

REPERCUSSIONS OF CHAOTIC FAMILY ON CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: *Deviant behaviours are often classified as errors in the education received by the individual within the family. Children act according to the model seen at home, being a mirror of the environment where they develop their personality. The imprint that the family leaves on them will have effects throughout their life, influencing their later lifestyle. In this paper I intended to study one of the family personalities analysed by David Field and to observe the influence it has in the child's life. I chose to analyse the chaotic family personality, because it is one of the factors that most often determines the appearance of problematic behaviour in a child. The objectives I forward are 1) Analysing the way in which the child from the chaotic family understands the concept of family and 2) The link between the relationship between family members and the child's relationship with society. We shall study how the child is affected by the chaotic interaction in the family, and we will analyse the effects that the family environment has on the child's behaviour by studying the literature. Through the paper, we want to identify how the problems of the chaotic family environment affect the child's behaviour and relationships in interactions with other children, the school environment and society.*

Keywords: family, development, chaotic, implications, children

1. Defining the chaotic family system

According to David Field, the chaotic family represents a poorly organized space, with a constant status of ambivalence, where the relationship between family members is conflictual, with problems, with an insensitivity to the needs of children (Field, 1988, p72). Another definition can be found in Dex where the chaotic family system is defined as a disorganized environment, in which the presence of a hierarchy is not found.

Starting from these definitions, we can say that the chaotic family is characterized by a complete disorder: parents indifferent to the education of children, concerned only with their own interest, unsupervised children, acts of violence in the family by a member who wants to take control, the presence of trauma in the lives of family members, physical, emotional/psychological and verbal abuse by one of the parents, conflicts between parents, poor communication between family members.

Thus, children build their beliefs on 3 rules:

- 1) People are pawns that are used to fulfill personal needs
- 2) Feelings are a sign of weakness
- 3) It is not good to trust people.

There are cases where children are completely ignored, left to survive on their own, their physical, emotional, social needs are ignored, they are not given attention, parents do not show affection either to children or towards each other, the relationship between them and the children being non-existent, they are not able to bond relationships with each other, there is no love between spouses. In severe cases, parents even physically and emotionally abandon their children. Parents are very irresponsible with regard to their children's food, warmth or stimulation, medical or educational needs. Disinterest in everything related to children or life partner and an acute interest in one's own person is present. Moreover, it is possible that in the family milieu there is an authoritarian parent who wants to have control over the whole family at all costs. This includes physical abuse (slapping, beating, strangulation, whipping, hair pulling, etc.), sexual abuse (attracting, corrupting, persuading, forcing, using the child/partner to participate in acts of a sexual nature or assist by observing sexual acts between two adults or two other people), emotional or psychological abuse (by ridiculing, humiliating one of the family members, isolating them from others, prohibiting certain things, using epithets, negative predictions about the individual's behaviour, using as a scapegoat, highlighting negative points in front of others, using threats as a way of manipulation, inducing feelings of guilt) or cases of neglect (failure to satisfy or ignore essential needs), exercised on one or all members considered "weaker" in the family.

Another big issue, according to Elkin, is that the family doesn't know each member's role clearly. So, we may encounter different situations, ranging from feelings of disinterest towards children to

