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Dr. Nazneen Gazdar

Guest Faculty, HDFs, PG
Department of Home Science,
Jai Narain Vyas University,
Jodhpur, Rajasthan, India

Dr. Nasreen Gazdar

Guest Faculty (HDFS), PG
Department of Home Science,
Jai Narain Vyas University,
Jodhpur, Rajasthan, India

A study of young children's beliefs about objects and figures of fear in their surrounding

Dr. Nazneen Gazdar and Dr. Nasreen Gazdar

Abstract

Immediate environment of growing children continuously impacts them ^[1]. A child possesses different types of fears, 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.

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

To study difference in the choices and reasons behind their fear towards the presented objects, if any, on gender and on income group.

Method: A list of eligible subjects were prepared on the basis of the delimitation of the study, and 120 students (6 to 8 years of age) were selected from the population available in each school, to find out the beliefs about objects/figures fear in their surroundings. The selected samples were shown the self-constructed 'Album' containing pictures of the objects of fear present in their surroundings. Each Ss was shown the picture album and asked the questions for each picture separately. Their responses were recorded on a tape recorder and answers were later transcribed verbatim.

Conclusion: The finding leads to the conclusion that almost all the children responded to their likings for listening stories. Reportedly, most of the boys and girls dream while sleeping and got scared in their dreams from ghosts/animal attack, beating from parents or teachers. Boys were scared than girls in dreams.

Keywords: Childhood fear, gender, income group

Introduction

Fear has negative connotation but everyone needs to understand that fear are natural emotions completely normal and present from very young age. Sometimes the fears are just a passing phase, but at others they can grow to be larger than life. Most of us suffer from different kinds of fears are those who have not really learnt to let go of their childhood fears. 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. It is universally accepted that fear is one of the most innate emotions of human beings. But it is fear that has propelled them, their immense cognitive abilities. Fear is very imported emotion but it is also most inhibiting hurdle too, in the course of development of a human being.

Fear is a normal response in higher animals to an active or imagined threat and comprises an outer behavioural expression, an inner feeling and accompanying physiological changes. These fears develop through the interaction of three kinds of phenomena: those which are innate, those dependent upon maturation and those developed through learning (Jeffrey Derevensley, 1974) ^[1]. In the present study, Ss were quarried on objects of their fear.

Methodology

A list of eligible subjects were prepared on the basis of the delimitation of the study, and 120 students (6 to 8 years of age) were selected from the population available in each school, to find out the beliefs about objects/figures fear in their surroundings. The selected samples were shown the self constructed 'Album' containing pictures of the objects of fear present in their

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Nazneen Gazdar

Guest Faculty, HDFs, PG
Department of Home Science,
Jai Narain Vyas University,
Jodhpur, Rajasthan, India

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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), 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]

Result

Very interesting results were obtained; fears of animals were seen more in comparison to supernatural fears. Fear of extended family members such as grandparents and uncles have been reported more by Ss from low income group than middle income group indicating a difference in family pattern or family dynamics.

A picture of harsh discipline technique in low income group homes emerges out. Interestingly more boys were scared off by family members than girls which might be because of the family's strict ways of training boys in masculinity. However girls were scared off more by friends than boys.

A higher number of boys got scared because of horror serials, horror movies, and having fight sequences on television in comparison to girls. On the other hand a higher number of girls were scared of strangers because the stranger could be a dreaded thief, as they mostly stay at home and are more attached to their household stuffs which bring them a feeling of insecurity.

Conclusion

The finding leads to the conclusion that most fears are common in all children and disappear or diminish with time and experience. Most of the children are influenced by the television. Children do have fear of dark, animals and parents scolding, social acceptances. It was concluded that fear of wild animals like lion/tiger, reptiles like snakes, crocodile etc were almost similar in girls and boys. Both the genders expressed high percentage of innate fear in comparison to other reasons of fear. Majority of the girls scored high percentage of innate fear of darkness, ghost, shadows, height, dog, cockroach, and spider; whereas, boys expressed innate fears of lion/tiger, snake, lizard, test/exam and crocodile more than girls. Majority of both the genders expressed their fears through bodily reactions. Girls reported more bodily reactions and verbal expressions in comparison to boys. According to present study, a very high percentage of boys and girls reported no fear in similar measures. Therefore, it can be said that children till this age (6 to 8 years) are found to be similar in their expressions of fear irrespective of gender.

Experts insist that if a child continues to harbor a fear long after others have outgrown it or if it's severe, the fear may have developed into a phobia. If a child regularly goes to great lengths to avoid a feared object or situation, it may be time to seek professional counseling or treatment.

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