CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION

Conceptualization of childhood psychiatric disorders as distinct from adult psychiatric disorders is a recent phenomenon. It may be attributed to two reasons: first that such disorders were not specifically recognized in earlier times, second, that they were not so prevalent. The incidence of emotional disorders among children is rapidly increasing as has been revealed by the prevalence studies as well as the increase in the number of child guidance clinics. When we delve into the etiology of these, the most important causative factors that emerge are the anomalies of some kind among the parents. Psychiatric disorders in childhood have to be looked at against the background of the normal process of development from dependent infant to an independent adult. Parental child-rearing practices, their relationships, interaction patterns and mental health, etc. have come under scientific scrutiny as important aspects in the development of characteristics patterns of behaviour in children.

Systematic study of emotional problems began with Freud's theorizing that intrapsychic conflicts were the major contributory factors in the onset of mental health problems. The seeds of neurosis are
planted in childhood, when the child fails to pass successfully through the oral, anal and phallic stages of development. Significance of biological factors as advocated by Freud has been found to be highly speculative and difficult to determine. With the advent of Neo-freudians and social psychologists, the environmental and social factors, in addition to biological ones, received attention. Environmental factors, particularly when found in the subtleties of personal relationships rather than obvious social conditions can seldom be excluded from consideration. The most significant environmental factor in mental health of the child appears to be the one connected with the quality of his/her interpersonal relationships. With the popularity of behavioural viewpoints, for over the past three decades, the significance of environment as functional in human behaviour has been realized all the more. The most important part of the environment is the family; and family members, especially the parents, are frequently responsible for producing and maintaining inappropriate behaviours.

It was not until the early twentieth century that we saw the first signs of a society awakening to the needs of emotionally ill children. Mental Hygiene Clinics became part of educational system by the middle
of 20th century. Human behaviour overt and covert is determined by the same basic law of cause and effect as is any other phenomenon of life. Whenever deviation occurs, whether it is an abnormal body temperature, refusal to eat, the tendency to withdraw from active participation or being unruly and unmanageable, usually there is some underlying cause responsible for it.

The child grows in a family which belongs to a group. Thus, the child starts with biological foundations and grows up in a social environment. Every living being is a product of its unique experiences interacting with its own unique genetic endowment. Since the child lives in and grows in a social set-up, people, particularly the parents and other members of the family, determine the way in which child develops. Early childhood is a period of rapid growth, intellectually, socially and emotionally as well as physically. It is, thus, a period of continuous change.

The first five years of life are considered to be the most critical for the development of personality. During this period the basic patterns which determine the personality become crystallized. It is also the time when the child is most vulnerable to negative factors which may have bearing on the future mental
health. During this period there is a strong bond between the mother and the child. The total family unit (mother and father) plays an important role in terms of meeting his needs and responding to his demands. The personality advances rapidly with changes in perception, emotion and behaviour. His world moves from an absolute absence of awareness to a complex society. Desires, values, interests and attitudes communicated by the family begin to mould his personality.

At birth, human being is essentially a biologic organism with a potential for change and modification. Development of the child always occurs in relationships to others, who for the time being are largely responsible in fulfilling his basic needs which are not only biological but also social, emotional and intellectual.

It is a well accepted fact that the parent child relationship is of utmost importance in shaping the character and at the same time its importance in the production of psychopathological deviations in childhood should not be underestimated. Even the grandparents can have an important formative or rather deformative influence on the life of a child especially in a joint family system.
The most characteristic feature of the environment of a child is the mother and father. In some cases—it may be the person who fulfills most of his basic needs and spend more time with him. If these key persons provide a sheltered training ground the child can become a healthy member of the society. It is a miniature society in which the child makes his first attempt at adaptation and in which he learns patterns of social behaviour which tend to persist throughout life. Childhood is a process of gradual transfer of responsibility from parent to child. This process requires a secure and stable family set-up with reasonably consistent and constant parent figures. For healthy development, child must be exposed to a range of emotions and situations keeping in touch with reality.

Psychoanalysts have stressed the importance of early family experiences on the behaviour and attitude of a child. A well balanced home which offers adequate parental care is the best guarantee of the adjusted behaviour of the child especially at the early stage.

