, be of much use of all the stakeholders to understand the fears and fantasies of young children of our times.

Aims and Objectives: The aim of the present study was to find the objects of fear and fantasy imbibed from the day-to-day surroundings of children between 6 to 8 years of age.

Review of literature

Not much indigenous work has been done in the area of fantasy and fear of young children amongst outside studies. Cantor, (1995) [2], reveals that preschool children are more responsive than older children and adults to salient visual images; that is, something that looks frightening will be more likely to frighten young children than something with a more benign exterior that is actually harmful. Young children are also more likely than their older counterparts to respond with fear to blatantly fantastic happenings, and less likely to respond to threats communicated in a more abstract manner. [2].

Egan, (2008) [3], states that fantasy is an important part of human inheritance but children's fantasy world is specifically created by the multitude of stories, comics, films etc. to which they are exposed. Fantasy is a primary process activity which operates, and generates its peculiar images, according to the rules of substitution, displacement etc. Fantasy allows children to create an imaginary world in which they can rehearse and begin to deal with many of the most fundamental psychological challenges and problems that come with the territory of being human.

Methodology

Mothers of 80 children aged 6 to 8 years selected on an incidental purposive basis were interviewed regarding their children's favourite and fearful objects/figures from their child's world of stories, television and day-to-day surroundings. A detailed interview schedule both in Hindi and English was developed for this purpose.

Result and Discussion

A look at the background information of the Ss helps in putting the obtained information in the context and therefore, the education and occupation of the mothers (Ss) was assessed.

Table 1: Education of the Mothers

Education	Percent
Uneducated	22%
Less than secondary	15%
Secondary	26%
College	30%
Professional	7%

Table 1 depicts that 30 percent of the mothers were college educated, while 26 percent had higher education up till secondary level and 15 percent were less than secondary educated. Only 7 percent of the mothers were professionally educated. However, as high as 22 percent of the mothers had no education at all.

Table 2: Occupation of the mothers

Occupation	Percent
Housewives	86.25%
Teacher	6.25%
Lecturers (University level)	5%
Maids	2.50%

Overall analyzing the result in Table 2, lead to the conclusion that the majority of the mothers (86.25%) were full-time housewives, 6.25 percent were teachers, 5 percent were lecturers in colleges and 2.50 percent of the mothers were working as maids.

Table 3: Favorite object/cartoon characters of children

Character	Percent
Tom and Jerry	28.75%
Chota Bheem	22.50%
Doraemon	20%
Barbie	16.25%
Ninja hattori	12.50%

Table 3 reveals that the favourite object/cartoon characters of the majority of children as reported by the mothers were Tom and Jerry (28.75%), Chota Bheem (22%), Doraemon (20%), Barbie (16.25%), and Ninja Hattori (12.50%).

Table 4: Children’s objects of fear: General Objects

Objects	Percentage
Animals	55%
Darkness	18%
Ghost/Shadows	10%
Robbers/Kidnappers	2%
No fear	15%

As can be seen in Table 4, the most common fears of children concerned animals (55%), darkness (18%), ghosts/shadows (10%) and very few (2%) children had fear of robbers/kidnappers, whereas rest (15%) of the children had no fear at all.

Table 5: Children’s objects of fear: Cartoons

Cartoon	Percentage
Ghost	30%
Chota Bheem	5%
Ugly face	5%
No fear	60%

A look into the tons which are fearful for children, mothers reported that of 30 percent of children fear ghosts (Table 5). Very few (5%) reportedly had a fear of Chota Bheem and Ugly Face. However, 60 percent of the mothers reported that their children do not fear the cartoons they watch.

Table 6: Ways of expressing fear

Expression	Percentage
Verbal expression (switch on/off the lights, shouts)	60%
Facial expression (closed eyes)	10%
Bodily reaction (running away)	6%
No fear	24%

When mothers were asked about their children’s expression of fear as depicted in Table 6, maximum number of the mothers (60%) reported that their children express fear verbally like shouting, while others (10%) through their facial expressions like closing their eyes and some (6%) children express their fear by bodily reactions (running away) whereas 24 percent of the children reportedly had no fear.