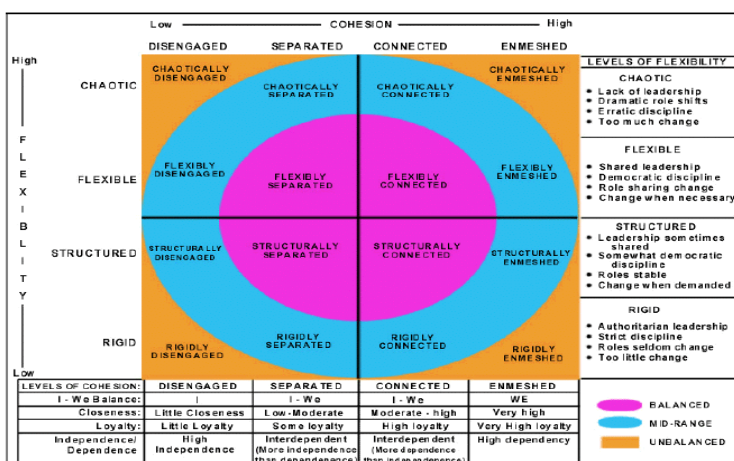
abandoning them in nurseries, kindergartens, in front of the television or in other families both for subsistence and training (Elkin 1960, p.46). In sync with the aforementioned author, I argue that this child-rearing function is being distorted with far-reaching and dramatic consequences in the future. The child growing up in such an environment generally suffers trauma. In a family with a chaotic atmosphere, basic needs (security, orderly life, love) are completely neglected. Parental functions can no longer be fulfilled. An example of neglect is the selfish attitude of the parents, so that not meeting the needs of the children is only a natural continuation of the attitude expressed by these answers: "I thought it was fun to have children, that you could play with them, have fun with them", "I thought that through a child I would save the marriage that I felt was falling apart". When everyday life brings more stress than satisfaction it is very easy to discharge one's feelings of frustration on the weakest, the children. The chaotic system can also be described as a deviation from an ideal of space, order and coherence and family stability, assuming minimum standards of living. There are some specific elements that define this system: family disruption, very low family cohesion, overwork and stress. Bronfenbrenner and Evans mentioned, moreover, that there are two determining factors: the first is the "confusing environment" characterized by "frantic activities, lack of structure, everyday uncertainty and a high average level of environmental stimulation, and the second consists in the lack of family stability (Bronfenbrenner&Evans, 2000, pp.116-125).

Confused environments are generally defined by a few characteristics: high levels of noise, overcrowding (found in large families), and sometimes lack of routine and rules. This factor may appear as a result of the increased number of individuals in the family, poverty and stress of the parents (with negative results of the parent-child interaction in the cultivation and cognitive development of the child). On the other hand, the lack of family stability is determined by family deviations and refers to psychological maladjustment and poor academic performance. It is accentuated in the case of family conflicts, limited resources and residential instability.

2. Interfamily relations and interaction between partners

In most cases, the relationships that children see within their family circle determine how they will later relate in society, which will influence their way of thinking and behaving. David Field affirmed that: "the family where you come from continues to influence and affect you every day of your life" (Field, 2000, p.12). He also claimed that behaviours and thoughts, attitudes and reactions, values and beliefs are related to one's origin family. Willingly or not, consciously or not, children will react according to what they have learned or seen in their parents. Realizing how important family relationships and interactions are in a child's life, we will further analyse how the interactions unfold both between partners and between parents and children. Starting from the idea that in a family it is important to know and define the roles between partners, a structural model of relations between partners is offered by Olson, Sprenkle and Russel (Mitrofan&Ciupercă, 1988, p.199). They start from two dimensions: cohesion and adaptability. Adaptability means the ability to change one's roles from chaotic structure to flexible and stable structure. And by cohesion, we mean the emotional bond between family members that can be viewed from total rupture to total involvement. I present below a diagram which renders this oscillation from chaotic to flexible.

Figure no.1 Circumplex model of marital and family systems



Source Saini et.al., 2017

The authority structure existing within a family determines the functioning of the system (Mitrofan&Ciupercă 1988, p.156). From this point of view, power can be held by:

- the man, in the case of patriarchal systems, as he sets the division of roles, deciding the professional and marital orientation of his own children and represents the interests of the family in relation to the church, school, etc. In this case we encounter the isolated family style, with an authoritarian father who controls family members through intimidation, threats and force. Disciplines applied are irregular, harsh, unfair and unbearable, and the goal is to correct behaviour.

- the woman, in the case of matriarchal systems. In these cases we encounter the absence of the father's involvement in decision-making and the education of the children.

- the child, when the older child assumes parental duties. They are prematurely forced to take on the responsibilities of the adult when they show indifference regarding their relation with the family.

- other people, outside the family. This situation occurs when the power is held by people (parents, aunts) with a great influence on the respective family or when the "personality" of the child is low and subject to persuasion. It is observed a manipulation that these people exert on the family, generating conflicting situations between the partners.

Another important aspect in the functioning of relationships between partners is the marital role. "Deviating" from this expected role produces a feeling of frustration and anxiety. And this is because spouses relate to each other according to the "relational and functional norms" of marital behaviour seen in their parents.

