Let noble thoughts come to us from all sides’

....Rig Veda

CHAPTER VIII
OLD THEMES, NEW DIRECTIONS: A ROAD MAP TO INTERVENTION

The final chapter presents an emerging conceptual model that can provide an impetus to the endeavour to building strong and healthy families that can provide a nurturing context to enhance child mental health. Based on an amalgamation of contemporary and traditional childrearing wisdom, that emerged from the study, it concludes with a simple and feasible intervention model that can contribute to child mental health movement.

The study data clearly showed that urban environments in which children were raised may not be protective contexts due to the inherent mental health risks for the family unit. Due to the parental stress generated in these contexts, the ‘vulnerability’ of children would increase, as they would be exposed to childrearing styles that may not be conducive to their emotional development. Parallel to the concepts of the family resilience perspective, what emerged most prominently in the study was the possibility of the transformation of the same vulnerable family to a stable structure through inherent recovery processes that could enhance child mental health. The study used insights regarding optimal recovery processes articulated by the respondents to create a conceptual framework (Figure 8.01) for the emerging model of intervention (Box 8.01) that can assist the family to move from vulnerability to stability.

THE EMERGING MODEL FOR PROMOTION OF CHILD & FAMILY MENTAL HEALTH
Figure 8.01: Conceptual framework of the emerging model of intervention

**FAMILY AS A RISKY CONTEXT**
*Transmission of risk*
- **Value consensus**: well-being equated to economic development
- **Common goal**: singular pursuit of economic development
- **Social script**: childrearing style directed towards academic excellence for material success

**PERMISSIVE CHILDREARING STYLE**
- **Singular focus** on academic achievement
- **Permissiveness** and 'compensation culture'

---

**FAMILY AS A PROTECTIVE CONTEXT**
*Resilience promoting processes*
- **Sense of coherence**: inherent ability to deal with dysfunction
- **Reduction of vulnerabilities**: for positive adaptation
- **Family-centred intervention**

**AUTHORITATIVE CHILDREARING STYLE**
- **Holistic excellence**- purpose and meaning
- **Balance** between child’s autonomy and parental expectations

---

**PROCESSES**

**Stressed parental lifestyles**
- Decline in parental investment
- Poor structure and discipline

**Individualistic childrearing styles**
- Outsourcing of childrearing tasks
- Play replaced by entertainment culture
- Replacement of human engagement with technology

**Decline in unstructured play**

**Poor inter-generational transmission of values**

---

**OUTCOMES**
- Vulnerable families
- Poor child mental health outcomes

**The vulnerable child**

---

**PARENT SUPPORT** to promote
- Parental involvement, chaperonage and guidance
- Structure and discipline

**Collectivistic childrearing practices** that provide interactions and activities for
- Unstructured play
- Widening the ‘context of engagement’
- Creating a life of purpose & meaning

**Cultural renewal**
- Inter-generational transmission of values

---

**OUTCOMES**
- Stable families
- Promotion of child mental health

**The emotionally competent child**

---

**289**
As seen in Figure 8.01, following parent support, the key recovery processes that the parent would use to promote child mental health would be to provide investment and chaperonage and maintain structure and discipline. Collective childrearing practices that provided interactions and activities to promote unstructured play and widen the context of engagement are recommended. Exposure to variegated activities that helped identify purpose and meaning in life to promote holistic excellence are suggested. Most significantly, a cultural renewal is advocated to provide a sense of harmony and rootedness within one’s own ecological context.

The next sub-section presents concrete recommendations that can facilitate the process of building stable families that contribute to building emotional competence of the child.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study brought to the fore that despite multiple roles and challenging lifestyles, children were still very important in the Indian family and caregivers took tremendous efforts to make them happy. This was indicated by the tremendous fatigue that caregivers reported in trying to maintain a balance between the multiple roles. Responses indicated unhappiness at the inability to deal with the pressures of urban living and the poor interaction with family members due to lack of time. Notably, women respondents claimed that their professional work gave them immense satisfaction and a break from the monotony of domestic responsibilities, and yet sought advice on how to balance their personal and childrearing responsibilities. In this context, intervention strategies were focused on meeting the needs of the parent first who then would be empowered to meet the child’s needs.

The study propounds parent support as the core intervention strategy that would empower the parent to be physically and emotionally involved not only with the child but also to enhance connectivity amongst family members. The processes involved in providing parent support would be promotion of personal responsibility, provision of information and emotional support, building of parental skills, making optimum use of existing family resources and supporting social networks that empower parents to improve their life circumstances. Box 8.01 presents the emerging intervention model for the promotion of child mental health in terms of areas of specific intervention and the strategies involved.
Box 8.01: A roadmap to intervention for the promotion of child mental health

### Parents reclaiming responsibility

- Parental **investment** and **chaperonage**
- Provide opportunities for **unstructured play**
- **Involvement** and **monitoring** of Media & Technology
  - Optimal and developmentally-appropriate use of media and technology
- Train in **household chores**

### Movement from ‘individualism’ to ‘collectivism’

- **Inter-generational transmission of values** through ‘Sanskars’/rituals, storytelling, etc.
  - Significant others –
  - Educational Systems
  - Peer Groups
- Draw on ‘**wisdom of traditional experts**’ (caregivers’ and allied medical systems).
- Shift from the ‘**Personality ethic**’ to ‘**Character ethic**’
- The process of renewal: from ‘**consumer to a contributor**’