As the infant progresses into childhood, he learns usable assumptions about himself and the world and exert increasing inner control over his behaviour.
During this period, the family unit becomes the crucial guiding influence in the development of personality. There is negative and positive effects of parental behaviour. Home influences the effects of all other environmental impacts combined in determining the fundamental organization of child's behaviour. In view of the importance of home experiences in the child's life, it is a small wonder that Freud was able to trace most of the psychological conflicts of man back to traumatic experiences during the first four or five years of life. Affectional tendencies which are so important to psychological adjustment in adult life are dependent on the nature of parent-child relationship.

Childhood behavioural disorders are classified into three categories: (1) Habit disturbances, (2) Conduct disturbances, and Neurotic habits. Nevertheless behaviour characteristics of all three almost appear in a particular child's functioning.

The current research on families as group systems has revealed that maladaptive behaviour of the child may be fostered by the general family environment. Typology of families have a detrimental influence on child development. Disturbed homes have been found to be associated with a high incidence of psychological disorders among children and the adolescents.
The basic factor of personality development is the relationship of the child to his parents. It is so important that almost any behavioural or personality disorder may grow out of an unhappy relationship.

Parental Attitude and Mental Health of Children:

Parental attitudes have been held responsible for behaviour pathology in the children. The importance of family attitudes towards children has been stressed by Kanner (1973) who has pointed out the harmful effects that may occur when rejecting parental attitudes replace the normally accepting attitudes which more parents have. All forms of rejection are harmful as they delay the emotional maturation and lead him to grow up lacking in confidence in himself and seeing the world as an unloving and unsatisfactory place. Parental rejection is also associated with antisocial behaviour in the child.

Extreme behaviour in any direction can be the cause of emotional disturbance and later abnormal behaviour. Man is a social animal and loss of contact with or rejection by the herd renders him both vulnerable and unhappy. Prolonged extreme or cruel rejection constitutes a definite source of insecure
feelings and later maladjustment. Parental rejection is felt by the child as lack of affection, and it is a frequent causative factor in producing psychological disturbances.

Over protected children tend to grow into submissive or over-demanding, anxious and insecure persons. Overprotection leads to adult patterns of emotional instability and immaturity. The over protected child experiences different types of difficulties. He lacks not only emotional security, but also an opportunity of achieving independence in meeting day-to-day life problems. Overprotected children frequently exploit human relationships in a selfish manner.

The democratic home atmosphere has a reasonable degree of permissiveness, avoidance of arbitrary decisions and a high level of verbal contact between parents and children. The child is rewarded for the curiosity and independent activity; for participation and decision making. While in homes, characterized by authoritarian control, there are clear cut restrictions on behaviour and, consequently, friction over disciplinary procedure is low. These
kind of homes produce quiet, well behaved, nonresistant children who are socially unagressive, but this conformity, which is associated with restricted curiosity, originality and fancifulness, is obtained at the expenses of freedom of expression.

In the development of conduct disorders also, environment plays a very significant role. The more stable, secure, accepting and consistent the family, the greater the chance of children identifying with their parents and behaving as they wish. Unhealthy parent-child relationship and abnormal parental attitudes like overprotection, rejection, comparison, negligence and over-strictness, also lead to maladjustment. The common causes of these adverse attitudes are: ignorance on the part of the parents about the psychological needs of the child (like love, security, independence and protection) disharmony between parents, attitudes of grandparents, overcrowding, slums, poor sanitation and hygiene etc.

Antisocial children has parents who are lax in providing discipline and supervision. A sense of guilt, although crucial in the development of the child as a social and moral being is only a second line of defense in his compliance with the rules.
When the parental attitudes are not appropriate and consistent, the child is particularly vulnerable to the development of the conduct and neurotic disorders. Maladjustment may take place because of wrong attitudes of the parents.

**Parental Marital Adjustment and Mental Health of Children** - A baby's entrance into a family turns it into a different microsystem from what it was before. The relationships change and it brings about changes in the roles of the parents as well. Starting a family unit involves considerable adjustment and changes. Satisfactory adjustment may not occur at all, leading to breakdown of the relationships and separation of the parents. A well balanced home offers adequate care to children and provides proper adjustment. Maladjustment in the earlier family life is likely to be followed by poor adjustment in society at large.

Adjustment is a process of harmonious relationship between the child and his environment. Adjustment problems often crop up, whenever there is some disturbance in the environment. There are four causes of maladjustment in the process of emotional development: Conflicts with the parents, faulty home environment, poor economic conditions of the home and inappropriate school environment.
Social learning theorists are of the view that the family has a particularly significant role in the child's social and moral development because it is the first and foremost in deciding which social stimuli he is exposed to. The children with persistent mental health disorders typically come from families where there is discord, discontent, lack of affection, inconsistent, ineffective discipline or where the family has broken up through divorce or separation.

