The Role of Parents in Maintaining Discipline Amongst Form 4 Secondary School Students in Fiji

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Abstract

This paper is a report of the study conducted to find the role of parents in maintaining discipline amongst Form 4 secondary school students in Fiji. The sample included sixty students and ten school counselors/principals. The findings revealed that parents play a pivotal role in maintaining discipline in schools whereas lack of their support gives rise to a number of problems such as swearing, bullying, truancy, alcohol abuse, glue sniffing, lying, stealing, rebelliousness, graffiti, fighting, smoking and relationship problem.

KEY WORDS: Discipline, Parental support, Discipline problem, Family environment, Student behaviour

Introduction

Family members, particularly parents, are the chief architects in shaping the personality of a child. The range and depth of emotions which parents display to their children builds up the psychological interior of their children. Emotional and social adjustment of children who are loved, accepted, nurtured, trusted and who have close emotional ties with their parents are superior (Chakra and Prabha, 2004).

The Fiji Education Commission Report (2000) stated that “Parental support is important in ways other than financial. Parents need to provide encouragement as well as an enabling environment for children to study and do homework. Schools may need to go to parents to raise awareness of how they can best assist their children” The report further stated that the abuse of alcohol, tobacco and marijuana is increasing amongst secondary students. Truancy and bullying are also prevalent. While the family lays the psychosocial, moral and spiritual foundations in the overall development of the child, parenthood is a responsibility requiring the full cooperation of both parents who must ensure the total development of their offspring(s) (Eweniyi, 2002).

Deroma, Lassiter & Davis (2004) emphasized the importance of encouraging the adolescents in discipline and the value of refraining from emphasizing adverse impact to adolescents. When adolescents are involved in discipline decision making they make better judgment. Schools should be considered as an important social context along with family, communities or neighborhood that also affect various processes related to delinquency (Unal & Cukur, 2011)

Deepshika & Bhanot (2011) in their study to assess family environment and its impact on their social-emotional adjustment revealed that eight family environment factors, viz. cohesion, expressiveness conflict, acceptance and caring, independence, active-recreational orientation, organization and control together showed significant role in socio-emotional and educational adjustment of the adolescent girls. When schools believe that lax parental discipline explains a child’s misbehavior, educators are less likely to consider alternative explanations for the misbehavior and the full range of interventions that could be implemented at school (Greene, 2011). Osher, Bear, Sprague & Doyle (2010) stated that the three approaches viz. ecological approaches to classroom management, school wide positive
behavioural supports and social and emotional learning improves school discipline practices and student behavior.

Structurally, a family is deemed either broken or intact. The broken family is not structurally intact for various reasons which includes the death of a parent, divorce, separation, dissertation and illegitimacy - a case in which the family was never completed (Coukline, 1996). When the single parent is overburdened by responsibilities and by their own emotional reaction to their situation, they often become irritable, impatient and insensitive to the needs of their children (Nzewunwah, 1995). Life in a single parent family can be stressful for both the child and the parent. Such families are faced with the challenges of diminished financial resources, assumptions of new roles and responsibilities, establishment of new patterns in intra-familial interaction and reorganization of routines and schedules (Agulanna, 1999).

Parental divorce has negative effects on the adjustment of children compared to their peers growing up in continuously intact families. Children of divorced families tend to encounter more social, academic and behavioural problems than children from intact homes (Amato and Keith, 1991).

Parental monitoring has a protective effect on many adolescent risk behaviors in both middle-class populations and poor urban environments and has been shown both to moderate the effect of peer influence and to persist into late adolescence. Whereas unsupervised time, exposure to sexual possibility situations, and out-of-home care increase sexual behavior, improved parent-child communication reduces sexual risk behaviors (DeVore & Ginsburg, 2005). A study by Juang & Silbereisen (2002) showed that parents who demonstrated more warmth, engaged in more discussions concerning academic and intellectual matters with their adolescents and had higher school aspirations for their adolescents, reported more involvement in their adolescent's schooling. In contrast, adolescents who were characterized by below average ability, parental school involvement and capability beliefs, demonstrated the worst school performance.

The family in its most common forms is a lifelong commitment between man and women who feed, shelter and nurture their children until they reach maturity. It is a primary socialization context and is, therefore, considered to be very important factor influencing child development (Ozeinar, 2006). Sheldon & Epstein (2002) postulated that creating more connections and greater cooperation amongst the school, family and community contexts is one way for schools to improve student behavior and school discipline. Okorodudu (2010) posited that parents who exerted control and monitored adolescent activities and promoted self-autonomy were found to have the most positive effects on adolescents’ behaviour. This study aims to study the role of parents in maintaining discipline amongst the Form 4 secondary school students in Fiji.

Methodology

Purpose

This research was carried out to find out the role of parents in maintaining discipline amongst the form 4 secondary school students in Fiji. It sought to resolve the major discipline problems that are ubiquitous in secondary schools and how the family structure and organization contribute to these problems.

Design and Participants

In this qualitative research, an in-depth interview using a semi-structured interview guide was used. Ten school counselors/principals were interviewed and their views were recorded and analyzed.
A semi-structured questionnaire was also administered to sixty students. The students were identified through the school counselors. Semi-structured questionnaire was used as to allow the students provide their views without being unduly feltered.