Table 7: Ways of reassurance used by mothers

Ways	Percent
Logical explanation	32%
Verbal assurance	17%
Exposing the child to fearful situations gradually	11.25%
Bodily support	7.50%
Religious support	1.25%
Nothing particular	6.25%
No fear	24.75%

A query was made to know the ways of reassurance used by mothers when the child is fearful. The result revealed (Table 7) that most of the mothers (32%) give logical explanations by making them aware about the reality. While 17 percent of the assurance came in the form of verbally soothing of the child. 11.25 percent of mothers exposed their children to fearful situations in a gradual manner. Surprisingly only 7.50 percent of the mothers reported giving bodily support to alleviate their child’s fears by making them sleep/sit nearby, and by kissing, patting and hugging their children and 1.25 percent of the mothers gave religious support, 6.25 percent of the mothers were not particular about reassuring their children. A large number of the mothers (24.75%) reported that their children have absolutely no fears.

Table 8: Choice of storybooks

Story Books	Percent
Balhans	7.50%
Balbhaskar	6.25%
Chotu Motu	3.75%
No response	82.50%

Table 8 reveals that 7.50 percent children liked to read Balhans, Balbhaskar (6.25%), Chotu Motu (3.75%). A very high number of the mothers (82.50%) reported that they do not buy storybooks for their children.

Table 9: Favorite stories of children

Stories	Percent
Animal stories (Lion and the mouse, rabbit and tortoise, lion and the rabbit, the foolish turtle, etc.)	58.75%
Fairy tales (Snow White, Cinderella, Barbie, Tinker Bell etc.)	11.25%
Religious (Krishna, Surya Bhagwan)	10%
No response	20%

As revealed in Table 9, majority (58.75%) of the mothers reported that their children demanded to listen to animal stories, fairy tales (11.25%) and religious stories (10%). As high as 20 percent of mothers, however, did not give any response to this query.

Table 10: Fear factor in stories

Object	Percent
Ghost	2.50%
Ant	1.25%
Krishna movie	1.25%
No fear	95%

Most of the mothers (95%) admitted that their children did not get fearful of any objects in the stories (Table 10). According to them, children know that these are only stories and there is no reality in them. As few as 2.50 percent were scared of ghosts, Krishna movies (1.25%) and ants (1.25%).

Conclusion

It is concluded that the most common fears in all children are ghosts and darkness. Most of the children are influenced by the television; cartoons are very attractive to children. The most noticeable finding is that through TV children’s objects of fear and fantasy are no more rooted in local surrounding rather they have become globalized which is evident from the reported choices. The stories children like to listen to are Lion

and the Mouse, Rabbit and Tortoise, Lion and the Rabbit, the Foolish Turtle, Snow White, Cinderella, Barbie, Tinker Bell etc. They watch cartoons like Tom and Jerry, Doraemon, Chin-Chan, Chota Bheem, and Ninja Hattori the most. In the present study, most of the mothers reported that their children are able to differentiate between reality and fantasy and therefore, are not scared of characters or situations in the stories. As for fear children do have fear of darkness, animals and scolding by parents as well as social acceptance. Since fear is an innate emotion having a developmental curve i.e. it increases with age and experiences and gradually gets limited with further age and experiences. Almost one-fourth of the children in this age group (6-8 years) reportedly had no fears may be because the sources or stimuli for fear keep getting varied and wider and by this age, other types of fears (social fears) start becoming more prominent. Psychologists like Jacqueline Woolley, a professor at the University of Texas at Austin, are studying the process of “magical thinking”, or children’s fantasy lives, and how kids learn to distinguish between what is real and what isn’t and that it is important for children’s cognitive development ^[6]. Another important conclusion is that almost all (more than 80%) mothers reported that no storybooks are bought for their children. It could be one of the reasons for all their responses being centre on TV programs. A very unfortunate state indeed!! Therefore, it can be stated that to a certain level, all growing up children have fears and fantasies and that these are essential for their normal development.

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