As such, comparisons, analogies, and not infrequently dissonances and frustrations, are expressed through expressions like: "my father would never have told my mother this", "in my family the wife has to do this", "my mother doesn't do it that way," etc. Therefore, the partners who seek to perpetually identify with the maternal or paternal model are prone to relationship failure, frustrating their partners and themselves. As tension rises in the family and the degree of anxiety is ever greater, each partner externalizes his or her anxiety into the marital relationship. Each focuses on the negative side of the other and tries to control the other, and each of them resists the other's efforts to control him.

Described as chaotic, the system is incapable of unity, and members are unable to bond with others. There is no love between spouses, but on the contrary, they show anger towards each other. The family is poorly organized, and with a constant status of ambivalence. In general, the condition is conflicted, troubled and insensitive to the needs of children.

From the point of view of the interactional process quality, we often meet families in which the constant state of conflict is generated by the competition of the needs of the marital partners and the disagreements regarding their goals and values. When the intensity and content, the form of manifestation and the frequency of conflicts increase significantly, they acquire disorganizing values in the family microgroup, progressively alternating marital relations. The internalization or defective exercise of marital roles lead to distortions of the family role structure. Bowen claimed that the level of tension in a family is given by the way partners relate to each other in stressful situations (Bowen Theory).

We highlight below some of the factors generating conflicts (Mitrofan&Ciupercă 1988, p.161):

- Tense relations between the couple and the orientation family, frequent conflicts between daughter-in-law and son-in-law.

- Deficient relations with the group of friends, colleagues, neighbours.
- Imbalance in the income and expenditure budget, which can stimulate and support some marital-family dysfunctions.

- The incidental-situational factor that produces latent dysfunctions.

We remind the cases in which the partners have a relationship based on their own interest: "I give you love, you give me social status and material well-being". Thus, the unfairness of the transaction between partners falls under moral judgments.

According to Bowen's theory, the family may be defined as an "emotional system", within which the partners will exhibit different degrees of emotional fusion. However, with the emergence of tensions and divergent points of view, the emotional fusion knows different degrees of erosion. First, one of the spouses may become dysfunctional due to "under- or over-adequate reciprocity", which causes the partner to become psychologically symptomatic. This affects the marital relationship which may become discordant. Emotional dysfunctions extend from the marital relationship to the parenting relationship.

Here are some contributing and risk factors for marital dysfunction:

- Associations between partners from significantly different socio-cultural backgrounds
- Interpersonal incompatibility caused by adherence to consensual family role models belonging to fundamentally different norms, customs, traditions, and deficits in interaccommodation

- The couple's relations with the outside may take on disorganizing values, precipitating marital conflict
- Precarious material-economic conditions, events in the physical and social environment, catastrophes, deaths, illnesses
- Poverty, material frustration, unemployment, prolonged social insecurity.

We can say that once the marital dysfunction intervenes, the process involves the entire structure of family roles and through that, it affects in different degrees and manners, the positions and the harmonious development of the members or the personalities of the members of the family system.

Iolanda Mitrofan and Cristian Ciupercă defined marital dysfunction as a critical dyadic interactional incident that disrupts and distorts homeostatic marital behavioural patterns (role-driven behaviours), disorganizing or stagnating the evolutionary processes, affecting the couple's functional goals. Often, so-called "crisis" states are encountered in the relationship of chaotic couples. They cause intra-adaptation-integration tensions and stresses in the family and are triggered in the form of manifest or sub-manifest conflict.

Thus, we may affirm that a problem child can be a symptom of a "parental failure" and represents an unfortunate consequence of a deep interpersonal dyadic marital dysfunction, which requires the appreciation of the degree and chances of compatibility of the partners, the stage and their difficulties of interaccommodation. In this way, a neurotic child becomes the imminent effect of a neurotic marital relationship. Most of the time, the physical abuse of the child covers a wide range of unjustifiable treatments that the child receives, such as: extremely violent beatings manifested by sadistic and cruel acts on the child. As defined by Kempe, physical abuse consists of "physical attacks or physical insults, ranging from minimal forms to fatal insults, caused to the child by the person who takes care of him/her (Neamțu 2003, p.698), although the legislation in the field specifies that , the child has the right to have his personality and individuality respected, "not being subject to physical punishment or other humiliating and degrading treatments" (Law 272/2004).