### Investment in people rather than professionals

- **Shared parenting**
- **Significant others** (for skill training) in
  - Life management skills -functional competency and financial competence
  - Social skills – interpersonal relationships
  - ‘Social Interest’ – “social good over individual good”
- **Teachers** at all levels
  - Academics
  - Co-curricular activities

### Collaboration with professionals

- Use of **holistic and culturally-rooted models** of intervention
- **Parent support**
  - Attitudinal change to bring in awareness of the significance of
    - Childrearing function and its responsibilities
    - The significance of the developmental stage of childhood
  - **Skill training**
The next sub-section describes some mandatory processes that would be involved in the provision of parent support, a core strategy of the emerging intervention model. These emerged from the study data based on traditional childrearing practices and strategies created by parents to cope with the changing realities of the current childrearing environment.

**Mandatory processes for providing parent support**

1) **The process of empowerment**

The concept of *parent support* as opposed to that of parent training and education has been upheld as a preferred strategy (Carter and Kahn 1996). Parent support was seen as a change process where awareness and attitudes once established would lead to enhanced wisdom in making choices related to the childrearing function. Learning of skills and techniques that enhanced the parenting function then became an easily achievable goal.

2) **Focus on parent-child relationship**

The bi-directionality of healthy parent-child relationships made a case for interventions that addressed emotional competence and social development with emphasis on the parent as well as the child’s emotional health, rather than those that focused on communication skills or child development alone. The focus therefore was from changing the child or the parent to the all-important *parent-child relationship*.

3) **Reclaiming responsibility**

Modern consumeristic societies are marked by an increased reluctance of parents to accept personal responsibility for their children’s lives. The tendency to blame the media or external structures for their problems was commonly observed, disregarding the critical function of the parent as role-models in shaping children’s lives. Childrearing is a personal exercise of social responsibility and therefore it was important that parents and families acknowledged their role in inculcating healthy lifestyles in their children. In the context of increased responsibilities of the women, the concept of ‘*shared parenting*’ (Elkind 199?) can be a concrete strategy to mitigate the fatigue that women expressed in the study. Apart from assisting the woman, it strengthens the bond between father and child and the spouses. Resisting the seductions of consumerism and moving away from the ‘*herd mentality*’, parents through their personal creativity needed to be proactive in making responsible choices that considered the child’s developmental needs and well-being.
Arrien (1993:5) eloquently brings out the importance of reclaiming responsibility in our children’s lives.

“To have integrity we must recognise that our choices bring consequences and that we cannot escape responsibility for the consequences, not because they are imposed by some external authority but because they are inherent in the choices themselves”

Starhawk....Dreaming the dark

4) **The need for meaning and purpose in life**

This would involve a shift from the contemporary *personality-oriented ethic* to the *character-based ethic* (Covey 2004) which is fructified through the processes of collaboration, value transmission and purpose-oriented goal-setting. The process involved a transformation of information to knowledge and consequently to wisdom. Sir Laurens’ words quoted below elucidate the ‘purpose and meaning’ culture requisite for real happiness and mental health in the individual’s life

*The need for meaning in life:*

*The Bushman talk of two kinds of Hunger.*

*They say there is physical hunger, then what they call the Great Hunger.*

*That is the Hunger for Meaning.*

*There is only one thing that is truly insufferable*

*And that is a life without meaning*

*There is nothing wrong in the search for happiness.*

*But there is something Great-

*Meaning-*

*Which transfigures all*

*When you have meaning, you are content,*

*You belong*

Sir Laurens van der Post  

5) **The marriage of modernity with tradition**

It is essential to amalgamate the wisdom of the past and the experience of the present to create a balance in the childrearing process. Certain key processes within the family that helped overcome adversity by reducing vulnerabilities were reported by respondents. Some of them have emerged from the traditional childrearing practices that were perceived as strengths by the respondents. These included collective childrearing practices

---

48 In the documentary *Hasten Slowly* (as cited in Arrien 2007 pg xviii).
play, chaperonage, value transmission, and socialisation practices, the structure and discipline of the authoritarian style). Some factors emerged in the context of newer individualised values of the largely nuclear family unit. This included friendly communication and warmth between family members (an aspect of the permissive style of parenting) and newer identities of women beyond the culturally idealised motherhood identity. The two aspects were amalgamated to create a contextually relevant intervention model for the promotion of child mental health.

6) **Recommended childrearing style**

While there are no specific theories in child mental health or childrearing styles, research in the West (Baumrind 1991; Adler 1927; Maccoby and Martin 1983) has categorised parenting styles and recommended key parenting behaviours and attitudes essential for optimal child development (Gfroerer et al. 2004). Baumrind’s (1991) longitudinal study of three decades has favoured the ‘authoritative’ childrearing style that recommended a combination of parental *warmth* and *control*, as it has been closely associated with positive developmental outcomes in terms of social competence, academic performance and psychological well-being. That the ‘authoritative’ style was the most desired for childrearing style was seen from the responses, where most respondents stated that the major obstacle in providing an involved and nurturant context for child development was the inability to maintain a balance between *warmth* and *control*. 