Six urban secondary schools were randomly selected to carry out this research. The schools were from the two major cities in Fiji; Suva and Lautoka. Of the three schools selected from each urban area, one was an Indo-Fijian dominated school; one was dominated by the indigenous students while one was a multi-racial school.

Results

Findings from questionnaire of students

An analysis of the data received from students revealed the following:

- Sixty-eight percent of the students from broken families had discipline problem at school compared to twenty-four percent from intact families.
- The discipline problem encountered included bullying, lying, graffiti, fighting, truancy, late arrival to school, swearing, smoking, and glue sniffing.
- Seventy-two percent of the total students indicated that they spent over one hour with one or both parents, twenty-two percent indicated that they spent under one hour with one or both parents and six percent stated that their parents never spent any time with them. They avowed that their parents were either too busy in their own work or engaged in social commitments. The time spent by the parents with their children is shown in figure 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time spent</th>
<th>Tally</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>above 3 hours</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - 3 hours</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - 2 hours</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>up to 1 hour</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 1: Time spent by parents with children

Findings from interviews with school counselors and principals

This part of the study which explored qualitative dimensions in particular yielded quite obvious results which has reinforced that parental support is important in maintaining discipline amongst the students at school. An analysis of the responses from the recorded interviews revealed the following:

- A number of discipline problem exist in schools. These include relationship problem, swearing, bullying, truancy, alcohol abuse, glue sniffing, lying, stealing, rebelliousness, graffiti, fighting and smoking.
- Relationship rates number one problem in most schools. The students are not able to differentiate between love and infatuation at this early age. As schools try to make informed decisions on this, there are some parents who see nothing wrong in their children having a relationship at school.
- Rebelliousness exists in the form of breaking school rules. As the child rights are too heavily emphasized in both the print and non-print media, teachers feel disempowered to firmly discipline the child. The attitude of some over protective parents and the fear of legal retort further prevent the teachers from imposing discipline upon the child.
- In a family where the father practices domestic violence and where harsh corporal punishment is used, children are abusive and bullying is evident in them.
A child who has low self esteem from being bullied at home will bully others to make himself feel good.

Where the children stay with their relatives to complete their education, the child is seen as a servant in the house where he lives. He is also expected to carry most tasks in the house. To show his anger and frustration the child gets involved in unethical behavior at school.

Late arrival in schools is due to a number of contributing factors. Bus breakdowns, water cuts, food not being prepared on time, dropping siblings to their primary schools and late arrival of the bus are some common problems. While parents do not have direct control over many of these, they can at least make sure that the food is prepared on time.

Parents who are not well versed about the child’s progress and attendance to school entirely believe what the child says. They do not involve themselves in open discussion and as a norm in the house the child keeps everything to himself. The child talks to the parents only when need arises and the child may live in the fear of his own parents and guardians. With low self esteem the child may find ways to stay away from school.

While some parents boast of higher earnings in the form of salary and wages, giving money to the child to buy lunch from the school canteen does not contribute to maintain good discipline either. With much money in hand the child is tempted to use it elsewhere, ending up stealing lunch from his/her colleagues to satisfy the hunger.

While teachers have tried their best to maintain discipline in schools, a lot of rules are being created. This is contrary to the past where there were only a few rules. Nowadays new rules are being invented for each new problem that arises from student offences. In the past, values and attitudes were carried in the heart and it was used by students which influenced their life.

Discussion

The families in general and parents in particular, have often been deemed to be the most important support system available to the child. The strongest factor in molding a child’s personality is his relationship with his parents (Mohanraj and Latha, 2005). While schools are trying their best to meet its social obligation of educating the most important asset; the future generation of the country, it’s important that proper values are inculcated in those young and adolescent minds so that they grow to be responsible citizens of their country.

The findings can be explained by the fact that students from broken families and families where parents are too defensive towards their children, the children tend to involve themselves in unethical behavior which is of concern at school. Similarly intact families must set limit to their children and where need be engage themselves in open discussion.

The results from the student feedback is in line with a earlier study by Spruijit and De Goede (1997) which concluded that youngsters growing up in families with a happy, harmonious parental marriage experience fewer problems than those from divorced or militarily distressed families. Much research has found that children tend to do better in traditional or intact families- those which include two biological parents or two parents who adopted the child in infancy (Bray and Hetherington, 1993). Schools are trying their best to instill good discipline amongst the adolescents. However there are several factors which prevent the teachers from achieving this goal. It is the responsibility of the parents to work in partnership with the schools and be well informed about the progress and shortfalls of their child. The effectiveness of any form of discipline may depend on how a child interprets and responds to it in the context of the overall, ongoing relationship with a parent (Papalia and Olds, 1989).

While a lot of discipline problems do exist in schools it may be appropriate to take each problem separately and find out their individual cause and effects on the adolescent, the school system and the family at large. Longitudinal study may be conducted to find out the effect of indiscipline in adolescents later life.
Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations are made:

- Parents to be educated on the importance of family structure on the life of their children
- Counselling to be provided to the students who are disadvantaged in the sense they come from broken families or from families with lots of problems.
- Government, Human Rights group and other NGO’s to equally educate students on their roles rather than only on their rights
- Schools to have regular parent awareness programs based on their experiences and research.

References