Psychologist Simona Nelu Potorac pointed out some consequences on teenagers coming from such environments: low attention to physical appearance and clothing as well as inadequate hygiene; loss of appetite and unexplained weight loss; absenteeism and poor school performance; loss of interest in school, extracurricular activities and hobbies; behaviour characterized by lying and stealing; contemptuous behaviour towards family and friends; hostile and violent attitude; disinterest and lack of future perspective. These are consequences that affect the normal process of psychological and psychosocial maturation of the children's personality and lead to the appearance of an acute form of aggression (which adolescents use with the aim of causing harm both outside the subjects and on themselves).

Moreover, delinquent acts (deception, vagrancy, vandalism) are often his main concern, while they condemn them to an even more drastic life. Children who come from such family systems are not used to mutual understanding, but only to rejection situations. The presence of anxiety and "high levels of aggression" often be overwhelming (Frude, 1988, p.203). These children experience their anxiety in concrete situations of abuse. They deal with feelings differently, but most of the time, they are left to deal with these situations on their own. If anxiety is overwhelming, children may defend themselves by pushing away their own feelings and redefining the given situation.

At the same time, in marital conflicts, the aggression directed towards one of the spouses may be channelled towards the child. The child seems to function in the family as a "scapegoat". Parents, and often siblings, take out their frustrations and aggression on the child. The child lives all the time with the uncertainty and anxiety of a new abuse. Mistrust, the emotional atmosphere in the home and the attitudes of the parents lead the abused child into a confused state (Rohner, 1980, p.15). Thus, for most people, aggression is the best method of defence, and many of them learned at home how to deal with problematic situations by being aggressive. These children learn to perceive themselves as "bad" children who do not deserve love or care. They live daily in the same situation that frighten them and from one day to the next, they get used to the idea that the adult is abusing them. In this very difficult situation children develops survival strategies.

According to a study (Killen, 1989, p.90), it was observed that most children have feelings of "denial, identification, isolation/separation in which they mentally transposes themselves into another position". These children, instead of channelling their aggression towards their own parents, discharge it onto other people. They are reduced to just a mode of survival, trying to avoid actions that provoke the aggression of their caretakers, but take out their frustrations on the weaker ones. They are always on the lookout. It is also very difficult for an abused child to think about the future. For them "tomorrow" will not

come; there is always "a today" (Kempe&Helfer, 1974, p.41) . So their answer would be "Why wait? Tomorrow will be no better than today."

Following a study of 50 abused children, Martin and Beezly made a list of behavioural characteristics of abused children: inability to enjoy themselves (they look sad, apathetic); symptoms of psychosomatic stress: enuresis, fits of anger, eating problems, bizarre behaviours; inferiority complexes (they think they must have been worse to deserve such treatment); poor school performance due to lack of concentration; isolation (they have weak social relationships and exhibit depressive states); opposition (negative attitude); hypervigilance (Calam&Franchi, 1987, p.6) Reactions to abuse differ from child to child. Some are more anxious, fearful, isolated, others exert their pain on other "victims", and others are immune to anything aggressive, to any punishment or negative attitude.

Most often, a series of reactions are created in these children's behaviour, causing them to respond later with the same hostility and lack of affection with which they were treated. According to this fact, the following behavioural indicators were identified: behavioural problems (anxiety, aggression, hostility); emotional disturbances (the feeling of being unloved, unwanted, worthless); social disturbances (negative perspectives on society); irritability and in some cases failures in trying to succeed; anxious attachment to parents; fear or distrust; low self-esteem; feelings of inferiority, withdrawal, lack of communication; self-destructive behaviour (self-mutilation, depression, suicidal tendencies); delinquency (Gil, 1988, p.8). The development of the emotionally abused children is difficult and as Garbarino described in his research, they are „real evidence of a psychosocial evil”, a distorted image from what "normal" means (Neamțu, 2003, p.698).

3. Violence and aggressive treatment

As per Law 217/2003, family violence is any physical or verbal action intentionally committed by a family member against another member of the same family that causes physical, mental or sexual suffering, or material damage. However, referring to the consequences of violence and aggressive treatment on children, Law 272/2004 reads: "it is forbidden to apply physical punishments in any form, as well as to deprive the children from the rights related to life endangerment, physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development, bodily integrity, physical or mental health, both in the family and in any institution that ensures the protection, care and education of children" (Ministry of Labour, 2005). So, we may say that family violence is one of the most common forms encountered and the most worrying, because it is not visible. In most situations, violence happens behind closed doors or is hidden from the victim, due to fear of the aggressor or a sense of shame towards society. Because this is a closely guarded secret, the positive image of the family is kept intact with solidarity. In general, the family that constitutes a field of manifestation of domestic violence becomes less transparent and less open to the social environment (that is, to the extended family, neighbours, friends or colleagues).