Faulty development has often been observed in infants who have been deprived of maternal stimulation or there is lack of adjustment among the parents. Families are central in infancy and early childhood and they continue to be the hub of existence throughout middle childhood. Many children of school age have to live through a divorce and then grow-up in a single parent family. The stress and strain of divorce are bound to interfere, at least, temporarily with their lives. The parental role in the personality development of a child is, by way of providing him an environment of parental affection and also an opportunity to experience authority.

A single parent family can have harmful consequences for the child. Separation from father at an early stage is
more harmful than later separation. Parental absence may play a highly significant role in deflecting the course of development.

An unhappy marriage is one of the most important contributory factor in causing mental distress. It may cause suspicion and jealousy which can lead to mental and physical cruelty and a broken home. An obvious source of emotional insecurity is the broken home and it implies that the children in such a home have been deprived of love & affection. The absence of a parent leads to lack of one source of affection and produces a general sense of insecurity.

In the words of Warren Ketchman (1979), the greatest single cause of maladjustment in a child is the withdrawal of affection and security by the parents associates and teachers.

Parental Mental Health and Mental Health of Children-

Children with emotional problems have been found to come from broken families and the parents with neurotic tendencies. This happens generation after generation. Pathological patterns of family functioning - like 'scapegoating' the child, (the child becoming an object on to which family's bad feelings are projected) can cause emotional problems. Unemployment of the parents and broken homes
are important factors responsible for emotional disorders among children of tender age.

The commonly held view is that anxiety about threatened withdrawal of parental love is the major contributing factor to the child's internationalization of parental values and make him more susceptible to adult influence. Delinquent behaviour is not inherited as such, but personality disorders in the parents probably lead to antisocial problems in the children through their association with family discord and disruptions.

Several types of specific parent child patterns appear with great regularity in the background of children who show emotional disturbances and other types of the faulty developments. Parents who are emotionally disturbed or maladjusted are more likely to serve as an undesirable model. Undesirable parental models are undoubtedly an important reason why the mental disorders, delinquency, crime and other forms of maladaptive behaviour tend to run in the families.

Present Study:

A child, in almost all societies, is regarded as someone to be cherished, a tender and precious
human being who must be nurtured and protected. A child's development is worthy of careful attention and scientific study.

A greater number of emotionally disturbed children than reported are probably going unrecognized, unprotected and undetected. A number of studies have shown that parental health, (both physical and mental) is correlated with the emotional disorders of children. The subject of emotional problems has assumed great importance in the last three decades all over the world. Various types of studies have been conducted by several research workers in the developed as well as developing nations. But the incidence of emotional problems especially among the children is still a matter of speculation, mostly based on small scale studies.

A number of parental variables such as parental attitude, marital adjustment, mental health and some socio-demographic conditions etc. seem to have important contribution in the formation of habit patterns and adjustment. Children's performance on intelligence tests and achievements in school are likely to be influenced by the above mentioned variables.
In most of the studies mothers have been considered as solely responsible for healthy and unhealthy development of the children. The role played by fathers varies greatly from family to family. In terms of time spent with the child, the mother has more opportunities than the father to influence the psychological growth and behaviour of her off-springs. The human infant is largely dependent on the mother as she satisfies his basic biological needs and thus the infant develops emotional dependence on her. It is generally believed that mother plays a far more important role than father in attempting to change the child's ongoing behaviour.

In the present times, this view is changing gradually. The traditional large and joint families are now being converted into small and nuclear families. As a result, role of father has changed greatly. Mother's role remains, by and large, the same as it has been earlier. Only in some instances the total number of hours spent by mothers and fathers, individually has changed. Now fathers, especially, in the educated circles also spend more time with their children than before (Lytton, 1980). In the new social perspective where both the parents are working, the roles of mother and father are
diluted. There may be difference in how the father spends time with children, the activities shared etc. For some aspects of bringing up, the role of mother is dominant, whereas, for others father's role may be dominant as in play particularly rough and tumble play.

In the present study fathers are also included considering the important influence as models, they have in the development of their children. Father is an integral member of the family who has an equal impact on child's development.

Indian studies in this context have been limited. The present study is an attempt to investigate the effect of parents' marital adjustment, attitudes and mental health on the behaviour pathology, intelligence and academic achievement of children. The role of birth order of child in the family and some other demographic variables will also be determined.