In these cases, social isolation inevitably occurs. They acquire a stigma in the eyes of others and at the same time a feeling of stigma and guilt that makes them isolate themselves.

From the point of view of the authors Răvaș and David, characteristic of family violence are deviant emotional relationships. They claim that a deviant manifestation would be the Stockholm syndrome, the syndrome in which the victims come to feel emotionally connected to the aggressors, to be on their side in the event that measures are taken against them, which constitutes a pathological manifestation of attachment. However, in every family falling under the family "dysfunctional syndrome" category, the children, due to their great sensitivity, receive and experience particularly intensely any "event" between family members. The main effect of conflictual interpersonal relationships on children's personality is the devaluation of the parental model and, at the same time, the loss of the possibility of identification with this model. In this sense, Ana Muntean explains that in the atmosphere of a home full of violence, neither the mother nor the father can be able to concern themselves with stimulating the child. They lose their authority in front of the child and instead of authority, terror is installed that does not educate, does not train and puts a brake on their emotional and mental development (Muntean, 2001, p.46). Therefore, children will understand that social relations are based on power relations, of the submission of the weakest by the strongest. Consequently, their own relationships with family, peers, and others will be based on strategies aimed at aggressive dominance or flight from the situation.

Analyses of the effects of aggressive parental behaviour on children have concluded that they are drastic. Many authors try to make a correlation between the fact that parents apply aggression as methods of discipline and mistreatment of children (Glăveanu, 2010, p.189) .

Among the most frequently encountered disorders we may list emotional disorders (depression, anxiety, phobia, panic), low self-esteem, memory disorders (dissociative amnesia, loading of

autobiographical memory with negative events), cognitive disorders (decreased ability to solve problems, negative cognitive schemes), stress syndromes (posttraumatic syndrome), eating disorders (bulimia, anorexia), sleep disorders (insomnia, nightmares), psychosomatizations (digestive, respiratory disorders, psoriasis, bronchial asthma, arthritis), personality disorders (dissociation, dependent, passive-aggressive personality), unhealthy lifestyle (alcohol consumption, self-medication) (Bălan, 2011, pp.67-69)

Research shows that the trauma of children growing up in such violent family climates is more intense and with deeper and more lasting consequences than for children who are direct victims of parental abuse and neglect. Often, the child takes the blame for the current family situation: "I am to blame for the problems in my family", "No one else has the problems we have", "I am unimportant, I have no value, no purpose and I have to justify my existence" (Muntean, 2001, p.46) And although, in the family, they only have the option of blind, unconditional submission, in relation to the demands and claims of the parent, children will exhibit indirect responses, through aggressive actions on others or self-aggression. The tension accumulated over time, caused by intense states of frustration, will manifest in sudden discharges. In these situations, the child constantly rejected and mistreated by the parents will learn how to react aggressively, but the object of aggression will be all authority figures.

4. Conclusions and discussions

Children from chaotic families are deeply affected emotionally, psychologically and socially. Most social failures have been found to have their origin within the family milieu and children try to draw attention to these shortcomings through their behavior.

The environment from which the children come seriously affects their behavior and way of relating, later on. Of course, there are exceptions, in which family gaps are recognized and which act in such a way as to "repair" the situation that triggered the respective tensions. Most of the time, however, the presence of disorganization and chaos both in family life and in the life of each member, in the interactions between them, in the way of approaching and creating a perspective for the future. Also, through the child's manifestations in relation to society, one of the previously detailed behavioural patterns is identified: abuse (physical, emotional, sexual), neglect or violence. The indifference of the parents, the lack of affectivity and motivation, the permanent presence of tensions between partners and later, between parents and children, determine very low school performance and an acute need for the child to look for an external environment in which to receive the necessary affection. In this sense, the child will either assume the responsibility that normally falls to the adult, or seek to integrate into different social groups that satisfy his or her identified needs. Consequently, what we should clearly understand is that the role of the family in children's life influences every area of their existence: degree of socialization, emotional and mental life, degree of motivation and stimulation, level of trust in themselves and others, etc. later reflected in their behavior.

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